

The Galatians had allowed themselves to be turned away from the true gospel soon after they had heard it. This clearly astonished the apostle Paul (v6). But even in our own day we are still susceptible to relaxing our hold on the true gospel and being led astray.

Discuss - How can you practically 'test' the truth of what you hear from those you listen to (ie. Pastors and teachers)?

Read Galatians 1v1-5

Since the apostle Paul had visited Galatia, the churches he had founded there had been troubled by false teachers, called Judiazers. Instead of preaching the gospel of justification by faith and grace alone they had said that you needed to be circumcised as well (see 2v2 and Acts 15v1). What's more they were seeking to undermine Paul's authority – perhaps saying things like: "Who is this man, Paul, anyway? He certainly wasn't one of the original twelve disciples."

Who does Paul say appointed him as an apostle? And why is it significant to point this out in light of the controversy surrounding him?

Paul summarises the gospel for us in these opening verses, what are the key points?

Read Galatians 1v6-10

In every other epistle Paul wrote, after greeting his readers he goes onto to either pray for them or praise God for them. In contrast what does he do in this letter?

v6. How have the Galatians as Paul puts it "deserted" (swopped allegiance)?

v7. As we noted earlier false teachers were seeking to add to the true gospel message by insisting on circumcision – but in fact – as Paul points out – it takes away from it ... as Paul says in v7 "It's really no gospel at all." Why is that?

Explain what you understand the two phrases: "gospel of grace" and "gospel of works" to mean?

v8-9. The point Paul makes here is so important to grasp that he says it twice! What will happen to those who distort the gospel? Why do you think Paul uses such strong words here?

v10 – what is Paul's motive in presenting the gospel, in turn what were the motives of those preaching a false gospel?

Think – Do you know anyone being swayed by false teaching, if so how can you help them?

Read Galatians 1v11-17

Paul says that he had received the gospel by direct revelation from Jesus Christ, and then goes onto prove that he hasn't made it all up, by telling the story of his own conversion and providing evidence of his radically changed life.

Firstly, how does Jesus say we can distinguish a false prophet from a real one? (See Matthew 7v15-16)

v13-14. What were the driving forces in Paul's life before he was converted?

v15-17. What steps did Paul take to deliberately avoid human consultation about the gospel?

Why is Paul so careful to show that he didn't get his gospel from anyone else?

How does his pre-conversion life add weight to his claim that the gospel came directly from God?

Read Galatians 1v18-24

Even three years later when Paul does start to have limited contact with Christians he is at pains to point out that they he hasn't been unduly influenced by them – what other evidence does he pile up here?

v24. Why is it significant that the Christians in Judea praised "God" and not "Paul"?

Think – Paul had had his life totally transformed by God, what are the biggest changes God has made in your life? Praise God for how he has worked and continues to work in your life.