

Galatians 1:1-7

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[0 : 00] A few years ago, or many years ago now, I lived in Kenya for a year, and we had these in our house occasionally, about once every week, I suppose. We'd see these big orange furry spiders. They're quite terrifying, but we thought, well, those dudes are going to kill off the other things we really don't want to have.

So we let them run around our house. We put up with them. We thought they were a kind of welcome addition to our house. They'd take care of other nasties. Now, after we'd been there 11 months, one of our students, we're teachers out there, one of our students, a lad named Ezra, was in our house.

He saw one of these things, and straight away he stamped on it. And we looked at him like, Ezra, what's the problem? He said, aye, teacher, these are more dangerous than scorpions. Oh, okay.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for helping us out.

See, Ezra loved us. He didn't want us to be in danger. And so he acted very promptly. These things that we tolerated, he knew, were actually dangerous to us.

So he took strong action. And that is a sense of what is happening here as we read Galatians. The Apostle Paul is taking strong action because ideas that people were tolerating, that people were thinking were acceptable, were actually deadly.

[1 : 20] That's why he gets straight into this stinging rebuke. Every other letter he writes, he starts with thanksgiving and saying how he's praying for people. Not stay with these folks. Look at verse 6.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. He is not, as I think the Germans were saying, he's not politely knocking on the door, asking to come in for tea.

Rather, he's entering the house with the door in his hand. I believe that's a German expression.

Barbara can correct me if I'm wrong. It's what a German professor told me. He's entering the house with the door in his hand. He has an urgent message.

He's being very abrupt with these people. Now that sounds intolerant. It sounds very fundamentalist to our 21st century Western ears.

So why is Paul being like this? Well, we need to understand that he's being like this because it's only God's good news that rescues people.

[2 : 23] It's only God's good news about Christ Jesus that transforms lives. And so Paul wants us to hold to that true gospel message.

To accept other ideas is not merely to dilute the gospel. It is to distort the gospel and make it deadly rather than life-saving.

Now why is that the case? Well, Paul shows us here in these verses that the gospel has a unique source, a unique message, and a unique seriousness. A unique source, a unique message, and a unique seriousness.

We need to get these things right to understand why Paul is so urgent here. So first of all, the source. Look at verse 1. This is God's good news. Paul says, Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.

The unique source is God himself. That's why Paul introduces himself as an apostle. Literally, that's a word that means sent one. Now, occasionally in the New Testament it is used as someone sent by a church, but mostly it is used in a technical sense of one sent, one appointed by the Lord Jesus, one sent by him with a message to speak his message.

[3 : 49] So in Acts chapter 1, when they needed to get a new apostle to replace Judas who betrayed the Lord Jesus, there were certain criteria. It had to be someone who had been with the

Lord Jesus from the beginning, who had been a witness of the resurrection.

And he was then appointed by the Lord Jesus, in fact, through lots there in Acts chapter 1. Now, some people dismissed Paul. They said, oh, you weren't one of the original crowd. But Paul, and we'll read about this later on in Galatians, was specifically chosen by God, by the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.

He had been an eyewitness of the resurrection as he saw the Lord Jesus there. And Paul wants to underline this, because he's not speaking as a private individual. He is speaking as one speaking God's message.

He is not from man or through man, but by God. It is God's word. God is the source of this gospel. Now, it's important we get this for two reasons.

Firstly, there are some today who use that word apostle in a very different, loose way. So about a few years ago, I had a cup of coffee with a lady who gave me a book she'd written, and she called herself an apostle.

[5 : 02] Now, the best thing I can say about that is it's very confusing. Very confusing. She is at least 2,000 years too late to be an apostle. She is not an eyewitness of the resurrection.

She does not have the authority of an apostle, in the biblical sense. So that is confusing. The second reason it's important is that people like to, we all, all of us as human beings, like to resist authority.

And we find that with the Bible particularly, and often very much with the apostle Paul. People like to divide a, try to create a division between what Jesus taught and what Paul taught.

So people will say things like, Well, I like Jesus. I like what he said. But I don't like what Paul said. He can be very harsh. He can be very judgmental. He was a misogynist.

What did he know? He was very sexist, wasn't he? That's why it's really important we understand, when Paul talks as an apostle, he is saying that he is speaking God's words, with God's authority, as one appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father.

[6 : 06] What the apostles said went into the Bible. What we say today, what people like me say today, has to come out of the Bible. There is a unique source here.

The unique source is ultimately God, is his gospel. So that's the first thing, there's a unique source of this message. It is from God. But secondly, there is a uniqueness to this message.

There's a unique message here. Many people may say, well, all religions are just the same, really, aren't they? They're all really about getting to God, and being nice people, and all that sort of thing. I mean, after all, didn't Muhammad claim to be speaking God's words? What makes Paul any better or different than Muhammad? That's why we need to be clear about the uniqueness of this good news message.

Gospel means good news. So look at all other religions. You find you can divide them into three basic camps. They're either about behavior, what we do, or belief, what we think, or about belonging, about being part of a community.

[7 : 13] So for example, Islam gives many things for Muslims to do. They've got the five pillars of Islam. Forms of Buddhism can really be a kind of philosophy, a way of thinking about the world.

Many forms of Buddhism are atheistic, in fact. Nothing about God at all. Or think about a conversation I had with a Hindu friend of mine. And he didn't necessarily believe any of the, or many of the teachings.

But for him what was important was a sense of belonging, a sense of tradition, a sense of the culture, being part of something bigger than himself, which generated a sense of order to life and connectedness with the past.

See, these religions tend to be about behavior, about belonging, or about believing certain things, thinking certain ways. But in contrast to these mere religions, see what Christianity is about.

We get a clue to what it's about in verse 4. You see, the gospel diagnoses a deeper problem and prescribes a different remedy.

[8 : 20] Diagnoses a deeper problem and prescribes a different remedy. You see it in verse 4. Paul talks about the grace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of God the Father.

See, the deeper problem that the gospel identifies is our sins. It's the fact we're in an evil age. It's not just modifying our behavior.

It's about rescuing us. Deliver us. He delivered us, Paul said, from the present evil age. That's the worst to do with rescue. There's a film out at the moment, or it came out at the end of last year. I could have watched it on a plane I was on but didn't a couple of weeks ago. It's called The 33. It's about the miners, the 33 Chilean miners who a few years ago were trapped underground for many, many days.

What was their problem? Their problem was they were trapped. They were in a desperate situation. They were going to die. They needed to be delivered from that. They needed people to come down and get them out.

[9 : 31] That, Paul says, is what has happened to us. We have been delivered from this present evil age. We've been rescued through the death of our Lord Jesus. Now, what are our sins?

What are our sins? What is this present evil age? Well, our sins are not one or two wrong things we do but our general rebellion against God. Our turning away from the God who made us and trying to live lives relying on our own strength, our own wisdom, our own sense of right and wrong.

And that's true of the whole world around us. Has been true since Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden and ate the apple. It's been true ever since. This present evil age is not an age where there's an internet or whatever you think is the most evil thing around.

It's the human course of life all through human history trying to live without God. One of the most obvious consequences of that is death. Because death is the consequence of sin.

Death is the consequence of rebellion against this God. So that's the diagnosis of this unique gospel message. The diagnosis is we are dead in our sins.

[10 : 45] Trapped in this present evil age. What's the remedy? Well the remedy is not just to change the way we behave. That's the remedy of religion. The remedy is not just to think something different.

That's a remedy of man-made religion. The remedy is not to belong to a certain group. Again, that's just mere man-made religion. What is the remedy? What's the cure?

Well verses 3 and 4 again. It's the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of God the Father.

Through Jesus' death we can be raised set free raised to new life. And that is the will of God the Father. That's why Paul can pray in verse 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

The whole point of this gospel message is it's not about what we do it's about what God in Christ has done. It's about what God in Christ has done.

[11 : 49] That's why Paul can say grace to you and peace from God our Father. Grace is God's undeserved kindness God's unlimited kindness to undeserving people.

God's unlimited kindness to undeserving people. He gives us his love he gives us forgiveness he gives us rescue not on the basis of what I do or what you do but on the basis of what Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God has done.

And through that grace we get peace. Verse 3 Peace is not just an absence of conflict but the presence of wholeness the presence of the wholeness the well-being that God created us for and that can only come through knowing God.

If you look at the end of verse 4 how does all this come about? Well through Jesus who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of God the Father. See this good news this rescue is all God's idea.

That's what makes this a unique message. It's not about our idea it's about God's idea. It's unique in its diagnosis of our real problem. We need to be rescued from our sin.

[13 : 08] It's unique in its remedy. It's not about us it's about what God has done in Christ. And it's unique because the hero is not us and what we do the hero is God it is all his will.

So that is the good news message. That is the good news message that Paul had taken to these Galatians. It's the good news message that we preach here week by week. So what's the danger? Why is Paul writing so forcefully to these Galatians? What's the danger for you and me? So I suspect it's not that we'll wake up tomorrow and say I don't believe in God anymore I'm going to be an atheist now.

I don't think that's our biggest danger. Our biggest danger is probably not we're going to wake up and say you know what I think Buddhism or Hinduism or Islam is a much better idea. I don't think that's the biggest risk.

The biggest risk is we distort the message that we've heard. Because that's what the Galatians are doing. This message that is unique in its source unique in its substance in its message it's also unique in its seriousness.

[14:17] So look at verse 6 I'm astonished that you're so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel. Not that there is another one but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

And look how serious this is. He goes on verse 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you let him be accursed.

As we've said before also now I say again if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received let him be accursed. That is let him be cut off from God forever. This is a very serious warning in the New Testament I think.

Now what is this distortion that Paul is worried about? What distortion is this that it's turning away from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ God's unlimited kindness to undeserving people it's turning away from that it's thinking we can do something to deserve to merit it's thinking we can do something extra to add to what Christ has done that's the different gospel here the difference of adding saying yet Jesus is good but I need to do something else Jesus is good but I need to have something else and that is what the danger you see what Paul says they're doing as soon as they add try to add to the gospel verse 6 they are deserting him who called them they're not just having a different idea they're deserting the God who called them as soon as they distort the gospel as soon as they leave the central teaching of Jesus giving himself as a substitute for us as soon as we try to add to that we're deserting we're rejecting

God and how are they in danger of doing it? I'll see more of this in coming weeks but they're deserting being called verse 6 in the grace of Christ Jesus in other words they're deserting the simple truth that is purely what Jesus has done on the cross for us through his life death and resurrection that makes us right with God it's not our own religious act it's not our own prayerfulness it's not our own giving it's not our own church attendance it's purely Jesus now why would anyone be tempted to turn away from that?

[16:46] why were these Galatians tempted? why are you and I tempted day by day to try and add to what Jesus has done? well it comes from at least three different places first of all there can be pressure from people teaching let's look at verse 7 Paul says there are some who not that there is another one but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ well people need to make money by writing books by being preachers and teachers on the circuit they put pressure on Christians by selling different ideas by saying things which sound very believable and plausible which sound like they're Christianity but actually are not notice Paul goes on to underline the fact it doesn't matter what people's qualifications are or credentials or their past record what matters is whether what they teach is in line with the gospel that's why he says in verses 7 and 8 if even an angel shop or even I come back myself and preach something different let me be accursed let me be cut off so there can be pressure from other teaching coming in also there can be the desire to be popular can make us want to add to the gospel and distort it that's what Paul says in verse 10 am I now seeking approval of man or from God if I were trying to please man

I would not be a servant of Christ Jesus see people hate the idea that as human beings we are powerless to save ourselves people hate that idea it's deeply unpopular to say that Jesus is the only way to be right with God and so it's easy just to be more popular to kind of dilute that a bit but of course the other reason we can try and add to the gospel is purely our own pride in our pride we want to feel like we can do something to make ourselves in a better standing with God but as human beings we're all naturally proud we all want to feel we've contributed something if you want evidence of this just go down the road to Marks and Spencers I've got nothing against it but go and look at the food aisle go and look at the kind of meals you can buy now you can buy ready meals or you can buy meals where all things are already chopped up and there's a nice sauce there so you can make the meal yourself that's the idea you can feel like you've contributed something to it that's why supermarkets like M&S; sell those kind of meals not just things you shove in the microwave and so you can feel good about yourself like you've contributed to the meal you haven't just been lazy and had ready meals that's appealing to our pride as one of the adverts once said life gets so busy that sometimes it's temptingly easy to pick up some convenience food but it's easier than you think to find nutritious foods in other words don't give in to the easy thing do something yourselves make us let us help you feel good about yourselves and that's why it's so tempting to think we can

add to what

Jesus has done it appeals to our pride instead of recognising that actually it's only through the perfect sinless life of our Lord Jesus through his death in our place on the cross and through his resurrection to new life it's only through that we can be set free from this present evil age see Paul wants the Galatians and us to see the ultimate significance of this gospel message if we try and dilute it we don't merely water it down we distort it and make it deadly it is not a matter of life and death it is more important than all that in July the 7th 2011 a 44 year old lady surprisingly died at the hospital in Greater Manchester people couldn't quite figure out why and four days later another man died and on the 12th of July staff at Stepping Hill Hospital discovered that vials of saline solution had been tampered with what should have just been pure water with a bit of salt in it used for flushing out drips and syringes and things to keep everybody healthy instead someone had added some insulin the result was that something that should have been safe and promoted health became deadly and those vials which were contaminated would not have looked any different to the healthy ones to the true ones yet the addition of one extra ingredient was deadly and that is the same with the gospel of the Lord

Jesus Christ the good news about Jesus if we dilute it if we try and add to it we make it deadly it might look similar it might sound similar but it's deadly only God's good news about Jesus rescues us this message is unique in its source it comes from God as Paul as an apostle writing it it is unique in the scope of its message it diagnoses our deep problem rebelling against God it prescribes the only remedy faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God and it's unique in its seriousness this is the only way to life so we must hold fast to this gospel and not desert it let me pray for us