

Today we're continuing our series on Paul's letter to the Galatians, and right throughout this letter, Paul's main message (and possibly his almost 'sole' purpose), has been to remind the Galatians "what the Gospel is" – That they became "sons of God", by faith... And so they shouldn't be (at all) convinced by these (what we call) Judaisers, who have come into town, and started telling them "If you want to be a Christian, then first of all, you have to become a Jew and keep all the religious Laws & whatnot."... ..

And we're more than half-way through the letter now, and this has been Paul's constant messaging, and it continues to be his message today... But today, we're going to focus on 5 truths that Disciples of Jesus should know.

1.

The first truth, is that our salvation and our status as 'Sons of God', isn't about how much **we** know (If it was, it would only be the academics who could be saved) — It's not about how much we know – It's about us **being "known by God"**...

Now, at one time, these Christians in Galatia, used to be 'Pagans'... That means they didn't know the One True God, and so they worshipped a multitude (or a pantheon) of 'false gods'... In fact, Paul says that they were enslaved to them...

But (in V9) he sorta corrects himself – he says , ⁹ **But now that you have come to know God**, (and here comes the correction, and there's depth to this correction) **or rather to be known by God**

You see, we might have friends/family/know someone in the community, and they might be very nice sorts of people, and then somebody asks you, “are they a Christian?” And often, the answer comes “Oh, they’ve got a sort of belief – I’m pretty sure they believe in God” – as if that’s something that’s going to save them...

The devil believes in God, and he’s destined for the pit of hell...

Many, many people “know God”. They “know about God”. They might even think “God’s alright”... But are they known by God???

Let me give you an example.

I think it was in 2002. I was studying at Bible College, and so we were living in Brisbane. And Queen Elizabeth II visited Brisbane... And I thought, well, this is an opportunity – we should take the kids to see the Queen. As almost an afterthought, we quickly picked some frangipani flowers off the tree, and we walked to the bus station, and caught a bus into the Roma Street Parklands...

Anyway, we (along with thousands of other people), lined the roped-off path she was going to take. I think I might’ve had Ben on my shoulders, and Jake wiggled through the crowd, to squat down at the front...

We believed in the Queen. We knew she was coming, and we went to meet her. It just so happens that Jake got his face on the front page of the Courier Mail. What the photo didn’t

capture, was that the Queen actually took the flowers out of Jake's hand...

Now, do we know the Queen??? Sorta...

But that's not what's important. What's important, is if the Queen knows us. And she doesn't. I can't front up to Buckingham Palace, and knock on the door to visit the Queen... "Tell Bessie we're here to see her. We met at Roma Street Parkland. She'll remember. She took the flowers from our son Jake... She wrote a letter to Robyn's grandmother a few months ago..."

I'm pretty sure, they wouldn't even bother to tell the Queen that there's some crazy colonials knocking at the door...

If I know about God; or have some kind of a belief in God; or think I know God – that's not what counts... What counts, is if **we** are known by God. Are we sons of God? Is the Spirit of His Son, living inside of us??? You see, as Christians, this is an intimate, 2-way relationship we have... We are so close, that Christ in us, makes us cry "Abba, Father". And God knows us, because we are in Christ His Son, and His Son is in us...

What an amazing and wonderful blessing it is, to be known by God... And let's never 'dumb-it-down', by saying, "They've got a sort of a faith" – as if that's any advantage to them... We need to be upfront with people, and say "Knowing about God isn't going to 'cut it'". And even "Thinking you know God, isn't going to cut it"... It's about God counting us as His

family... – and share with them, the blessing you’ve experienced – to be known by God...

So, that’s the 1st one – being known by God.

2.

The Second truth we encounter, is the futility of religious observances (such as a liturgical calendar), in the hope that by ticking the right religious boxes, we might be saved.

So, part of the Old Covenantal religious law (that was getting pushed onto the Galatians) was the liturgical calendar – that’s a fancy way of saying that they had all these dates on their calendar, where they were expected to celebrate:

- feasts
- sacrifices
- festivals
- fasts,,,

and if you do all of these things, then that’s going to make God happy.

And somehow, this sort of thing has found its way into Christianity too...

Back in the Day, the Anglican church was known as the Church of England (CofE), but in most country towns, we thought that stood for “Christmas” and “Easter”, because those were the times where (if you were CofE), you would go to church...

Years ago, I used to joke with a bloke who used to attend the church I was in, that he was the most regular church attender in that church – he'd be at church every Easter Sunday – he'd never miss it...

And it's amazing, the number of people who will rarely go to church, but they'll only eat fish on Good Friday.

For many ministers, what they wear, is dictated by the calendar. Some ministers wear a scarf called a "stole", and depending on the season, it can be purple; white; green; red; black...

Now, there's nothing wrong with any of these things, but if we slavishly do them, in the attitude that God's going to be more happy with us if we've celebrated a date on a calendar, then we've lost the plot – we've enslaved ourselves to what Paul calls **the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world.**

You see, **elementary principles of the world** – this is the first thoughts of the world, when it comes to God – if you can tick all of the right religious boxes, then you're good to go...

But Paul says, that's enslaving yourself – it's weak; it's worthless these are just empty religious observances, and they're futile...

Easter was only 2 weeks ago... At Easter, some people go to church, because it's 'the done thing'... But why do we

worship??? We gather to worship our Lord Jesus Christ, because our hearts are filled with joy, and we yearn to worship Him – together....

Let's move on:

3.

The third truth for today, is that we can follow the Godly example of others, who **are** “living by grace”...

We've got the **weak and worthless elementary principles of the world**, tugging at us all the time – It's the worldly, vain hope that “we can save ourselves”, or at least we can help God save us...

But Paul says, look at me: ¹² **Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are....**

At one time, Paul **was** a Jew (well, he still was a Jew). But, at one time, he was the most fastidiously **religious** of Jews – he was a **Pharisee**... Now, the Pharisees – they kept The Law, to the nth degree. Jesus poked fun at them, because they even tithed on the herbs they used in their dinner... “Oh, 10 mint leaves for the pot, so I'd better set aside a 10th – 1 mint leaf to add to the offering on Saturday....

And Paul's saying, “I left all that behind, to live by grace”... I became **as you are** ... But the thing is (and this is the thing that had him perplexed) now these Galatians, were wanting to become what Paul once was...

Paul understood what it meant to live by grace – not working for salvation – but living by the Spirit – where the righteousness of God oozes out of us, because Christ lives in us... It's good to have Godly examples of those who live by grace. And we should learn from them.

4.

Fourthly, Christians (even good Christians), get sick.

Why would I need to tell you this?

There is a (I was going to say “strange teaching”, but I'm going to be more blunt than that).

There is a **deceptive** teaching around (and you've probably heard it), that Christians can never be sick. And that it's God's will, that **all** Christians should be healed, all of the time. And if you're filled with the Holy Spirit, then you **cannot** be sick, and you **will** be healed... And if you're not healed, then you've either got too much sin, or not enough faith...

Silly Paul – he obviously didn't get that memo. Or maybe Paul didn't have enough faith....

Paul, was crook. He said: ¹³ You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first

Now, a fair bit of ink has been spilled over this, with various theories have arisen, because we like to know:

- What ailment did Paul have?
- Why was he crook?
- Some people think he had a problem with his eyes, because he says: **For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.** Maybe it was an eye complaint – Don't know...
- Why did he end up in the Region of Galatia? Don't know. Maybe he was on his way through, on his way to somewhere else, and because he got crook, he had to hang around until he recuperated.; or
- maybe somebody told him, the climate of Galatia was a good place to recuperate, and so he went there for that reason...

We don't know. And this side of glory, we **won't** know.

But I'll tell you what we **do** know.

We do know that the apostle Paul – a man through whom God had done amazing miracles (and healed others), – the apostle Paul, was sick... Do you know why? Because Christians get sick. And while, in God's mercy, the Lord does miraculously heal some, He doesn't heal us all...

Now, some preachers, will reject (outright), what I just said. But you know what??? It's true...

And the sort of teaching that tells us we should expect all to be healed, all of the time, is little more than 'wishful thinking'...

I've seen a few churches over the years, that adopt that sort of teaching, and it's really popular (at the start)... But then, people start to realise, "It's not true"... "I'm getting fed this

false hope” – “I’m getting these promises, week after week, but it’s just not happening for me...”

- my old, sore knees, are still old and sore;
- my asthma goes up and down with the season, more than what it does to prayer;
- I’m still deaf in one ear;
- I still need a filling;
- the cancer’s still growing...

And no matter how much the promises get ‘pumped out’ and ‘propped up’ with claims that people are healed when they not, or rejoicing that someone’s recovered of a cold in 3 days... (I’m being a bit naughty, aren’t I)... but in the end, some are healed... But many are not...

You see, God is sovereign – He is King – it’s up to God, whom He heals, and who He doesn’t heal.

But let’s rejoice and be glad, because we **will** all be healed at the resurrection. When those who are in Christ, are raised from the dead, there will be no more sickness or disease. But until then, yes, we pray for the sick, and we pray in the way that Jesus taught us (and the way that Jesus modelled) “Your will be done” – “Not my will, but Your will be done”...

And we rejoice in the mercy of God, when He **does** grant healing. And we also rejoice in the sovereignty of God, when His will, is for something other than healing.

Something I’ve noticed, is when “guaranteed healing” is what’s promised, often that church will usually have a 2-way door. There will be:

- those who arrive, hoping for healing; and
- those who are leaving because, despite all of their hopes/prayers/faith, they haven't been healed...

And sadly, many of those will never set foot in a church again. Do you know why? Because they've experienced a lie... Which means they haven't experienced Jesus, because Jesus is "Truth". ...

But even so, if the image a church is chasing, is to be a picture of "health" and "wellness", they may actually achieve that, because the sick; the aged; and the infirmed, who haven't been healed, can't stand it anymore, and so they leave.

So Christians (even good Christians), get sick. **And the Christian church, is the place for sick people to be.**

We minister to them, you see. We:

- pray for them
- nurse them;
- care for them;

Did you notice, the way the Galatian church, cared for the apostle Paul, when he was incapacitated???

V14 ¹⁴ and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus....

He said, "You would've torn your eyes out and given them to me, if you could..."

They loved Paul so much. And they cared for him. And that's what we do (as the body of Christ), isn't it??? When one of us is sick, we pray for them, but we also **practically**

care for each other. I know some of the ladies are always cooking up meals and giving them to those who are unwell.

And you know what? – God will use our sickness, to be a witness for Him... Paul only stayed there and preached the Gospel to them, because he was sick...

But even though, at one time, they had that sort of love for Paul, something changed... Paul said: ¹⁶ **Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?**

5.

And so, we come to the 5th truth: Beware of flattery.

V17 ¹⁷ **They make much of you, but for no good purpose.**

Sometimes, it feels ‘nice’, to be ‘made much of’...

Vs16 & 17 demonstrate a very sad reality. It’s a tough job, being a preacher/teacher/pastor of a church... You see, I know that there are times, when I teach the truth, some people are going to be offended, and might even possibly stop coming to church, because it’s not what they want to believe, and it’s certainly ‘not what they want to hear’.

I also know, there are some, who only want to feel good about themselves. They don’t want to hear any negativity – they

only want to be affirmed... And their weakness, is they want to feel special... They **want** to be made much of...

You see, the state of the human heart, is such that some of us want to feel really good about ourselves and never be challenged (or told that we're wrong). And some crave to receive: recognition; esteem; admiration; – they want to be honoured; appreciated; valued...

And so they fall for the flatterer... I know a bloke (he ended up being a bit of a conman), but he has the ability, that no matter who he meets, within a couple of minutes of conversation, he would make you feel like 'the centre of his world'... He has this way of making you feel so 'important' and feeling 'so good about yourself' ...

You do remember me saying, "He was a bit of a conman" hey...

And some people fell for it. And others saw straight through it ("Can you believe this guy")... And the difference, is some people have a gift of discernment, and others don't.

Proverbs 29:5 (ESV)

⁵ A man who flatters his neighbour
spreads a net for his feet.

Romans 16:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.

18 For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

Now, none of us like to think that we're "naïve", but if I fall for a flatterer, that's exactly what I am... And so, if there are people who are wise in the Christian faith, and discerning, and if they have concerns about somebody who I really like (because they make me feel really special), maybe I should listen to those who have spiritual wisdom and discernment...

Flattery, is a very powerful form of manipulation. It makes us feel really good about ourselves, but for no good purpose...

And here's an example here: by flattery, these false teachers had captivated the hearts of many in the Galatian church. And they'd turned them against Paul... Paul was the one who was teaching them the truth, but now they saw him as the enemy, because when they were seduced by a lie, and Paul upheld the truth... But they were so captivated by the flatterers, they wouldn't tolerate Paul saying anything bad about them...

And I've used the word "captivated" a couple of times, and it's the right word, because by flattery, they've been enslaved to a false gospel, and enslaved to these false teachers.

And this really grieves Paul...

As a pastor, do you know what grieves me most? It's when those who came to faith in the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, are led astray into falsehood. And so I understand the grief that

Paul's expressing here... And the more he tells them the truth, the more they don't want to hear it.

But it can change, you know. This is the whole purpose of the letter to the Galatians – to stop listening to the rubbish, and to return to the pure Gospel.

And why wouldn't we? The Gospel of grace in Christ Jesus... What a wonderful, wonderful thing – to be the sons of God.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
We thank You, that it is through You,
that we can be known by God.
What a wonderful privilege this is.

Lord, please forgive us for
empty, worthless religious observance;
Forgive us for the times that we've done these things,
rather than having a genuine, living relationship with
you.

Lord, we thank You,
for this gospel of grace.
Help us to follow the examples of
Godly men and women,
who live by grace, and do it well.

Lord, shortly we will pray for the sick,
But Lord, help us to not pursue physical health
(as if it's the end to be attained).
Give us the grace to pray for;
and to care for the long-term sick among us.
Fill our hearts with the mercy that You have;
And help us to love one another
even when it's something that costs us, and is a burden,
as we carry one-another's burdens in the Name of
Christ.

And Lord, in times of sickness,
help us to be a witness to You,
That our joy in Christ Jesus,
would overflow, even in times of pain & torment.

And Lord, guard our hearts.
Let us never be enslaved
by the tongue of the flatterer.

May we always love truth;
reject lies; and
not be manipulated
away from Your pure Gospel.

in the Name of Christ Jesus,
Amen.