

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE GOSPEL ALONE

GALATIANS

Leave the Gospel alone! Is the heart cry for this letter of Paul.

This book ties to the book of Romans as you look at the message and the content. It's a book of Romans in miniature as Paul is explaining the finer points of salvation.

If we go all the way back to Acts 15, we have an event called the Jerusalem Council, and the purpose of this council was to discuss if the observance of the Jewish law had anything to do with God's work of salvation. In testimony after testimony, the answer was decidedly no. Paul spoke, Peter spoke, James spoke and all gave testimony and clarification that faith in Christ is the standard of salvation and nothing else. That settled the matter in this physical location of Judea, but for some attendees, they never settled the matter in the spiritual location of the heart.

A small and zealous group of individuals rejected this message completely and were referred to as Judaizers and apparently, they were not only serious about their message that a person needed to accept Christ and perform the law to have salvation, but they were also so well-financed they made it their mission to follow the apostle Paul around and come against young Christians to tell them that they were mostly right, but not completely. And the message had a strange temptation to it. People are always fascinated with performing religious acts to get God's attention. There is something sinfully fulfilling about doing something for God and having some form of righteousness to point to and using this as a means to get to heaven. That's what was happening here.

Paul had traveled to the province of Galatia of Asia Minor during his first missionary journey and came to the major cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derby. Once again, this was Paul's method. He went to where the people were in order to cause the Gospel to spread as wide as possible.

However, sometime after Paul left, the Judaizers came preaching the same old song and dance stating that we could actually help God out a little bit and have a hand in our own salvation. That wasn't the main problem, though. The main problem was that several of these Galatian Christians were actually starting to believe it.

They were toying around with, or coming to a full acceptance of the entire idea of the 'faith plus works' understanding of salvation, and to that Paul says, "Leave the Gospel alone!"

How to Think About Galatians

The book of Galatians is a more forceful book. It has a different feel to it. In this letter, Paul asserts himself in a different way than we have seen in his other letters, and as we follow the outline of the book we can see why.

This Is What the Gospel Is (Chapters 1-2)— You'll see the force of this letter once it's pointed out to you. In the very first words of the letter to the Romans, as Paul is introducing himself, this is what you find, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ..." In 1 Corinthians "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God..." In 2 Corinthians "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God..."

But when you get to Galatians, Paul doesn't just describe his office as he is opening his letter, He's asserting his office as he opens the letter, "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead:)"

The full weight of God's call of apostleship is right there at the beginning. The reason Paul does this is because the Judaizers were not only damaging the message of the Gospel, but they were damaging his office of Paul's authority. They were saying that Paul was not a legitimate apostle and couldn't be trusted on the work of salvation.

That's why Paul comes out swinging. He's fighting for the Gospel. He's mad about the corruption of the Gospel. If you mess with information contained in the Gospel, you are messing with information about how people go to heaven; and so this entire first section is dedicated to explaining what the Gospel is.

Departure from the Gospel (Chapter 1:6-9): Paul mentions here that he is amazed that these people would go from salvation to corruption so quickly. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ." (vs. 6-7)

Description of the Gospel (Chapter 1:10-24): Paul spends the rest of the time in this section describing the Gospel and how it came from God and nowhere else.

Defense of the Gospel (Chapter 2): Chapter 2 is a fascinating chapter devoted to Paul's personal ministry preparation and confirmation. He uses his experience to share with the Galatians that it was because of God's working in his life through the power of the Gospel.

This Is How the Gospel Works (Chapters 3-4)—This is where the book of Galatians becomes deep and complex. The Gospel is so simple that a child can understand it. But it is so deep at the same time that it stretches your ability to understand it.

There are six evidences Paul uses to explain the validity of how the Gospel works;

1) **The Personal Evidence (Chapter 3:1-5):** Paul tells them to recall their own salvation, "...Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (vs. 2)

2) **The Scriptural Evidence (Chapter 3:6-14):** This goes back to what we have learned through our time in Romans. The fact that is presented here is that those saints in the Old Testament were saved by faith just as we are saved by faith now. The only difference is the direction we look to the object of our faith. In the Old Testament, those who were saved looked forward to One coming who would die in their place. Now, we look back to the cross as we now see that the One coming was Jesus Christ, who died in our place. In other words, there are not two Gospels.

3) **The Logical Evidence (Chapter 3:15-29):** Paul explains here the purpose of God's law and how the Old covenant of the Law was filled by Christ and not by us.

4) The Dispensational Evidence (Chapter 4:1-11): Jesus came exactly when He was supposed to— at the fulness of time.

5) The Sentimental Evidence (Chapter 4:12-18): Paul points to their relationship and how much he cares about them. Would these Judaizers be able to say the same?

6) The Allegorical Evidence (Chapter 4:19-31): This is where Paul pulls a story from the Old Testament to explain the course of salvation.

This Is Why the Gospel Transforms (Chapters 5-6)— After, and only after the Gospel is understood, can you understand how our works fit into the equation. We do not work to obtain salvation. We work because of our salvation.

How to Understand Christian Liberty (Chapter 5): Paul describes how tethering yourself to the law becomes heavy and hard, but relying on Christ brings a new liberation to want to do everything He calls you to do.

How to Understand Christian Life (Chapter 6): There is a great passage between what is done in the flesh versus what is done in the spirit. There is also instruction about how to help each other and laws of spiritual sowing and reaping.

What to Look for in Galatians

Key Words—

Faith: This word occurs 14 times and is the central teaching behind the book.

Law: This word occurs 14 times. It is used to clarify the purpose of how God used it, and what it means now as we look at the work of salvation.

Promise: This word occurs 11 times. This is the basis by which God operates. He declares promises, keeps His promises, and makes us the children of promise in salvation.

Allegory—

Ishmael and Isaac: We have to be careful with allegorical references. Paul was an apostle and was given special revelation from God. Some have used Paul's example here and started to 'see' allegories everywhere in the Bible. But once this caution is noted, a powerful message begins to surface that identifies our life in the flesh and our life of promise.

What to Gain from Galatians

The Gospel: Plus Nothing, Minus Nothing— This is Paul's message. This is God's message. But to this day, we still have to deal with the distortion of the Gospel message. You can probably think of people or denominations right now who add to the message of the Gospel and declare themselves saved. You can probably think of people or denominations right now who subtract from the message of the Gospel and declare themselves saved.

Paul's cry should be our cry.

This life, we know, is preparation for the next life and it is so incredibly small compared to the prospect of eternity. It's serious business and demands our serious attention. This is how people get into heaven.

We repeat it often, but God forbid it of us that we get tired of its message.



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