

Deliverance in Galatians

by George Verwer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living the life of the age to come in the midst of a corrupt generation, and the need for Christians to be bold in preaching the truth and resisting false teachings.

Duration: 41:11

Scripture: Galatians 1:6-10, Galatians 1:13-14, Galatians 2:20, Galatians 3:1-3, Galatians 3:10, Galatians 3:13-14

Topics: "Deliverance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the four strands of Christian truth represented by Evangelion, Charismata, Roma, and the hope for a fourth sister, Orthodoxa. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the message and beliefs of a preacher before being led astray by their oratory skills or miracles. The speaker encourages listeners to test the spirits and asks three key questions: What is the heart of the preacher's message? What is their understanding of the atoning work of Christ? And what are the fruits of their message in their own life and the lives of others? The sermon also explores Paul's challenges to the Galatian believers and false teachers in his epistle.

Transcript

So you've got chapter 3, verse 3, Paul appeals to them, having begun with the Spirit. Why are you now trying to gain your goal by human effort? They were going back to legalism, back to the law. But Christ died, says Paul, to deliver us, to rescue us from all that.

To rescue us from this present evil age. Now, exactly what does the death of Christ deliver us from? Here, I have to disappoint those who love the authorised version. Because right here, the A.V. is intensely misleading.

Christ did not die to deliver us out of this present evil world. That is quite wrong, and has been very, very harmful to Christian understanding over the years. God's purpose is not to take you and I out of this world.

His purpose is that we should stay right in the middle of this world. And in the middle of this world, in the middle of this present evil age, we are to be the salt. We are to be the light.

Now let me give you one more quote from John Stott. It's a complicated quote, but I hope you'll be able to follow me because it's a very, very important truth. The Bible, says Stott, divides history into two ages.

There's this age, and the age to come. It tells us, moreover, that the age to come has already come. Because Christ inaugurated it.

But the present age has not finally passed away. So you've got the two ages overlapping one another today. And the marvellous thing about the Christian is that through conversion, he's rescued from this evil age, and he's transferred into a new age.

The age to come. So this is the Christian life, brothers and sisters. The Christian life is living the life of the age to come.

Right here, in this present age. And I always like to stop at that point when I'm looking through Galatians and face that challenge. Am I living the life of the age to come in the middle of this generation? That's what eternal life is all about.

As you know, eternal life is not something you're expecting when you die. Eternal life is a quality of life which you're enjoying today in the midst of a decrepit, corrupt generation. We have to ask ourselves, just what difference has conversion made? Do we have new motivations, new goals, new purposes, new ways of spending our time, our energy, our money, and so on and so on? This is what it means, the life of the age to come, right here in this generation.

Now let's preach that. Yes, Christ died to save men from sin, but he died to rescue them from this corrupt, decaying world, and give them a quality of life today which surely those who have experienced it would never trade for anything else. So that was the purpose of the death of Christ.

The nature of his death, substitutionary. The purpose of his death, to rescue us from corruption in this generation. And then thirdly, the origin of his death.

Paul says all this was the will of God. Christ didn't die because of the power of the Roman government. He didn't die because he made a wrong move out of his father's will.

Remember how Peter explained to the great crowd on the day of Pentecost, This man, Jesus, was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. We know the book of Revelation tells us that he was slain even before the foundation of the world. That's a tremendous thought.

The Lamb of God was slain even before Adam was created. Now this, says Paul, is God's great purpose. His purpose is to send his son to be a sin offering so that people can be rescued from this evil age.

This is the will of God in history. This is what Christianity is all about. So that's the first main heading.

Paul is looking at the false teachers troubling Galatia. He mentions their teaching. He shows how they're attempting to undermine his authority.

He answers their criticism of him. He says, I've seen Christ. I've been commissioned by Christ.

And then he gives his gospel, the true gospel, to show up the error of their teaching. Now the second thing he does in the epistle is give a direct challenge. So if you're taking notes, the second point is Paul's challenge.

He's got two challenges. First of all, he challenges the Galatian believers. And then secondly, he challenges the false teachers.

Look first of all at how he challenges the believers. He expresses his utter and complete astonishment that they are deserting and turning to a different gospel. How could these people, having experienced the grace of God, having received the Holy Spirit, knowing something of the life of the age to come, turn away? How could they listen to opposing voices? And Paul is saying in those verses, I'm utterly flabbergasted, absolutely astonished that you are turning back.

When you think about it, backsliding is nothing less than astonishing. Having put our hand to the plow, how can we turn back? And yet we do. I would venture to suggest that right here, in this august company of people, there is probably someone right now who is in a state of backsliding.

It's not always public, of course. We keep up our public image, but we know that there's not the love there used to be. There's not the devotion there used to be.

There's not the commitment there used to be. Other loves have crowded into our lives. Paul says it's absolutely astonishing that this should ever happen.

I pray that in the next few days, as we look at the grace of God in this epistle, we will be drawn back fully to Him. So that's his challenge to the believers. He just says, I'm bowled over and flabbergasted that you could ever even consider backsliding.

But he also challenges the false teachers. And he uses, in his challenge, the strongest language anywhere in the New Testament. He says, let these people be, verse 8 and verse 9, eternally condemned.

Or, as certain older versions have it, let them be anathema. Now this repetition, in verse 8 and verse 9, is very, very important. If you read the liberal scholars, you probably don't, and you don't need to, but if you read the liberal scholars, they will say Paul here lost his temper.

The false teachers, they would argue, were destroying his work. And as he saw his work being destroyed, he just flew into a fit of rage. And that's why these strong, strong words slipped from his pen.

But that's not true. This is something Paul has thought about. He has considered it carefully.

If they are going to proclaim a message, the essence of which is that Christ's work is insufficient, then, says Paul, the divine curse rests upon them, nothing less. Anathema, a curse, are such people. Now in today's world, where tolerance, broad-mindedness, particularly in the West, I don't know so much about here, but these are the in-things in Western theology.

Tolerance and broad-mindedness. To many people, this is much, much more important than truth. It doesn't really matter what's true, as long as you're loving and tolerant and broad-minded.

And I think in today's world, Paul's strong line might seem very, very surprising indeed. Now it's important to notice that Paul, on certain issues, could be immensely flexible. His flexibility on other issues might astonish you.

You're all familiar, I'm sure, with Acts chapter 16 and verse 3. Paul's had his great bust-up with Barnabas, the end of chapter 15. He gets across to Lystra and Iconium and he finds Timothy. Now listen to verse 3. Paul wants to take Timothy along on the journey, so he circumcises him because of the Jews who lived in that area.

Absolutely fascinating. If you read through the Galatian epistle, you'll find out what he thought about circumcision. You read through the Roman epistle, he's got some very, very strong words to say about circumcision.

And yet here is Paul circumcising Timothy. If that doesn't blow your mind, it will blow your mind if you read through and get to Jerusalem. Because when Paul arrives in Jerusalem, there's a rumor going around.

It wasn't true, but this rumor was going around that Paul was instructing Jews who were converted to Christ to forget the law and to forget the Mosaic customs. He never did it, but that was the rumor. And so the church leaders approach Paul and they say, Look, if you're going to have any effect of ministry in this city, you're going to have to identify with Jews and with Jewish practices.

And he says to them, as it happens, there are three men going through a Jewish purification ceremony tomorrow. Now how about joining them? And how about paying their Jews? And what does Paul do? He goes right through the ceremonial washing with them. Identifying himself with those to whom he is seeking to minister.

So you've got to get a balanced view of the Apostle Paul in your mind. On certain issues, absolutely intransigent, inflexible. On other issues, tremendous flexibility.

You know, a great part of Christian wisdom is knowing where to take your stand. Where to drive in the stake and say, I'm not moving from that position. And what's the answer? Why was Paul so strong here in writing to the Galatians? Of course, the simple answer is that it's because the very heart of the Gospel was at stake.

The heart of the Gospel wasn't at stake when he had Timothy circumcised. He was doing this to make Timothy more acceptable. The heart of the Gospel wasn't at stake in Jerusalem.

Again, his desire was to be more acceptable in the culture where he is ministering. But here, the very heart of the Gospel is at stake. And Paul drives in his stake.

And he says, no movement. So think of two reasons in the chapter for Paul's inflexibility. First of all, he says, I am so inflexible because there is only one Gospel.

He says, you're turning to another Gospel. But then he adds, really, there's no Gospel at all. There's only one Gospel.

Now this is a vital point. I hope you don't feel that what I'm going to say now is controversial. But I think it's a vital point.

There is only one Gospel. That's the Gospel of the grace of God which centers on the finished work of Christ. Now notice that Paul did not consider that these false teachers were looking at truth in a different way.

He says in verse 7, you are perverting the Gospel. Now as Christians, we want to be open-minded. We want to be big-hearted and generous.

We certainly don't want to be guilty of rejecting anyone whom God has accepted. Rejecting anyone who is a brother or sister in Christ. But I think it's extremely important to say that there are limits to the extent of our big-heartedness.

And the limit, to me, is clear. We can discuss this afterwards. But to me, it's clear.

Does that person trust in the finished work of Christ alone? Or does he seek to add to it in order to be saved? There's a reliance for salvation on anything else. Be it baptism, religious devotions, the sacraments, good works, whatever it might be. If he's adding to the finished work of Christ for salvation, then it's not a different way of looking at the truth.

It is a different Gospel. Now in a discussion we were having a couple of days ago with just some of the folks, I mentioned Michael Harper's book, *Three Sisters*. Now Michael Harper is a leading evangelical in Britain today.

And he wrote this book in the late 1970s. The three sisters in his book are Evangeline, the evangelical stream in the church, Charismata, the charismatic stream in the church, and Roma, the Roman Catholic church. And he says in his book he's hoping one day soon for a fourth sister to join Orthodoxa, the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches.

Now his argument throughout the book is that these are four strands of Christian truth. And we can learn from all of them. Now as this is so prominent in the Western world, let me just read one section of the book to you.

It's just one paragraph. Of course the three sisters have this in common. They all have the same father.

We're capable of printing the most grotesque caricatures of each of them. We can play duck pins with them, bowl them over with the greatest of ease, by simply placing the best features of one against the worst of another. But if we are charitable, and ought we not to be as Christians, and look for the best in each, we shall begin to see how important it is that these three sisters move together.

They need each other. Each is indispensable to the other. We need to forgive what is bad in each, as indeed we need to be forgiven by others from the bad which is in us.

Our happiest memories of each should make us want to see ourselves together rather than separate, and make us feel that a part of us belongs to each. Now that is common Christian teaching in Britain today. Of course when you read it, and when you speak it, it sounds so Christian.

It sounds so charitable. It sounds so good. But I want to suggest to you, and we must discuss it afterwards if you disagree, that the Galatian epistle does not allow for such breadth.

If a man or a woman is adding to faith in the finished work of Christ, it's not just a different way of looking at the truth, brothers and sisters. It is another gospel. So that's his challenge to the false teachers, and the first reason why he's so strong.

He's so strong because there's only one gospel. The second reason he is so strong is undoubtedly his concern for the souls of men. What's the other occasion in the New Testament where he uses this word anathema? Well of course it's Romans 9.3, a verse you're familiar with where he says, he would be willing himself to be anathema if thereby others could be saved.

So Paul realized that if these false teachers weren't controlled, the problem was they would lead to eternal condemnation for many people. And this was something of enormous concern to him. He would rather be unpopular, he would rather appear to be intolerant, than allow a message to be propagated which would

lead to the internal condemnation of men and women.

I sometimes wonder if we're too peace loving in the church today. I wonder if we're too polite. Someone recently wrote this in a magazine article in Britain.

Really many of us don't mind if people go to hell as long as they go loving us. I wonder if that's true. I wonder if the time has come to be more bold.

To preach the truth more courageously. To call error, error. I wonder how many of you have heard of Billy Bray.

Billy Bray, the great Cornish evangelist. I don't know whether his life story gets to these parts. But Billy was a converted tin miner.

And he had none of the graces and the sophistication of many. And after he was converted, he was quite an extraordinary witness. I think about two days after he was converted, he was in the tin mine and he heard somebody swearing, blaspheming.

So he shouted, you must give an account of that someday. So all the others mockingly joined in. Shall we all start going to the Bible meetings now Billy? This is what Billy replied, a nice, quiet, polite witness.

It's better to go to the Bible rally than to go to hell. Someone admonished him for making such a noise. So again he replied, you would roar out too if you felt my load.

And I'll roar, and I'll roar, and I'll roar until I get it off my heart. Nice, quiet, polite Billy Bray. But more concerned for the souls of men than he was for his own reputation.

And Paul clearly states in verse 10 that this is his position. If I was still trying to please men, I wouldn't be a servant of Christ. Paul says you must take your choice.

You can either be nice and kind and go along with these false teachers. But if you're going to do that, you're not going to be a servant of Christ. You must take your stem.

So that's Paul's challenge to the believers. Utter astonishment that they're backsliding to the false teachers. No uncertain terms.

God's curse is upon you if you lead men astray by suggesting that the finished work of Christ must be added to. Now finally, from this first chapter, let's go to Paul's argument. Our third main heading, Paul's argument.

How is he so convinced that he is right? And aren't I being dogmatic to suggest that evangelicals are right? Aren't there many ways to God, brothers and sisters? Wouldn't it be so much nicer to believe that the Hindu is going his way and the communist is going his way? The latest Catholic theologian, Dr. Hockner, and there are many Protestant theologians saying the same thing, is that we must drop the word Christian from our vocabulary. It doesn't matter if you're a Christian. It doesn't matter if you're a Hindu.

It doesn't matter if you're a Muslim. No, we should use the word God per se. Anyone who is a God person doesn't mind if he's got 300 gods.

If he's worshipping them sincerely to the best of his ability, he's a God person and that's what counts. Aren't evangelicals just a bit too dogmatic? Isn't it time for us to broaden our minds a little and to accept the great flow of universalism which you can see all around you in the theological world today? Why is Paul so certain? Let me just finish with two things. First of all, he's certain because of the origin of his gospel.

He's certain because of where his message comes from, verses 11 and 12. He says it's not something that man made up. It's not just someone else's teaching that I'm passing on to you.

I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. He makes a similar point in 1 Corinthians 15, 3. Very important verse. What I received, not what I heard, but what I received, revelation, I passed on to you.

What did I receive? Christ died for our sins, was buried, was raised again the third day according to the scriptures. That, says Paul, is the message I received on the Damascus road. This is what kept Paul going forward at the tremendous rate he went in his day.

He was convinced that he had something from God. He didn't get something from books. He didn't get something just from conversation with other brothers.

He had something from God. And I hope you're convinced that you in this day of a multitude of voices, I hope you're convinced that you've got something from God himself to share with men. So that's the first reason he was so certain.

He knew he had the message of God. The second reason was because of the effects of his gospel. He saw its effects in people's lives and in his own life.

And this is what he's taken up with from verse 13 to the end of the chapter. Let's just look at those verses very briefly. You scan over them.

You'll see that Paul is looking at his own life. He speaks of himself before his conversion. And then he speaks of his conversion.

And then he speaks of what he did immediately after his conversion. He proves the dramatic effect of the gospel from his own experience. So first of all, he speaks of what he was like before his conversion.

Now what kind of a man was Saul of Tarsus? Well look at what he says in chapter 1. You've heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the Church of God violently, tried to destroy it, advanced in Judaism beyond many of mine own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. You've got a very clear picture from other New Testament verses of Paul before his conversion. What about chapter 8 and verse 3 of the Acts of the Apostles? Saul laid waste the Church, entering house after house, dragged off men and women, committed them to prison.

You've got the famous first verse of Acts 9. Paul breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. He's a man in a hot temper, breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Now ask yourself, why was Paul like that before his conversion? Was he just an ignorant man? Was he just a vandal who used to love to throw men into jail for sheer pleasure? Of course he wasn't.

He was an intelligent man. And the Lord Jesus told the disciples about these kind of people just before he went to heaven. John 16.2 The hour is coming, says Jesus, when whoever kills you will think he is offering

service to God.

Now that was Paul's position. As he threw these men into prison, he sincerely thought he was fulfilling the will of God. That's what he says in chapter 26, the Acts of the Apostles, and verse 9. Let me just read it.

I myself was convinced that I ought to do, that it was right to do, many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And looking back on his ministry before his conversion, in 1 Timothy 1.13, this is what he says. I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted Jesus, but I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.

And the reason for this ignorance is found in Philippians 3, 5 and 6. Paul gives his testimony. He was a man who was circumcised on the eighth day. What's important about that? Well, he knew Genesis chapter 12.

If you're a good Jew, you didn't get circumcised on the seventh day of your life or the ninth day of your life. You got circumcised on the eighth day. Paul says, my parents did it right.

You circumcision teachers, don't you forget, I'm an eighth day man. Not all of you are eighth day men, but I'm an eighth day man. Very, very important in the Jewish religion.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, I'm of the tribe of Benjamin. You know, the Hebrew people, you can't get any more Jewish than that. I'm of the tribe of Benjamin.

No wonder he says, I'm a Hebrew born of Hebrews. As for the law, I'm a Pharisee. As to zeal, I'm a persecutor of the church.

And listen to this. As to righteousness, under the law, I am blameless. You ever thought about that? Do you know how many laws there were according to a faithful Jew in the Torah, the Old Testament law? I think, if my memory serves me rightly, there were 636 laws.

Certainly 630 something. More negative than positive. There were 73 laws that a faithful Jew had to keep every Sabbath day.

This young man says, as to righteousness under the law, 636 laws, I'm blameless. That was after his conversion. I'm blameless.

Here was a remarkable man who felt he was performing the will of God. Now what's Paul getting at? Why does he mention his former life? His argument, quite simply, is God must be behind the message that transformed me. No human argument could make such an impact upon my life.

Only God could have done what has happened to me. I'm sure that many of you tonight could jump up and testify similarly. Drawn out of Hinduism, drawn out of Islam, what power can do that? Only the power of the living God, as it's contained in the living gospel, can transform men and women as we have been transformed.

Then the second thing he does is he looks at his actual conversion. He does this in verses 15 and 16. He looks at his conversion from the inside and he shows how God has had his hand upon him even from his mother's womb.

Very interesting how God prepared Saul of Tarsus to be the apostle to the Gentiles. What do we know about the beginning of Paul's life or Saul's life? Well he was born around AD 3 in Tarsus. Now Tarsus was the capital of Cilicia in Asia Minor.

His father was a Roman citizen. That was a privilege which not many people in his day and in that part of the world possessed. As a lad, just like every other Jewish boy, he learned a trade.

Now the great industry of Tarsus was the weaving of a coarse cloth from the hair of the Cilician goats. And this coarse cloth was used to make a covering for tents. Now I've just mentioned there three seemingly highly insignificant facts.

And they must have seemed absolutely insignificant to Paul before his conversion. But they weren't insignificant in the eternal mind of God. Think of those three seemingly insignificant facts again.

In the providence of God, Saul was born in Tarsus. Now Tarsus was an interesting city. It was the great center of the Gentile world or one of the three great centers of the Gentile world.

So here Saul learned much of the culture, much of the tradition, which was so important to him as later he became the apostle to the Gentiles. But more remarkable, it wasn't just the center of the Gentile world, it was also one of the major Roman administrative posts. So he began to know much about Romanism as well, which was so vital for him also in his future ministry.

Now the second insignificant fact is that he was born a Roman citizen. It wasn't insignificant later, was it? It delivered him from beatings, it delivered him from certain death. What about tent making? What a fantastic trade.

It was later to be such a blessing to him in his ministry. You see, Paul is saying, look, God was at work in my life long before my conversion. God is in my message, God is in the remarkable change that has taken place in my life.

And then the third phase of his argument, Paul defends himself in the closing verses against some people who were saying, all right, Paul, we'll accept you as an apostle. You did receive a revelation on the Damascus road. We're not going to deny that.

But that revelation has been tainted by human thoughts and human suggestions. Now we'll look at more of this tomorrow morning as we look at chapter 2. But to defend himself against this accusation, Paul gives detailed steps of what he did right after his conversion. Now verse 16, the second part of it, is particularly interesting.

It literally reads this. I immediately decided not to confer with flesh and blood. So here was a definite decision of the apostle Paul.

He didn't go to Jerusalem, he didn't go and talk with anybody. But after God had spoken to him, he went to the Arabian desert. And there for those years, he communed with God.

And he had this message from God confirmed and filled out in his heart and in his mind. He says, I know my message is true. God gave it to me.

It hasn't been tainted by human thought. And look at the remarkable impact which this has had in my life. Let's go back to the beginning.

If I was preaching a new message tonight, if I was claiming to be a prophet of God with all the signs and miracles, what test would you apply? George was speaking this morning about testing the spirits. How do we practically do that? What test do you apply to the wandering prophet who claims to be a servant of God? Here's three questions to ask yourself. What's the heart of this man's message? Is it grace and faith? Or is it mixed with the law and works? Is he taking you back to legalism? Is he saying faith in Christ is great, but you mustn't do this on the Sunday? You mustn't eat this.

And you mustn't go there. Is he bringing you back to legalism? Or is his message resting on the foundation of grace and faith? And secondly, very closely linked with the first point, what is his understanding of the atoning work of Christ? What does he believe about it? Does he believe it's just an example of heroic sacrifice? Or does he see it as the substitutionary vicarious work of a sin offering? And thirdly, what has his message produced? What are the fruits of his message in his own life? And what are the fruits of his message in the lives of others? Is he a holy man? Is he righteous? And is his message producing holiness and righteousness in the lives of other people? So let's not be led astray by great orators. Let's not be led astray by great crowds.

Let's not be led astray even by miracles. Interesting people have performed miracles through the history of the Church. This is what we need to ask ourselves.

Is it grace and faith? Is it the substitutionary work of Christ? Does it produce radical holiness of life? Now tomorrow morning we'll go on to chapter 2 and in chapter 2 we face the great issue of contextualization in the Bible. We see how Paul contextualized his message for the people to whom God was sending him. Now please, if there's anything I've said in this message which you have difficulty with, which you don't agree with, which you'd like to add to, I'd just love to discuss it with you any time, tonight or in the remainder of our time together.

Maybe two or three could just close in prayer. ...that we spend upon this earth and in this body. Maybe you need to get it right with the Lord right now and say, Lord, I've been living for earthly things.

Oh, somewhat for spiritual things, but not the way I should. Lord, help me to have a heavenly vision. Help me to understand that I am a heavenly person and that I want to live for you upon this earth and seek those things which are above.

Just tell the Lord now that decision you're making in your heart. Maybe there's some sin in your life that needs to be taken care of. You say that's an earthly thing.

Maybe it's worry or fear or whatever it is, some way not submitting to God and you need to confess it to Him. Just get it straight right now with Him and then yield to Him. Say, Lord, I'll do what you want me to do and I believe you're empowering me now by your Holy Spirit.

Claim His fullness and go in His strength. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would conceal these decisions being made in hearts today concerning the heavenly things and the heavenly ministry of our Savior. We thank you for Him and all that He is doing for us now, all that He has completed and accomplished already.

We just thank you for your goodness, Lord, and all that you mean to us. Help us not to forget you in the busyness of life. Help us to put you first.

Help us to spend that time with you each day that you desire so much. Help us to know you and to walk with you. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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