

ECC Growth Groups – Term 2, 2014
Study 2 – Galatians 1:10-2:10

Big Idea¹: Paul insists that the Gospel that he preaches is the one true Gospel, having been received directly from Jesus Himself, and therefore it is not a message that has its origin in man, been tampered by man, nor requiring man's confirmation

Study Aim²: That group members will be reassured that the Gospel is ultimately a message from God not from man and therefore be encouraged to continue to place their trust in that Gospel and reject other false gospels

Sharing

Have one/two people share their story of how the Gospel changed their life and how they've been challenged and encouraged in their Christian life to stick with the Gospel.

Discussion Starter³

Think about a time when you were telling someone a message that was important or a message that they found hard to believe. How did you try and convince them that it was important or believable?

Bible Reading

Read Galatians 1:10-2:10⁴.

¹ See the footnote from last week regarding the 'big idea' and 'study aim'.

² Again, refer to the relevant footnote from the first study.

³ Last week's study makes reference to these various headings ('Discussion starter', 'Passage questions' etc). Please refer to that again if you need to.

⁴ The reading for this week purposefully includes verse 10 from last week's study. The verse is what I like to call a 'hinge' verse because it 'swings' between the two sections. Note its repeated references to "men" which, when combined with 1:1, forms a bracket for the first section (1:1-10) but also links with the theme of today's section (see 'Big Idea') – 1:10-2:10. Hence its inclusion in the readings for both studies.

Passage Questions

Think back to our passage from last week (1:1-10). What was the situation in these Galatian churches that Paul was writing to?⁵

See particularly 1:6-7. Some false teachers have come in and taught the Galatian believers a different gospel – a perverted version of the Gospel of Christ. This has introduced confusion and caused the churches to turn to this different gospel. In effect, they are “deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ” (God) – verse 6! Paul, of course, is deeply concerned and distressed by this⁶.

What questions might this have raised for the Galatians regarding Paul and his Gospel?

Some possibilities: Did Paul really tell us the truth? Or was he mistaken? And if, as it seems from what these other teachers are telling us, he was mistaken – was that innocently or maliciously? Can we really trust him and what he said? Was Paul’s Gospel really the one true Gospel? Maybe it was false after all? And, if so, what does that mean for where we’ve placed our trust and for our Christian experience?

Look particularly at verses 10-12 in Chapter 1. How does Paul initially respond?

In terms of Paul’s defence of himself, he is not on about pleasing men or seeking their approval.

Additionally, in terms of Paul’s defence of his Gospel, it is not a message made up by men, received from men, or taught by men. Its origin is in a revelation offrom Jesus⁷.

As a side note (and one that you might like to point out to your group), this helps us to make more sense of why Paul introduces himself the way he does in the opening verse of the book – “Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father” (1:1).

⁵ Asking this question is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, comprehending the Galatian situation helps us to grasp why Paul says what he says in this week’s passage. Secondly, it helps people to understand that the book is a coherent whole (even though we are breaking it up into smaller parts each week to better understand it) – i.e. its various parts relate to what comes before and what comes after. Thirdly, and relatedly, it also keeps reinforcing (perhaps more subtly) to our people that good Bible reading (and in fact any good reading really) requires reading a text in its context.

⁶ Remember from the first study that these ‘answers’ are just provided as a guide for you as the leader to know what the questions are aiming at. You don’t need to ‘check off’ every aspect or provide the group with *the* answer at the end of each discussion.

⁷ Given time constraints you probably won’t have the opportunity to look into this “revelation” reference further, but if people have questions regarding what this is or how this came about you can refer them to the places where Paul recounts the details of his conversion (Acts 9, 22 and 26).

Activity⁸

Paul continues his defence of himself and his Gospel right through to the end of our passage. Split your group into two smaller groups⁹. Get one group to look at 1:13-24 and the other group to look at 2:1-10. Using the relevant passage, choose from one of the three options below:

- (i) ‘Mock’ interview. One person can pretend to be a news reporter and another can pretend to be Paul. Extra group members can help come up with questions and responses from the passage. Allow some time for the group to prepare their interview and then present it to the larger group.
- (ii) Drama. Have various group members act out the different characters, interactions and events mentioned in the passage. Allow some time for the group to prepare their script and then present their drama to the larger group.
- (iii) Investigation. Have the group read the passage and pretend that they are detectives compiling a dossier on Paul and his message. Allow some time for the group to prepare and then report their findings back to the larger group.

Passage Questions cont.

Paul mentions a lot of details about himself and various events in his life in this passage. What is his purpose in doing this?

Paul’s purpose revolves around ensuring that “the truth of the Gospel might remain with you” – his Galatian readers (2:5). He is concerned that, having shared the Gospel with them, now with the arrival of these false teachers, he might have run his race in vain (2:2). He wants to protect “the freedom we have in Christ Jesus” (2:4).

He recounts the details of his conversion in order to show that he wasn’t even part of the church of God previously – in fact he was a persecutor of God’s church and tried to destroy it! Upon being commissioned he didn’t seek anyone’s permission before being engaged in proclaiming the Gospel. It was only after three years that he even went to Jerusalem and saw the other apostles – and even then he was only there for a two week period and only saw Peter and James. When he went fourteen years later (!) nothing was added to his message, or corrected, but rather all that the apostles there could do was recognise God’s grace and his work in and through Paul.

⁸ Again, please refer to the first study for my comments about the inclusion of this ‘Activity’ section each week. This particular one helps those who are more kinaesthetic in their learning style and also appeals to those with a preference for the dramatic. You may initially feel like the options suggested – especially the first two – won’t work for your particular group (e.g. they will think it’s too immature, they will find it too embarrassing, we’ve never done something like this before). Try and resist that urge and get brave! You might just be surprised ☺. At any rate, I would suggest that it’s a far more interesting and fun way to work through such a long section of mainly autobiographical content than the question and answer style.

⁹ If your group is quite large you can split into four groups instead of two and give the same sections of the passage to two of the groups (i.e. double up). The activity works best if the groups only have 3-4 people in each one.

How do all these details strengthen the claims that Paul made in 1:10-12?

Paul is not sharing all this information about himself and these various events in his life just for the sake of it. He employs them deliberately in his argument to demonstrate that he is not on about pleasing men or seeking their approval and to prove that his message is not made up by men, received from men, or taught by men. They form a crucial part in Paul's defence of himself and his Gospel message.

The ESV helpfully makes the logic of this clearer than some other translations with its use of "for" at the beginning of verses 10, 11, 12 and 13.

Application Questions

In terms of receiving the Gospel, in what ways are we different from Paul?¹⁰

We cannot say, as Paul does, that we "received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (1:12). We are not apostles and do not stand in such a pivotal position in salvation history as Paul does (the one who was commissioned to initially bring the Gospel to the Gentiles). Unlike Paul, we are taught the Gospel and receive the Gospel from others. It's important that we understand the differences and not just apply from Paul's experience directly across to ourselves.

Given that this is the case, how does our passage equip us to discern the various messages we might be taught?

Some questions we might ask of the messages we hear and the messengers we hear them from may include: Is the one teaching us being a man-pleaser or a God-pleaser? To what extent is it a message from man or from God? Does the messenger appeal to God for their authority (as he is now revealed to us in Scripture) or to people – i.e. wise gurus/special anointed ones? Does the message emphasise and lead to freedom or slavery? Has anything been added to the truth of the Gospel?

How does this passage reassure you in terms of the truth of the Gospel?

Try and tease out the aspects related to the origin of the Gospel, the content of the Gospel and the transmission of the Gospel.

¹⁰ Often as Bible readers our tendency is to jump straight from what the text says and seek to apply it to ourselves and our situation. This can be particularly problematic when it comes to reading the Old Testament (e.g. we forget that we are Christians and not Israelites or we miss the ways in which Jesus fulfills the Old Testament) but it sometimes trips us up even when we're reading the New Testament. This is one such example. We need to be careful here not to put ourselves into Paul's position – we are not like him in some ways – in order to apply this passage appropriately.

Prayer Points¹¹

Praise God for the one true Gospel – a message that has its origin in God not man and therefore can be trusted.

Praise God for faithful people who have guarded the Gospel and faithfully taught it and passed it on through the generations – even down to us today.

Pray that God would help us to be discerning as we hear different messages and that he would help us to stick with the one true Gospel.

¹¹ See the point made in Study 1 referring to the fact that these are just suggestions for you and your group to use during your time of prayer.