

A: The Cross and the Apostle

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, or at least the first of our Bible readings. We find it in Paul's letter to the Galatians, and if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, that should be, I think, page 972.

Rupert Hunt Taylor, one of our staff, is going to be preaching this morning and twice again in the fairly near future and is going to attempt to do an ABC, an overview of this letter of Galatians over these three Sundays.

And we studied this in depth some years ago, but it will be very helpful indeed to get a refresher and to get the big argument of this letter into our minds.

So, we've a lot to read this morning. We're going to split it into two, but I'm going to begin now, chapter 1, and read into the beginning of chapter 2. Then we'll sing, and then we'll return and read to the end of chapter 2.

So, Paul's letter to the Galatians, beginning at verse 1. Paul, an apostle, not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches of Galatia.

[1 : 18] Grace to you and peace 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 our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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.

Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 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, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. Am I now seeking the approval of man or of God?

Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. But I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

[2 : 39] For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people. So extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born and who called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son in me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.

Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. But I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Kephas and remained with him fifteen days.

But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. In what I'm writing to you before God, I don't lie. Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.

[4 : 13] And they glorified God because of me. Then, after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

I went up because of a revelation and set before them, though privately before those who seemed influential, set before them the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles in order to make sure that I was not running or had not run in vain.

But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus so that they might bring us into slavery, to them we do not yield in submission even for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

And from those who seemed to be influential, what they were makes no difference to me. God shows no partiality. From those who seemed to be influential, those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.

On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been trusted with the gospel to the circumcised, for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me from mine to the Gentiles.

[5 : 46] And they saw that, and when James and Kephass and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.

Only they asked us to continue remembering the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. Amen.

Let's break there and sing. Well, let's pick up our reading there in Galatians chapter 2, verse 11.

So Paul has described these harmonious meetings with the apostles in Jerusalem, the Jerusalem church, the church in Judea, the church mainly among the Jews.

They were preaching the same gospel, and they shared the same fellowship in Christ. But, verse 11, when Kephass, with whom he'd shared fellowship and been at one in Jerusalem, but when Kephass came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.

[7 : 18] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Kephass, before them all, if you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live as Jews?

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ or through faith or the faith of Jesus Christ.

So we also have believed in Jesus Christ in order to be justified by the faith of Christ and not by works of the law. Because by works of the law, no one will be justified.

But if in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin?

[8 : 52] Certainly not. For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law, I died to the law.

So that I might live to God, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God.

For if justification of righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. Amen.

May God bless to us this reading of his word. Well, friends, turn back with me to Galatians chapters 1 and 2, page 972 in the Visitor's Bibles.

[10 : 08] Galatians chapters 1 and 2. And let me pray. Father God, we thank you that through this letter of Paul's, you speak wonderful news to us today.

We ask, Lord, that you give us open ears to hear what you have to say and alert minds to concentrate on what you have to say and ready hearts to respond to what you have to say.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, what would it take for the Tron Church, this church, to abandon the Apostle Paul and his message?

If the Apostle Paul got off a bus on Queen Street and happened to find his way to our church on his first Sunday in Glasgow, would he come back the next?

Would he recognize a living, authentically Christian congregation? Or would he wonder what we're all playing at? Or to put it another way, is Paul still our Apostle?

[11 : 22] That's a question at the heart of this morning's passage. And I suppose as a Bible-believing church, our immediate answer would be, well, yes, of course he is.

But as it turns out, that's not simply a question for other Christians and other churches to answer. In fact, if this letter is to believe, Paul may well walk into the most biblically, literate church in Scotland

and ask that very same question.

You see, Paul and his gospel can be denied in more ways than one. Well, we have three Sundays together to listen in to one of Paul's earliest letters to one of his first church plants.

And although this is an epistle which we evangelicals love and which is done more, probably than any other, to shape church history, it is a rather difficult letter to climb inside.

So this time, we're simply going to try and learn our Galatian ABCs. We're going to try and get a feel for the basic shape of this letter, the main flow and the main application.

[12:41] And we're going to begin this morning with the letter A, the cross and the apostle. What makes Paul's gospel the only gospel worth listening to?

And how do even good conservative Christians, evangelicals, often deny that gospel? That's the first big section of this letter, chapters 1 and 2.

And then in a few weeks' time, we'll come back to B and C. The cross and the believer is chapters 3 and 4. And finally, the cross and the church, chapters 5 and 6.

Now because this is just the ABCs, we can't afford to get stuck in the rather tricky detail of this letter. But fear not, if you want all the dots in the iotas as well as the ABCs, then Willie preached on this a few years ago and you can still find it on the website and that may have helped some of you. But God willing, we will begin to see how the big sweep of Galatians applies to us Glaswegians. So let's begin where Paul begins with the cross and the apostle.

[13:54] And what an astonishingly strange way to begin a letter this is. We get a seriously blunt introduction, verses 1 to 10, followed by a long autobiography of the apostle Paul, all the way down to chapter 2, verse 10.

And finally, an account of a rather obscure argument from the early church. So what ties all of this together? Chapter 2, well, the big point of these two chapters is fairly loud and clear.

Paul's gospel is God's gospel. And so it is the only gospel. And that last little section, that argument between Peter and Paul, in fact, gives us a perfect illustration of how even good, well-taught Christians can deny that one gospel of God's apostle.

So firstly, let's look at the blunt opening. Ten verses about the one costly gospel of Christ crucified. The one costly gospel of Christ crucified.

Now as you start to read this letter, you quickly sense that it isn't written by a man relaxing in an armchair over a big mug of coffee.

[15:18] This is Paul, the worried pastor, tearing out his hair over the churches he founded on his first missionary trip. And there's no beating about the bush.

Verse 6 tackles the issue with a bang. I am astonished, says Paul, that you are 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. So welcome to Galatia, a church in trouble.

And as the letter goes on, it becomes obvious that Paul isn't really angry with them. He's deeply frustrated and concerned, even anguished.

Why? Because no sooner has he gone back home to Antioch than his baby Galatian church begins to turn away from the grace of Christ to a distorted gospel.

[16:26] Now we don't know yet what that distortion is. We'll have to keep our minds open about that. But we have already met a third party, another group whose fingerprints are all over it.

Verse 7, there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. And if Paul is perplexed and worried about the church, he's furious with these troublemakers.

Let him be damned, cursed. That is no light thing from the lips of an apostle. So why should these churches listen to Paul and not to the new troublemakers?

What makes his gospel worth listening to? Well, five times we're told it's because his authority doesn't come from any human being, but from God himself.

Verse 1, not from man, nor through man. And in case we forget it, it's repeated all the way down to verse 12. And because it's God's gospel, not man's gospel, it's God who has the right to determine its boundaries.

[17:44] And that's what Paul does in this first section. He tells us about its content, its contrariness, and its cost. Firstly, its content the only form of Christianity worth listening to, according to Paul, is a rescue religion.

It's a gospel of peace, verse 3, won for us by the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins. And he did all that for one reason, to deliver us, rescue us from this present evil age.

a very similar phrase right at the end of the letter. Paul's gospel is not about coping with this world, it's a gospel of deliverance from this world and this age.

That's its content. Secondly, its contrariness, because Paul's gospel is God's gospel. Even Paul, verse 8, has no liberty to preach another.

It's not one amongst many, verse 7, but the one and only gospel of God, set against every distortion of the truth.

[19 : 02] It's one or the other, Paul or the troublemakers. And thirdly, verse 10, God sets its cost. Because it's not man's gospel, it doesn't lead to man's approval.

It seems like one of the charges these troublemakers made against Paul was that he was simply a people pleaser. That's where his grace leads.

His gospel was simply telling people what they wanted to hear. But just turn quickly to the very end of the letter. And it's an ending even more stark than the beginning.

Look at the second to last verse. From now on, says Paul, let no one cause me trouble. For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

What a somber ending. According to Paul, it is his gospel, which is the truly costly gospel. Now, as we venture further into the letter, I think that costliness of Paul's gospel and his message is rather surprising.

[20 : 16] because whoever these troublemakers are, it seems that they are adding certain religious requirements onto Paul's message. They're peddling a sort of full-fat version of Christianity, which involves adopting Jewish customs and commitments if you want to be properly spiritual.

And we might tend to think it's that zealous religious road, which is the hard and costly one. I'm sure they did.

But not Paul. All he had to do, it seems, to ease some of the pressure that comes with being a servant of Christ was to add a little bit of something to his gospel.

A few weeks ago, my sweet little toddler launched a precision strike on my right eye. I can only assume it was a move perfectly calculated to be as exquisitely painful as possible.

She poked me with her finger and tore my cornea and then attempted a sweet little laugh to shrug it all off. Now the worst thing was this. All you can do with a damaged cornea is wait for it to heal.

[21 : 37] But I happened to have a little bottle of local anesthetic proxymetacaine eye drops and I soon discovered that just one little drop would make all the pain go away.

The problem is it only lasted about 20 minutes and when Kathy Morrison, our church eye specialist, heard what I was doing, she went absolutely bananas.

Because you see every little drop sets the healing right back to square one. Imagine how tempting it was lying there with my eyes shut and tears streaming down my face for days on end just to reach for that little bottle.

One drop. And all that stopped me was thinking what would Kathy say? She's not a woman to mess with, I can see her now. I'm wishing I hadn't told this story.

Well, I think that's a little picture of what a young Christian can expect if this Galatian church is anything to go by. There are only two kinds of people, the servant of Christ and the pleaser of man.

[22 : 49] man. And we can expect people to cause us real trouble and worry if we choose to be the servant of Christ. If you're a young Christian, like this young church, expect that one of these days you'll begin to face trouble.

And all you'll need to do to release the pressure is add a little something to the gospel you've believed. A new experience, a new prayer meeting, a new type of church, a new gift or baptism or rule.

One little drop and all the pressure's off. And the only way to resist it is to ask yourself, would Paul go for that?

His gospel is the one costly gospel of Christ crucified. And so deserting it, verse 6, is deserting him who called you.

Well, that's the blunt opening. Next comes the extended autobiography. And if we want to do some theological train spotting now, I could spend the next half hour, as most of the writers seem to, trawling through every detail of this and trying to correlate it with the book of Acts.

[24 : 07] But that would rather assume that Paul is a bit like the boring guest at a dinner party, who simply wants to talk about himself. whereas actually, I think chapter 1, verse 11, all the way through to chapter 2, verse 10, make a very clear point about the one complete gospel of Christ's apostles.

apostles. The one complete gospel of Christ's apostles. Notice how we move from the you who are deserting the gospel of God in verse 6, to the I of verse 10.

And from then onwards, almost every verse uses either I or me. Not because Paul is self-absorbed, but because if he is to rescue the Galatians, Paul needs to convince them about his authority. And the key question seems to be how his authority and his gospel relates to the Jerusalem authorities and their gospel.

Presumably, the troublemakers were trying to drive a wedge between the two. Paul, he's okay for beginners, but if you really want to be in the inner spiritual circle, it's the Jerusalem guys you need to listen to.

[25 : 25] That's where the real Bible teaching is. Well, to keep it simple, Paul knocks down that nonsense in three fairly straightforward paragraphs, which progressively flatten the authority of these troublemakers.

Firstly, in verses 11 to 17, Paul states his independence from the Jerusalem apostles. God called him directly and supernaturally, and therefore his gospel is God's gospel.

He didn't need any further training from the other apostles. Rather, he was put straight to work in Syria. More than that, the next paragraph, verses 18 to 24, tell of Paul's encouragement to the Jerusalem apostles.

All they knew was that this persecutor of Christ had become the preacher of Christ, and they glorified God because of it. And more still, the third paragraph, chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, confirm Paul's agreement with the Jerusalem apostles.

When he finally meets them after 14 years, will he find them preaching another gospel, one which undermines all of his God-given work to the Gentiles?

[26 : 53] Well, of course not. Praise God, quite the opposite is true, verse 9. They rejoice even more. They give them the right hand of fellowship.

So you see, Paul wants these Galatians to know that authentic, full-fat Christianity doesn't come from loyalty to Jerusalem or any other man-made authority, but simply from loyalty to the one unchanging message of Jesus apostles.

There's no inner circle of special religious Jerusalem-type Christians. In fact, if anything, the Jerusalem church seems to have its own problems and they give us our first big clue as to what the troublemakers in Galatia might be up to.

Just look with me at verses 3 to 5 in the middle of that third paragraph. Chapter 2 verse 3, even Titus was not forced to be circumcised, yet because of false brothers secretly brought in who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ so that they might bring us to slavery. To them we did not yield in submission even for a moment so that the truth of the gospel, remember that phrase, might be preserved for you.

[28 : 23] Just as in Galatia there are troublemakers at work in Jerusalem and they seem to be outsiders, maybe even unconverted Jews, false brothers secretly brought in and their agenda is one of enslaving the Christian with Jewish religion.

circumcision. What's at stake? Well, clearly it's more than a simple matter of custom, the practice of circumcision, because verse five lifts the lid, doesn't it?

Paul doesn't yield for a moment because he recognizes that what's really at stake is the truth of the gospel. is Paul's gospel going to be enough?

Or do we need to pile on more conditions the moment people are through the door? Well, there's obviously a bit of a stushy, but the Jerusalem leaders are crystal clear.

Paul's gospel is their gospel. Verse six, they added nothing to me. It's complete already. whoever these troublemakers are and wherever they've come from, the one thing that's clear is that it isn't the Jerusalem apostles.

[29 : 45] Full fat, apostolic Christianity adds nothing to the cross. But notice that it does demand much in response to it.

Not just backbone, although I'm sure plenty of backbone was needed, but also brotherly love. don't miss the one condition that the apostles do expect in verse 10.

Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. The true gospel, the gospel that says God has freely and undeservedly loved us and forgiven us in the cross of Christ, should provoke a response of love to others.

God has added anything to Paul's gospel. Not at all. In fact, if you do your train spotting in Acts chapter 11, it seems like that's the very reason he's in Jerusalem in the first place, to bring famine relief to this poor church.

But how interesting that Paul should bring it up here. why, if he and the other apostles are in such agreement, is that the one response to the gospel that he bothers to include, that he mentions in this letter?

[31 : 09] Could it possibly be that the Galatian church needs to hear it? I suspect as we dig further into the letter, we'll find out the answer to that question.

You see, Paul's gospel, it's a little like the bottle of drinking water that you trust when you're traveling abroad. You need to know, don't you?

You need to trust its source. And the source of Paul's gospel is God himself. It doesn't get more trustworthy. But like a safe bottle of water, you need to know that the seal is intact.

And Paul's message has not been tampered with. Nothing has been added to it. Not even the other apostles have tampered with his message. But finally, of course, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

If you're sick as a dog for the next week, you won't buy that bottle of water again, will you? Well, just take a sneak preview of chapter 5. Have a little look at chapter 5, verse 15.

[32 : 20] And you begin to suspect that the gospel the Galatians are swallowing is far from healthy. Instead of loving concern for those whom God has loved, the fruit of this gospel is backbiting and division.

It doesn't take a seasoned traveler to recognize that, does it? It's not so much brotherly love as spiritual deli belly. it's a sure sign of a dodgy product, a gospel not from him who called you.

Well, finally, as this first section of the book closes, Paul tells us how that one costly and complete gospel of Christ's apostles can be totally undermined.

our third point is a story of the catastrophic hypocrisy of thoroughly orthodox Christians.

Chapter 2, verses 11 to 21, the catastrophic hypocrisy of thoroughly orthodox Christians.

Christians. And what an extraordinarily honest moment this is.

[33 : 36] We've gone from that absolute unity of the apostles that Paul was at pains to draw to our attention, to a sudden moment of real crisis.

Peter, the great rock of the church, stands condemned. That is not a word to throw around lightly, is it? But on the surface, this seems to be about the relatively trivial matter of which table someone eats at, the kosher one or the gentile one.

But what's really going on? It's there in verse 14, isn't it? Whatever they had just agreed in theory about the truth of the gospel, Paul now sees it all falling apart in practice.

I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel. So the issue here is not that Peter has turned to a false gospel, like these troublemakers.

I doubt that any of us are more sound than the apostle Peter. But even if we think we are, we should find this section very worrying, because it's not what Peter believes that undermines the gospel.

[34 : 55] people. It's how he behaves. That's fairly plain in verse 16, isn't it? Peter says, Paul, you and I both know perfectly well that a man is put right with God simply by the faith of Christ, or faith in Christ.

We know, both of us, that it's not about being a devout religious Jew. By works of the law, he says it three times in one verse. You know that as well as I, Peter, but your conduct, verse 14, is out of step with your confession.

And so Paul tells what happens in verses 11 to 13, of how when Peter first came to Antioch, he quite happily ate with both the Jewish and Gentile Christians as brothers in Christ.

But certain men came from James, verse 12, and Peter begins to worry. Now we know that James is on exactly the same page as Peter and Paul.

It's Christ crucified that counts, not how Jewish or religious you are. In fact, it was James, alongside a clearly repentant Peter, who would take the lead in resolving this whole mess a little while later at the Jerusalem Council.

[36 : 18] But now here are people on the scene saying something different. People Paul calls the circumcision party. And when push comes to shove, it seems like the thing which counts for them isn't so much what Jesus did, but what good religious Christians have to do.

Now it's hard to know exactly who these people are. It reads as if they're the same people from James, in which case Acts 15 strongly suggests that they weren't speaking on his behalf. Or perhaps if others are right, this circumcision mob are another group of people altogether. Jewish hardliners persecuting the church of Christ back in Jerusalem.

People who James' friends are simply bringing news of to Peter and Paul. Whoever they are, the threat is serious enough to cause real worry for Peter.

Whatever his principles, he knows that if he carries on eating with the Gentile Christians, it's going to make life very difficult for Jewish converts everywhere.

[37 : 35] If he, the leader, is seen to be doing away with Jewish custom, what will be the consequences for the average Jewish convert? suddenly they'll find households close to them, religious parents shunning their Christian children, perhaps the good jobs taken away, maybe even violence.

And all Peter has to do as the tender-hearted and pragmatic leader is add a little drop of public religion and all the pressure is off.

not say anything different, not abandon the cross and his teaching, just move across to the kosher table, put a little distance between himself and the Gentile Christians, and one by one, all the others follow, even lovely old Barnabas.

Is that so bad? It's just pragmatic. Well, in verse 14 comes Paul's quick answer. Peter, it is sheer hypocrisy.

And then for the rest of the chapter, it's as if the Galatians are invited to listen in to Paul's reasoning. And as it turns out, what Peter needed to hear, if he was going to stand up to the pressure, is precisely what the Galatians need to hear.

[39 : 03] In fact, I think verses 15 to 21, Paul's extended answer, set the program for this whole letter. And the key to Paul's arguments are two little words, halfway through verse 17, in Christ.

It's in Christ that Peter and Paul and every one of us is put right with God. it's by faith in him or by being joined to his faith that all of us are agreed we have any hope at all.

And being joined to him means, verse 19, that when he died to satisfy the law's demands, I died.

And because he lives, I now live to God. The life I now live here in the flesh is Christ's life in me.

When God looks at me, he doesn't see a good religious Jew or a miserable Gentile sinner. He sees his son who loved me and gave himself in my place.

[40 : 24] And being in Christ totally transforms the way a Christian lives. God's will be to keep God's approval.

That's the life of the religious man, isn't it? But more fundamentally still, it means that the really religious Christians who sit at one table and eat one type of food are no more or less spiritual or pleasing to God than the Christians at the other table.

And to make a distinction like that denies the very fact that all of us are united together in him. Deny that.

And you're on your own. You're outside of Christ. You've rebuilt a whole religious system that can only condemn you outside of Christ.

So says Paul, far from me encouraging sin as they seem to think he is, you are in danger, verse 21, of nullifying the grace of God.

[41 : 39] Opening the door to dead religion allows one group of Christians to feel superior to another. And if that happens in Antioch, the heart of the Christian mission to the world, God, then it's game over for the future of the church.

Now let's see if we can wrap this up. There's one crucial question about this argument that isn't immediately obvious, and that is why Paul raises it at all.

What relevance does this have to the Galatians? Oddly enough, the only bit of geography every writer seems to agree on is that this took place miles away from them.

This Antioch is the big Syrian city, a crucial city for the church. But why is Paul troubling the Galatians with it? Has he just moved from autobiography to soap opera?

Well, I suspect not. In fact, I think the answer to that question might well be our biggest clue as to why he's writing this letter. If we can grasp what went wrong in Antioch, then by now we should be

able to piece together a working theory for what's going wrong in Galatia.

[43 : 05] You see, it's obvious as you work through this letter that like Peter, the problems in Galatia weren't simply a matter of orthodoxy. These were Paul's converts.

They knew they were saved by grace. The problem in Galatia was a failure to consistently tie their doctrine of justification by grace alone to the new life of the believer.

And so just like Peter, when the troublemakers come along, they're not able to stand up to the pressure. A little bit of legalism gets mixed into the Christian life.

And just as in Antioch, that hits in two places. Firstly, it hits the individual life of the Christian. The cross is enough to get us through the door, but for the rest of our lives, it's a hard, legalistic slog. And that is just where the next chapter begins. But secondly, that inconsistency hits the corporate life of the church. We can be thoroughly orthodox about our justification, but still act as if it's our Christian performance that sets us up above our brothers and sisters.

[44 : 32] Of course, God has accepted them freely in Christ, but we'll only accept each other if we conform to our own particular religious standards. And those two consequences the individual and corporate life of Christ's church will be the big themes of the rest of this letter.

Galatians tells us that the cross is not simply the answer to our conversion, but to our sanctification, the whole life of an individual Christian and of the church as a whole.

It's all right there in verse 20. The cross is the start of the Christian life. I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And it's the cross right to the end of the Christian life. The life I now live here in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

any other gospel. And Christ died for absolutely nothing. Well, it's Glasgow, it's 2013, and just before the service begins, the Apostle Paul wanders in off Bath Street.

[45 : 58] He runs the gauntlet of welcomers downstairs, he braces himself for a long handshake with Norrie Miller, and then he takes a seat up here in the Grand Hall.

What will he make of us? Is Paul still our apostle? I think it's this last little section that challenges us the most.

We know, don't we, that you can't preach the gospel without words. But according to Paul, you can deny it loud and clear without uttering a breath.

It doesn't take much. If an apostle can do it, then so can a church who prides itself for sticking by Paul's teaching. It just takes a bit of inconsistency, a bit of religious pride.

You ignore the person sitting next to you. You invite the exciting people to Sunday lunch, or the high profile ones, or the new converts, the influential ones, and begin to make a distinction between your Christian brothers and sisters.

[47 : 15] And soon word gets around. The Tron, they're a great Bible teaching church, yeah, but they're not very loving. And in one stroke, our historic ministry, our public stand for truth, all of it goes out the window.

And Paul would say, well, they took the talk, but have they really listened to my gospel? Now, I won't pretend that's a direct match for the situation in Antioch or Galatia.

I think that particular cocktail of genuine fear and ethnic tension and religious legalism was fairly unique. But you see what happens, don't you, when the cross slips from being at the heart of the Christian life to something on the edge?

All sorts of ugliness creeps into its place. So Paul says, don't compromise my gospel like that. Not with your lips and not with your lives.

No, the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Let's pray.

[48 : 43] Father God, we thank you that once in history you loved us through the cross of your Son. And we thank you that now, today, we're joined to him simply because you are a gracious God.

Help us Father to be a living and gracious and generous church, sons and daughters in Christ. Amen. Amen.