

“Cherishing, Proclaiming & Defending the Gospel of Jesus Christ” A Study in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians



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The letter from Paul to the Galatians has spoken timeless truth to the church for 2,000 years. Martin Luther referred to it so often in his preaching they called it Luther’s book. Its focus, in six short chapters is the magnificent gospel of grace in Christ. Paul’s passion for this glorious gospel is demonstrated in Galatians in three main areas: cherishing, proclaiming, and defending the gospel. In my journey with Christ over the past 30 years the gospel has become my passion as well. Please join us for both this important teaching and the experience of authentic Christian community. It will bring about deep, personal renewal and you will become a catalyst for revival in your church.

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Introduction:

The letter from Paul to the Galatians has spoken timeless truth to the church for 2,000 years. Its focus, in six short chapters is the magnificent gospel of grace in Christ. Paul’s passion for this glorious gospel is demonstrated in Galatians in three main areas. These are: cherishing the gospel, proclaiming the gospel, and defending the gospel. For our application cherishing relates to the personal treasure that the gospel must become to us. Our study, meditation, and internalization (Redemption’s application in us) of all that Christ accomplished for us in his death, resurrection, and in Pentecost represent this cherishing aspect. Before we can proclaim the good news we must experience it deeply and personally (i.e. “the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are sons of God”). We cannot impart to others what we haven’t first received. Paul spent several years after his conversion in this cherishing dimension of his preparation to be a herald to the Gentiles absent of any significant outreach activity (Gal. 1:15-18, 2:1). After one brief trip to Jerusalem to meet with Peter we don’t have any record of him in the New Testament until his journey back there most likely 14 years after his conversion when his missionary work began in earnest. What was he doing all that time? Cherishing Christ in the gospel!

Proclaiming encompasses all that we speak and live out before others that point them to the good news including the witness of our unity as brothers and sisters in Christ. Defending the gospel is where Paul’s letter to the Galatians begins. “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-which is really no gospel at all.” (1:6-7) It is also where Galatians ends. “Those who want to make a good impression outwardly (Judaizers) are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the Cross of Christ.” (6:12) Defending is the work of the whole church against attacks from within (i.e. legalism, Emerging Church) and without (i.e. Islam, Post-Modernism). We will organize content as we study Galatians around these main themes of cherishing, proclaiming and defending.

As Christians don’t we graduate from the gospel?

Many Christians due to a lack of an intentional discipling relationship believe that the gospel is an essential beginning point in their journey of faith but simply a threshold to cross. Some would contend that we must go beyond the gospel and deeper to experience all that God has for us. For the apostle Paul, one never graduates from the gospel! Its depth is immeasurable since it involves God’s covenant love towards all who take their refuge in Christ and his victory for us. The treasures of the gospel that we will focus on in Galatians are: justification by faith, Christ’s imputed righteousness to us, our adoption as sons of God, the freedom of grace, and the Spirit led life. The study of the Bible’s teaching on salvation is called soteriology. This study involves all facets of God’s work of grace in the gospel including three primary areas: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Paul calls the gospel “the power of God unto salvation for all who believe...” (Rom. 1:16) Christianity is all about transformation and life change. For that we need a power beyond ourselves. That power is affective to us in removing the penalty of sin the moment we first trust Christ alone for our salvation. But the gospel’s power to

deliver us from sin's power is needed daily. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Only by the present power and activity of the gospel through the Spirit are we being saved. The message of the cross and the message of the gospel are used by Paul often as interchangeable. Paul underscores this cherishing aspect of our devotion to the gospel when he states, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Gal. 6:14

Who is the apostle Paul?

Any study of Galatians must begin with its author, the great apostle Paul, who was summoned by Christ while on a donkey traveling to Damascus (Acts 9). This powerful experience with the risen Lord was indeed a divine summons that he personally responded to with a full surrender of his life. He defended his calling as an apostle, though referring sometimes to it as one who was abnormally born. His calling as an apostle was a supernatural one that he never tired to rejoice in. "But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles..." (Gal. 1:14) He was a Pharisee and trained by the great Rabbi Gamaliel.

He possessed a brilliant mind and he was an ardent student of the Law. With regard to its practice he was found blameless (Philippians 3:6). Though Paul was a "righteous" Jew he came to see in the gospel that he must "put no confidence in the flesh." All of his religious works counted for nothing, "whatever things were gain to me those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." These qualities were all a part of a soul life that was in Adam. A man centered system of religious works defined by keeping the Law. Natural gifting, energy, intellectual brilliance, zeal for the Law; it was all crucified with his flesh at the cross with Christ. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20a). As a result of this deep work of grace, Paul's church planting efforts among the Gentiles were blessed throughout Asia Minor and all the way to Rome (Acts 9:13-28).

Before his conversion he was Saul, a relentless persecutor of the church, inciting Jewish mobs to kill Christians or to bring them to be imprisoned. The stoning of Stephen (Acts 7) depicts young Saul's leadership in this. His conversion was dramatic and decisive. His vision of Christ changed his heart and his mission radically. The immensity of his passion to know Christ in his death and resurrection is the burning torch of light he brought in the gospel to the Gentiles (Phil 3:8-10). Getting to know the heart of this giant of the church in some measure must be your starting point before studying the book of Galatians. Take some time to read the passages noted in this section to get to know the apostle Paul and his heart for the gospel.

Context of Paul's Letter to the Galatians

One immediately recognizes at first reading of Galatians that Paul is madder than a Steeler fan whose manhood has been called into question by a Ravens zealot! I mean he is smokin' hot (1:6-9). The gospel of grace is being assaulted by a group called Judaizers. They are Jewish Christians who are imposing certain aspects of the Law on Gentile converts in order that they are accepted in fellowship and their lives be found pleasing to God. Circumcision is a main requirement of the Gentile converts from the Judaizers. The apostle Peter has come under their influence, shrinking back from close association with

Gentiles as has Barnabas who had spent a great deal of time with Paul over the past 14 years. They believe that Christ's atoning sacrifice in the Cross and the righteousness imputed to us by faith in Christ alone was not sufficient for Gentile converts. Circumcision was needed for their salvation and acceptance before God. Paul viewed this position as an attack upon the gospel of grace and confronted Peter openly (2:11-14). The Judaizers sought to discredit Paul as an illegitimate apostle that was unworthy of serious consideration. Paul defends his apostleship in the opening section of the letter for this reason. The Galatians began their race by grace and the promise of the Holy Spirit but now they believed that they would be perfected by works through keeping the law (3:1-3). Galatians 2:16 is a key verse in understanding Paul's defense of the gospel; "know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law..." Christ fulfilled all of the righteous requirements of the law so that his sacrifice for sins could satisfy the wrath of the Father and become the basis of imputed righteousness to us. We have been set free from the law of sin and death through Christ and now a new law operates in our lives. It is greater and more powerful. Just as the law of gravity can be trumped by the law of thermodynamics (Due to tremendous lift) so too the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). The great themes of justification by faith, imputed righteousness, adoption, and the Spirit-led life flow out of this focus on the one true gospel of grace.

Outline of Our Series:

- I. Paul's Apostleship & the Judaizers (Gal. 1:1 to 2:10)
 - A. Major themes identified (Cherish, Proclaim, Defend)
 1. Gal. 1:6-9, 2:4-5-Defend
 2. Gal. 1:13-16-Cherish
 3. Gal. 2:6-10-Proclaim
 4. What is the Gospel? Definition
- II. Cherishing the Gospel
 - A. Justification by Faith (Gal. 2:11 to 3:25)
 1. Abrahamic Covenant-Genesis 12
 2. Jesus has become a curse for us-Genesis 15
 3. What is saving faith? (James 2:18-19)
 4. Imputed Righteousness (2:21, 3:6, *3:27)
 - B. Adoption (Gal. 3:26 to 4:7)
 1. The Spirit's Embrace
 2. Sons of God (4:4-6)
 - C. Freedom in Christ (Gal. 2:19-21, 3:13-14 4:21-31,4:8-5:1-15, 6:14)
 1. Christ's victory set us free
 2. The Just shall live by faith
 3. Children of the Free Woman, the Jerusalem above

4. Cross-Centered Life, Resurrection, & Pentecost (2:20, 6:12, 14)
- D. The Spirit Led Life (Gal. 5:16-26)
 1. The Spirit of Promise
 2. Fruit of the Spirit
 3. Sealed in the Spirit (Eph. 1:13)
 4. Being Continuously Filled (Eph. 5:18-21)
- III. Proclaiming (Gal. 6:1-18)
 - A. Witness of the Church
 1. Personal Testimony-stories of broken people
 2. Our community life together-“one another commands”
 3. Writing our testimony
 4. Sharing our testimony
 - B. Making Disciples
 1. Paul’s models of parent & coach
 2. Reproducing through triad groups
 3. Life to life, vulnerable, truth-centered, accountable relationships
- IV. Defending (1:6-9, 3:1-5)
 - A. Attacks from within the Church
 1. Works Righteousness
 2. Legalism
 3. The Trap of Sacramental Observance
 4. The Emerging Church (Rob Bell & others)
 - B. Attacks from Outside the Church
 1. Post-Modernism
 2. Islam—the children of the slave woman Hagar

Unit #1-Getting Started

Read through Galatians two times. The first reading should provide a good 30,000 ft. view of the letter with main themes noted and the letter’s purpose. The second time through should be slower and more careful. Be observant of key words and verses that require deeper study.

Please answer the following questions as a reference point in beginning our study. Each question relates to Galatians closely. We will be covering them throughout our series. You will be able to look back and see how the Word of Christ and the work of the Spirit have deepened you in the course of our time together.

1. What is the good news of the gospel seen in Galatians? Use 3 to 4 sentences to explain.
2. Is assurance of salvation for Christ followers promised in the gospel? Cite verses.
3. How can your study and devotional life become more centered in the gospel?
4. Are you living a Spirit led Christian life? What evidences of it do you see?
5. Is there an Old Covenant pathway to God and a New Covenant pathway?
6. Does the Bible teach one central covenant of grace? What passages reflect this OT/NT?
7. Are you experiencing a rich freedom in your relationship with Christ? Explain.
8. Is defending the gospel important for you as a Christ follower? Why?
9. How can I be equipped for this defense? In your opinion, where are the attacks coming from?
10. What are your goals for our study in Galatians? List them.

