



# Galatians and the Gospel: What Do We Learn from Paul's First Epistle? (and some of his admirers along the way)

## The Necessity of the True Gospel

It is better to preach the right gospel with the wrong motives (Phil 1:15-18) than to preach the wrong gospel with the right motives (Rom 10:2; Gal 1:8-9). In the former Paul can celebrate. In the latter he calls for a curse!


“Salvation, said the Reformers, is by faith (man's total trust) only, without our being obliged to work for it; it is by grace (God's free favor) only, without our having to earn or deserve it first; it is by Christ the God-man only, without there being need or room for any other mediatorial agent, whether priest, saint, or virgin; it is by Scripture only, without regard to such unbiblical and unfounded extras as the doctrines of purgatory and of pilgrimages, the relic-cult and papal indulgences as devices for shortening one's stay there; and praise for salvation is due to God only, without any credit for his acceptance of us being taken to ourselves. . .

. . . The Reformers made these points against unreformed Rome, but they were well aware that in making them they were fighting over again Paul's battle in Romans and Galatians against works, and in Colossians against unauthentic traditions, and the battle fought in Hebrews against trust in any priesthood or mediation other than that of Christ. And (note again!) they were equally well aware that the gospel of the five "onlies" would always be contrary to natural human thinking, upsetting to natural human pride, and an object of hostility to Satan, so that destructive interpretations of justification by faith in terms of justification by works. . .



...as by the Judaizers of Paul's day, and the Pelagians of Augustine's, and the Church of Rome both before and after the Reformation, and the Arminians within the Reformed fold, and Bishop Bull (among later Anglicans) were only to be expected. So Luther anticipated that after his death the truth of justification would come under fresh attack and theology would develop in a way tending to submerge it once more in error and incomprehension; and throughout the century following Luther's death Reformed theologians, with Socinian and other rationalists in their eye, were constantly stressing how radically opposed to each other are the "gospel mystery" of justification and the religion of the natural man...

...For justification by works is, in truth, the natural religion of mankind, and has been since the Fall... (J. I. Packer, "Sola Fide: The Reformed Doctrine of Justification").



## Why Study Galatians for Insights on the Gospel?

- 1) It is likely Paul's first letter.
- 2) It is the only letter Paul writes with no opening word of commendation.
- 3) The gospel is the dominate theme of the epistle.

## Gospel Definitions

**Alistair Begg:** Here's the gospel in a phrase. Because Christ died for us, those who trust in him may know that their guilt has been pardoned once and for all. What will we have to say before the bar of God's judgment? Only one thing. Christ died in my place. That's the gospel. (Taken from *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross: Experiencing the Passion and Power of Easter*)



## **Gospel Definitions**

**John Piper:** What's the gospel? I'll put it in a sentence. The Gospel is the news that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies, so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe, but only everlasting joy. That's the gospel. ("The Gospel in 6 Minutes," 9/12/07).

## **What Did Martin Luther Say About the Galatians?**

"The Epistle to the Galatians is my dear epistle. I have put my confidence in it. It is my Katy von Bora." (Luther's Works, vol. 54, pg. 20).

### **What Did Martin Luther Say About the Galatians?**

“I have taken in hand, in the name of the Lord, yet once again to expound this epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians; not because I desire to teach new things, or such as ye have not known before, since that, by the grace of Christ, Paul is now thoroughly known unto you, but for that we have to fear lest Satan take from us this doctrine of faith, and bring into the Church again the doctrine of works and men’s traditions...

### **What Did Martin Luther Say About the Galatians?**

Wherefore it is very necessary that this doctrine be kept in continual practice and public exercise, both of hearing and reading. And although it be never so well known, yet the devil, who rageth continually, seeking to devour us, is not dead. Likewise our flesh and old man is yet alive. Besides this, all kinds of temptations do vex and oppress us on every side; so that this doctrine can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough...



## What Did Martin Luther Say About the Galatians?

...If this doctrine be lost, then is also the doctrine of truth, life, and salvation, also lost and gone. If this doctrine flourish, then all good things flourish; religion, the true service of God, the glory of God, the right knowledge of all things which are necessary for a Christian man to know” (Commentary on Galatians, xi).

## Gospel Definitions

**Thabiti Anyabwile:** The gospel or good news of Jesus Christ is that God the Father, who is holy and righteous in all his ways, is angry with sinners and will punish sin. Man, who disobeys the rule of God, is alienated from the love of God and in danger of an eternal and agonizing condemnation at the hands of God. But God, who is also rich in mercy, because of his great love, sent his eternal Son born by the virgin Mary, to die as a ransom and a substitute for the sins of rebellious people...

...And now, through the perfect obedience of the Son of God and his willing death on the cross as payment for our sins, all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, following him as Savior and Lord, will be saved from the wrath of God to come, declared just in his sight, have eternal life, and receive the Spirit of God as a foretaste of the glories of heaven with God himself.

### **Gospel Definitions**

**Danny Akin:** The gospel is the good news that God has provided salvation through Jesus Christ's substitutionary death and bodily resurrection, and as a gracious gift, it is received by personal faith [and repentance] through the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 1:16-17; 3:22-26; 1 Cor 15:3-4; Eph 1:13).

The gospel of salvation originates in God's sovereign grace and is experienced only through personal faith in Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16; 20:32; Acts 16:31; Eph 2:8-10)



**Galatians and the Gospel:  
What Do We Learn from Paul's First Epistle?**

**Chapter 1**

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- 2) The gospel delivers us from the present evil age to the glory of God our Father – 1:3-5
- 3) There is only one gospel and to depart from it is to be accursed (damned – 1:6-10)

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- 5) The gospel is grounded in a gracious election – 1:15-24

### **D.A. Carson**

The gospel is integrally tied to the Bible's story-line. Indeed, it is incomprehensible without understanding that story-line.

God is the sovereign, transcendent and personal God who has made the universe, including us, his image bearers.

Our misery lies in our rebellion, our alienation from God, which, despite his forbearance, attracts his implacable wrath. But God, precisely because love is of the very essence of his character,...

## **D.A. Carson**

...takes the initiative and prepared for the coming of his own Son by raising up a people who, by covenantal stipulations, temple worship, systems of sacrifice and of priesthood, by kings and by prophets, are taught something of what God is planning and what he expects. In the fullness of time his Son comes and takes on human nature. He comes not, in the first instance, to judge but to save:

## **D.A. Carson**

...he dies the death of his people, rises from the grave and, in returning to his heavenly Father, bequeaths the Holy Spirit as the down payment and guarantee of the ultimate gift he has secured for them—an eternity of bliss in the presence of God himself, in a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. The only alternative is to be shut out from the presence of this God forever, in the torments of hell. What men and women must do, before it is too late, is repent and trust Christ; the alternative is to disobey the gospel.



## Summarizing 1 Corinthians 15

- 1) The gospel is Christological.
  - 2) The gospel is theological.
  - 3) The gospel is biblical.
  - 4) The gospel is apostolic.
  - 5) The gospel is historical.
  - 6) The gospel is personal.
  - 7) The gospel is universal.
  - 8) The gospel is eschatological.
- (Taken from "What is the Gospel?", Gospel Coalition Address)

## Galatians and the Gospel: What Do We Learn from Paul's First Epistle?

### Chapter 2

- 6) The gospel of grace and freedom is constantly in danger of being lost and must be fervently defended – 2:1-6

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- 6) The gospel of grace and freedom is constantly in danger of being lost and must be fervently defended – 2:1-6
- 7) The gospel that saves Gentiles is the same gospel that saves Jews – 2:7-10

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**Chapter 2**

- 8) There are ethical imperatives that follow naturally from the truth of the gospel – 2:10-15
  - no economic distinction
  - no ethnic distinctions (more to come!)



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- 9) The gospel is the good news that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not the works of the Law – 2:15-16

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- 10) In the gospel we are identified with Christ in His work on the cross – 2:17-21
- 11) The love of Christ for sinners is made evident in the gospel – 2:20

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We are sinners and thieves, and therefore guilty of death and everlasting damnation. But Christ took all our sins upon him, and for them died upon the cross . . . all the prophets did foresee in spirit, that Christ should become the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, blasphemer, etc. that ever was for he being made a sacrifice, for the sins of the whole world, is now an innocent person and without sins...



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...our most merciful Father, seeing us to be oppressed overwhelmed with the curse of the law, and so to be holden under the same that we could never be delivered from it by our own power, sent his only Son into the world and laid upon him all the sins of all men, saying: Be thou Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that sinner which did eat the apple in Paradise;...

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...that thief which hanged upon the cross; and, briefly, be thou the person which hath committed the sins of all men; see therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them. Here now cometh the law and saith: I find him a sinner, and that such a one as hath taken upon him the sins of all men, and I see no sins but in him; therefore let him die upon the cross. And so he setteth upon him and killeth him...

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...By this means the whole world is purged and cleansed from all sins, and so delivered from death and all evils (Luther, *Galatians*, commentary on 3:13).

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**Chapter 3**

12) We receive the Holy Spirit by faith in the gospel, the same Spirit who both justifies and sanctifies  
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- 12) We receive the Holy Spirit by faith in the gospel, the same Spirit who both justifies and sanctifies – 3:1-6
- 13) The gospel that saved Abraham in the past is the same gospel that saves us in the present – 3:7-9

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- 14) Relying on good works for salvation does not save, it curses. 3:10-12

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- 15) The gospel is the good news that Christ has redeemed us from the curse as our penal substitute – 3:13-14
- 16) The gospel is rooted in a covenantal promise that precedes the giving of the Law – 3:15-18



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17)The Law is good in that it shows us our sin –  
3:19-22

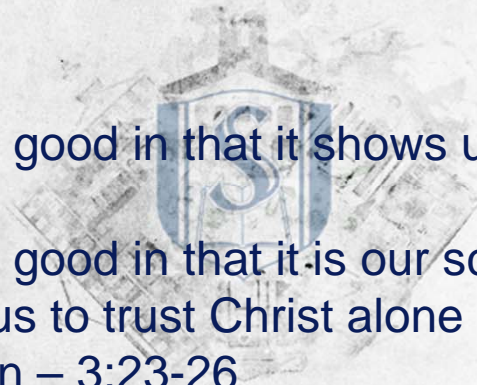


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**Chapter 3**

17)The Law is good in that it shows us our sin –  
3:19-22

18)The Law is good in that it is our school teacher  
that leads us to trust Christ alone by faith alone  
for salvation – 3:23-26



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19) The gospel of Christ unites us to Christ where there is no racial, social or gender distinction. We are one in Him – 3:27-29

**J. I. Packer**

I formulate the Gospel this way: it is information issuing in invitation; it is proclamation issuing in persuasion. It is an admonitory message embracing five themes. First, God: the God whom Paul proclaimed to the Athenians in Acts 17, the God of Christian theism. Second, humankind: made in God's image but now totally unable to respond to God or do anything right by reason of sin in their moral and spiritual system. Third, the person and work of Christ: God incarnate, who by dying wrought atonement and who now lives to impart the blessing that flows from his work of atonement...



## **J. I. Packer**

...Fourth, repentance, that is, turning from sin to God, from self-will to Jesus Christ. And fifthly, new community: a new family, a new pattern of human togetherness which results from the unity of the Lord's people in the Lord, henceforth to function under the one Father as a family and a fellowship.”  
(*Serving the People of God: Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer*, Vol. 2. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998, 44).

## **William Tyndale**

Evangelion (that we call the gospel) is a Greek word and signifieth good, merry, glad and joyful tidings, that maketh a man's heart glad and maketh him sing, dance, and leap for joy... [This gospel is] all of Christ the right David, how that he hath fought with sin, with death, and the devil, and overcome them: whereby all men that were in bondage to sin, wounded with death, overcome of the devil are without their own merits or deservings loosed, justified, restored to life and saved, brought to liberty and reconciled unto the favor of God and set at one with him again: which tidings as many as believe laud, praise and thank God, are glad, sing and dance for joy (*A Pathway into the Holy Spirit*, 1531).

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20)The gospel is grounded in a Trinitarian Theology  
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21)The gospel of redemption in Christ results in our  
adoption as children of the heavenly Father –  
4:4-7





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**Chapter 4**

22)The gospel gives us a knowledge of God that  
frees us from enslaving rules and rituals – 4:8-  
11

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**Chapter 4**

22)The gospel gives us a knowledge of God that  
frees us from enslaving rules and rituals – 4:8-  
11

23)Faithful ministers will be passionate for the truth  
of the gospel even if it results in anguish of heart  
and necessitates strong rebuke – 4:12-20

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### **Chapter 4**

24) Works salvation leads to slavery and Mt. Sinai but gospel salvation leads to freedom and the New Jerusalem – 4:21-31.

### **Mark Dever**

Here is what I understand the good news to be: the good news is that the one and only God, who is holy, made us in his image to know him. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him. In his great love, God became a man in Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of all those who would ever turn and trust in him. He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ's sacrifice and that God's wrath against us had been exhausted. He now calls us to repent of our sins and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness...



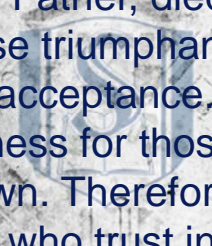
## Mark Dever

...If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God. Now that is good news (Taken from *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*).



## Darren Patrick

Fundamentally, the gospel is the good news that the eternal Son of God entered our sinful world and lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father, died as a sacrifice in the place of sinners, and rose triumphantly as a sign of sin's defeat and the Father's acceptance. In all this, the Son established a righteousness for those who had no righteousness of their own. Therefore, there is 'now no condemnation' for those who trust in Christ alone. Jesus' death and resurrection are the permanent placeholders for the sinner's right standing before the holy God (Darrin Patrick, *Don't Call It a Comeback: The Old Faith for a New Day*, 157-158).



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**Chapter 5:1-12**

25) To pursue salvation by works obligates one to keep the whole law perfectly – 5:1-3

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25) To pursue salvation by works obligates one to keep the whole law perfectly – 5:1-3

26) To be justified by works is to fall away from justification by grace thru faith – 5:4-6



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27) The gospel saves us and sanctifies us (cf. 3:1-6)  
– 5:7-8



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**Chapter 5:1-12**

27) The gospel saves us and sanctifies us (cf. 3:1-6)  
– 5:7-8

28) To preach a false gospel invites judgment and  
calls for the strongest condemnation from  
faithful teachers – 5:9-12



## **Tullian Tchividjian**

Imperatives minus indicatives=impossibility. When we give commands without saying what God has done for us, we create impossible scenarios for people to live a long obedience in the same direction... Long term, sustained, gospel-motivated obedience can only come from faith in what Christ has already done, not fear in what we must do. Any other kind is unsustainable.

## **Galatians and the Gospel: What Do We Learn from Paul's First Epistle?**

### **Chapter 5:12-6:20**

29) The indicative of the gospel naturally leads to the imperatives of the gospel! – 5:13-6:20



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- 29)The indicative of the gospel naturally leads to the imperatives of the gospel! – 5:13-6:20
- a. We will not indulge and pander to the flesh – 5:13, 16-21

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- a. We will not indulge and pander to the flesh – 5:13, 16-21
  - b. In love we will serve others – 5:13-14
  - c. We will not brutalize each other in word or action – 5:15

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- 29)The indicative of the gospel naturally leads to the imperatives of the gospel! – 5:13-6:20
- d. We will live in the realm of the Spirit whom we received when we believed the gospel – 5:22-26



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  - e. We will engage in spiritual restoration – 6:1-2
  - f. We will be humble – 6:3

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- g. We will serve and do our part in the body of Christ – 6:4-5

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- g. We will serve and do our part in the body of Christ – 6:4-5
  - h. We will bless those who teach us – 6:6
  - i. We will embrace the principle of sowing and reaping – 6:7-8

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  - k. We will accept persecution for the cross of Christ – 6:11-13

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- l. We will boast only in Christ and His cross – 6:14-15



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- l. We will boast only in Christ and His cross – 6:14-15
- m. We will pursue peace, mercy, grace and Christ – 6:16-20

**The Essence of the Gospel by John Piper**

O Lord Jesus, I am by nature a rebel and find more pleasure in what you made than in you. I am sick and corrupt. O Christ, how plain it is to me now that I need something so much deeper and more powerful and more personal than the law. I know your law is good. But I am flesh, and powerless to obey. And so, Lord Jesus, I turn away from the law, to you. You are my only hope. I turn away from my own resources and bank on your blood and righteousness for acceptance, and on your help for holiness. I turn away from all earthly pleasures and take you, and you alone, as the all-satisfying joy of my life. I renounce Satan and all his ways and all his works. I repent of all the sins I know, and those you know and I don't...

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...And, O Lord, I pray that you would have mercy on me, and open the eyes of my heart to see you as you really are in all of your surpassing beauty. I pray that you would display your glory to me in the gospel. What I see and know of you now, I embrace with all my heart. I receive you as my Savior and Lord and Treasure. And ask you to dwell mightily in me and make yourself the Victor in my life so that when I love my brothers and my enemies – as I intend to do with all my heart – the glory will go to you (“How the Spirit Does What the Law Could Not Do,” November 11, 2001, Bethlehem Baptist Church)