

Truth and Fellowship of the Gospel

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Date: 07 September 2025

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, thank you, Cata. Oh, that's loud. Thank you, Cata, for reading that to us and for praying that we do ask that God will bless the reading of his word and as we open it up this morning.

And it's great to be in Galatians. It's a great letter and we trust that we will learn a lot this morning. You know, it's good to do a recap. Some of you maybe haven't been here the last couple of weeks. This is our third installment in Galatians and we'll be doing it through to November. So this is our third installment. We're in chapter two. So if you've not been, you've missed chapter one.

And maybe you have been here the last couple of weeks, but our minds are weak, aren't they? So it's always good to have a recap. So this is a letter of Paul, the apostle, and we'll see him a lot this morning. And he's writing to the churches of Galatia.

It says that in chapter one. Now, if you read Acts chapter 13 and 14, you see Paul on his missionary journey where he goes through, he visits, he encourages, he helps to run and to challenge these churches in the province of Galatia.

We can see some of them there. We have Iconium, Antioch, Lystra, Derby. These are places that are mentioned. You know, it's great to go and read Acts. That's your homework. My youngest daughter, she just started school. She loves homework. Brilliant.

[1 : 26] So I hope you guys are the same, but go and read Acts. Read the background, the context of Galatians. It is very helpful. OK, but in Acts 13 and 14, Paul goes through these churches and that is who he is writing to.

That there is modern day Turkey. You might recognize it. That is the situation that we are in. But Paul, he is writing an impassioned and a frustrated letter to these churches.

Why? Well, he's addressing a false teaching. This false teaching that the Christians, especially the Gentile Christians, they had to follow certain Jewish laws in order to be truly saved.

That was this false teaching that had come in. And Paul is writing to challenge that. And he's writing in about A.D. 48 to 50, probably around A.D. 50 is the timeline on that one.

And we saw in chapter one, we saw that Paul, he calls himself an apostle. What does that mean? Well, it means that he was commissioned by God himself, was given the message directly to go and tell others.

[2 : 45] And we see in chapter one that he defends his authority to be doing so. He also defends the message that he is giving. This message is that there's only one gospel.

That Paul, he was commissioned by Jesus. He received it from Christ himself. I know that word gospel. I'm always wary we use words that maybe aren't common in the world.

Well, to define the word gospel, it means the message concerning Christ, God's kingdom and salvation. That is what the gospel means.

And literally, it means good news. But we'll see the gospel again in a minute. But Paul, in chapter one, he's defended his authority and his character to preach.

He's addressed the presence of this false teaching. He's defended his calling. And this is necessary. Because if people don't think he has the right to speak, then they're not going to listen to the content of his message, are they?

[3 : 55] So that was chapter one. And that brings us to this morning. And hopefully, nice and simply, two things to remember. First of all, in the first half, we see the truth of the gospel.

And then in our second half, we're going to see the fellowship of the gospel. So let's get stuck into the truth of the gospel.

Paul now goes on to defend the message that he has been giving and the truth of it. You know, the truth, it's a bit of a flimsy concept nowadays, I believe.

We live in the world of fake news, of AI, where we could watch something and we go, I don't know if that's real. You know, it could be made up. Started with photo editing, now video editing. What is true? What is really true? You know, some people would say we live in a post-truth society. What does that mean? Well, it means that we all have our personal truth.

[4 : 58] That if it's true to you, then that's fine. But then that makes truth subjective. But truth is not subjective. Truth is black or white.

It is one thing or another. Things are true or not. And this morning, we will see the truth of the good news of Jesus laid out and defended.

So, please have the Bible in front of you. It's so helpful to have it in front of you as we go through this morning. It is God's word and it is so important to read it.

So, in verse 1, in the start of verse 2, we see that after 14 years, Paul goes up again to Jerusalem.

So, at the end of chapter 1, he visits Jerusalem after three years of his conversion.

And then 14 years later, he goes back to Jerusalem. He takes this man Barnabas with him, who is a partner in the gospel work that he was doing.

[5 : 57] And he also takes Titus. And we'll talk about Titus in a minute. But you know, he doesn't go up because it's really nice that time of year. He didn't fancy a holiday.

It was a revelation from God. He felt God speaking to him and saying, Paul, you need to go to Jerusalem. So, he goes and he meets privately in verse 2, those esteemed as leaders.

These were the Jewish leaders, sorry, the Christian leaders in the church in Jerusalem. And they are mentioned later on and we'll speak about them then.

But he goes and he presents the gospel to these church leaders in Jerusalem. He goes and presents what he has been speaking about for the past 17 years. You know, in the second half of verse 2, we have a slightly funny phrasing.

He says, I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. You know, I'm not a big horse racing fan.

[7 : 07] I don't know if you guys are. I never really got the whole horse thing. If you want to challenge me on that later, feel free. But I never really understood the whole horse racing thing. But you know, sometimes I have found some enjoyment in horse racing.

It's when the jockey falls off. Hopefully they're okay, of course. But the horse, it just keeps running. And this horse just, you know, happy as Larry, running along. Having a great time. Here's one here. This was actually a horse in Mexico and it won the race, having lost its jockey at the start. But you know, once again, I don't know anything about horse racing. But the rules of horse racing is that a horse with no jockey can't win.

This horse had totally wasted its time and energy by running and absolutely given everything to win this race while he was trained to do. But it was totally pointless. Why am I going on about this?

Well, Paul, he doesn't want to have wasted his time. These 17 years that he spent, he doesn't want to have been running this race in vain, as he calls it.

[8 : 11] But this is strange because Paul, he went up not because he doubted in what he had been doing, not because he didn't trust the gospel that he had been preaching.

No, he went because he felt God wanted him to go. Paul wasn't unsure. Paul was confident in the gospel of Jesus Christ that he was preaching.

He had got it straight from Christ himself. He was an apostle. He had spent so long. He was so committed to this good news that he was going around telling others about.

He was so committed to it. He was suffering for it. And he would go on, as I'm sure you know, to suffer even more and eventually be killed for this message that he was proclaiming around the world.

So what does he mean here? Well, he's fighting for the truth. That truth that Gentiles can be saved by faith alone.

[9 : 11] If these other Christian leaders in the center of Judaism in Jerusalem, if these church leaders disagreed with him, if they undermined him, then Paul's work, in a sense, would have been in vain.

The Gentile Christians, their confidence and their faith would have been shattered. It would have emboldened these false teachers who are saying the wrong thing. But thankfully, we see that Paul has not been running in vain.

We meet this man, Titus, in verse 3. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. So Titus was a Greek. He was not a Jew, essentially, a Gentile. Okay? That he was brought up to the center of Judaism. But, you know, he wasn't made to be circumcised by the Christians in Jerusalem so that he could fit in.

The main, but not the only thing that these false teachers were saying was that these Gentile Christians should be circumcised. That's something that the Jews followed from the Torah, their laws.

[10 : 25] But there was other laws they were trying to put on these new Christians. But circumcision was one of the main ones that they tried to impose. But, you know, if Titus wasn't made to be circumcised here by those who ran the church in Jerusalem, then it means that no one should be, that no one has to.

Jesus plus nothing. Jesus minus nothing. The good news of the gospel is that it is just Jesus. That Jesus is enough. In verse 4, Paul explains what he's talking about. He explains what he's talking about.

He says, This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.

These Judaizers, as they were called, they were trying to put these Christians back into the slavery of rules. that you must do X, Y, and Z in order to be saved.

[11 : 34] But, you know, if anyone was going to stick to the Jewish laws, it would have been Paul. Paul, as he admits in chapter 1, he was top Jew.

He was zealous. He loved the rules. That was what he lived for. In chapter 1, verse 14, he says, I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

You know, the false teaching that creeps in here is very close to the truth. These false teachers, they weren't saying to abandon all that they'd heard and go back to, you know, all following all of the rituals and all of the traditions.

But they were just adding things on. And, you know, it's often when false teaching comes in, it sounds almost right. If we were to play that game, have you played it two truths and a lie?

Most people have played that game. We play it with a teenager sometimes. So if I was to tell you things that are true about myself, two of them, and I was to give you a lie, you know, if I give you an outrageous lie, like I'm the president of America, you would spot it a mile off, wouldn't you?

[12 : 53] But if I said something that, oh, that could be true, if I just twist it a little bit, I'm more likely to get away with it. And that's the game. But, you know, that's a little bit like false teaching.

That's when false teaching can be dangerous, and that is why Paul is addressing it here. Paul, he is fighting for the freedom found in the gospel.

We might hear from society or friends or family, we might hear that, you know, Christianity, well, it's oppressive. It's old-fashioned. It's just rules.

Oh, you can't do that. And you must do this. And you have to go to church on a Sunday. And you can't do that before you're married. And all that kind of stuff. Maybe that's what we hear. But the truth is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is freedom.

What do I mean by that? Well, it's freedom from sin. It's freedom from the curse of sin. The curse of sin. We are all sinful by nature.

[13 : 59] Yeah, we all have individual sin. We mess up at times. Well, that is because we are sinful in and of ourselves. What does that mean? Well, it means that we have an eternal separation from God.

God is just. God is holy. That means that he cannot just put up with our disobedience. Cannot just put up with our sinful nature.

God wouldn't be just if he just said, you know what? I'll let you off this time. God is holy and God is just. The law, these rules that the Jews had to follow, all that it achieved was it pointed out to the fact that they couldn't follow them.

If I gave you a massive list of rules, all that would happen is that you would feel guilt and shame and you would feel not good enough because you wouldn't be able to follow them. That was essentially what the law did for the Jews.

You know, the gospel of Jesus Christ, it says that Jesus, he came to this earth. We're approaching that time of year again when we'll think about that. But Jesus came, he came as fully human.

[15:12] So he could feel how we feel. He could be tempted. But he was also fully God, which meant that he did not sin. He resisted temptation. He lived that perfect life.

And he went all the way to the cross. And as he lived his life, he made many claims and he backed them up with miracles, which proved that he was who he said he was, the Son of God.

He went all the way to that cross that we think about Easter time. He gave up his life. And yet he suffered physically. And yes, he died physically.

But in those three hours of darkness, that eternal separation from God, that separation of God that we deserve, it was put upon him, the undeserving one.

Why? So that if we trust in him, we don't have to face that. And he physically died. But he was resurrected again, showing that sin and death had no hold upon him because he didn't deserve to die.

[16:22] He witnessed to many and then ascended back to heaven and is preparing a place for us. How wonderful is that? That means that if we trust in him, if we rely on Christ and not on ourselves, as we sung about earlier, yet not I, but through Christ in me, then we can have our sin problem forgiven.

That we can have freedom in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Graham Helpfully, a couple of weeks ago, said, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone.

That is the good news, the truth of the gospel that Paul was getting across. You know, if that is not you this morning, please speak to me after. Please go along to Hope Explored.

What a great opportunity to go and discuss these things and to really tease them out. It's the most important thing we'll ever do is address our position before the God who made us and the God who loves us.

But you know, if we are saved, then we respond in love and appreciation. We respond by doing what he wants us to do. Not because we have to, not because of a condition of our salvation, but because we want to.

[17:37] And you know, not reverting back to what we were doing before in our sinful ways. It's a silly example, but it's the only one I thought of. Can you imagine being set free from prison?

Captive in there. You've got the whole world in front of you, but you keep going back because you really enjoyed the yard time where you could look up to the sky and imagine the possibilities out there.

That's probably just a, like what I see in films, it's probably not reality at all. But you know, imagine that. Imagine going back to something like that. But in a sense, if we go back to our sinful ways after being saved, then that's what we're doing.

So that is the truth of the gospel. And to finish, we have the fellowship of the gospel. I don't know if you hear the phrase the fellowship of, and in your head, you just start going, a few blank faces.

I'm talking about the Lord of the Rings, the fellowship of the ring. So the Lord of the Rings, the J.R. Tolkien book, and then the famous film series.

[18:46] Here we have the fellowship of the ring. There are a varied bunch. Ignore the horse, just photo bombed in there. But the rest of them, you've got an elf, you've got a man, you've got a wizard, you've got a king, and you've got the hobbits, of course.

And this fellowship, they came together. They had a purpose. They had something to do. They wanted to get rid of this ring. They went on a quest. They all had the same purpose and goal in mind, and they were dedicated to it.

And they traveled all that way to Mordor. Anyway, you can watch it later on. But read Acts first.

Okay. So, why am I talking about this?

Well, this was the fellowship of the ring. But here in the second half, we see the fellowship of the gospel. Here we see that the Christians here, they had a common goal and purpose.

They wanted to see the good news of the gospel spread abroad. And they have real unity in what they are doing. In verse 6, read along with me, it says, As for these who were held in high esteem, whatever they were makes no difference to me.

[19:56] God does not show favoritism. They added nothing to my message. These esteemed others, as Paul calls them, they had nothing to add to what Paul was preaching.

The gospel is the gospel. And that was true then. And it's true now. That's why we need to guard against false teaching if it comes in at all.

And Peter, he's named later on. It might be in your version, Cephas. That's him. That's Peter. But he had seen firsthand in Acts chapter 10 and 11, he had seen the Gentiles come to faith and receiving the Spirit with no add-ons, just by accepting the truth of what Jesus had done, his death and resurrection.

Acts 11 and 18, when they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, So then, even to the Gentiles, God has granted repentance that leads to life.

So Peter, he couldn't add to this because he had seen it firsthand. And Paul, interestingly, he sees no hierarchy because God doesn't. It says, God does not show favoritism.

[21 : 05] All are the same before God. Everyone is equal before God. We can maybe explore that in growth groups or discuss after maybe about how that would relate in church circles, but that's not time for that this morning.

But we are all the same before God. When God looks out, he sees us in two categories. It's sinners or saved. So that means if we are saved, then we are all equal.

You know, it's remarkable that nothing is added to in the gospel here that Peter and the others, they basically sign off and say, we are preaching the same gospel. Think about it. 14 years has elapsed between when they've seen each other.

Think of the distances involved. This wasn't in the day that you could email or send a text and say, oh, how's your doctrine on this? What do you think about that? Can you remind me of this?

You know, in human terms, this is remarkable, but it's because of the work of God. This is God's work. And so the gospel has been stuck to.

[22 : 13] The truth of it has been kept. And we see in verse 7 and 8 that God is working in Paul and Peter, but in different ways. Verse 7 says, It is all God's work here.

Peter and Paul, they are just messengers. They are just being used by God. And they are equal in role. There is no hierarchy. They just have a different calling.

They've been called to go to different places and to speak to different people. And when you break that down, that means that there is no difference between a Jewish Christian and a Gentile Christian.

And that really affects the false teaching that was being put in here. There is real unity and responsibility in the body of Christ. What do I mean by that?

The body of Christ. Elsewhere in Paul's letter, he talks about the body of Christ. That is the church. Not the building, not Bruntsfield, but the global church. All Christians are the body of Christ.

[23 : 36] You know, what do we know about the body? Well, there's lots of different parts. I can read Paul's letter that explains this. But essentially what he says is that the church is the body of Christ.

There's different parts. There are hands. There are feet. They do different roles. But we need all of them for it all to come together and to work well. If we were missing any part of our body, then I'm sure we would struggle in certain ways to do certain things.

So they are equal but have different roles. And we see that in verse 9 where James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.

They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. There's marvelous common appreciation and respect shown here between these two parties.

Yes, they have different roles. They have different areas. They have a different ministry. But they have the same gospel. There is mutual encouragement here.

[24 : 51] We'll see next week that there was challenge when things aren't right. There's accountability in this. You know, the right hand of fellowship, it's something that we don't really, maybe that's not fair to say, buy into nowadays, but not explicitly.

But you know, really back then it was a strong thing. It meant that we were partnering. We're partnering in this together. It means that there would be encouragement, there would be challenge, that there would be prayer for one another.

It was really a sense saying, I am with you no matter what in our shared work of the gospel. This is a great example to follow nowadays.

Partnering in our work. It might be in big ways, it might be in small ways. Partnering in the work of spreading the good news of Jesus. So we have our final verse.

And it might seem a bit random. It says, All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I'd been eager to do all along. Seems sort of added on, out of place.

[25 : 59] But you know, this here is the outflowing of this fellowship. Outflowing of this like-mindedness. It was probably meaning by the poor, it was probably meaning the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

They were really struggling. They were facing massive hostility for what they believed. They were being persecuted. They were facing really tough times. And we see in Acts that they were raising money in other churches and sending it to these Christians in Jerusalem.

You know, if the truth and the fellowship of the gospel is applied, then we're not inward focused. We're not thinking all about us and how things affect us.

But we look outward. We look outward. Yes, in message telling, but also physically looking after people and really caring for how other people are.

That is the truth and the fellowship of the gospel applied out the way. So as we finish, I thought it'd be helpful just to look at some practical things as to how we can think about this.

[27 : 13] So from our first section, how can we stick to the truth of the gospel? Well, first of all, there's study. Read the Bible. Yes, individually, it's so important to have that one-on-one time in God's word.

In this age that we are in, this is the age that God speaks to us through his word. So it's important that we spend time reading it, understanding it, getting to know it. You know, it's also great to come together on occasions like this and to hear from God's word, to attend home groups, to go to places where God's word is discussed and that we can learn and also when we can be corrected.

These things are important. Why? Because if we don't know the Bible, how are we going to spot false teaching coming in? How are we going to guard the truth of the freedom of the gospel?

Well, one of the best ways to do so is through prayer. We need to pray because we need God's help in these things. Just as it was God who kept the gospel true in those 14 years and no deviation in that time for Paul and for Peter, likewise, we need the Spirit's help.

And lastly, challenging what isn't right. You know, if there's things that aren't right, if there's things that are being said that aren't true, then in a loving and a gracious way, we need to challenge these things.

[28 : 43] We cannot just let small things, it's not quite right, but we'll just let it go. You know, these things snowball. We cannot allow false teachings to come in because they are dangerous and it will cause a lot of problems.

So how can we encourage fellowship in the gospel? Well, meeting with other Christians, meeting together. We're not going to encourage people, we're not going to have fellowship if we don't meet together.

As Craig said, grab a coffee at the end, speak to someone. You know, encouraging people, encouraging one another, both within Bruntsfield, yes, but then out with as well.

How do we do that? Well, within Bruntsfield, if we come, we come to the prayer meeting, we'll encourage people by being there, by attending, speaking together, how about you ask someone after the service how their prayer life has been this week.

Now, it's a challenge, but it's an encouragement that we care about one another. We could message people during the week, how are you getting on? Anything I can pray for, that's really encouraging.

[29 : 57] It encourages this fellowship in the gospel. Or they're serving. You know, it's brilliant to be able to serve one another. It's really encouraging to see people serve and give up time and do roles that are just in the background that are so important and are so helpful.

That's within, but then we also have without. So it might be going to speak somewhere, giving a talk. Maybe it's helping at other churches' events, doing camps, this type of thing.

We've been blessed at Bruntsfield to have people come to our church weekend away to do the cooking, to look after children. That was really encouraging. Or maybe you're on holiday and you attend a local church.

That will be really encouraging for them, wherever that is. And then you've got more formalized ways of fellowship in the gospel. So we have things like the Origin Events in Edinburgh, where lots

of people from all the churches in Edinburgh and beyond gather together to sing and worship our God together.

Similar with the praise gathering, which some people here are involved in. And we also have gospel partnerships. There's one in Glasgow. There's some all over the place. But Graham, he's heavily involved with the East of Scotland gospel partnership, working with other churches to see people in our city saved.

[31 : 20] Wonderful. And finally, what does our saving faith cause us to do? Well, inwardly, we rejoice.

Rejoice in the freedom of the gospel, the truth of it. And then there's that outward pouring, the gospel applied, preaching the gospel, telling others, telling your friend over lunch, whatever it might be.

Telling the good news of Jesus to those who we rub shoulders with. But then practically as well, remember the poor, those who are in difficult times, those who are struggling physically, mentally, whatever it might be, looking out for others.

God, Father, we just thank you for your word. We thank you for the opportunity and availability we have of it. And we thank you for speaking to each one of us. And we pray that your spirit will work in us this week as we go and as we consider and apply these things that we have heard from you this morning.

And so we just ask your blessing on the rest of our time. In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.