

*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 faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)*

It is God who saves his people, *not* we ourselves. And it is God who changes the hearts and lives of Christians, *not* our own human effort. This (or something like this – it remains to be seen) is the kind of message we will get from Galatians as we study it in our evening services.

It is a forceful and fiery letter. Paul's love for his friends is clear as he rages against the false ideas that have influenced them. "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" he asks at one point. Clearly there is something here that exercised Paul's heart for these people very strongly.

They would have looked like a respectable and clean-living church. Unlike some of the other letters Paul found himself having to write, the issues here are not to do with flagrant disobedience to Jesus' moral teaching. Instead they are much more subtle. Underneath the surface, at the level of their thinking and their motivations, the Galatians were being led away into a false form of Christianity that lifted up their own human pride at the expense of God's Spirit. How do we live the Christian life and make progress? Is it by working hard to be good, or by trusting Jesus day-by-day? That is the question this letter addresses.

For many of us this has got to be timely. We understand the need and feel the desire to grow in holiness, but as we pursue this in our lives we find pitfalls on every side. What place should Christians give to God's Old Testament law (Galatians 3:19)? What does it mean to walk by the Spirit (5:16) or to bear the fruit of the Spirit (5:22)?

As we seek to understand Paul's answers to these questions, probably (again it remains to be seen) we'll find ourselves returning again and again to Galatians 2:20 which was quoted at the head of this article. Becoming a Christians means there is a change of identity at the root and foundation of a person's life. The old independent "I" that seeks to be the centre of life and to keep the initiative must die, crucified with Christ. In its place there must be a new "I" that trusts Jesus and looks to Him day-by-day for sustenance. The Christian life is not just begun but also lived by faith instead of works.

Galatians is not always an easy letter to understand. There will be times when we have to think together about quite what God's Spirit has inspired. But as we dig into it, we will see shining in this passionate letter new and wonderful aspects of God's good news.

Details of both series are in the term card. And all our sermon series are on the website, so if you miss a Sunday try and catch up by listening on-line.