

# Galatians 1:1-19

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's awful, isn't it, when you hear stories of con artists, salesmen, scammers, cold callers, people who prey on the vulnerable and pose as somebody they're not.

! You've got to watch out for that, haven't you? And if that is the case with your bank details, or your online identity, or your passwords and property, how much more important is it in spiritual things and in your soul? You might know the history a little bit of the book of Galatians, you can read about it in Acts, chapters 13 and 14, and Paul, the apostle, he's on his missionary journeys, isn't he? And he tours this region of towns called Galatia. He sets up some churches there, he sets them up and then moves on, but within a short time in these churches some problems arise. And we're going to look through the whole letter to the Galatians as a kind of new series over the next few weeks, and we'll see more about what was the matter. But basically, in a nutshell, they have been conned. Spiritual scammers have been sniffing around the front door of the church, and they've got into the church. Do you see, he says in verse 6, doesn't he, that they've been led to a different gospel from the one that Paul initially gave to them.

And so he's writing this letter to deal with that issue. And in this intro section, I want you to see with me three things. Firstly, the gravity of the situation that they are in. The gravity of the situation.

As you pick up the letter to the Galatians in the New Testament, some people think that Paul, he's being quite cold, and he's being quite nasty. He seems quite prickly, as you read through it. He's pretty touchy.

And it's quite unusual. The tone in the letter is quite unusual. It's not the Paul that we're used to listening to. There's not much politeness. There are no airs and graces. There's not his usual words of gratitude and thanksgiving for the Christians in Galatia, like there is in Ephesians or Philippians or even in Corinthians.

[ 2 : 31 ] The tone is really tense. It's serious. It's pained. He cuts to the chase in verse 6, doesn't he?

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ. Later in chapter 3, he calls the Galatians fools.

But don't mistake that tone for coldness. Because some situations require a harder tone of voice, don't they?

Imagine a child running into the road. You're not going to politely ask them to stop, are you? You're going to shout, stop! And grab them. His harshness in the letter reflects the gravity of the situation that they are in.

Because, if you look at verse 7, he says, There are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. Our baby, he's called Kit.

[ 3 : 35 ] And he's three weeks old and he loves drinking his mother's milk. He's really good at feeding. But imagine that Emma and I, we go away for the night and we get a babysitter in. We get one of you lot to come and look after him for the evening.

And we get the milk all set up in the kitchen, lined up, ready for you to feed him. And it's all sterilised and it's pure. And it's ready to go. And all you've got to do is deliver it.

As is. But when we get home, you say to us, Thanks for the milk, it was really good. But I wanted to liven it up a bit. So I thought I'd add some iron brew to the milk.

Is that alright? It just needed that fizz factor. So I've added some Coca-Cola as well. I've enhanced it. Just a little bit.

Just a few drops. Well, we'd be mortified, wouldn't we? You haven't enhanced it at all. You've ruined it. You've changed the milk and you've damaged the child.

[ 4 : 39 ] And that is what has happened to the Galatians. Notice how he describes the fake message that they have been duped by. Verse 8 and verse 9.

He says twice, doesn't it? It is a gospel that is now contrary. A gospel contrary to the one that we preached. Just a little tweak. Just a little addition.

But it's now totally in opposition to what Paul taught them. For Paul, that the genuine gospel message of Christianity, delivered by him originally, the real McCoy, the good news of Jesus Christ, is so good and so pure that if it's tampered with in any way at all, it is utterly ruined.

And it's utterly contrary to the truth. It's not just mainly truth, is it? With a bit of untruth added in. The whole thing becomes contaminated.

And so you can't tweak the Christian message for a different audience. You cannot fine-tune it or perfect it. It's already perfect.

[ 5 : 55 ] It's actually beyond the realm of criticism. And you can't do that without absolutely ruining it. Without damaging people with it. It's actually more like putting a bit of bleach in the baby's milk bottle, isn't it?

For Paul. And so he's livid. He is worried. Very worried about the gravity of the situation. Of them turning to a modified gospel.

So that's the gravity of the situation. But secondly, look with me at the guile of the con artists. The guile, the trickery of the con artists.

He calls them troublemakers, doesn't he, in verse 7. As we go through the letter over the next few weeks, we'll see that the particular things that they were adding to the gospel that Paul gave were to do with the function of God's law.

To get right with God. Do you know that the message of the Bible has always been that being right with God and being in a relationship with him is a gift that is given and not earned.

[ 7 : 10 ] You and I can never belong to God because we obey him. But we do obey him because we belong to God through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

As a gift. But the troublemakers, what they're doing is that they're flipping that around. Yes, there was faith in Jesus Christ but they wanted to add a little bit more.

Just a little bit of fizz. It was Jesus plus something else. And certain religious ceremonial activities were added in, like circumcision, we'll see.

To be right with God. And it was very subtle. Very clever. The guile of the troublemakers. It was very attractive. And we know that because of the way that Paul describes their message.

And look at that key verse in verse 6 again. It's really interesting. What he calls their message, he calls it a different gospel. A different gospel.

[ 8 : 16 ] He says, I'm going to use that fantastic word that is loaded with great meaning to describe what they are doing but I'm going to use that word to highlight how clever they are.

It's likely that the troublemakers were calling themselves Christians. They preached gospel. It looked legit. It looked gospel-like.

They had gospel meetings and gospel-driven churches. They led gospel ministries. Published gospel tracts. They sang gospel songs. Read gospel books.

That's the name they used for them anyway. And the use of that word that Paul is using there, he's being a bit sarcastic, isn't he? Because in verse 7 he says, well, not that there is another gospel. But the point is that what they are doing, it looks Christian. It uses gospel language. Maybe they talked about Jesus Christ and his church and the cross and the resurrection.

[ 9 : 21 ] All the right words might be there. If you go to one of their meetings, there won't be a poster outside the church door saying, welcome to the meeting with visiting heretic, the reverend such and such, leader of false gospel ministry.

You're just not going to see it. And actually what made them more dangerous was it seemed like they were advancing the gospel. It was as if they were being more holy.

It was Jesus plus. It seemed like they were more faithful. They were enhancing the gospel message that Paul gave. That you've got faith in Christ.

But we want to go one step further. And we want you to come with us and do this little ceremony or this little law. Paul's got a message, yes, and we love him for it.

But we've been around a lot longer than Paul. And we want you to go further with Jesus. And it is, isn't it, how the best con artists work by making the bad stuff they do look really good.

[ 10 : 32 ] That is what the Bible tells us the devil does. That he makes himself look like an angel of light. So that when he's doing bad things, when he's adding bleach into the milk, it looks really good.

We don't have physical persecution so much, do we, as Christians, if you are a Christian living for Jesus in this country. And we're grateful for that. That has been done in the past, hasn't it, in this country.

The devil has used that tactic. But I don't think he does that as much in our country, anyway, at the moment. But in a way, what he does is even more dangerous.

Because the devil is trying to destroy the true gospel and he does it under the disguise of advancing the gospel. Like the troublemakers, he poses as a gospel advancer.

He says, I'm not going to silence the gospel. I'm not going to try and kill Christians off. I'll just give them a better gospel. I'll give them another one.

[ 11 : 45 ] I'll try and get them to think of a better gospel. that there's a whole world out there beyond simply trusting in Jesus Christ. Whether it's giving money or taking mass or not eating chocolate over Lent or whatever.

Whatever it is I can get them to do that is additional, whether it's superstition or merit or brownie points. However silly it is, it doesn't matter. If I can get them to think they need more, that Jesus isn't quite enough, I can even peddle them as enhancements to the gospel, as Jesus plus, if I can do that then actually I can ruin it.

Because Jesus plus anything else equals nothing actually. And actually I think that is the tactic he's using in many churches today sadly.

The calm is happening It is not Islam or secularism or atheism or pluralism that threatens the true gospel most.

It's not these obvious false messages but it is the temptation of a better gospel. Of Jesus plus something else.

[ 13 : 11 ] And so that is the guile of these false gospel advances. The gravity of the situation, the guile and thirdly the Galatians gullibility.

The Galatians gullibility. A friend spoke about the time he'd been on holiday to a country in the Near East and it was one of these cities with a fantastic tourist industry and he knew that going there he had to keep his wits about him for pickpockets and people like that.

At one point he got lost trying to find his way back to the train station so he asked the local for directions and the local man immediately in Helford not only to give him directions but to lead him to the train station.

He would take him there. I know a shortcut he said leading him through the back alleys and the back streets until they arrived at their final destination which did not look at all familiar.

There was not a train or a platform in sight and it turned out to be a shop that the guide's brother owned selling rugs to tourists. Come in he said. He'd been duped.

[ 14 : 26 ] He'd been conned. He'd been led in a different direction and he was an experienced traveller. He'd gone to this place knowing you've got to keep your wits about you.

He wasn't stupid but that is why cons work isn't it? Cons work for people who think they're not going to be conned. And that is why this letter is as relevant today as it was then because as hard as it sounds for you and me we are as gullible as the Galatians were.

They are in a grave situation and we may be closer to it than we think. We are in as much risk as they were of turning to a different gospel of turning to a gospel that supplements the basics of faith in Jesus with other stuff.

We are. we really are. And we won't see that easily will we when we're in it. But we're just as at risk of losing why the good news of the gospel is good news at all.

Of knowing that Jesus death verse 4 Jesus who gave himself for our sins to deliver us is enough for you to be free to enjoy God and to live for him without fear.

[ 15 : 51 ] We are just as gullible on this. Look at what happened to them. They've had Paul the great apostle the great master theologian. Look at the start they've had as churches.

The theologian on grace and on the atonement that look what they've done in verse 6 I'm astonished that you've so quickly deserted him who called you in the grace of Christ.

verse 9 we've said it before so we say it again it's not the first time that he's warned them about this. This isn't just a little blip it's a perennial problem isn't it?

He knows how gullible they are and how easy it is to veer off and how quickly they've done that and those harsh words in verse 6 they might not be written to you and me in 2019 but they are written for you and for me.

Adding other things on to trusting in Jesus is for us folks a constant and easy and quick mistake to make.

[ 17 : 06 ] I think it is pretty safe to say that I can almost guarantee that the moment we leave this building and even in this moment right now we are at risk of this. That we are gullible we are susceptible to the claim that the gospel is about earning salvation.

Our idea of Christianity is a kind of performance related pay system isn't it from God. We may say that Christ is everything but deep down maybe we live as if he is insufficient and we've got to top it up a little bit more.

God and it can be doing good things isn't it that is good to do. Acts of social justice and praying and fasting and picking up litter and reading the Bible and evangelism.

Good things to do. But we forget don't we so often that we don't obey that we might earn and belong to God but we already belong in Christ and so we obey.

So I can have a bad week can't I and I can have a good week where I've done lots of good stuff but actually I'm all over the place and I kind of think of God as having this kind of emotional wreck by the end of it.

[ 18 : 28 ] And Christian meetings can be full of that too can't they? We look at each other and we make comparisons but if you start thinking that that is the way the gospel works you've got a different gospel.

Jesus plus anything else equals nothing at all and the gospel is ruined. Just as we close let me say that these meetings on a Tuesday as you listen to God's word preached maybe on a Sunday and in other meetings this meeting on a Tuesday is probably the most dangerous place that you can be in Ealing right now.

As you come, as people come here and the Bible is opened and the gospel is spoken out prayerfully and faithfully we are not infallible people are we?

I am not the Apostle Paul. And there is always a risk isn't there? that the true gospel is so good and pure there is always the risk that we could ruin it that if we don't tell it faithfully and if we should ever tell you or imply that you need more than faith in Jesus actually you'd be better off not coming at all honestly you would be better off not coming if we ever try and enhance the gospel in that way tell us and then do not touch us with a barge pole Paul is much stronger than that isn't he?

Verse 8 verse 9 if anyone does that let him be accursed it's the same idea being accursed the same idea as in the Old Testament when people dropped down dead didn't they when they went in the temple and they were unclean or they touched the ark of the covenant if anyone does that let him drop down dead Paul says even if it's an angel from heaven even if it's me says the apostle Paul that is how grave it is to add anything to Christ nothing matters more than the purity of the message of grace of salvation being a gift so let me say don't get taken in by the con and it can come in different ways can't it because we can't easily see it happening in our context let us pray that as we go through this letter we would recognise our own gullibility when it comes to good works and earning salvation and obedience and to recognise those areas in our lives where we battle with that where we get confused on that because

[ 21 : 34 ] Jesus Christ plus anything at all really is nothing let's pray■