



Why the Trinity is essential to the Gospel

Main Point:

The Apostle Paul wrote an emergency letter to the believers at Galatia because they had been deceived into believing a false gospel. Some false teachers had entered into their community and were leading them away from the good news of trusting in the grace of Jesus Christ for their salvation. Today, on Trinity Sunday, we will consider why understanding God as a three-in-one union is fundamental to understanding the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Intro |

Have you ever received an email or text on your phone or computer which looked totally authentic? You click the link, only to discover, you've unknowingly infected your computer or phone with a virus?



I did. Many years ago, I got sent an Australian Post delivery email. I had been receiving many packages and thought it was legit. After clicking the link, however, an alert notice came up on my screen – Your computer has been hijacked! To retrieve your files, you must pay \$5000.

My entire computer was locked. I couldn't access any files.

Even if I paid the ransom, there was no guarantee they wouldn't ask for more money.

While I've described a scenario of the modern, technological world, the same thing was happening about one and half thousand years ago, to a little community of believers who lived in the city of Galatia, near modern day Turkey.

They had been deceived. Their faith had been hijacked. And they were being held in ransom.

If you'd like to open your Bibles to the letter of Galatians.

Today, on Trinity Sunday, we start a new series on this little letter.

Even though it is only short, we mustn't be deceived by its tiny size.

Just like that alert notice which glared at me from my computer, Paul designed this little letter to be an alert notice to these believers!

Sometimes when a computer gets infected with a virus, it still functions, but there are glitches. It may suddenly shut down, or files won't open, or you'll get constant 'unrecoverable disk errors' ... you begin to wonder, 'what's going on here'.

The problem is you've got a virus in your computer and it's has corrupted your hard drive.

Your computer is in captivity to a virus and the only way to get free from it is to remove the virus.

In the same way, the Galatian believers were being held captive to a false Gospel. But, they hadn't worked it out yet. They thought they were doing fine.

So Paul sent them an alert message.

You've been hijacked! Don't you know you've been deceived! What you're believing is dangerous and very wrong! You're in bondage, and you don't know it!

Point 1 | It is important we know the true and authentic Gospel. Salvation and freedom are found by receiving God's free gift of grace, made possible through is Son Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit.

Let me just summarise the whole book, then we'll go back and look at how it relates to the Trinity – because, after all, its Trinity Sunday!

Paul starts in chapter 1 and 2 by challenging the Galatians. First, he summarises the gospel message about the crucified Messiah (see 1:3-4).

Then, he argues that this gospel is what creates the new multi-ethnic family of Jesus and Abraham, (chapters 3 & 4) and then he shows how this gospel is what truly transforms people by the presence and power of the Spirit (chapters 5 & 6).

Did you notice how in describing the Gospel message, Paul needed to identify all members of the Trinity?

The trinitarian nature of God is deeply and integrally intertwined with the good news message known as the Gospel.

How, you ask?

Because all three members of the Godhead are involved in our salvation.

First, motivated by self-sacrificing love, God the Father sends His only begotten Son into the world to save sinners (1 John 4:9-10). So, the Father *initiates* salvation.

Second, God the Son, also known as the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, accomplishes our salvation by dying in the place of sinners on the cross. Jesus' announcement at His death, "It is finished" (John 19:30) shows the Son *achieves* salvation.

Third, God the Holy Spirit, also called the Advocate or Comforter, applies salvation by His threefold work of convicting people of sin (John 16:8), regenerating hearts (Titus 3:5), and enabling people to confess Christ as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). So, the Holy Spirit *enables* salvation.

Point 2 | The crisis in Galatia was a salvation issue. Salvation is always initiated by the Father, made possible by the death and resurrection of the Son, through the gift of grace and work of the Spirit.

And now we come to the part why Paul was so upset with what was happening in Galatia.

Salvation must always be received as a gift. And it is a work which nobody but God contributes to: the Father, Son, and Spirit accomplish it all.

We need all persons of the Godhead for our salvation.

There is no Gospel without the Father sending the Son.

There is no Gospel without the Son laying down his life, due to His love for His Father (John 10:17).

But, there is also no Gospel without the Spirit being released into the world to work in the hearts of people to become aware of their sin and alienation from God (John 16:8)

And it is because this pure message was being threatened, that Paul wrote this emergency letter. He was deeply concerned for their salvation.

While they were not being tempted to turn away from the doctrine of the Trinity – for that term had not yet been formally identified in the Church – they were still being led astray by Jewish Christian ‘converts’ who did not understand the grace of God.

Because these Jewish Christians didn’t understand God’s grace, they told these young Galatian believers that they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved.

They evidently also attempted to get the Galatians to mix their Christian faith with other parts of the Old Testament law.

You can read more about this issue in Acts chapter 13 and 14.

The false teachers must have been persuasive. It is clear from this letter that the Galatians were almost completely seduced by these “Judaizers”. That’s the name given to so-called Jewish-Christian converts who were in fact perverting the gospel they claimed to believe.

To Paul this was no petty issue – it was a salvation issue.

Point 3 | The true good news must be a “Jesus only” Gospel. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Paul preached a “Jesus only” gospel. He taught that the way of salvation was “by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.”

The Judaizers taught a “Jesus plus” religion. They didn’t deny that Jesus was the Son of God, and they didn’t deny his death and resurrection, and they didn’t preach against believing in him, but they in essence said, “What Christ started, you need to finish. You must finish the unfinished work of Christ.”

In Paul’s mind, this was nothing less than an attack on the gospel itself. If the Judaizers prevailed, his work would have been in vain. The doctrine of grace itself was at stake in this controversy.

Application | In our desire for salvation and freedom, how can we ensure we too are not deceived? We must hold onto the true Gospel: Salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone.

The letter raises a simple question: Are we saved by believing or by achieving?

Paul is so determined they know the true Gospel, he states it clearly right at the very beginning of his letter.

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."(Galatians 1:3-5)

When I was a Scripture teacher I often used this illustration.



I showed them a bundle of money.
That got their attention!

I offered to give a few one of my
hundred bills for free!

It didn't take long for them to eye
me with suspicion, but someone
would come and grab one from
me.

Now, it didn't take long for them
to work out the money was a
counterfeit.

It looked slightly different. It felt
slightly different. And it smelt
different.

The best way to identify whether something is a counterfeit or not, is to compare it with the true, genuine article.

It is the same in the spiritual with God's truth.

How do we discern a lie? We compare it with the truth.

How do we discern a false gospel? We compare it with the true gospel.

As we journey through Galatians, we will revisit our understanding of the true Gospel.

This will empower and enable us, through the work of the Spirit of Truth, to identify the false gospels that already being preached in our world today.

Next week we will look more closely at the issue corrupting the believers at Galatia.

However, today, on Trinity Sunday, we acknowledge that a fundamental foundation of the Christian Church is our faith in God's triune nature.

We acknowledge that all persons of God are involved and necessary for our salvation.

There is only one God, made up of three distinct persons, each acting in unity and harmony out of love for the world.

There is only one Gospel.

There is only one Saviour.

There is only one way of salvation.

This passage calls us to stand strong for the true Gospel.

I realize that we live in an age when anyone who expresses a strong opinion on anything is liable to be ridiculed and called narrow-minded—or worse.

So be it. Let us be as narrow as God's truth is narrow and as broad as God's grace is broad.

All truth, by its very nature, is narrow.

Thank God for this emergency letter to the Galatians. It reveals the heart of the Gospel and calls us to be faithful to the truth revealed in the New Testament.

And thank God that the finished work of Christ is truly finished.

Let us join together with true believers everywhere in declaring the free grace of God. This is the message the world needs to hear.

May God deliver us from the fear of people's opinions.

May we never be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Preach it, believe it, tell it to someone else this week. Amen.