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PAUL'S PROCLAMATION, DEFENSE, AND APPLICATION
OF THE GOSPEL IN GALATIANS AS A PARADIGM
FOR GOSPEL-CENTERED PREACHING

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PAUL'S DEFENSE, PROCLAMATION, AND APPLICATION
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This labor of love is dedicated to the two women who believed and insisted that it get done. To my mother, Alice Pepper, who never wavered that it could happen. To my bride, Lee Ann, your patience and grace are a daily display of God's glorious gospel.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Thesis	11
Scholarly Contribution	14
Background	14
Commitments	16
Methodology	19
2. THE RELEVANCE OF THE GOSPEL TO PAUL	20
Introduction	20
Paul's Life Influences	20
Paul, the Apostle of the Gospel	23
Defining the Gospel	27
New Testament Gospel Definition	27
Paul's Gospel Definition	30
Paul's Gospel Language	34
Paul's Gospel Categories	36
Conclusion	47
3. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS	49
Introduction	49
Occasion and Overview	49
The Influence of the Letter	50

Chapter	Page
The Author of the Letter	53
The Recipients of the Letter	54
The False Teachers in the Letter	55
The Reason for the Letter	56
Galatians as a Sermon	59
Conclusion	62
4. PAUL’S PROCLAMATION, DEFENSE, AND APPLICATION OF THE GOSPEL IN GALATIANS	64
Introduction	64
Proclamation and Defense of the Gospel, Galatians 1-4	64
Proclaiming the Gospel, Galatians 1:1-5	65
Defending the Gospel, Galatians 1:6-2:14	73
Proclaiming the Gospel, Galatians 2:15-21	95
Defending the Gospel, Galatians 3:1-6	100
Proclaiming the Gospel, Galatians 3:7-4:7	106
Defending the Gospel, Galatians 4:8-20	118
Proclaiming the Gospel, Galatians 4:21-31	124
Applying the Gospel, Galatians 5:1-6:18	129
Applying the Gospel, Galatians 5:1-15	132
Applying the Gospel, Galatians 5:16-26	141
Applying the Gospel, Galatians 6:1-18	144
Conclusion	151
5. PAUL’S USE OF THE GOSPEL IN GALATIANS AS A GOSPEL-CENTERED PREACHING PARADIGM	152
Introduction	152
Paul’s Gospel-Centered Preaching Paradigm	152

Chapter	Page
How Does This Passage Proclaim the Gospel?	155
Paul Proclaims the Gospel in Various Places in the Sermon	156
Paul Proclaims the Gospel in Simplicity	157
Paul Proclaims the Gospel through Redemptive History	160
How Does This Passage Proclaim the Gospel? The Broader Context	163
How Does This Passage Defend the Gospel?	167
Paul Defends against False Teachers	167
Paul Defends the Gospel against Weakness	170
How Does This Passage Defend the Gospel? A Broader Context	173
How Does This Passage Apply the Gospel?	174
Paul Applies the Gospel as Freedom	174
Paul Applies the Gospel to the Spirit	176
Paul Applies the Gospel to the Church	177
How Does This Passage Apply the Gospel? The Broader Context	178
Conclusion	180
6. CONCLUSION	182
BIBLIOGRAPHY	186

PREFACE

No one is more surprised than I am that I have written a dissertation. I was the kid who could never wait for school to dismiss to a break, and always dreaded going back. Graduation from college was enough, and I would never have pursued a Master of Divinity degree much less a Doctor of Philosophy degree except to follow my Savior. May God receive all glory and praise for the beginning, sustaining, and finishing of this work.

When debating which type of doctorate to pursue, Lee Ann and I were blessed to hear Dr. Albert Mohler preach on Colossians 1:24-29. It was then that we were both convinced of God's call to pursue a Ph.D. in preaching so that I could become "a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known" (v. 25). I stand in honor of Dr. Mohler and in his leadership and faithfulness to God's Word. The conviction of this calling kept us going over more years than we care to count. Thank you, Lee Ann, for believing in me all the way. May we have much joy in continuing to trust God for how he will use this passion for gospel-centered preaching.

David and Alice Pepper taught me the value of work and the joy of people. They are amazing parents. My mother accompanied me to Southern Seminary when gathering information about applying for the Ph.D. program. She heard me laugh and exclaim that if I was supposed to do this, God would have to get my application approved! She made sure my scholarship was intact from elementary grade homework through proofreading this dissertation. My parents both sat patiently under my teaching as I covered this material in Bible Study classes, and they provided a cabin where much of the writing took place. My in-laws, Ron and Dianna Walke, graciously kept the kids,

nurtured my wife, and helped us in so many ways. Many thanks to our children, who provided great reasons to leave the study to play, attend their activities, or just watch a movie.

I must also confess my debt of gratitude to the Apostle Paul in whose company I richly dwelt while writing about his letter to the Galatians. He is to me a preacher, pastor, teacher, mentor, and friend.

The family of Grace Heartland Church exercised much love and mercy to us during this entire process. Another community of friends, family, and fellow-students received e-mail updates to pray for us. Ruth Redel, Ph.D. served as a prayer-warrior and proofreader of highest esteem. Your work allowed the drafts to get quick approval. You are dear to me and my family.

My final word of appreciation is to Dr. Hershael York. Somehow you allowed me into this program and then you refused to accept anything but God's best in me. You are a model of preaching, and my learning from you only continues.

Daryl L. Pepper

Elizabethtown, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul writes to the churches in Galatia to proclaim, to defend, and to apply the gospel to their lives. In his exhortation, he despairs that these brothers are so quickly deserting the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and turning to a different one, which does not really exist (Gal 1:1-7).¹ He is so despondent over their abandonment that he addresses them as “foolish Galatians!” and asks, “Who has bewitched you?” (3:1). He implores them: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (5:1).

Like the Galatian congregations, some contemporary churches abandon the gospel. Those who profess to be brothers in the Lord, who attend church faithfully, and who serve with zeal, may still trust in their own efforts to keep the law in order to have a right standing with and approval from God. Having begun in the Spirit, they seek perfection in the flesh like the Galatians (3:3).

George Barna, surveying numerous studies, concludes that to millions of Americans God “exists for the pleasure of humankind” and that “true power is accessed not by looking upward but by turning inward.”² He describes a church culture that

¹All Scripture references, unless indicated otherwise, are from the English Standard Version.

²George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word, 1998), 67.

believes their salvation is secure because their self-esteem is positive.³ Barna summarizes,

We desire experience more than knowledge. We prefer choices to absolutes. We embrace preferences rather than truths. We seek comfort rather than growth. Faith must come on our terms or we reject it. We have enthroned ourselves as the final arbiters of righteousness, the ultimate rulers of our own experience and destiny. We are the Pharisees of the new millennium.⁴

Contemporary evangelicalism, unlike the first century churches in Galatia, offers a burgeoning industry of Christian publishing and resources. Some of these materials can help followers of Christ to understand the Scriptures and the depth of the gospel more clearly.⁵ However, many of these books, blogs, websites, and conferences can lead people away from “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), from the true gospel of Christ to a gospel according to man.⁶ D. A. Carson laments the current evangelical culture: “The books on many church bookstalls are a disgrace—thousands of pages of sentimental twaddle laced with the occasional biblical gem.”⁷

Theologian R. Albert Mohler Jr. sees the threat to the church as much closer than the conference center or the Christian bookstore: the problem is in the pulpit.

³Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, 7, 21-28.

⁴Ibid., 23.

⁵This dissertation is indebted to Christian authors, blogs, websites, and bookstores.

⁶This may include a man-centered faith, self-help, therapy and a moralistic lifestyle. Michael Horton surveys just how American Christianity is enslaved in these methods: *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 15-64.

⁷D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 484.

Mohler believes that a threat to the church getting the good news right is that “contemporary preaching suffers from an absence of gospel.”⁸ He recounts the robust authority of the gospel in Christian history:

The preaching of the apostles *always* presented the *kerygma*—the heart of the gospel. The clear presentation of the gospel must be part of the sermon, no matter the text. As Charles Spurgeon expressed this so eloquently, preach the Word, place it in its canonical context, and ‘make a bee-line to the cross.’⁹

Mohler then laments the current absence of the gospel in preaching:

The approach of many preachers is to present helpful and practical messages, often with generalized Christian content but without any clear presentation of the gospel or call to decision and accountability to the text or to the claims of Christ. The apostles should be our model here, consistently preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of course, in order for the gospel to make sense, authentic preaching must also deal honestly with the reality of human sin and must do so with a candor equal to that of the biblical text. All this presents the preacher with some significant challenges in our age of ‘sensitivities.’ But in the end, preaching devoid of this content—preaching that evades the biblical text and biblical truth—falls short of anything we can rightly call *Christian* preaching.¹⁰

Mohler’s solution is to “confront the congregation with the Word of God.” He assures this gospel proclamation “will be at times awkward, challenging, and difficult. After all, this is the Word that pierces us like a sword. The evangelical preacher must set his aim at letting the sword loose, neither hiding it nor dulling its edge.”¹¹

In harmony with Mohler’s concerns, author Trevin Wax exposes three gospel compromises and six specific counterfeits. He laments a “threefold crisis in the church”

⁸R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 20, emphasis original.

⁹*Ibid.*, 20-21, emphasis original.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 21, emphasis original.

¹¹*Ibid.*

about the good news: “a lack of gospel confidence,” loss of faith in its power to change lives; “a lack of gospel clarity,” loss of focus on just what the good news is; and “a lack of gospel community,” loss of church identity around the freedom of the gospel.¹² A student of the gospel meaning and message,¹³ Wax cites six gospel counterfeits, each of which will get part of the gospel correct but will then stray:¹⁴

1. The therapeutic gospel redefines the nature of the fall of mankind.
2. The judgmentless gospel denies the final judgment.
3. The moralistic gospel depicts Christ’s work as merely good advice.
4. The quietist gospel identifies good news as a message of personal experience.
5. The activist gospel unites the church around many things that are not the cross.
6. The churchless gospel—neglects the role of the church in the gospel message.

Pastor John MacArthur agrees with this gospel desertion and warns of two major ways the contemporary church compromises. The first problem is pragmatism: “the notion that meaning or worth is determined by practical consequences. . . . if a technique or course of action has the desired effect, it is good. If it doesn’t seem to work, it must be wrong.”¹⁵ The second gospel desertion is worldliness: “the sin of allowing

¹²Trevin Wax, *Counterfeit Gospels: Rediscovering the Good News in a World of False Hope* (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 14-15.

¹³Wax claims the largest grouping of gospel definitions on the Internet, “Gospel Definitions” [on-line]; accessed 25 Jan 2013; available from <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2009/09/14/gospel-definitions-2/>; Internet.

¹⁴Ibid., 18.

¹⁵John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 26-27.

one's appetites, ambitions, or conduct to be fashioned according to earthly values.”¹⁶

MacArthur laments,

Yet today we have the extraordinary spectacle of church programs deliberately designed to cater to fleshly desire, sensual appetites and human pride—“the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions.” To achieve this worldly appeal, church activities often go beyond the merely frivolous. . . . No brand of horseplay, it seems, is too outrageous to be brought in to the sanctuary. Burlesque has become the liturgy of the pragmatic church.

Moreover, many in the church believe this is the *only* way we will ever reach the world. We're told that if the unchurched multitudes don't want classic hymns, serious doctrine, and biblical preaching, we must give them what they want. Hundreds of churches have followed precisely that theory, actually surveying unbelievers to learn what it would take to get them to attend.¹⁷

MacArthur finds that cultural relevance and high attendance surpass holiness and worship as the main objectives of the church gathered. He argues, “Preaching the Word and boldly confronting sin are seen as archaic, ineffectual means of winning the world.”¹⁸

In the updated edition of his work, MacArthur adds three forces that threaten the clarity of the gospel worldwide: the end of the cold war, the dawn of the Internet age, and postmodernism.¹⁹ At the collapse of the cold war, he cites the Western dalliance for “superficial and worldly” worship sweeping across the former Soviet Union which is “injecting a seriously false gospel into the public perception, totally confusing millions. . . . So much false Christianity on television no doubt inoculated multitudes against the real gospel. Thus, “The poison of religious pragmatism is now an enormous *global*

¹⁶MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 31-32.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 14-24.

problem.”²⁰ The dawn of the Internet age, MacArthur argues, allows both the novice and the scholar to speak, elevates show above substance, and glorifies feelings above facts. This medium exports the Westernized gospel across the globe.²¹ Postmodernism, MacArthur’s third threat, eclipses the scientific reasoning of Modernism by questioning everything, despising authority, injecting skepticism, and embracing cynicism.²² MacArthur’s siren call about pragmatism and worldliness, spreading via the Internet and taking root in postmodern thought, finds its silence in bold gospel preaching.

David Jones and Russell Woodbridge agree that the pragmatic approach to Christianity that Americans embrace leads to the temptation to believe in a particularly viral strain of false good news: the Prosperity Gospel. These researchers cite the tendency of modern Christians to be pragmatic, to value style over substance, and to be impressed with polished, millionaire preachers. This leads them to “incorrectly conclude that if a method works, it must be legitimate.”²³ Jones and Woodbridge claim that this deception is reaching far beyond its original charismatic movement and is encompassing the evangelical church.²⁴ These self-professing Christians, adrift of doctrinal roots,

²⁰MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 16-18, emphasis original.

²¹Ibid., 19-20.

²²Ibid., 20-22.

²³David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 18-19.

²⁴Ibid., 16. Jones and Woodbridge cite a Pew Forum survey stating that 46 percent of evangelicals affirm that God grants riches to those with enough faith: *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2006), 147.

readily follow this “appealing but fatal message: accept God and He will bless you—because you deserve it.”²⁵ They document what many evangelical pastors hear far too often: their own congregants giving glowing testimonies about two particularly popular prophets of prosperity, Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen.²⁶ Sadly, many nations, “influenced by American affluence and prosperity,” follow this positive approach but false gospel.²⁷

D. A. Carson attacks the foundations of postmodern thought that lead to such rampant pragmatism in *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*. He finds the debates of former generations at least agree upon objective truth.²⁸ Carson’s concern with the contemporary thought is that “this is the first generation to believe that there is no objective truth out there, or that if there is, there is no access to it.”²⁹ He elucidates three types of pluralism. The first is empirical, a growing diversity of peoples, cultures, and thought in most Western countries. Carson finds this change to be merely factual and not inherently good or bad. Second, cherished pluralism, praises the diversity of the empirical as a fundamentally good change. The third, philosophical pluralism, embraces multiple theories about understanding and interpretation of the empirical diversity, affirms these differing values in agreement with cherished pluralism, and then *philosophically* applies doubt that objective truth even exists. Philosophical pluralism

²⁵Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 16.

²⁶Ibid., 13-17; 81-103.

²⁷Ibid., 16-17.

²⁸For example, J. Gresham Machen confronted the problems of Modernist thought with his bold rebuke, *Christianity and Liberalism* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923, 2001).

²⁹Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 54.

“locates most if not all meaning in the interpreter, not in the text or object interpreted.”³⁰

Carson finds the extent of philosophical pluralism from the university, where it infects every discipline, to the public square where the common citizen may argue for his own brand of truth. This pervasive pluralism deconstructs truth, dismisses the possibility of heresy, and redefines true tolerance. Spiritually, it marginalizes religious thought to private meditation without public merit, embraces New Age trends, increases biblical illiteracy, and allows for a type of generic Jesus to be found in many other religions. The overall effect of this philosophical pluralism also replaces moral responsibility with therapy, avows pragmatism, pop culture and devout individualism.³¹

Carson laments that media personalities like Oprah Winfrey are the “arbiters of public morality” and that “Oprah shapes more of the nation’s grasp of right and wrong than most of the pulpits in the land.”³² One of his chief arguments is that “*confessional Christianity cannot wholly embrace either modernity or postmodernity, yet it must learn certain lessons from both; it must vigorously oppose many features of philosophical pluralism, without retreating to modernism.*”³³

The results of such pluralism is apparent in both mainline³⁴ and evangelical

³⁰Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 52.

³¹Ibid., 37-52.

³²Ibid., 24.

³³Ibid., 23 (emphasis his).

³⁴Robert Jewett researched mainline churches (mostly Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian) and found that the Pauline corpus was missing from the sermons. Robert Jewett, *Paul the Apostle to America: Cultural Trends and Pauline Scholarship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

denominations who believe that God exists to serve mankind and that Jesus is a good example about how to overcome setbacks; sadly, “evangelicals are as likely as mainliners today to talk pop psychology, politics, or moralism instead of the gospel.”³⁵ According to researchers Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, the next generation of church leaders will be just as likely to confuse the gospel. They claim that these teenagers cannot articulate with any sense of gravity the gospel message.³⁶

In harmony with the concerns about a lack of gospel preaching, counterfeit messages, and global pragmatism is the truncation of the good news: mistaking the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as *merely* the entrance into salvation. Certainly his atoning sacrifice on the cross cancels the debt of sin. However, the gospel is not the front door of the church from which believers then advance into the good works of discovering spiritual gifts, serving out of those gifts, and even attaining leadership positions in the church. The gospel is the beginning of salvation *and* the power for sanctification and the promise of final rest in Jesus. Pastor Milton Vincent exhorts,

God did not give us His gospel just so we could embrace it and be converted. Actually, He offers it to us every day as a gift that keeps on giving to us everything we need for life and godliness. The wise believer learns this truth early and

³⁵Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 30.

³⁶Smith and Denton summarize the beliefs of the teens they researched with the title: “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” or MTD. Their working theology may be expressed as the following: 1. God created the world. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and most world religions. 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when needed to resolve a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). In response to how only the gospel can answer the demands of MTD, see Steve Watters, “I Want My MTD, the Allure of Cultural Faith” *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Towers*, March 2012, 14-15.

becomes proficient in extracting available benefits from the gospel each day. We extract these benefits by being absorbed in the gospel, speaking it to ourselves when necessary, and by daring to reckon it true in all we do.³⁷

Church planter, ministry leader, and author C. J. Mahaney envisions a broader understanding of the good news:

The gospel isn't one class among many that you'll attend during your life as a Christian—the gospel is the whole building that all the classes take place in! Rightly approached, all the topics you'll study and focus on as a believer will be offered to you 'within the walls' of the glorious gospel.³⁸

Thankfully, an interest in the gospel abounds in the current evangelical culture. Gospel-centered literature is thriving.³⁹ Gospel-centered ministries and conferences are also available.⁴⁰ These publications and ministries offer helpful insights and reviews as and they seek to refocus the church upon her main message, the gospel of Christ.

³⁷Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God's Love* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2008), 5.

³⁸C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2002), 75-76.

³⁹Examples of gospel-centered books include: Darrell L. Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel: Reclaiming the Gospel as Good News* (Nashville: B&H, 2010); Matt Chandler and Jared Wilson, *The Explicit Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Mitchell L. Chase, *The Gospel is for Christians* (Houston: Lucid Books, 2010). Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); J. D. Greear, *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* (Nashville: B&H, 2011); Horton, *Christless Christianity*; Tim Keller, *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*; John Piper, *God is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); R. C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right: The Tie that Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Wax, *Counterfeit Gospels*; and, Jared C. Wilson, *Gospel Wakefulness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

⁴⁰See, for example, The Gospel Coalition ministry with website, blog, and conferences [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2012; available from www.thegospelcoalition.org. Internet. Together for the Gospel with website, blog, and conferences [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2012; available from www.t4g.org. Internet.

Professor Robert L. Plummer positively references these publications and ministries, but still laments the lack of gospel knowledge: “Even with this plethora of gospel language, there seems to be an ongoing fog surrounding what it means to have a life and ministry defined by the gospel of Jesus Christ. One well-established pastor confided in me ‘I’m still trying to figure out what it means to preach a gospel-centered sermon.’”⁴¹

Agreeing with the concerns and hopes shared by these theologians and pastors, the cry of this work is for the church to re-embrace Paul’s gospel confidence as found in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Specifically, pastors do well to look to Paul as a model for how to proclaim, defend, and apply the gospel.

Thesis

This dissertation establishes Paul’s proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. Paul’s letter⁴² serves as a model sermon for gospel-centered preaching: the first four chapters alternate between proclaiming and defending the

⁴¹Robert L. Plummer, “Paul’s Gospel,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 44.

⁴²This dissertation uses “epistle” and “letter” as synonyms. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor traces the original distinctions that a letter was “artless and unpremeditated” while an epistle “was a conscious work of literature, designed to interest as wide a public as possible now and in the future” He agrees with other scholars that today these terms are used without distinction; rather, “they are employed as synonyms.” (*Paul the Letter Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995], 42-45).

gospel, chapters five and six apply the good news.⁴³

Certainly the Apostle Paul does not delineate his letter into these three categories (gospel proclamation, defense, application), nor does he include a section on how to apply these ideas to preaching. Yet, this dissertation contends that every passage in the letter serves to accomplish one of these three purposes and that the epistle to the Galatians serves as a model for gospel-centered preaching.

Paul loves these Galatians whom he led to a saving faith in the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. A bodily ailment allows Paul to preach the good news to them, and though this condition was a trial to them, they treated him “as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus” (Gal 4:12-14). He thinks of them as “his little children for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (4:19). He repeatedly refers to them as “brothers” (1:11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18).

Because of his great love for them, his rebuke is vitriolic: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (1:6). He insists that if they (Paul and the brothers who are with him), a heavenly angel, or anyone brings them another gospel, “let him be accursed” (1:8, 9). The word “accursed” is to give them over to destruction, to devote them to divine condemnation.⁴⁴ He calls them “foolish,” and “bewitched” (3:1). He is

⁴³Chap. 3 of this dissertation defends why Galatians should be viewed as a sermon; chap. 4 develops Gal 1-4 as a proclamation and defense of the gospel, 5-6 as the application.

⁴⁴This word in the Greek, *αναθεμα*, should not be confused with *αναθημα* which is a votive offering consecrated in the temple. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), s.v. “to set up.”

“perplexed” by them and wonders if he has labored over them in vain (4:11, 20). “False brothers” who know the freedom that these Galatians have in Christ are seeking to enslave them under the Mosaic law (2:4). Paul’s solution to this allure is to remind the Galatians of the gospel that he proclaims, defends, and applies.

Paul did not take this gospel threat lightly and neither should preachers today.

Pastor Josh Moody finds Paul’s exhortations to the Galatians universal in nature:

The book of Galatians is really neither about first-century Judaism nor about sixteenth-century Roman Catholicism. It is actually about our common human tendency to think we no longer need Jesus. We have moved on from the cross. We now have a bigger, better gospel—a gospel that is not gospel—that will divide us from God’s people, and that is the common human tendency to self-righteousness.⁴⁵

Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia must resound today. Pastors today must embrace the Apostle Paul’s passion for gospel purity and apply it to the confusion in the current church culture. This dissertation applies Paul’s proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in the work of Galatians to encourage pastors to proclaim boldly the true gospel.

The weight of this work defines the gospel biblically, traces how Paul uses the word in its noun and verb forms, evaluates how he applies the gospel into categories, and then specifically focuses on how he proclaims, defends, and applies the gospel in his letter to the churches in Galatia. A final segment uses Paul’s work in Galatians to build and to apply a gospel-centered preaching paradigm.

⁴⁵Josh Moody, *No Other Gospel: 31 Reasons from Galatians Why Justification by Faith Alone Is the Only Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 11-12.

Scholarly Contribution

This dissertation adds to the field of preaching by offering a gospel-centered preaching paradigm based upon Paul's word to the Galatian believers. For homiletical studies, this work defines the word "gospel" as used in the New Testament, surveys Paul's usage of the word, and then focuses on his defense, proclamation and application of the gospel.

This dissertation adds to the field of Pauline studies and literature by declaring his epistle to the Galatians as a model for contemporary preaching with a gospel-centered approach. Paul uses the word "gospel" more than any other NT writer.⁴⁶ He applies the good news to many categories of life in the faith. Paul's sermons in the book of Acts and his admonitions to preach and to teach in his other epistles are noted, but his exhortation, structure, and passion found so powerfully in Galatians serves as the body of the argument.

Background

Student's Interest in the Subject

In the spring of 2006, my wife and I were blessed to attend John MacArthur's Shepherd's Conference. Before attending and while there, we knew that God was calling me to do more study and writing in the discipline of preaching but were unsure whether to pursue the Doctorate of Ministry or the Doctorate of Philosophy. When listening to R. Albert Mohler Jr. preach from Colossians 1:24-29, the answer became clear. The text clearly shares that the gospel was given to the Apostle Paul for the believers: "to me for

⁴⁶A defense for this statement is found in chap. 2 of this dissertation: "The Relevance of the Gospel to Paul."

you” (v. 25). He summarizes, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (v. 28).⁴⁷ God used this passage, faithfully expounded by Mohler, to call me to pursue a Ph.D. in preaching. The text highlights two passions that burn within me.

First, I have a passion for preaching in a pastoral context. So, my interest in an advanced degree in preaching is gained with the hope of “equip[ing] the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). In the preaching and teaching of God’s Word, my goal is to exposit faithfully the Scripture and to teach God’s people how to read, study, and apply His Word. Pastor and professor Hershael W. York rightly contends: “*the way you handle the Word in the pulpit is the way your people will handle the Word in their lives.*”⁴⁸

Second only to my passion for preaching in a pastoral context is training preachers who are serving or who will serve in the local church setting. My hope for this dissertation is to center my own soul, teaching, preaching, and lifestyle in the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and to help other pastors be workers unashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, preaching the word in season and out of season. I pray this work will center our sermons in the gospel to equip God’s people for the building up of the body of Christ for the glory of the Father.

⁴⁷R. Albert Mohler Jr., “General Session 5.” The Shepherd’s Conference, 2006 [on-line]; accessed 5 June 2012; available from <http://www.shepherdsconference.org/media/details/?mediaID=285>. Internet.

⁴⁸Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 20, emphasis original.

This dissertation demonstrates that preaching should be gospel-centered. Looking to Paul's defense, proclamation, and application of the gospel in Galatians as a model, this work offers a gospel-centered preaching paradigm.

Commitments

This introduction lists the presuppositions held by the author. The following commitments are a summary.

A commitment to authority. I affirm a high view of the Scriptures and believe that they are inerrant,⁴⁹ infallible and profitable. The Word assures its own reliability: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Paul's mandate to Timothy is clear: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:2). Since the Scriptures are true and profitable, the meaning of the text is the meaning of the sermon; and, the emotion of the text is the guiding emotion of the sermon.⁵⁰

A commitment to conservative doctrine. Without apology, and because of a high view of Scripture, I affirm the authority of the Word of God. Therefore, I hold to

⁴⁹Here, I follow the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and follow their 1978 publication: "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2012; available from http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf; Internet.

⁵⁰York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 207-13. Cf. Adam Brent Dooley, "Utilizing Biblical Persuasion Techniques in Preaching without Being Manipulative" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006).

doctrinal statements that commit to the supremacy of Christ in his literal virgin birth, death on a cross, physical death, burial, resurrection, and second coming.⁵¹ The gospel, as the central word in this thesis, is given by God, for the glory of God, and for the salvation of all who believe (Rom 1:16).⁵²

A commitment to expository preaching. Because the Word of God is true and profitable, expository preaching is the best method of preaching to equip the people of God with the Word of God. Expository preaching has numerous definitions.⁵³ It can

⁵¹See, for example, “The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000,” [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2012; available from <http://www.sbts.edu/documents/bfmexposition.pdf>. Internet.

⁵²Helpful definitions from evangelical theologians and organizations for the word gospel are offered later in this work as well as a review of the usage of the word gospel in the NT Greek. For a summary of helpful thoughts on the gospel, see: “6. The Gospel” in The Gospel Coalition’s “Confessional Statement”: [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2012; available from <http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/who>. Internet. See also: Together for the Gospel, “Affirmations and Denials” [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2012; available from <http://t4g.org/about/affirmations-and-denials-2/>. Internet.

⁵³The following provide just a brief sample from the multitude of definitions available: “To exposit the word” (Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 11). “Expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered explanation and proclamation of the text of God’s Word with due regard to the historical, contextual, grammatical, and doctrinal significance of the given passage, with a specific object of invoking a Christ-transforming response” (Stephen Olford and David Olford, *Anointing Expository Preaching* [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998], 69). Many books on preaching quote Robinson’s well known definition, “The communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.” Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 19. “A discourse that expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main divisions which issue forth from the given text, and then decisively applies its message to the listeners.” Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 29.

mean a verse-by-verse explanation of the Word done book by book.⁵⁴ It can also encompass doctrinal preaching, historical, topical, biographical, and overviews.⁵⁵ The expository preaching methodology includes the need for redemptive-historical and Christocentric preaching.⁵⁶ This dissertation adopts York's broad definition: "*Expository preaching is any kind of preaching that shows people the meaning of a biblical text and leads them to apply it to their lives.*"⁵⁷ In affirming expository preaching, this work rejects any notions that it be presented as a dry, running commentary, a purely academic exercise, or the reading of an essay.⁵⁸

⁵⁴John MacArthur exemplifies the commitment to verse by verse expository preaching. In his tenure as pastor of Grace Church he has preached through every book of the NT verse by verse. His scholarship is preserved in his NT commentaries. John F. MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series* (Chicago: Moody, 1987). His motto for his Grace to You media ministry is "Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time" [on-line]; accessed 22 Jan 2013; available from www.gty.org. Internet.

⁵⁵Irvin A. Busenitz, "Must Expository Preaching Always Be Book Studies? Some Alternatives," *The Master's Journal* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 140-57. Pastor Mark Dever serves as a model for expository preaching done in an overview form in his sermon series where each biblical book is summarized in one sermon (*The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006]; *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005]).

⁵⁶See Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007). For an excellent and current analysis, see David Edward Prince, "The Necessity of a Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011).

⁵⁷York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 33.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 6-7. See also D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who insists that preaching must be biblical but must also take form and become like the artistry of a poem, musical composition, or work of pottery (*Preaching and Preachers*, 40th ann. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 80-81).

Methodology

This work evaluates the biblical meanings of the word “gospel” in the New Testament Greek and then surveys how Paul uses this word in his various epistles. He clearly defines the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. This work evaluates Paul’s language for the gospel and provides categories for how he applies the word.

To establish the real weight of the argument, Paul’s specific work in Galatians is central. While Paul uses the word “gospel” in all of his writings except the book of Titus, his letter to the churches in Galatia most ardently proclaims, defends, and applies the gospel.⁵⁹ These “foolish Galatians” quickly abandon the true gospel to follow after false teachers who were doing them much harm (Gal 3:1, 4:17). Paul, wishing to eradicate the heresies and to reestablish these young believers, writes with passion from a commitment to God’s Word and to their souls. He addresses *why* the true gospel matters, *what* that gospel is and is not, *what* sufferings happen when they do not follow it, and *what* blessings flow from belief and application.

To establish a gospel-centered theme from the work of Paul in Galatians, exegetical work in the epistle will explore how the letter proclaims, defends, and applies the gospel message. Interaction with theologians who write about the life of Paul as well as commentators who specifically address the epistle are integral to the argument.

The final portion of this work applies Paul’s gospel proclamation, defense, and application as a model for today. This section includes a gospel-centered preaching paradigm that bridges the biblical text to the contemporary sermon.

⁵⁹Chap. 2 of this dissertation, “The Relevance of the Gospel to Paul,” will trace how Paul uses the word “gospel” and how many times he uses it in his epistles.

CHAPTER 2

THE RELEVANCE OF THE GOSPEL TO PAUL

Introduction

The thesis of this work establishes Paul's proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. Before detailing Paul's exhortation to the Galatians, this work surveys the relevance of the gospel to Paul. It begins by offering a brief review of the early life influences on the apostle and missionary, discusses why he is the Apostle of the Gospel, seeks his definition of the gospel, and then examines his gospel language and categories.

Paul's Life Influences

Paul is born as "Saul" in Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3), a major city of trade on the Mediterranean Sea, where he learns the Greek language and Gentile culture.¹ This exposure gives him zeal for education, philosophy and athletics which he uses in his sermons and writing.² While Paul's early life is in Tarsus, he is "brought up" in

¹John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman, 1999), 6-15.

²Ibid. Cf. F. F. Bruce, "Paul in Acts and Letters," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 679-92. Paul uses athletic imagery: he compares the Christian life to

Jerusalem, “educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers” (Acts 22:3). His Jewish pedigree is high: “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee” (Phil 3:5). Even so, he is a Roman citizen, a benefit that brought both legal protection and responsibility³ (Acts 22:25-29; 23:27; 25:11-12).

The gospel changes Paul. The gospel matters to Paul because it changes his life. The Lord Jesus Christ confronts Paul (then Saul) on his way to Damascus. While Paul is on mission to persecute those belonging to the Way, Christ appears in brilliance of light and with an audible voice⁴ challenges him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Jesus then identifies himself by insisting: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:4-5). Jesus’ response to Paul’s bloody agenda completely identifies him with his followers: the persecution of those who follow Jesus is taken as a direct attack on Jesus himself.

Saul, like Jesus in the tomb, spends three days in darkness without food or drink. Ananias then faithfully obeys the Lord by laying hands on Paul so that he regains

running and boxing (1 Cor 9:24-27); he tests his revelation, his gospel, before the Jerusalem apostles to ensure he is not running in vain (Gal 2:2); he does not wish to run or labor in vain (Phil 2:16); and, he tells Timothy that he fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith, and thus a crown awaits him (2 Tim 4:7-8).

³Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 15-17.

⁴Russell D. Moore insists that the gospel involves both seeing the light and hearing the voice. Paul, sharing his testimony in Acts 22:9, informs that there were some who “saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.” Russell D. Moore, “Introducing the Cross and the Jukebox,” *The Cross and the Jukebox* [on-line]; accessed 11 July 2012; available at <http://www.russellmoore.com/2011/01/14/introducing-the-cross-and-the-jukebox/>; Internet.

sight and experiences the filling of the Holy Spirit and is baptized (vv. 9-18). Saul “immediately” responds when he “proclaim[s] Jesus in the synagogues,” insisting that he is the Son of God and “proving that Jesus was the Christ” (vv. 20, 22). The Jewish leaders, former admirers of Saul’s bloodthirsty zeal, fear this complete change in Saul and begin to plot his death (v. 23). The disciples of Jesus, the very ones he intends to arrest, help him escape, and Barnabas defends him before the apostles (vv. 24-27).

This dramatic conversion story includes the calling God gives to Paul: he is God’s chosen instrument to the Gentiles, and he will have to suffer for the name of God (vv. 15-16). Paul’s testimony in Acts 26 illustrates that he fulfills each of these purposes. While suffering as a prisoner, he gives testimony before the king. Paul shares the gospel with him and then recalls his obedience to this mission by enumerating his travels to the Gentiles “that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (v. 20). He is faithful to the gospel challenge.

In this same recitation before King Agrippa, Paul adds these details about his gospel calling:

But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:16-18)

Paul experiences a dramatic transformation and lives a life of suffering for the gospel of Christ whose power changes him. Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the one whom his former religious regime persecutes (compare Acts 7:58-8:3 to 2 Cor 11:23-27). This is Saul who has letters from the high priest to travel, to seek any who belong to the

Way, to bind them and to bring them to Jerusalem (9:1-2). He becomes Paul who has apostolic authority from Christ, who travels on missionary journeys, who plants new churches for people belonging to the Way, and who pens letters to instruct the churches then and the Church now. F. F. Bruce observes,

He was in mid-course as a zealot for the law, bent on checking a plague which threatened the life of Israel, when, in his own words, he was ‘apprehended by Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 3:12) and constrained to turn right round and become a champion of the cause which, up to that moment, he had been endeavouring to exterminate, dedicated henceforth to building up what he had been doing his best to demolish.⁵

Paul, the Apostle of the Gospel

In the entire scope of the New Testament, the word “gospel” appears ninety-six times. Paul uses the word seventy-seven times⁶ in the thirteen books he writes.⁷ Only the book of Titus does not mention the word “gospel.” Plummer explains that even where Paul’s exact words for gospel are absent, “the concept remains prominent. For Paul, his divine commission to bring the salvation of God to a fallen world was nothing other than

⁵F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 74.

⁶Robert L. Plummer, “Paul’s Gospel,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 45. Plummer cites BibleWorks software search in the thirteen Pauline epistles.

⁷Pauline authorship of Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon is debated by theologians. In this statement I am following the lead of conservative evangelicals and other scholars who affirm Pauline authorship of these letters. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 1, 67-68. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 403.

his defense and proclamation of the gospel (Rom 1:14-17).”⁸

In the book of Acts, written by the physician Luke, “gospel” describes Paul’s proclamation four times (14:7, 15, 21; 16:10) and Paul uses this term once as he speaks to the Ephesian elders (20:24).⁹ In the New Testament, Paul writes the word “gospel” or it applies to his actions (as in the book of Acts) seventy-seven of its ninety-six appearances. Paul distinguishes himself as the “Apostle of the Gospel.”¹⁰

Word count alone may not suffice to grant Paul such a name. He also earns this title by allowing the gospel to be a defining mantle of his ministry. To establish this theme, this section surveys how the gospel changes Paul’s life and explores how he sees the gospel as a stewardship.

⁸Plummer, “Paul’s Gospel,” 45.

⁹The number of times that Paul uses other root words and their applications to describe the salvific process includes the following: justify, 25; righteous, 70; salvation, 20; sanctify, 17. Words that surpass the number of times Paul uses the word “gospel” pertain to the work of the gospel: love, 107; and faith, 140. These statistics are my own informal study based upon their usage in the New American Standard Bible, 1995.

¹⁰Paul is given other names by scholars who study his life and works. For example, Thomas R. Schreiner states that he is the “Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ,” (*Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001], 22). F. F. Bruce, based upon Paul’s statement in 2 Cor 3:17, entitles Paul “Apostle of the Heart Set Free,” in (*Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* [1977; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 21). Robert Jewett, citing Paul’s obligation to Greeks and to barbarians (Rom 1:13-15), believes his writings to be most adaptable to all cultures and applies Paul’s theology to America (*Paul the Apostle to America: Cultural Trends and Pauline Scholarship* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994], ix-xi). David Alan Black names him the “Apostle of Weakness” (*Paul, Apostle of Weakness: Astheneia and Its Cognates in the Pauline Literature*, American University Studies Series VII, vol. 3 [New York: Peter Lang, 1984]).

Paul Understands Gospel Stewardship

Paul holds the gospel as a trust. He has no shame of the gospel, for he understands it to be the power of God to salvation, to the Jew first and then to the Gentile (Rom 1:16). His pattern when arriving in a new city is to preach in the synagogue first and then in the marketplace or common gathering area. Paul expresses his gospel stewardship by saying that he “received” the gospel, that it is “entrusted” to him, and that he serves as a “steward” of the good news.

Received. Paul instructs the Corinthian congregation that they “received” (παρελάβετε) the same gospel that he “received.” He instructs them, “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,” the gospel (1 Cor 15:3). He reminds them that it is the same gospel they “received” from him “in which [they] stand, and by which [they] are being saved” (v. 1). In his exhortation to the Galatians, he defends his gospel message: “I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12). He warns them, “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (v. 9). The nuance of the word “received,” when Paul applies it to the message he accepts (1 Cor 15:3; Gal 1:12), is “to gain control of or receive jurisdiction over.” As applied to the congregations (1 Cor 15:1; Gal 1:9), “received” means to agree, approve, and to accept.¹¹

Entrusted. Paul states that he has “been entrusted with the gospel to the

¹¹W. Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), in Logos CD-ROM (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2013), s.v. “received.”

uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised” (Gal 2:7). His appeal to the Thessalonians does not flow from deception, but from a heart that seeks to please God, “entrusted with the gospel” (1 Thess 2:4). To Timothy he reasons that the gospel judges that which is unrighteous, all that “is contrary to sound doctrine in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted” (1 Tim 1:10-11). Although the exact word “gospel” is not in the passage, the same idea exists in Paul’s introduction to Titus (1:3). The word “entrusted” (ἐπιστεύθη) means “entrusted by someone with something.”¹² Paul feels the weight and the joy of this trust that is a gift from Christ.

Steward/Stewardship. To the church in Ephesus, he assumes that “you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you” (Eph 3:2). To the Colossians, Paul asserts that he “became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known” (Col 1:25). In his letter to the Corinthian congregation, he defines himself as a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1). Combining these two words into one description, Paul states, “I am still entrusted with a stewardship” (1 Cor 9:17). In all of these verses, to steward (οἰκονομία) is to administrate the household of another.¹³ Paul’s original audience, who intuitively understand the word pictures he uses, recognizes him as a manager who administers the gift of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul proves faithful to the end:

¹²Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “entrusted.”

¹³Ibid., s.v. “steward.”

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Tim 4:6-8)

Defining the Gospel

To define the gospel, this work summarizes the gospel language of the New Testament to establish a broad context. Then, the way Paul uses and employs the word in his epistles provides more detail.

New Testament Gospel Definition

New Testament authors use the word “gospel” as both a subject (εὐαγγέλιον), and as a verb (εὐαγγελίζω). Paul’s use in the NT echoes the “good news” of the OT that Yahweh, the God of Israel, defeats his enemies, brings an end to exile, and establishes his reign (Isa 40:9; 52:7-10; 60:6; 61:1). The noun gospel “originally signified announcement of victory after battle and later the content of that message.”¹⁴ It is the good news of Christ and His salvation, the gospel.

Its verbal form, the gospel (εὐαγγελίζω), means to “proclaim the divine message of salvation” and includes the people who hear the gospel.¹⁵ Pastors must know that within the verbal form of the word “gospel” is the very idea of proclamation, of preaching. The gospel definition includes the expanse or scope of the idea, the fact that the gospel is good news, and the relationship of the gospel to the kingdom of God.

¹⁴Donny Mathis, “Gospel,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. C. Brand et al. (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 671.

¹⁵Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “gospel.”

The expanse of the gospel. The depth of the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ is lost on many Christians. To many professing believers, the gospel is the plea of the pastor at the end of the sermon for those who do not know Jesus to come forward in response, or for those who may wish to “rededicate” their lives to faithful service.¹⁶ They believe that the gospel applies to the lost outside the church rather than those professing salvation within the church. The gospel may also find mention in the messages during the holy days of the church, Christmas and Easter. If these followers do not understand the inexhaustible brilliance of the gospel, they are not able to apply the message extensively.

The gospel is about the forgiveness of sins *and* so much more. The gospel is good news because sinners surrender and repent of sin, and because they receive the righteousness of Christ (Rom 3:22; 5:17-21; 1 Cor 1:30; Phil 3:9). The gospel is the fountain from which to live all of life, to walk every day in a manner worthy of the gospel (Gal 5:16, 25; Eph 4:1, 17-24; 5:8-9; Col 1:10; 2:6; 1 Thess 2:12). Yet, the gospel is about even more than the individual believer: the gospel is continually increasing and bearing fruit (Col 1:5-6), and the gospel is about the redemption of a fallen earth to a new creation (Rom 8:19-23).¹⁷

¹⁶A gospel invitation at the end of the sermon can be a very appropriate place to present the gospel. Here, I am referring to the more traditional view of altar call evangelism that some pastors invoke every week.

¹⁷Craig Gilbert answers the title of his book *What is the Gospel?* with a four-fold response of God, Man, Christ, Response ([Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010]). Matt Chandler and Jared Wilson in *Explicit Gospel* discuss “The Gospel on the Ground” with the same outline as Gilbert; the latter portion of *Explicit Gospel* includes the “The Gospel in the Air” with the outline Creation, Fall, Reconciliation, Consummation ([Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012]).

The gospel is good news. The gospel is good news, but it contains sobering truths: man is sinful; God’s wrath prevails upon the sins of the world; God’s righteousness demands judgment upon sin; God’s Word is true and commands obedience; Christ is the only way to the Father; and mankind must die to sin and live for God. Yet, these necessary truths surrender to better news: God, though holy and wrathful, is loving and merciful; he comes in his Son Jesus to reconcile man to himself, his wrath ceases, his mercy abounds.

The gospel is good news for all Christians for every moment. Each day the believer must interpret the world in light of his own sin and the sins of others.¹⁸ The Christ-follower remembers God’s lovingkindness that never ceases and his compassions that never fail because they are new every morning (Lam 3:22-23). He must see these truths and engage with them in light of the cross and live out of the resurrection power that the gospel promises is already secure. He must react to the sins of others with love and compassion because Christ loved him while he was yet a sinner (Rom 5:8), forgive because he continually receives forgiveness (Matt 6:12-14), and speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Like Moses, he must set his hope in Christ and not on the fleeting pleasures of the world, looking to heavenly rewards (Heb 11:24-26). He must see the summation of all things in Christ Jesus and His advancing kingdom (Eph 1:10).

The gospel and the kingdom. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray “your kingdom come, your will be done” (Matt 6:10). Jesus instructs Christians to “seek first

¹⁸Jerry Bridges, *The Gospel in Real Life: Turn to the Liberating Power of the Cross . . . Every Day* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 11.

the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you” (Matt 6:33). Paul exhorts believers to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col 3:2).

The good news also pertains to the kingdom that already is and also to the fulfillment of the returning of Jesus Christ. The phrase the “gospel of the kingdom of God” is found numerous times and further expands our definition (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; 26:13; Mark 1:14-15; 13:10; 14:9). The preaching of Paul and Jesus are complementary when the believer reads Jesus’ teaching as the *gospel* of the kingdom and understands Paul’s work as the *gospel* of Jesus through justification by faith.¹⁹

Paul’s Gospel Definition

Paul, as the NT writer who most uses the word “gospel,” comfortably uses the word as both verb and noun. In Galatians chapter one Paul uses τὸ εὐαγγέλιον twice in verses 6-7; then, in verses 8-9 he states twice that he “preached” to them a gospel (εὐαγγελίζω); and finally, in verse 11, he references the noun again. Paul also has the only NT use of προεὐαγγελίζωμαι: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand [προεὐαγγελίζωμαι] to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’” (Gal 3:8). Paul titles this covenant promise “gospel.” With his apostolic right, he recognizes the authority of the OT and highlights that this promise finds its fulfillment in Christ.

Paul not only makes the word “gospel” a theme of his work, he also defines the idea. Paul tells the Corinthian believers that the gospel is what he “preached” to them,

¹⁹Scot McKnight, “Jesus vs. Paul,” *Christianity Today*, Dec 2010, 24-29.

which they “received,” and in which they “stand” (1 Cor 15:1). He further instructs that this gospel saves them if they hold fast to the word he preaches, lest they believe in vain (v. 2). He then defines the gospel: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (vv. 3-4). Paul testifies that Christ in his resurrection is a public persona, appearing to Cephas, to “the twelve,” to “more than five hundred brothers at one time,” to “all the apostles,” and then to Paul (vv. 5-7).

This passage is Paul’s Magna Carta of gospel definition. As he closes his letter to the struggling church in Corinth, after giving them much instruction, correction, exhortation and encouragement, he then concludes not with a new instruction or a fresh insight but by reminding them of the gospel:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you - unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Cor 15:1-3)

Paul boldly yet simply states that he gave them that which was of “first importance”: the gospel (v. 3). He knows what this sinful Corinthian church needs most. They need now just what they needed when Paul first came to them, the gospel. They do not need a new word, a new revelation, or any addition to what they already know. Paul reminds them of this gospel they already heard and received and in which they now stand. He then changes from past tense to present tense: “by which [you] are being saved” (v. 2). The gospel saved them and the gospel is saving them. The Apostle challenges them to examine their souls with the use of two small but powerful words: “*if*

you hold fast,” and “*unless* you believed in vain” (v. 2, emphasis added).

John MacArthur defines what Paul alludes to in verse 2 by believing “in vain.” He understands Paul to be offering a “warning against non-saving faith.” He clarifies that the verse can be translated, “If you hold fast what I preached to you, unless your faith is worthless or unless you believed without effect.” The emphasis of the verse is that the Corinthians’ holding fast to Paul’s preaching is “the result of and evidence of their genuine salvation. . . . It is only by God’s power that we are saved and only by His power that we are kept saved. Our salvation is kept by Christ’s holding us fast, not primarily by our holding Him fast. Our holding onto Him is evidence that He is holding onto us.”²⁰

Paul then details just what this good news contains: “That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (v. 4). The Apostle highlights the actions of Jesus Christ that secure the gospel realities in three past tense verbs: died, buried, raised. He begins with substitutionary atonement, moves to the burial of Jesus, then to the power of the resurrection. Paul is not alone in emphasizing the death, burial, and resurrection of the Christ. This three-fold pattern is exactly what is found in the gospels and in the preaching of the early church.

Matthew writes about Jesus telling his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, die, and rise again on the third day (Matt 16:21). John records that Jesus said if the temple is torn down, he will rebuild it again in three days: “But he was speaking

²⁰John F. MacArthur Jr., *I Corinthians: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 399.

about the temple of his body” (John 2:21). After his resurrection, the disciples “believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken” (22).

Peter, preaching to the men of Judea (Acts 2:22-31), also proclaims this three-fold gospel pattern for preaching the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ: “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (24). Later, he revisits these themes: “you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses” (3:15). Before the temple court of the High Council, Peter boldly proclaims the Christ and calls his own accusers the guilty:

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you *crucified*, whom God *raised* from the dead - by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:8-12, emphasis added)

Peter and the other apostles receive imprisonment for their preaching; then, upon release they are told not to teach in the name of Jesus. They continue to proclaim him: “The God of our fathers *raised* Jesus, whom you *killed* by hanging him on a tree” (5:30, emphasis added). Paul, preaching in the synagogue in Thessalonica, “reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to *suffer* and to *rise from the dead*, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ’” (Acts 17:2-3, emphasis added).

This dissertation establishes Paul’s proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. Paul’s writings center on the gospel theme. The gospel changes Paul’s life and he never

loses sight of this wonderful news in his teaching, writing, preaching, and missionary journeys.

Before establishing a gospel-centered preaching paradigm from the Galatians text, this chapter surveys how Paul uses gospel language. When evaluating his epistles, Paul's gospel language is about the gospel of the Lord and the gospel of the believers. Paul also has gospel categories: the gospel gives power for salvation, ministry, strength, partnership, suffering, judgment, and proclamation.²¹

Paul's Gospel Language

Paul invokes the word "gospel" as a tool. Even so, this usage is much more than an instrument. To the "Apostle of the Gospel," the word encompasses power, wonder, and beauty. This section surveys Paul's gospel language and his various gospel categories.

The gospel of God. Paul speaks of the gospel with a sense of possession: the good news is the gospel of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul is "set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom 1:1). He states that the good news is the "gospel of God" which he boldly proclaims to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:2, 8, 9). He insists that he did not sin in his preaching "God's gospel" to the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:7).

Paul shares his message is the "gospel of Christ." He claims that by the power of the Holy Spirit, he "fulfill[s] the ministry of the gospel of Christ" (Rom 15:19). He endures anything rather than to put "an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (1

Cor 9:12). He preaches to Troas “the gospel of Christ” (2 Cor 2:12), and reports that the Corinthian church confesses the “gospel of Christ” (2 Cor 9:13; 10:14). He warns about a distortion of the “gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:7) and exhorts believers to live a life worthy of the “gospel of Christ” (Phil 1:27). Paul also defines Timothy as “God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ” (1 Thess 3:2).

Paul invokes more affectionate and personable language by stating early in his work in Romans that God is his witness whom he serves “with my spirit in the gospel of his Son” (1:9). These warm tones continue when he intimates that Jesus is “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). He warns the Thessalonians about the fury of the judgment of Christ “for those who do not obey the gospel”; he also comforts by reminding them that the message is “the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess 1:8).

The gospel of the believers. Not only is the gospel “of God” and “of Christ,” but Paul exercises this possessive case on behalf of the believing community. He states that “our gospel is veiled” by those who are perishing (2 Cor 4:3); that “our gospel came to you” in word, power, and Holy Spirit conviction (1 Thess 1:5); and that God calls the Thessalonians “through our gospel” so they may obtain the glory of “our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 2:14). To the Ephesians, he instructs that this “gospel of [their] salvation” is part of their spiritual armor that allows them to stand “having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace” (Eph 1:13; 6:15).

²¹These are my categories based upon a survey of how Paul uses the word “gospel,” in its various forms, in his own writings. These categories are by no means exhaustive or exclusive, but are to provide a general overview to help establish the thesis.

The apostle, on voyage from Troas to Miletus, calls the elders of Ephesus to himself so that he may address these saints who are so very dear to him:

And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.” (Acts 20:18-23)

Then the apostle Paul, following ominous marching orders to Jerusalem, manifests his passion for the gospel with this statement: “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). This one verse serves as a fitting summary for his entire ministry. Paul’s gospel language fills his passionate preaching and teaching.

Paul, the Apostle of the Gospel, certainly understands the good news to be the gift, property, and privilege of God, of Christ, of his Son, of Jesus Christ, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the light of the glory of Christ. Paul exalts the glory of the gospel. He teaches, through his use of gospel language, that the body of Christ is “one body” (1 Cor 12; Eph 2:16; 3:6; Col 3:15). Yet, this news is personal for Paul as he states the message is “my gospel” (Rom 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim 2:8).

Paul’s Gospel Categories

The gospel is the power that dramatically changes Paul’s life. Paul uses language that demonstrates the gospel belongs to the Lord and to his people. He clearly understands that the good news is the only power for changing the world. Paul’s writings

illustrate that this gospel strength applies to both believer and unbeliever. To the believers, the message is the power for salvation, for implementing gospel ministry, for strength to live, for partnering with others in the gospel, for suffering well, and for proclaiming the gospel. Paul also soberly warns that this gospel is the power of judgment for the unbelievers.

Gospel power for salvation. He begins his magnum opus of theology, the epistle to the Romans, by insisting, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). Whether Jew or Gentile, free or slave, man or woman, the gospel is the only power of God for salvation (Gal 3:28).

The first occurrence of the word “gospel” in relation to Paul is with Barnabas in Iconium preaching to both Jews and Greeks (Acts 14:1-7). Some believe (v. 1), but “unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds” (v. 2). Paul and Barnabas flee the city to avoid stoning but they do not cease to preach the gospel. Understanding the power to call Gentiles to the faith, they flee to Lystra and to Derbe where “they continued to preach the gospel” (v. 7).

The power of the gospel for salvation changes lives which were in sin. Now they are set free as partakers of the gospel. When Christ calls the lost out of darkness and into the light to be his children, Paul says that they are partaking of the gospel. Paul calls the believers in Ephesus “partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:6). Paul’s language in these passages insists that God calls people through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. In order for church members to come to Jesus Christ for

salvation, the gospel must beckon them. This calling takes place through the faithful proclamation of the gospel.

Gospel power for ministry. Paul is clear that the calling of the gospel allows him to serve as a minister: “Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power” (Eph 3:7). He instructs the Colossians that the message is “the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Col 1:23). He reminds Timothy that the gospel brings life and immortality to light. Proclaiming this good news is the mission for which he “was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher.” For this gospel calling Paul suffers, “convinced that he [Jesus] is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me [Paul]” (2 Tim 1:8-12).

Gospel power for strength. This gospel power, according to the Apostle, “is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ” (Rom 16:25). In the strength of this good news, one can stand firm in the gospel of peace (Eph 6:14-15), and live a life worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27). This gospel is the word of truth that causes the whole world to bear fruit and to grow (Col 1:5-6) allowing believers to be “stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel” (Col 1:23).

Gospel power for partnership. Paul finds the gospel profitable for partnerships. The Philippian church is with him in the gospel from the very first of his ministry. He cites that they were partakers with him of grace, in his imprisonment, and in his confirmation and defense of the gospel (Phil 1:5-7). Later, he reaffirms this account: they partner with him from the beginning of the gospel, and they were the only church to

do so (Phil 4:15). Paul finds Timothy to be a “coworker” in the gospel of Christ in order to establish the church in Thessalonica in the faith (1 Thess 3:2).

Gospel power for suffering. The skeptical world may ask the believer, “If God is good, why is there so much suffering in the world?” This question may be a smokescreen or a passionate search. Christians may reply in humble confidence. The Scriptures do not dismiss the intricacies or difficulties of suffering but understand them as part of life in a fallen world. The gospel promises both suffering to come and the power to persevere through the trials.

The Bible clearly explains that sufferings will happen. The curse upon mankind and the earth means that people and place are fallen. In this sinful world, child bearing, and by implication child-rearing, occur through suffering. Husband and wife live at odds as her desire is to rule over him. The provision for home and family happens with sweat as mankind fights against thorn and thistle (Gen 3:14-19). Temptation abounds through the world (Matt 13:22), the flesh (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:13-24; Eph 2:3; Phil 3:19), and Satan (Gen 3:15; 2 Cor 11:14; 1 Pet 5:8). Trials happen that the Lord uses for sanctifying his own (Jam 1:2; 1 Pet 1:6; 2 Pet 2:9); persecution continues as a promise (Matt 5:10-11), and sufferings still happen (Rom 5:3; 2 Tim 4:5; 1 Pet 5:9).

While sufferings transpire, the gospel empowers believers to suffer courageously. Paul explains to the Corinthian church that earthly agony passes quickly and brings eternal rewards:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:16-18)

This clearly applies to the brothers in Thessalonica facing persecution who are “considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering” (2 Thess 1:5). Paul reminds Timothy of his faith which came to him through his mother and grandmother and then encourages him to use the gift which God gave to him, and that God gives believers “a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:5-7). He then instructs Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony about Jesus, nor of Paul’s imprisonment, but to “share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,” who saves and who calls believers to a holy calling (1:8-9).²²

Schreiner observes that Paul’s suffering from sickness is an entrance to sharing the gospel with the Galatians (4:13-14), and his weakness from illness allows the strength of Christ to be manifested in him (2 Cor 12:7-10). Paul regularly teaches that his sufferings were the means God uses for spreading the gospel (2 Cor 1:3-11; 2:14-15; 4:7-12; 11:23-29; 13:4; Col 1:24-29).²³ Schreiner expounds upon this idea of gospel suffering:

The progress of the gospel is accompanied by the suffering of its messengers. Such has been the story throughout church history, and God intended that it be so. When the world sees that Christians are willing to suffer and die for their faith, it understands that something incredibly precious (i.e., someone wonderfully delightful) is at stake. Tertullian rightly said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, that the church advances as it proclaims a crucified Lord and lives a crucified life. The beauty of Christ is reflected in the humble and glad suffering of its messengers. No one delights in suffering inherently, but if suffering begets

²²Cf. Don N. Howell Jr., “Paul’s Theology of Suffering,” in *Paul’s Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 95-106.

²³Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, gen. ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 286.

complaining and grumbling, the distinctiveness of the Christian faith is lost. It is the gladness and courage of the messengers, despite the pain in their bodies, that heralds the goodness of the gospel to the world.²⁴

The Scriptures are no stranger to the cries of suffering. Rather, they explain why Christians suffer, warn that sufferings will come, instruct believers in how to walk through these agonies, and promise that rewards will follow. The gospel is the key that makes sense of suffering. The Scripture also warns of something worse than suffering while clinging to the good news: the judgment of Christ that he bears with the gospel.

Gospel power for judgment. Paul is clear that the gospel is also a tool of judgment. While understanding that the gospel is the power of salvation “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16), he clarifies that all are guilty before God, and that the saving power of the gospel, upon rejection, yields judgment:

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them *on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* (Rom 2:12-16, emphasis added)

Schreiner explains the judgment power of the gospel according to this passage:

Verse 15 describ[es] the present work of conscience and verse 16 the final judgment. The accusing and defending work of the conscience in the present will reach its consummation, full validity, and clarification on the day of judgment, when God will judge the secrets of all. . . . God’s judgment brings the entire passage to a climax and recalls the introductory words in verse 12. Not only is his judgment climactic; it is also comprehensive. He will judge the secrets of all, assuring the reader that the judgment will truly be impartial (v. 11) since it is based on a thorough understanding of both actions and motives (cf. 1 Cor 4:5). . . . The gospel

²⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 291.

that Paul preaches to the Gentiles does not invalidate the law. On the contrary it teaches that Jesus Christ will judge all people according to their obedience of the law.²⁵

To the Corinthian church, Paul teaches that the gospel is God's light shining in their hearts: "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). Yet, this proclamation of good news finds lament in its introduction: "And even if our gospel is veiled it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of the world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (vv. 3-4).

Gospel for suffering and judgment. In two different texts Peter and Paul integrate suffering and judgment. Peter echoes Paul's teachings on suffering and judgment as he encourages suffering Christians and warns the unregenerate: "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those *who do not obey the gospel of God?*" (1 Pet 4:16-17, emphasis added).

According to this verse, the key to suffering is to live out the beauty of the gospel, to glorify God in the struggle, and to live in light of the judgment of the household of God. Peter beckons a clear warning to those who do not obey the gospel. The power of this judgment of Jesus, according to the gospel, should inform pastors to make the gospel the clarion call of the pulpit.

²⁵Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New

Paul, writing to the Thessalonians as they were enduring suffering, persecution and afflictions, explains that God will both aid them in their suffering and afflict and judge those who attack them.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your *persecutions* and in the *afflictions* that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous *judgment* of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also *suffering* - since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those *who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus*. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thess 1:3-10, emphasis added)

Paul instructs that these believers are growing in their faith and are found worthy of the kingdom because they are suffering affliction and persecution. He encourages them with a picture of their reigning King who will return in might and who will inflict vengeance on those “who do not obey the gospel” (v. 8). They do not obey the good news because they reject the gospel, Jesus Christ.

Gospel power for proclamation. “Preach the gospel and if necessary, use words.” Usually attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, this phrase proclaims the hesitant nature of professing believers rather than the wisdom of the ages. Mark Galli, biographer of St. Francis, disputes the attribution. He informs that quite the opposite is true: St. Francis, member of a preaching order, boldly proclaimed the gospel, sometimes five

Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 125.

times per day and he certainly used words.²⁶

Ed Stetzer rewords the quote to align with biblical truth: “Preach the gospel and since it’s necessary, use words.” He further laments the failing evangelical view of gospel proclamation found behind this popular phrase.

‘Preach the gospel; use words if necessary’ goes hand in hand with a postmodern assumption that words are finally empty of meaning. It subtly denigrates the high value that the prophets, Jesus, and Paul put on preaching. Of course, we want our actions to match our words as much as possible. But the gospel is a message, news about an event and a person upon which the history of the planet turns. . . .

And this is the real problem — not from whom the quote originally came, but just how it can give us an incomplete understanding of the gospel and how God saves sinners. Christians are quick to encourage each other to ‘live out the gospel,’ to ‘be the gospel’ to our neighbors, and to even ‘gospel each other.’ The missional impulse here is helpful, yet the gospel isn’t anything the Christian can live out, practice, or become. . . .

The Apostle Paul summarized the gospel as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through whom sin is atoned for, sinners are reconciled to God, and the hope of the resurrection awaits all who believe. The gospel is not habit, but history. The gospel is the declaration of something that actually happened. And since the gospel is the saving work of Jesus, it isn’t something we can do, but it is something we must announce. We do live out its implications, but if we are to make the gospel known, we will do so through words.²⁷

Certainly, preaching the gospel at all times *and* using words was the life of the Apostle of the Gospel. Before Paul shares this bold gospel assertion to the Romans: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16), he declares that he

²⁶Mark Galli, *St. Francis of Assisi and His World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

²⁷Ed Stetzer: “Preach the Gospel and Since It’s Necessary, Use Words,” *Tabletalk Magazine* [on-line]; accessed 27 June 2012; available at: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/preach-the-gospel-and-since-its-necessary-use-words/>; Internet. Emphasis original.

serves “with my spirit in the gospel of His Son” (v. 9). Schreiner emphasizes that this phrase highlights Paul’s “wholehearted service in the gospel with all his being.” This service “in the gospel” reflects the gospel summary Paul offers in the introduction (vv. 1-4), continues by wanting to visit them to impart a spiritual gift (v. 11), and announces that he is “eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome” (v. 15).²⁸

Later, he instructs the faithful to proclaim the gospel in order for people to come to faith in Christ:

For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the *gospel*. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Rom 10:13, emphasis added)

Paul asserts that he does not want to impress people with his oratory skills, education, or eloquence: all the things that the culture of Gentiles and Jews alike held in high regard.²⁹ Rather, Paul insists that he will “preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power” (1 Cor 1:17). While asserting that those who proclaim the gospel have the right to make their living from the gospel, Paul refuses any payments so that he can preach freely, becoming all things to all men that some may come to salvation. He passes this judgment upon himself: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (9:12-23, v. 16).

Paul reports that he chooses to be “unskilled in speaking” and to accept support

²⁸Schreiner, *Romans*, 51.

²⁹Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*, 237-38.

from other churches so that he can preach the gospel without charge to the Corinthians: “in every way we have made this [the clarity of the true gospel contrasted with a “different gospel” they accepted] plain to you in all things” (2 Cor 11:6). Paul’s pattern of proclamation he shares with the Thessalonians: “We had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.” He defends that this boldness was not to please man but God, not for greed or from vanity. Rather, “We worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God” (1 Thess 2:1-9).

Paul uses the word “ambition” (ἐπιθεία) to state: “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation” (Rom 15:20).³⁰ Paul asks the Ephesians to pray “that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel” (Eph 6:19). Writing to the Philippian church, he states that his imprisonment emboldens the brothers to “speak the word without fear,” and that his captivity is “for the defense of the gospel” (Phil 1:14, 16).

In Paul’s final word to his son in the faith, Timothy, he exhorts,

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (2 Tim 4:1-2)

Paul, meeting for his final time with the Ephesian elders, reminds them:

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from

³⁰Ambition, (ἐπιθεία), is used in this same sense in Rom 15:20, 2 Cor 5:9; and as “selfish ambition” in Jas 3:14, 16; Phil 1:17; 2:3.

declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:18-21)

He then provides a fitting summary of his life of sharing the gospel at all times and using words since they are necessary, “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

Conclusion

This dissertation establishes Paul’s proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. This chapter serves to stress the relevance of the gospel message to Paul. It traces his early life and influences and how, when Paul dramatically meets Jesus on the road to Damascus, everything changes. He becomes an apostle of Jesus Christ and he is the Apostle of the Gospel. This chapter defines Paul’s understanding of the gospel and his stewardship of this good news. Paul understands gospel possession: it is God’s gospel, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel that he receives and the gospel the congregations accept. The Apostle also instructs that the gospel is the strength for believers for salvation, ministry, strength, partnering, suffering and proclamation. For the unbeliever, the gospel is the power of God’s judgment. Mathis summarizes the force of the gospel upon Paul: “The gospel was the center of Paul’s preaching and the rule by which he conducted himself to the glory of God.”³¹

³¹Don Mathis, “Gospel,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. C. Brand et al. (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 671.

Paul is the Apostle of the Gospel. The most powerful force he ever encounters changes him forever. He comes to know this Jesus as the crucified, buried, and risen Messiah. Thankfully, Paul never recovers. He considers all other things as rubbish in comparison to knowing Christ (Phil 3:8-10). Paul enslaves himself as a bondservant of Christ to this passionate grace (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Titus 1:1). His writings brim with gospel impact. His travels move with gospel inspiration. His preaching reverberates with gospel passion. He is the Apostle of the Gospel.

CHAPTER 3

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

Introduction

This dissertation contends that Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia serves as a model for gospel-centered preaching. In Galatians, Paul proclaims, defends, and applies the gospel. The first part of this chapter examines the occasion and overview of the letter to provide a framework for the next chapter which focuses on Paul's proclamation and defense of the gospel in Galatians 1-4 and his application in 5-6. The second part contends that the Galatian epistle functions as a sermon, foundational for the argument that Paul's letter serves as a gospel-centered model for preaching. The scope of the chapter is to establish a foundation for the purposes of the dissertation, not to provide a detailed examination.

Occasion and Overview

"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" (Gal 2:20). This verse is the clarion cry of Paul in his letter to the Galatians.¹ The "Occasion and Overview" provides the background

¹Some, like John MacArthur, see the summary verse as Gal 5:1, "For freedom that Christ has set you free" (*Galatians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1987], x). Philip Graham Ryken believes the theme verse is "We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (2:16).

information and setting on which each passage of the letter to the Galatians rests.

The Influence of the Letter

Surveying the great charters of freedom in the world, Joseph A. Pipa Jr. insists that “the letter of Galatians is the Bible’s great Magna Carta; it is God’s Declaration of Liberty to every Christian man and woman.”² Philip Graham Ryken insists that Galatians is liberating in any age “because the church is always full of recovering Pharisees who need to receive the gospel again, as if for the very first time.”³ In his commentary on the letter, Timothy George explains: “From first to last Galatians is a book about God—God’s grace, God’s sovereignty, God’s purpose, God’s gospel, that is, His good news of justification by faith in a crucified Savior.”⁴ Hans D. Betz proclaims that Galatians “is one of the most important religious documents of mankind.”⁵

The “Magna Carta” of Christian freedom exerts particular influence on the thoughts and writings of the Reformers. These church leaders threw off the yoke of manmade righteousness in order to emphasize that salvation for Jew or Gentile, for slave

Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, Reformed Expository Commentary Series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 4.

²Joseph A. Pipa Jr., *Galatians: God’s Proclamation of Liberty* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), 7.

³Ryken, *Galatians*, 5.

⁴Timothy George, *Galatians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary, vol. 30, gen. ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 12.

⁵Hans D. Betz, “Spirit, Freedom, and Law: Paul’s Message to the Galatian Churches,” *Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok* 30 (1974): 145-60, quoted in James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (London: A & C Black, 1993), 2.

man or free, for Catholic or Protestant is not “by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:16). George summarizes, “The decisive theological conflict of their age so closely paralleled that of the apostle Paul that they were able to interpret his writings with penetrating insight and extraordinary power.” He resonates with “the reformers’ overriding concern that the living voice of the gospel—*via vox evangelii*—be heard afresh in every generation.”⁶

James Montgomery Boice summarizes the influence of Galatians on history, especially the Reformation:

Not many books have made such a lasting impression on men’s minds as the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, nor have many done so much to shape the history of the Western world. . . . It rightly maintains that only through the grace of God in Jesus Christ is a person enabled to escape the curse of his sin and of the law and to live a new life, not in bondage or license, but in a genuine freedom of mind and spirit through the power of God. Because of this powerful truth, Galatians was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation. Luther especially loved it. He called it his Catherine von Bora, for, he said, ‘I am wedded to it.’ In Luther’s hands the book became a mighty weapon in the Reformation arsenal.⁷

Indeed, Luther sees the Galatian letter as a battle of the Gospel against the world:

The Gospel is a doctrine that teaches a far higher matter than the wisdom, righteousness, and religion of the world; it teaches free forgiveness of sins through Christ. But the world prefers its own things instead of the Creator and tries to get rid of sin, be delivered from death, and earn everlasting life in its own way. The Gospel condemns this. On the other hand, the world cannot abide things being condemned when it values them highly and likes them best; and therefore it claims that the Gospel is a seditious doctrine, full of errors, that it overthrows governments, countries, and empires, and therefore offends against God and the emperor, that it abolishes laws, corrupts good manners, and sets everybody free to do what they want.⁸

⁶George, *Galatians*, 12.

⁷James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians*, vol. 10 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1976), 409.

⁸Martin Luther, *Galatians*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 25.

Perhaps no higher praise exists for Luther's work than H. D. Betz, in his "landmark commentary"⁹ on the letter, who proclaims, "Luther's commentary is more than a scholarly commentary upon Galatians. It is a recreation of Galatians in the sixteenth century. *Luther speaks as Paul would have spoken had he lived at the time when Luther gave his lectures.* He often speaks in the first person singular, imitating the apostle."¹⁰

The strong inclination of the world to live a works-based gospel is alive and well. Every generation of Christian leaders must continue the Reformation's aim at true gospel clarity. Following Betz's observation that "Luther speaks as Paul would have spoken" in that era, this dissertation argues for pastors to arise and to speak as Paul still speaks to the contemporary church."

John Calvin used Galatians to argue against the hermeneutical abuses of allegorizing and modernizing: "He was convinced that a faithful exposition of the apostolic message in its first-century dress was what was necessary and most significant for the issues confronting Christians in the sixteenth century."¹¹ Merrill C. Tenney summarizes, "It was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation, because its teaching

⁹Witherington provides an example of the influence of Betz's work on Galatians by calling it "landmark." Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), xi.

¹⁰Hans D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermenia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), xv. Emphasis added.

¹¹Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, no. 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), iv. See Longenecker's "Introduction" for an excellent summary of the effects of the message of Galatians on various ages.

of salvation by grace alone became the dominant theme of the preaching of the Reformers.”¹²

Beyond the Reformation era, Paul’s letter to the Galatians is still influential. Ben Witherington agrees that Paul’s gospel-centered defense is important “because it raises crucial questions about the nature of the truth of the Gospel and what sort of pattern of life Christians ought to embrace in light of that Gospel.” These questions, according to Witherington, are about unity and diversity, the relationship between Jews and Christians, and conflict resolution.¹³

The passion of Paul’s Galatian epistle is immediately evident from the first chapters that proclaim and defend the gospel (Gal 1-4) to his fervent application of the good news in the last section (5-6). Galatians is “Paul’s most intense letter.”¹⁴ Paul’s passion for the true gospel prompts scholar and author Darrell L. Bock to argue that Galatians is “the angriest letter in the New Testament.”¹⁵ Harold L. Willmington observes the strong parallels between Galatians and Romans by citing nineteen comparable passages and depicting the letter as “a rough sketch of which Romans is the finished picture.”¹⁶ In comparison to Romans, J. Vernon McGee adds, “Someone has

¹²Merrill C. Tenney, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 15.

¹³Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, xi.

¹⁴C. Hal Freeman Jr., “Letter to the Galatians,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. C. Brand et al. (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 612.

¹⁵Darrell L. Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel: Reclaiming the Gospel as Good News* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 61.

¹⁶Harold L. Willmington, *Willmington’s Complete Guide to Bible Knowledge* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1991), 251.

said that Romans comes from the head of Paul while Galatians comes from the heart of Paul. . . . It is the declaration of emancipation from legalism of any type. . . . A veritable Gibraltar against any attack on the heart of the Gospel.”¹⁷

The Author of the Letter

In keeping with the pattern of ancient writings,¹⁸ Paul begins the letter by identifying himself and those who are with him. “Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers who are with me” (Gal 1:1).¹⁹ Later, Paul reminds them of the beginnings of their relationship: “It was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first” (4:13). The Apostle recalls the kindness of these believers who “received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus” (v. 14). Paul is not a church consultant offering suggestions for how they may grow in number; rather, he writes as a passionate father: “My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you” (vv. 19-20).

Paul identifies himself again in the latter portion, “Look: I, Paul, say to you . . .” (Gal 5:2). Noting these self-attestations, James Montgomery Boice adds, “The whole from beginning to end breathes such an intensely personal and unconsciously

¹⁷J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1981), 108.

¹⁸Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 42-55.

¹⁹Chap. 4 of this dissertation traces how Paul’s self-identification is part of his defense of the gospel that he received from Jesus Christ.

autobiographical note that only a genuine historical situation involving the true founder of the Gentile mission within the Church accounts for it.”²⁰ Willmington observes, “God raised up Paul as the Moses of the Christian church to deliver believers from bondage.”²¹

The Recipients of the Letter

Paul continues with his pattern of letter writing and names the recipients: “To the churches in Galatia” (Gal 1:2). The letter is entitled in modern translations as *Galatians* or as “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians.”²² Verse 2 reports the name of the area as Galatia, and this letter is the only one Paul writes to a group of churches.²³

Willmington reports, “The Galatians themselves were an emotional and intense Celtic people. Caesar said: ‘They are fickle in their resolves, fond of change, and not to be trusted.’ This is demonstrated during Paul’s first visit to them. In the morning they attempted to worship him, and in the afternoon to murder him (Acts 14).”²⁴

Rome made Galatia a province of the empire with the city of Ancyra as the capitol in 25 BC.²⁵ According to the book of Acts, Paul establishes churches in the area

²⁰Boice, *Galatians*, 420-21. Boice notes the exception being Bauer and the “Dutch school” of the late nineteenth century but claims that their views are now discredited. Pauline authorship is also affirmed by G. W. Hansen, “Letter to the Galatians,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 326.

²¹Willmington, *Guide to Bible Knowledge*, 251.

²²For example, The English Standard Version.

²³Willmington, *Guide to Bible Knowledge*, 251.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Boice, *Galatians*, 412.

of south Galatia: Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe (13:14; 14:1-6). His letter clearly establishes that he was in the area previously (Gal 4:13, 15), and he speaks as if they know Barnabas personally (2:13). Additionally, the Galatian churches contributed to the collection for the church in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-3).

The False Teachers in the Letter

Paul identifies these opponents as “some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:7); those who have “bewitched” them (3:1); those “Who hindered you from obeying the truth” (5:7); “the one who is troubling you” (v. 10); “those who unsettle you” (v. 12); and, “those who wish to make a good showing in the flesh” (6:12). Betz observes, “Paul never addresses his opponents directly, but he addresses the issues which they had introduced into the Galatian churches.”²⁶ Having no “primary evidence with regard to the origin, thoughts, and personalities that made up the opposition,” their views and identity must be reconstructed from the issues.²⁷

Commentators agree that these opponents were Judaizers, Christian Jews who insisted on the need for Gentile converts to be circumcised, to observe the Jewish calendar, and to keep the Torah.²⁸ Thomas Schreiner argues that these opponents both claim to be Christians and to confess that Jesus is the Christ “while also maintaining that Paul’s gospel must be supplemented and improved by adding observance of the law to

²⁶Betz, *Galatians*, 5.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Longenecker, *Galatians*, xcv. Schreiner summarizes the differing theories on the opponents and agrees that they are Judaizers, (*Galatians*, 39-52).

what they already believed.”²⁹

Paul’s letter to the Galatians is a direct attack on the message of the Judaizers: faith in Jesus Christ *plus* anything. It is against this message that Paul alternately proclaims and defends the true gospel (Gal 1-4) and then applies it as life in the Spirit (5-6). Willmington summarizes the urgency of the true gospel message in Paul’s era: “It has been said that Judaism was the cradle of Christianity and very nearly its grave.”³⁰

The Reason for the Letter

Paul clearly states why he writes Galatians.³¹ He is “astonished” that these believers in Galatia are deserting Christ and turning to a “different gospel” (1:6). He spends the balance of chapter 1 and all of chapter 2 defending his apostolic appointment and proclaiming the one true gospel. Chapter 3 begins with Paul addressing them directly with six rhetorical questions about these false teachers who “bewitched” them (3:1). He explains that all persons can be “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” by a life of faith-filled righteousness, not by adherence to the law (v. 29). In chapter 4 Paul declares these Galatians to be sons of God through Jesus, not slaves to sin. He entreats them to become like him, to return to the true gospel, and to discern the motives and credibility of the false teachers. Chapter 5 begins with the bold declaration

²⁹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 51.

³⁰Willmington, *Guide to Bible Knowledge*, 251.

³¹To grasp the reason of the letter is compared to listening to “only one end of a phone conversation” or “mirror reading” (Schreiner, *Galatians*, 31). Longenecker identifies strengths and weaknesses of this approach but affirms, “mirror reading is the only method here available to us” (*Galatians*, lxxxix). Cf. John M. B. Barclay, “Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test-Case,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 73-93.

of their freedom in Christ and instructs them to live accordingly. He reminds these believers that “they were running well” but now they are “hindered . . . from obeying the truth” (5:7). Chapter 6 continues the instruction on how to live a life of freedom, even in the flesh.

Paul’s passion pulses through every gospel proclamation, through each warning about abandoning the good news, and into his patient explanation of how to apply this gospel to their daily lives. McGee captures the emotion of the letter: “It is a stern, severe and solemn message (Gal 1:6-9; 3:1-5). It does not correct conduct, as the Corinthian letters do, but it is corrective—the Galatian believers were in grave peril. Because the foundations were being attacked, everything was threatened. . . . This is his fighting epistle—he has on his war paint.”³²

The intent of this dissertation is to examine how Galatians serves as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. Schreiner highlights the gospel-centeredness of the work:

Paul is engaged in a battle for the gospel in this letter, and his words still speak to us today. Vital issues for the Christian life are tackled in Galatians. Paul unpacks the heart of the gospel. We see the meaning and the centrality of justification by faith, which Luther rightly argued was the article by which the church stands or falls. How can a person stand before a holy God without being condemned? Paul answers that question in Galatians.³³

Paul rebukes the “foolish Galatians,” accusing them of being “bewitched” (3:1). He understands that they are “turning to a different gospel” and in doing so they are “deserting him who called you” (1:6). The Apostle understands that these believers

³²McGee, *Through the Bible*, 108.

³³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 21.

are not just misunderstanding a message or invalidating him as the messenger, they are deserting the person of the gospel, Jesus Christ. Schreiner understands the role of Jesus Christ as the heart of the good news:

Jesus Christ is also central in Galatians. We will see that Jesus is fully divine and hence should be worshiped. And the cross of Christ plays a fundamental role in the letter, for no one is justified apart from the cross. Believers are right with God because Christ on the cross bore the curse that believers deserved, and Christ freed us from the power of sin through his death and resurrection. . . . We see from Paul's passion for the gospel that issues of life and death are at stake.³⁴

R. E. Ciampa grasps Paul's intentions to address the gospel issue with the Galatian readers and he traces the role of eschatology as central to the argument. He views Galatians as "a salvation-historical perspective in which the coming of Christ is seen to be the climactic fulfillment towards which the whole history of Israel has been leading." These views exist in God's promise and coming fulfillment to Abraham (3:7-8, 16-17, 29; 4:22-23), the giving of the law (3:17, 19; 4:24-25), the implementation of the curse of the law in Israel's exile (3:10, 13; 4:24-25), and the promise regarding the fulfilling of the gospel as the final salvation and restoration of God's people (1:6-9).³⁵

Ciampa highlights the apocalyptic nature of the work in the following dualisms: heaven and earth, God and man, the current evil age and the age to come, promises made and promises kept, slaves and sons, Paul's time before Christ and life after his revelation, the Galatian lives when they did not know God and their lives in the time when they do, walking in disobedience and walking in the gospel, life in the flesh

³⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 21-22.

³⁵R. E. Ciampa, "Galatians," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 311.

and life in the Spirit.³⁶

Galatians as a Sermon

Paul writes “To the churches of Galatia” (Gal 1:2). The letter is apparently read to all the saints in one church and then circulated to the next one. This multiple-reading expectation is clearly stated in other letters. In the epistle to the church in Colossae, he states, “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea” (Col 4:15-16). He persuades the Thessalonian church with passion: “I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (1 Thess 5:27-28). Under accusation that his letters are “frightening . . . weighty and strong,” Paul exhorts: “Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present” (2 Cor 10:9-11). Obedience to his letters is the expectation: “If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess 3:14).

Paul’s expectation is that his letters command the same authority and attention as his sermons. Paul does not boast in his rhetoric, oratory, or literary skills; rather, he communicates with the humble orthodoxy of an apostle chosen by Jesus.³⁷ His boast is in

³⁶R. E. Ciampa, “Galatians,” 311-12.

³⁷Compare Paul’s claim that he did not preach “with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power” (1 Cor 1:17) to his defense of the authority of his apostleship (Gal 1-2; 1 Cor 9; 15:9-10).

Christ alone.³⁸ His expectation is obedience.³⁹

John Polhill understands the need for Paul to instruct that his letters be read aloud: “The literacy rate was low in Paul’s day; most people in his churches probably could not read. The oral presentation of his letters was a necessity.”⁴⁰ Joanna Dewey, in her studies on writing and speaking during this period, concludes, “Most people living during the first century were not literate: occasionally for specific very limited purposes they made use of writing, but that writing was done by someone else. Furthermore, writing and reading were not silent, individual activities. They were closely allied to the oral world, to speech.”⁴¹

Paul’s letters are sermons. James W. Thompson observes, “If the letters contain what Paul would have said if he had been present, they offer insights into the principles of arrangement, modes of argumentation, and stylistic features of the Pauline sermon.”⁴² Seeking to educate contemporary pastors about how to read and to preach Pauline letters, Sidney Greidanus argues: “Listening to the letter, then, was like listening to Paul. Hence one can characterize the New Testament Epistles as long-distance

³⁸1 Cor 1:17-31; Gal 6:14; Eph 2:9.

³⁹Paul expects obedience from the church (2 Cor 2:9; 10:5-6), churches in a region (Gal 2:9; 5:7), and from the individual members (2 Thess 3:14; Phil 2:12; Phlm 1:19).

⁴⁰John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 121.

⁴¹Joanna Dewey, “Textuality in an Oral Culture,” *Semeia* 65 (1994): 39.

⁴²James W. Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 36.

sermons.”⁴³

Paul does not write his letters from a comfortable study with quill in hand, but pacing back and forth dictating to his amanuensis⁴⁴ with the churches in the eyes of his heart, their issues pressing his soul. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor devotes a full volume to the letter writing of Paul and notes, “Although Paul composed his letters . . . he did not personally commit them to paper.” He observes that Paul often closes a letter with his own handwriting (2 Thess 3:17; Gal 6:11; 1 Cor 16:21; Phlm 19; Col 4:18): “A concluding paragraph, normally brief, in the author’s handwriting showed that he had checked the final draft and assumed responsibility.” He notes that Tertius identifies himself as the secretary for the letter to the Romans (16:22) demonstrating that he “was more a friend and collaborator than an employee.” He insists: “A confidential secretary is almost an extension of his master’s personality.”⁴⁵

Barclay offers a compelling picture to summarize how to think about these epistles functioning as preaching: “Paul’s letters are sermons far more than they are theological treatises. It is with immediate situations that they deal. They are sermons even in the sense that they were spoken rather than written. They were not carefully written out by someone sitting at a desk; they were poured out by someone striding up and down a room as he dictated, seeing all the time in his mind’s eye the people to whom

⁴³Sidney Greidanus, *Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 314.

⁴⁴“The normal mode of writing was by dictation, and that which is written down is intended to be read aloud to a group rather than silently by the individual.” John D. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), xv.

⁴⁵Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter Writer*, 6-7.

they were to be sent.”⁴⁶

Conclusion

Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia serves as a model for gospel-centered preaching. This chapter presents the occasion of Paul’s epistle, an overview of the contents, and argues that the letter serves as a sermon. This portion of the dissertation notes the influence of Galatians, defines Paul as the author, and discusses the audience. Paul passionately proclaims the true gospel and defends it against false teachers (Gal 1-4). He admonishes them to return to the one true gospel that Paul receives from Jesus and clearly preached to them. He corrects the false teachers who captivate their attention and who demand that these believers add circumcision and keeping the law to the gospel. Paul continues to teach and to affirm that the gospel is by faith alone in Christ alone. He warns that false gospels will enslave them to false teachers.

He follows the instruction in chapters 1-4 with commands for application in chapters 5-6. Paul pleads with these saints to find their freedom in Christ. He contrasts the life of slavery in the flesh to a life of freedom in the Spirit. He clearly delineates for these Galatians the benefits of living life as an overflow of the gospel.

To establish the thesis that Paul’s proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in Galatians is as a model for the gospel centered preaching, a basic understanding of the overview and occasion of Paul’s letter is essential. For the epistle to function as a model for preaching, the book must also be read and understood as a sermon.

⁴⁶William Barclay, “A Comparison of Paul’s Missionary Preaching and Preaching to the Church,” in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and R. P. Martin (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), 170.

CHAPTER 4
PAUL'S PROCLAMATION, DEFENSE, AND
APPLICATION OF THE GOSPEL
IN GALATIANS

Introduction

This dissertation establishes Paul's proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. This chapter details the epistle passage by passage in order to see Paul's proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel. The chapter has two sections: the first evaluates Galatians 1-4 where Paul proclaims and defends the gospel and the second explores his application of the gospel in Galatians 5-6.

Proclamation and Defense of the Gospel, Galatians 1-4

This section evaluates the first four chapters of the Galatian letter. In these chapters, Paul alternates between proclaiming the gospel and defending the gospel.¹

1. Proclaiming the Gospel, 1:1-5
2. Defending the Gospel, 1:6-2:14
3. Proclaiming the Gospel, 2:15-21
4. Defending the Gospel, 3:1-6
5. Proclaiming the Gospel, 3:7-4:7

¹These alternating proclaiming/defending categories are based upon my own observations and studies of the text.

6. Defending the Gospel, 4:8-20

7. Proclaiming the Gospel, 4:21-31

The goal in writing these sections is not to explore every phrase in detail, but to evaluate how the section either proclaims or defends the gospel to establish the thesis.

In chapters 1-4 Paul writes to clarify what the true gospel is (proclamation) and to protect its purity from being mixed with other claims (defense). The Galatians suffer from gospel confusion. They are “deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (1:6), are “foolish” and bewitched” (3:1) and are reverting to “works of the law” so that they are “perfected by the flesh” (vv. 3, 5). They are led astray by those who trouble them, who “distort the gospel of Christ” (1:6) and who “make much” of the Galatians “but for no good purpose”; rather, “they want to shut you out, that you may make much of them” (4:17). Paul’s perplexity over his “little children” is severe: “I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (v. 19).

Proclaiming the Gospel, Galatians 1:1-5

Paul begins his letter to the Galatians by proclaiming the gospel. He does not wait until the body of the letter or after he rebukes their gospel-confusion (1:6-7) but clearly teaches the gospel in this introduction. He delivers this as good news before he addresses the bad news of their “deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ” (v. 6). The gospel is heartfelt to Paul and he embeds it in the introduction.

Paul foreshadows specific themes that he will address in the letter.² One of the first is his apostleship. “Apostle” (ἀπόστολος) is one sent by an authority to represent his message, an appointed spokesperson who has credentials for the office.³ Apostle, “in Christian circles . . . denoted one who proclaimed the gospel, and was not strictly limited.”⁴ Paul’s calling is to proclaim the name of Christ “before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Paul restates this commissioning in his testimonies in Acts (22:7-21, 26:12-18) and in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8).

As an apostle, Paul must clarify whom he represents. Betz finds his two-fold negation, “not from men nor through man,” to be parallel to his two-fold affirmation, “but through Jesus Christ and God the Father” (1:1).⁵ Ryken finds this a “terse” introduction with Paul’s third Greek word in the negative: “Paul, apostle, *not*.”⁶ Schreiner notes that this is his only letter that begins with an apologetic.⁷

Some believe Paul is defending his apostleship against attacks from the

²Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 21.

³Kenneth S. Wuest, “Galatians,” in *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament* (1944; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 1:24.

⁴W. Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), in Logos CD-ROM (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2013), s.v. “apostle.”

⁵Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 38-39.

⁶Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, Reformed Expository Commentary Series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 6.

⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 74.

Judaizers, while others find no basis for this evaluation.⁸ The words that Paul uses in these passages yield insight into his primary concern. His title of “Apostle” occurs in the letter only four times while “gospel” occurs fourteen times in chapters one through four.⁹ Agreement centers upon the attack on Paul’s words. False teachers seek to discredit the messenger, but the real aim is the message, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Witherington summarizes: “The issue or *stasis* in this letter is what Paul takes to be the apostolic message or Gospel, as opposed to the message of the agitators which Paul says is not a version but rather a perversion of the true Gospel.”¹⁰ The main concern in the letter to the Galatians is that the true gospel is sent by an authoritative messenger. This question is an echo from the serpent’s hiss of old, “Did God actually say . . . ?” (Gen 3:1) that reverberates today:

Paul’s opponents said that his gospel was not God’s word to man, but a man’s word about God. Skeptics make the same argument today. They accuse Paul of Tarsus of inventing Christianity. They say that Jesus of Nazareth was a teacher of love and a model of sacrifice, but then Paul came along with all his complicated Greek concepts and turned Christ into Christianity.¹¹

John MacArthur evaluates Paul’s apostleship and notes that he and the other

⁸Ryken finds Paul accused of second-rate apostleship because he is not one of the twelve, therefore “his gospel was just hearsay” (*Galatians*, 6). Luther sees this as defense against the false teachers. Martin Luther, *Galatians*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 27.

⁹Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 71. He cites the work of B. Lategan, “Is Paul Defending his Apostleship in Galatians?” *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 417. Betz finds the claim that Paul is a lesser apostle based on this verse “questionable” (*Galatians*, 39).

¹⁰Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 72.

¹¹Ryken, *Galatians*, 7.

NT apostles are not writing *for* the church but they are speaking *to* the church:

The church derived its doctrine from the apostles, who received it directly from God (Eph 3:5). They are never spoken of as apostles of the church but always as apostles of Jesus Christ. . . .

Because the apostles' teaching came directly from the Lord, the writings of Paul, Peter, John, and the others are every much as divinely inspired and authoritative as the words that Jesus spoke in person during His earthly ministry.¹²

Paul continues to proclaim the gospel in the last phrase in verse one, "who raised him from the dead" signifying a new age is dawning (Isa 26:19; Ezek 37:1-14; Dan 12:1-3). Schreiner observes, "The Galatians were turning the clock back in salvation history by submitting to circumcision and the Mosaic law."¹³ According to A. T. Robertson, the verb "raising" (ἐγείρω) is used in the NT for "raising from the sleep of death, to wake up the dead."¹⁴ Before Paul can bring his apostolic identification to a close, he celebrates the resurrection. In verse two, Paul defines this gospel is not just his own, or that he is alone in the understanding of his office,¹⁵ but there are "brothers" with him.

In Galatians 1:1-5, no thanksgiving section is present as is usual in Paul's other letters (Rom 1:8, Eph 1:16; Phil 1:16; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 1:3). Even the church in Corinth, languishing in immorality, receives a note of praise (1 Cor 1:4). No such commendation exists for these Galatians: "Paul has nothing to praise about the Galatian

¹²John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 4.

¹³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 75.

¹⁴A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, vol. 4, *The Epistles of Paul* (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 275.

¹⁵Ryken, *Galatians*, 7.

assemblies, hence the sparseness of the address and the lack of a thanksgiving section.”¹⁶ Ryken contends, “This is in sharp contrast to his other letters, where invariably he thanked God for the good work the church was doing.” He continues, “After the doxology in verse 5, we might have expected a blessing. What Paul gives instead is a curse.”¹⁷

Paul does offer these Galatians a greeting of “grace to you and peace.” These are not just polite words for Paul: he grounds them in the very person and nature of God. They are “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3). The grace that Paul offers them “refers to his free mercy that is lavished on all who believe in Jesus Christ. . . . not just unmerited favor but also refers to God’s transforming power.” This grace is especially significant for Galatians who are in danger of accepting a “gospel” that denies grace.¹⁸

The result of God’s grace to them is “peace.” Because of God’s love and mercy, they now have peace with God and with each other. These joint gifts are always presented as God-given. Ryken explains, “nowhere in the NT does grace and peace come from an angelic being or human being. Such gifts come only from God” and from fulfilling covenants (Ezek 37:26; Ps 72:7; Isa 54:10).¹⁹ MacArthur finds these words inherent in the gospel: “Two of the most precious words related to that God-given gospel are grace and peace. The first is the source of salvation and the second is the result.

¹⁶Schreiner, *Galatians*, 75.

¹⁷Ryken, *Galatians*, 16.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 75-76.

Grace is positional, peace is practical, and together they flow from God our Father through His Son and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁰

Paul continues to proclaim the gospel and to explain the roots of “grace to you and peace” as he states that Jesus “gave himself for our sins” (1:4). “Grace and peace” are not empty words; they come from someone, “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3), and they come at high cost, the life of Christ. In this introduction Paul points to the cross by the beginning of verse four. Schreiner notes how quickly Paul highlights redemption since the Galatians are so “entranced by circumcision because they have forgotten the significance of the cross.”²¹ This phrase foreshadows what Paul writes about later in the letter, that Jesus “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

God’s wrath demands death as the consequence of sin (Rom 6:23). Jesus, the substitute for sins, gave his life to atone for sins.²² This substitutionary atonement is the “heart of the gospel” according to MacArthur: “If Christ had not died on our behalf, He could not have been raised on our behalf; and if He had not been raised, Paul says, then preaching the gospel would be vain, trusting in the gospel would be worthless, and all men would still be in their sins (1 Cor. 15:14-17).”²³

Paul’s proclamation continues by sharing that the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice is “to deliver us from the present evil age” (1:4). Schreiner finds an echo of God rescuing

²⁰MacArthur, *Galatians*, 5.

²¹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 76.

²²Ibid.

²³MacArthur, *Galatians*, 6.

his people out of Egypt in this phrase,²⁴ and MacArthur traces the word “deliver” to the same one that Stephen applies in his sermon about Israel’s flight from Egypt (Acts 7:10, 34).²⁵ This delivery is “from the present evil age” (v. 4). Paul enters into an eschatological dimension about the ages. Jesus made this same distinction about an age to come and the end of the present age (Matt 12:32; 13:39, 40, 49). In other epistles, Paul warns that believers are not to conform to this age (Rom 12:2) as Demas did (2 Tim 4:10); that the world system, or present age, dominates the lives of those in the world (Eph 2:2); and that the current intellectual world is limited to this age (1 Cor 1:20; 3:18). He does promise an age to come (Eph 1:21), and that believers are given grace to live now and then (Titus 2:12).²⁶ This “present evil age” connotes a passing system so that believers can be in the world but not of it (John 17:11, 14-18; Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 5:5).²⁷

Returning to Galatians 1:1-5, Paul introduces another major theme in verse 4: the law belongs to this old age, the promise to Abraham finds its resolve in Christ so that those who cling to circumcision hold to an old, evil age even after delivery through the death of Christ. Schreiner states, “Believers live in the interval between the already and not yet. God’s promises are already realized in Christ, but ‘the present evil age’ still exists, so that believers must remain vigilant and keep putting trust in the cross of

²⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 76.

²⁵MacArthur, *Galatians*, 6.

²⁶Schreiner, *Galatians*, 77.

²⁷MacArthur, *Galatians*, 6.

Christ.”²⁸

The next two phrases detail why this gospel proclamation exists, “According to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (vv. 4-5). Later, Paul reflects that God “was pleased to reveal his Son to me” (v. 16). Witherington exposit, “Both the death and the rescue were ‘according to the will of God’ which tells us even death is by no means outside the will of God for a person, indeed in the Son’s case this was at the very heart of what God sent the Son to do on earth. Then too, redemption is the larger aim of God for humankind.”²⁹

Verse 5 offers a doxology in response to this gospel proclamation.³⁰ Comparing this verse with the closing of Paul’s introductions in his other epistles, a doxology is not customary. Boice offers a fitting explanation, “It sets the gospel, centering in the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ and his work, above any human criticism or praise. The fact that the glory of God and the giving of glory to God will last forever (literally, ‘unto the ages of ages’) contrasts markedly with ‘the present evil age,’ which is passing away.”³¹

Paul’s introduction to the gospel of Galatians begins with a clear gospel proclamation. The Apostle starts with the good news. He rehearses the same gospel

²⁸Schreiner, *Galatians*, 77-78; Witherington also observes this passing age and the age to come, *Grace in Galatia*, 76-77.

²⁹Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 76.

³⁰Schreiner summarizes, “I would define the glory of God as the beauty, majesty, and greatness of who he is, and therefore in all he does, whether in salvation or in judgment, the greatness of his being is demonstrated” (*Galatians*, 78).

³¹James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians*, vol. 10 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1976), 426.

message that these Galatians know to be true because of Paul's previous visit (4:13-16). In verses 1-5 Paul proclaims a gospel of grace and peace that comes from heaven, is purchased by Christ, rescues the sinner and is done according to the will of God and for his glory.

Defending the Gospel, Galatians 1:6-2:14

Paul begins Galatians by proclaiming the gospel and now attacks the very heart of the problem. These Galatian believers are "deserting him" who is the gospel. Paul defends the good news informing them that no other gospel exists, only a distortion of the true one (vv. 6-7). In the latter half of chapter one and the beginning of chapter two, it seems as if Paul is defending himself, particularly his apostleship. However, Paul is really defending the message given to him, the glorious gospel.

Galatians 1:6-10

Ryken recreates the setting for Paul's sharp rebuke:

A messenger had brought him a letter or report about the churches in Galatia. The word was that the Galatians were adding the law of Moses to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was the teaching of the Judaizers, the Jewish-Christian legalists who came from Jerusalem to do follow-up on Paul's evangelism. They wanted to make Gentiles become Jews before they could become Christians. They wanted to add works of the law on top of faith in Jesus Christ as the basis for salvation.³²

Paul responds by rebuking their desertion. He is "astonished" (Θαυμάζω) or shocked³³ at their behavior. Literally, he is "astounded" and "bewildered."³⁴ This outrage is why,

³²Ryken, *Galatians*, 16.

³³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 84.

³⁴MacArthur, *Galatians*, 12.

according to Ryken, “the body of his letter seethes with righteous indignation.”³⁵ In the words “so quickly,” Schreiner finds an echo of the golden calf idolatry on Mount Sinai when the people ran from their covenant committing God to a gospel of their own craftsmanship.³⁶ The language is similar, “They have *turned aside quickly* out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” (Exod 32:8, emphasis added).

Paul is “astonished” that they are “quickly deserting him” (v. 6). This “deserting” (μετατίθημι) is a process, not an apostasy.³⁷ The verb deserting is used reflexively indicating voluntary action. MacArthur explains, “The false teachers were accountable for their corruption of God’s truth, but the Galatian Christians were also accountable for being so easily misled by it to pursue legalism.”³⁸ Witherington notes the object of this desertion, “Paul speaks here of leaving *someone* behind (the one who called you) in exchange for *something* (a different Gospel). The agitators were not offering a

³⁵Ryken, *Galatians*, 16.

³⁶Schreiner, *Galatians*, 85.

³⁷“By using the present tense, (‘ye are removed,’) he appears to say that they were only in the act of falling.” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 29. Schreiner also finds a process here against those who place too much emphasis on the present tense (Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990], 13; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993], 40). Witherington agrees with process (*Grace in Galatians*, 82).

³⁸MacArthur, *Galatians*, 13.

different God or Christ or Spirit but they were offering a different message.”³⁹

The very one whom they are rejecting is “him who called you in the grace of Christ” (v. 6). Paul reminds them of the calling of the gospel that they first heard through his preaching (4:13). In rejecting “him” they reject his call and his grace (1:6). “Called” (καλέω) is translated “called once and for all” (cf. 2 Thess 2:13-14; 2 Tim 1:8-9; 1 Pet 1:15).⁴⁰ They were “called . . . in the grace of Christ.” Paul defends the gospel by defending “the grace of Christ” (1:6). MacArthur notes,

The grace of Christ is God’s free and sovereign act of love and mercy in granting salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, apart from anything men are or can do, and of His sustaining that salvation to glorification. It is absurd to accept a gracious salvation and then endeavor to maintain righteousness through human efforts, ceremonies, and ritual.⁴¹

The Galatians desert him by defection and by “turning to a different gospel” in their devotion (1:6). Paul is then quick to correct, “not that there is another one” (v. 7). He highlights the striking difference between the words “different in kind” (ἕτερος), and not “another of the same kind” (ἄλλος).⁴² This “different gospel” is illegitimate and unworthy of the title “gospel.” Paul defends one true gospel and no other message, no

³⁹Witherington, *Galatians*, 82.

⁴⁰MacArthur, *Galatians*, 13. Schreiner notes the difference between calling and proclaiming: Calling occurs *through* the proclaimed word, and yet calling is not absolutely coterminous with the word proclaimed since only *some* of those who hear the word are called. Calling, then, cannot be the same as being *invited* to be saved, for all those who hear the word preached are summoned to faith and obedience. Since calling overlaps with being chosen in this context, it seems that calling refers to God’s effective work in bringing some who hear the gospel to saving faith (cf. Rom 8:30).” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 85.

⁴¹MacArthur, *Galatians*, 13.

⁴²*The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012); s.vv. “different” and “another.”

other Messiah, competes. In his second letter to the Corinthian church, Paul ties this “different gospel” back to the serpent in the garden who casts the first doubt on God’s word:

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2 Cor 11:3-4)

In the Corinthian rebuke, Paul associates a different gospel with a false Jesus and Spirit. Sadly, a gospel with additives compels the Corinthian and Galatian congregations. Paul understands that the risks are high: a matter of life and death. Charles Haddon Spurgeon testifies:

It is a great thing to begin the Christian Life by believing good solid doctrine. Some people have received twenty different “gospels” in as many years; how many more they will accept before they get to their journey’s end, it would be difficult to predict. I thank God that He early taught me *the* gospel, and I have been so perfectly satisfied with it, that I do not want to know any other.⁴³

Paul transitions to the proponents of this “different gospel.” He tells these Galatians that “some . . . trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (v. 7). These false teachers are Judaizers who claim to be Christians. They recognize Jesus as the Messiah and acknowledge his death on the cross. This may allow them a hearing in the church. They would not overthrow the gospel overtly but rather more subtly add to the gospel by requiring the Mosaic Law, ceremonies, and circumcision. When God’s law is added to His gospel, “even His grace ceases to be grace (cf. Rom 11.6).”⁴⁴ Grace is

⁴³C. H. Spurgeon, “A Defense of Calvinism” [on-line]; accessed 10 Dec 2012; available from <http://www.spurgeon.org/calvinis.htm>; Internet.

⁴⁴MacArthur, *Galatians*, 13-14.

“the operative concept in Galatians and runs like a scarlet thread throughout the epistle from start to finish (1:15; 2:9; 2:21; 3:18; 5:4; 6:18).”⁴⁵

“Trouble” (ταράσσω) means to agitate, shake, and to stir up.⁴⁶ In this verse (1:7), it applies to emotional disturbance and an unsettled mind.⁴⁷ While troubling these believers, they also distort the true gospel of Christ. To distort (μεταστρέφω) is to pervert, or to alter the true meaning,⁴⁸ to reverse or to turn upside down.⁴⁹ These troublemakers may argue that Paul’s gospel is “seriously defective” and are “trying to seduce the Galatians to turn from the light of the true gospel to the darkness of a false gospel.”⁵⁰ Paul understands that only the true gospel is worthy of the name of its author and adds the phrase “of Christ” (v. 7).

Paul continues his diatribe by demanding: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (v. 8). Later in the letter Paul affirms that they treated him like an “angel” during his first visit when he initially shares the gospel with them (4:14). He states that the law was “put in place through angels” (3:19). Paul also understands that even Satan

⁴⁵Timothy George, *Galatians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary, vol. 30 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 92.

⁴⁶*The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012); s.v. “trouble.”

⁴⁷MacArthur, *Galatians*, 15.

⁴⁸*The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012); s.v. “distort.”

⁴⁹Dunn, *Galatians*, 11.

⁵⁰Schreiner, *Galatians*, 86-87.

parades as an “angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14) and Jude informs of “angelic apostasy when the angels who rebelled with Satan ‘abandoned their own home’ (Jude 6).”⁵¹ True ambassadors of Christ proclaim “the gospel of Christ” (v. 7).

The result for those who preach a “gospel contrary to the one we preached to you” is to be “accursed.” These Galatians with Jewish roots recall the OT punishment for a prophet who did not speak for God: “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die” (Deut 18:20). Here, accursed is anathema (ἀνάθεμα), a technical Greek term “to call for persons to be put under a holy ban or be accursed (Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 1:8-9; cp. 1 Cor. 16:22).”⁵² Paul also uses the term for those who fail to love Jesus (1 Cor 16:22) and to offer himself “accursed” if the Jews who are separated from Christ will receive salvation (Rom 9:3). The force of this condemnation is that “irrevocable punishment will be meted out to those who proclaim another gospel.”⁵³ Ryken summarizes Paul’s adamant defense: “The good news of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, is the only gospel there is. Anyone who says anything different—Paul doesn’t care who—deserves to go to hell! . . . Paul is saying that he would be damned if he ever preached another gospel.”⁵⁴

⁵¹George, *Galatians*, 98.

⁵²Bryce Sandlin, “Accursed,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. C. Brand et al. (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 18.

⁵³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 87.

⁵⁴Ryken, *Galatians*, 22-23. Ryken also warns against gospel rivals such as Islam, cults, and even Bible scholars who say that the Protestant Reformers were wrong about Galatians: “It is not really about justification by faith alone after all. This is the approach taken by advocates of the New Perspective on Paul and the law, in which

Paul repeats this condemnation: “As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (v. 9). Verse eight points to a future, probable situation, verse nine assumes a reality.⁵⁵ Schreiner teaches, “The opponents who proclaim another gospel are likely in view, and Paul affirms that those who promote a divergent gospel will be cursed.”⁵⁶ Paul is not asking for personal loyalty but loyalty “to the unchanging message of Christ, Christ alone, that he had preached to them.”⁵⁷ Keller states, “Even an apostle cannot alter, revise or add to the message of Christ. What he says is not the result of his study, research, reflection and wisdom. It is God-given, and both unchanging and unchangeable.”⁵⁸

In his final verse in this segment, Paul rhetorically asks if he is seeking the approval of God or of man. He exclaims, “If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (v. 10). Later Paul will instruct these Galatians that applying the gospel means to walk in freedom (5:1). Keller insists that this freedom is the opposite of striving to live as a man-pleaser who elevates the importance of others’ opinions craving their approval and fearing their disapproval. Man-pleasing also ignores the OT

Galatians is reinterpreted as focusing on Jewish-Gentile relations and not on the more ultimate question as to how sinners can be righteous before God.”

⁵⁵Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 83.

⁵⁶Schreiner, *Galatians*, 88.

⁵⁷George, *Galatians*, 97.

⁵⁸Timothy Keller, *Galatians for You* (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2013), 15.

injunctions to live in the fear of the Lord, standing in awe and wonder at his greatness.⁵⁹

Paul admits to a time when he was “trying to please man.” Ryken elaborates:

Before he came to Christ, back when he was still a Pharisee, Paul did everything he could to keep up appearances. He put his confidence in his circumcision, his ethnicity, his family connections, his cultural background, and especially the way he kept the law (Phil 3:4-6). Back then he was living by a different gospel, which was no gospel at all.⁶⁰

Schreiner finds verse 10 to be transitional: the false gospels found in verses 7-9 sound winsome to men; yet, they are not the gospel Paul believes or preaches (Gal 1:11-24). Martin Luther offers this conclusion:

This is not preaching that gains favor from men and from the world. For the world finds nothing more irritating and intolerable than hearing its wisdom, righteousness, religion, and power condemned. . . . For if we denounce men and all their efforts, it is inevitable that we quickly encounter bitter hatred, persecution, excommunication, condemnation, and execution.⁶¹

Galatians 1:11-17

Paul continues his defense of the gospel: “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:11-12). This section informs that Paul receives the gospel by revelation (v. 12), discusses his former life in Judaism (vv. 13-14), and is called to be an Apostle apart from any human authority (vv. 15-17). Verses 11-21 offer an autobiography of Paul and

⁵⁹Keller, *Galatians for You*, 33.

⁶⁰Ryken, *Galatians*, 25.

⁶¹Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, trans. and ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26:58.

a defense of his gospel.⁶² As Ryken notes, “Paul understood that people [the Galatians] had to accept his apostleship before they would accept his gospel.”⁶³

In the middle of Paul’s refutation of the false gospel that allures them and defending the true gospel of Christ alone, he still refers to them as “brothers.” He is not basing this on heredity but upon a common faith in Christ.⁶⁴ He defends the good news by using a deliberate redundancy: “the gospel that was preached by me” (v. 11) is literally the gospel that I gospeled (το εὐαγγέλιον το εὐαγγελισθὲν).⁶⁵

Just as Paul claims that they are hearing a “different gospel—not that there is another one” (vv. 6-7), he now states that his gospel is not “man’s gospel”: he did not “receive it from any man, nor was [he] taught it” (vv. 11-12). Elsewhere, Paul teaches that believers can share and teach the gospel from man to man (2 Tim 2:2; 4:2). Yet, in these Galatian verses, he asserts that his gospel is by divine revelation. Schreiner argues, “Hence, according to the intruders who had entered the Galatian churches, Paul’s gospel was one that pleased people by omitting some of the essential elements of the gospel, i.e., the need to be circumcised and to keep the OT law.” In this portion, Paul defends the origins of his gospel which he does not do in any of his other letters.⁶⁶

After clearly delineating that his gospel is not manmade, he proclaims the true source of the gospel: “a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12). Jesus Christ (Ἰησοῦς

⁶²Schreiner, *Galatians*, 92.

⁶³Ryken, *Galatians*, 26.

⁶⁴Witherington, *Galatians*, 91.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 96.

Χριστός) serves, in the context of Galatians 1:16, as both objective and subjective:

“Jesus gave the revelation and is the object of the revelation.” Paul “saw the risen Christ . . . and the gospel in all its glory and beauty was disclosed to him.”⁶⁷ Paul’s memory still burns with the beauty and glory of the true gospel he met on the Damascus Road; any counterfeit gospel, no matter how slight, is appalling to him.

His apostleship is “through Jesus Christ and God the Father,” and his gospel is revealed by Christ. As a first-hand witness to the risen Christ, he qualifies as an apostle (Acts 1:22; 9:3-4; Gal 1:1). This appearance by Jesus also means that Paul does not need affirmation by any man to approve or to accredit this good news. Paul receives the gospel from the Gospel and stands confident in the message.

In verses 13-14 Paul highlights that he was once the enemy of the gospel: he “persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it” (v. 13). Schreiner asserts, “Paul was a young and rising star in the Judaism, advancing beyond many of his fellow students.”⁶⁸ Training under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 5:34; 22:3), he becomes a Pharisee striving to please God in every area of life (23:6; 26:5; Phil 3:5). He references his life as Saul who saw the stoning of Stephen and “approved of his execution” (Acts 8:1). He “was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (8:3). Just before his conversion on the road to Damascus, Saul was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” and was held letters of authority to bind believers in Christ and bring them back to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2) because he was “so extremely zealous . . . for the traditions of my

⁶⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 97.

⁶⁸Ibid., 99.

fathers”⁶⁹ (Gal 1:14). In his defense before Agrippa, Paul testifies about his life as a Pharisee:

I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. (Acts 26:9-11)

Jesus rages against Pharisees who condemn his disciples for breaking the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands. Jesus rebukes them for breaking the commands of God to keep their traditions (Matt 15:1-6). Paul (as Saul) deserves the judgment Jesus pronounces upon these Pharisees: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (15:8-9, cf. Isa 29:13; Ezek 33:31).

Paul defends the gospel by recounting just how much he hated the good news. Witherington argues that in Galatians 1:13-14, Paul “is not writing an autobiography here; he is arguing a particular case and trying to persuade his audience to adhere to the one true Gospel of grace, adhering to his own personal example.”⁷⁰ Paul is still ethnically Jewish, which is why he can refer to the traditions of “my fathers”; but he is no longer associated with the social, religious, or political structures known as Judaism. Rather, he now aligns with the church: Jews and Gentiles who are now united in Christ and who are the assembly of God.⁷¹

⁶⁹Schreiner notes that “traditions” in this passage does not equate to OT Scripture but a way of life commended by the Pharisees (*Galatians*, 99).

⁷⁰Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 96.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 98.

Paul abbreviates his biography in Galatians 1:13-17 to remind them of his dramatic conversion that he shared with them on his first visit: “For you have heard of my former life in Judaism . . .” (v. 13). Paul introduces these verses with the conjunction “But” (δὲ) to contrast his former way of life and to share two specific truths. First, that God “set me apart before I was born” (v. 15).⁷² Literally, God set him apart from his mother’s womb. Second, Paul shares that Christ “called me by his grace.” Paul is both “set apart” (ἀφορίζω) and “called” (καλέω) by Christ. Formerly, Paul equates spiritual commitment and piety with his zeal in persecuting the church, slaying the believers, and keeping the traditions. An effective call by grace compels and summons him to serve as an apostle.⁷³

Paul’s conversion happens as a great light blinds him and he hears the very voice of God. He is confronted by Christ: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”⁷⁴ (Acts 9:4). Even so, Paul reflects upon this event with joy: God “was pleased to reveal his Son to me”⁷⁵ (Gal 1:16). Paul shares that his conversion and his calling were one event: “So that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (1:16 as Paul recalls Acts 9:15).

⁷²This is similar to Isaiah who was set apart from the womb (Isa 49:1), Jeremiah who was appointed a prophet to the nations before he was born (Jer 1:5), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15).

⁷³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 101.

⁷⁴This question by Jesus defines the extent to which Jesus identifies with his followers. Paul seeks to persecute “any belonging to the Way” (Acts 9:2), but Christ indicts: “Why are you persecuting *me*?” (v. 4, emphasis added). The persecution of the followers is an attack upon the One whom they follow.

⁷⁵“To reveal his Son to me” can also be read, “to reveal his Son in me.” Witherington takes this as both subjective, happening personally to Paul, and objective in that it came as a revelation from outside Paul. Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 107. Also, Betz, *Galatians*, 71.

In the balance of verses 16-17, Paul shares two things he did not do: “consult with anyone” or travel to Jerusalem to see those apostles. He then shares the one thing that he did do: travel into Arabia and then back to Damascus (Gal 1:16-17). Keller finds in Paul’s years in Arabia a time of reflection, contemplation, and preparation.⁷⁶ In 2 Corinthians Paul reports that during his time in Damascus, King Aretas gave an order to seize him but that he “was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands” (2 Cor 11:32-33). Ryken believes Paul was also sharing the gospel during these days in Arabia and Damascus and thus the citation for arrest.⁷⁷ Paul shares with the Galatians that his gospel message is from Jesus; he does not need certification from any man. For Paul to defend the gospel, he must defend the One who gave it to him.

Galatians 1:18-24

In this section Paul continues to defend his apostleship in light of defending the gospel. He elaborates that “after three years”⁷⁸ he travels to Jerusalem and visits⁷⁹ with Peter (1:18, cf. Acts 9:26-30). Surely, the two exchanged their stories: Paul recounts his dramatic conversion, calling, and preaching in Damascus. Peter his first-hand experiences with Jesus. Boice sees the “two leading apostles” encouraging and

⁷⁶Keller, *Galatians for You*, 32.

⁷⁷Ryken, *Galatians*, 28-29.

⁷⁸Boice suggests this represents three years since Paul’s conversion (*Galatians*, 435).

⁷⁹The word “visit” (ἰστορήσαι) should be read simply as getting to know with no purpose of adding any information to the gospel Paul already understands. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 109.

planning coming work.⁸⁰ Paul contends that his gospel came from Jesus, not from man, and that he did not need to consult with the apostles in Jerusalem (vv. 11-17). Indeed, on his visit to Peter, he did not even see another apostle except James (v. 19). Paul confirms his report with an oath: “Before God, I do not lie!”⁸¹ (v. 20). He lists his travels after that visit, then cites that he was still “unknown in person to the churches of Judea” (vv. 21-22).

Paul defends the gospel by stating that he did not rush to Jerusalem for confirmation. While in the Judean region, he visits only with Peter and James. After this brief visit, he ministers in relative obscurity⁸² in Syria and Cilicia so that the only thing known of him in Judea⁸³ is “He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy” (23). Certainly this coincides with reports right after Saul’s conversion: “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 9:21-22).

⁸⁰Boice, *Galatians*, 435.

⁸¹Schreiner cites that this oath formula may well apply to the entire narrative in 1:10-2:21 (*Galatians*, 108).

⁸²Boice traces the idea of Paul’s obscurity to the word “only” (Gal 1:23) and to the sense of the passage that Paul is isolated from the happenings in Jerusalem (Boice, *Galatians*, 436). Cf. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 107-08.

⁸³The Roman region of Judea would include Galilee and Samaria, a large geography. This validates the idea that Paul was unknown in this area and that his gospel is independent. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 112.

Paul defends the gospel in Galatians 1:23 by insisting that it is “faith” he seeks to destroy which, according to Schreiner, “refers to the gospel in terms of what one believes in.”⁸⁴ He traces that “the faith” (πίστις) usually means “trust in God” in Galatians but that the construction here is similar to 1:11, “where Paul also uses a verbal form of the word ‘preach the gospel’ (εὐαγγελίζω), [and] there the thing preached is the ‘gospel’ (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) itself (cf. 1 Cor 15:1; 2 Cor 11:7).” Schreiner finds a parallel in the phrase “the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27) where the word “faith” is used in like manner as in the Galatian passage and where “‘the gospel’ is appositional to ‘the faith.’”⁸⁵

The result of Paul’s dramatic conversion, call, and obedience to the vocation is: “And they glorified God because of me” (Gal 1:24). Paul does not receive glory and he does not desire it. In his former life as a Pharisee, Paul receives the attention of others for his good works, accepts the place of honor at feasts, receives the best seats in the synagogues, and holds the title “Rabbi” (Matt 23:1-7). Pharisees never eat with sinners and tax collectors and bristle when Jesus does (Mark 2:16; Luke 7:36-40; 15:2). Even so, Paul is defending his apostleship to guard the very gospel given to him by Christ so that God receives the glory.

Galatians 2:1-10

Paul defends the gospel in this passage by stating that his message receives confirmation by the church leadership in Jerusalem. This may strike as a departure from

⁸⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 113.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 112-13.

his fierce independence in Galatians 1:11-24. Yet, as this first section of chapter 2 records, Paul is not the one on trial in Jerusalem: “false brothers” demand additions to the gospel (2:4). Schreiner clarifies Paul’s flow of thought in 1:11-2:10: “his gospel was *independent* from Jerusalem and later *ratified* by Jerusalem.”⁸⁶

The immediate context for Paul’s return to Jerusalem after fourteen years (Gal 2:1) is similar to the problem that elicits the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15: the addition of circumcision and the keeping of the Mosaic law to the gospel. In this Galatian passage, Paul offers an example of the freedom of the gospel. Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, is with Paul and is “not forced to be circumcised” (Gal 2:3). This verse is not merely an anecdotal note in a travel journal.⁸⁷ Titus is a demonstration of gospel freedom: he receives the gospel, he is a disciple, and he does not need to be circumcised to follow Christ. He is evidence that “the good news is not salvation by faith in Christ plus circumcision; the good news is salvation by faith in Christ alone.”⁸⁸ Witherington teaches that Paul took Titus to Jerusalem as a test case for the leaders of the Jerusalem church; however, in the presence of these “false brothers,” Titus becomes a matter of “provocation, an honor challenge, to which they must respond in kind or give up their

⁸⁶Schreiner, *Galatians*, 118, emphasis original. Schreiner also notes that pragmatically speaking, these Jerusalem apostles disagreeing with his gospel would not change his message but would serve to confuse the churches he established (121-22).

⁸⁷Schreiner notes that “verse 3 represents the main point of 2:1-5.” *Ibid.*, 118. Ryken states that it “was a daring move” to bring a Greek into the city of the Judaizers (*Galatians*, 43).

⁸⁸Ryken notes that the New Perspective on Paul claims that Galatians 2 is an ecclesiological issue about how Titus can be accepted to eat with the Jews. Ryken differs on the main point being soteriological: Titus proved that man is accepted by God, and by the church, by grace not by works (*Galatians*, 44-45, n. 3).

own views.”⁸⁹ Paul knows that Titus, as an uncircumcised Greek and convert from paganism, will be a definitive challenge for the church and will serve as a test case for his gospel to the Gentiles, to include the Galatians.⁹⁰

The clarion call for this meeting are the “false brothers” who are “secretly brought in” to the assembly (2:4). Schreiner argues, “Apparently they believed Jesus is the Messiah, and yet Paul concludes that they were not genuinely brothers in the Lord.”⁹¹ Ryken defines that they are “‘brothers’ because they claim to be Christians, but ‘false’ because they did not follow Christ after all.”⁹² Ryken believes that Paul finds their gospel addition far from trivial: “Requiring observance of the law changes salvation from being a work of God to a work accomplished by human beings. So, salvation is no longer of the Lord.”⁹³

The work of these pseudo-brothers is “to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus,” with the result “that they might bring us into slavery” (v. 4). Betz finds that these imposters are “like undercover agents and conspirators.”⁹⁴ This two-fold formula, taking away freedom from the law⁹⁵ in order to bring into slavery, echoes an

⁸⁹Witherington, *Grace in Galatians*, 128.

⁹⁰Ibid., 132-33, 135.

⁹¹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 124.

⁹²Ryken, *Galatians*, 39.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Betz, *Galatians*, 90.

⁹⁵Schreiner asserts that “In every context, including here, freedom means freedom from the law” (*Galatians*, 125).

ancient hiss: “Did God actually say . . . You will not surely die” (Gen 3:1, 4). These ideas imitate the desire of the rescued Israelites who nonetheless voice their longing to return to the yoke of slavery (Num 11:4-6). This NT freedom that Paul defines is the reality of a new exodus flowing from the prophesy of Isaiah: “Those who live under the old age of the law are enslaved, whereas those who are in Christ live in the new era in which God’s saving promises are being fulfilled.”⁹⁶

Paul’s response is stalwart: he and the others do “not yield in submission even for a moment”⁹⁷ (Gal 2:5). Randy Stinson defines submission (ὑποταγή) as the “voluntary placement of oneself under the authority and leadership of another.”⁹⁸ The foolishness of deliberate submission to slavery is a theme of this letter. Paul reminds them that they “were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods” and warns them not to become slaves once more “to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world” (4:8-9). He labors to draw a comparison to the life of Abraham (4:21-30) to teach these Galatians that they “are not children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (v. 31-5:1). When writing to the Corinthian church, Paul rebukes them for accepting slavery from others (2 Cor 11:20); he reminds the Romans that they do not have a spirit

⁹⁶Schreiner, *Galatians*, 125.

⁹⁷“Yield” (εἴκω) is “to give way before expression of force or argument. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “yield.”

⁹⁸Randy Stinson, “Submission, Subordination,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. C. Brand et al. (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 1537.

of slavery but the Spirit of God (Rom 8:15).⁹⁹

Paul notes how quick they flee from sin: they did not submit “even for a moment” (Gal 2:5). The result is that “the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you” (v. 5). Ryken observes Paul’s use of “the truth” not “a truth,” and comments: “Paul is a freedom fighter. He knew that people who want to keep their freedom in Christ have to fight for it. . . . It is not enough to share the gospel or even to preach it. The gospel has to be defended.”¹⁰⁰ Paul’s gospel clarity is so vibrant he does not waver in the slightest. Paul defends the gospel of Christ, preserving its purity and ensuring its availability.

The Jerusalem meeting is integral to Paul’s defense of the gospel he encountered on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) and preaches to the Gentiles. While at this meeting, he “set[s] before them . . . the gospel that I proclaim”¹⁰¹: “in order to make sure that I was not running or had not run in vain” (Gal 2:2). Paul’s gospel plea receives vindication: “Those who seemed to be influential [Jerusalem church leaders] . . . added nothing to me” (v. 6). These leaders understand that Paul is “entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised” (v. 7). Verse eight parallels this pattern of “entrusted” by stating that God “worked through” Peter and that he “worked also through me [Paul].” Therefore, when those

⁹⁹Paul does explain that submission may be appropriate “in the context of various relationships. In divinely ordained relationships, submission enables a unique Christian harmony, based on God’s good design.” Stinson, “Submission, Subordination,” 1537

¹⁰⁰Ryken, *Galatians*, 40.

¹⁰¹Witherington notes the present tense of the “gospel I proclaim” (not “proclaimed”) to emphasize that his message has not changed, a point much needed for this Galatian congregation (*Grace in Galatia*, 133).

“who seemed to be pillars perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me” (v. 9).

This right hand of fellowship is more than a kind gesture; it represents partnership in the gospel.¹⁰² Witherington summarizes this association: “Paul sees himself as having independent authorization, he simply seeks co-operation lest his work prove fruitless.”¹⁰³ F. F. Bruce highlights just how much is at stake for Paul in this partnership:

His commission was not derived from Jerusalem, but it could not be executed effectively except in fellowship with Jerusalem. A cleavage between his Gentile mission and the mother-church would be disastrous: Christ would be divided, and all the energy which Paul had devoted, and hoped to devote, to the evangelizing of the Gentile world would be frustrated.¹⁰⁴

Paul’s detractors did not disagree with his gospel in itself, but they find it deficient and in need of additions. The Jerusalem apostles affirm that the gospel is exactly as Paul preaches. Ryken instructs:

The gospel says that through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has done everything that needs to be done for our salvation. If we were to try to add anything to that free and gracious gospel, it would be like taking an Olympic gold medal and having it bronzed? The good news of the cross and the empty tomb cannot be improved; it can only be destroyed.¹⁰⁵

Paul protects the gospel in Galatians 1:11-24 by stating that he receives it from Christ alone; he defends in 2:1-10 by demonstrating that the Jerusalem council affirms

¹⁰²Ryken, *Galatians*, 46.

¹⁰³Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 147.

¹⁰⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 111.

¹⁰⁵Ryken, *Galatians*, 46.

his message. In chapter one Paul argues that there are no alternatives, in chapter two he contends that there are no additives.¹⁰⁶

Galatians 2:11-21

Paul continues his defense of the gospel in this passage by using it to confront Peter whose “conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel” (2:14). Paul asserts that the truth of the gospel, and the freedom found therein, allow him to correct Peter’s conduct when he goes astray and leads others to do the same. He shares this account, not to detail his relationship with Peter, nor to place himself in superiority over Peter, but to prove the authority of the gospel.¹⁰⁷

The setting is that Peter (Cephas) comes to Antioch and Paul opposes him because he was hypocritical: “he was eating with the Gentiles”¹⁰⁸ until other Jewish leaders arrived, then “he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (2:12). Peter’s actions are scandalous to those “of the circumcision party” who still practice Jewish law concerning Sabbath, circumcision, and purity laws.¹⁰⁹ Peter is guilty of living in the fear of man rather than the fear of God.

Peter, out of step with the gospel, stands “condemned” before God (καταγινώσκω, v.11). Peter understands the breach of law for a Jew to visit any foreigner, yet he testifies to Cornelius and other Gentiles in Caesarea about a vision:

¹⁰⁶Ryken, *Galatians*, 46.

¹⁰⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 139.

¹⁰⁸“Was eating” (συνήσθιεν) is in the imperfect to show this was his regular pattern of behavior. Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 140-41.

“God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean” (Acts 10:9-16, 28). During this visit, Peter preaches to them and they repent, receive the Spirit, and are baptized (10:34-48).

Peter’s hypocrisy is “play-acting”¹¹⁰ as he exhibits “pretense, duplicity, or insincerity.”¹¹¹ Peter’s charade has a negative result: “the rest of the Jews” and “even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy” (Gal 2:13). The force of Paul’s rebuke is with the truth of the good news: “I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel” (v. 14). There is reason to believe that Peter responds positively to the rebuke,¹¹² but the main point is to defend the gospel to these Galatians.¹¹³

Paul protects the gospel by stating that a Jewish man, a leader in this church, should exercise his gospel freedom by eating with these Gentiles. Paul’s summarizes, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (v. 14). The word “force” associates Peter with the “false brothers” in 2:3. Peter seeks to compel these Gentiles to become like Jews to belong to the people of God just as false believers wanted to force Titus to be circumcised.¹¹⁴ John Stott notes

¹¹⁰F. F. Bruce, *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 25.

¹¹¹Warren McWilliams, “Hypocrisy,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. C. Brand et al. (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 799.

¹¹²In 1 Corinthians Peter and Paul continue in gospel ministry (1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5). In 15:3-11, Peter, Paul, and James proclaim the same gospel. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 146.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 145.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 147.

that “the same Peter who had denied his Lord for fear of a maid-servant now denied Him again for fear of the circumcision party.”¹¹⁵

Paul walks in freedom and not in submission to the slavery of false brothers so that “the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you [Galatians]” (2:5); now, he defends the gospel against slavery to race or traditions. Boice summarizes, “The good news [is] that men and women do not become accepted with God because of anything they have done or can do but solely on the basis of God’s grace shown in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moreover, on the basis of this death all who believe become fully accepted by God and are accepted equally.”¹¹⁶

Paul defends the gospel by highlighting its freedom in contrast to the hypocrisy of Peter. This passage continues to press the independence of Paul’s message: “his gospel stands as an authority over these apostles when they depart from it. . . . Paul’s gospel is authoritative not only in Galatia, but everywhere—even in Jerusalem. . . . It is *the* gospel in all times and in all places.”¹¹⁷

Proclaiming the Gospel, Galatians 2:15-21

In this section Paul proclaims what the gospel is and is not: “a person is not justified by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” (v. 16). All that Paul writes from the beginning of the letter builds to this point. Witherington cites this passage is “the main thesis . . . the essential proposition to be promulgated in this work.”

¹¹⁵John Stott, quoted in Boice, *Galatians*, 446.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 447.

¹¹⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 135-36.

Concerning the Mosaic Law, he affirms,

If they [works of the Mosaic Law] are pursued by those who are Christians as the proper manner of Christian living, as if Christians were obliged to obey the Mosaic covenant's requirements, they amount to a fall from grace, a devaluation of what Christ accomplished on the cross. The origin, character and content of the Gospel determines the origin, character and behavior of the people of God, who are Jew and Gentile united in Christ and his finished work on the cross.¹¹⁸

Paul proclaims the gospel as justification in Christ alone and not according to any works of man (vv. 15-21). Schreiner boasts about this section:

Galatians 2:15-21 contains in short form the gospel that Paul proclaims. . . . Indeed, this paragraph functions as a transition in the letter, for Paul no longer defends his apostolic authority and begins to enunciate the gospel he preaches. . . .

We arrive at perhaps the most significant text in Galatians, in which Paul summarizes his gospel.¹¹⁹

In Galatians 2:15-16, Paul continues to rebuke Peter's hypocrisy of asking Gentiles to live like Jews (vv. 13-14).¹²⁰ Paul affirms that he and Peter are "Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners" (v. 15). Yet, he recalls the theology of the gospel as presented by Jesus to Peter and the disciples during his earthly ministry and to Paul in a vision while traveling to Damascus. Paul appeals to their common understanding of what the gospel *is*: a person is "justified . . . through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ" (v. 16). In verse 16 Paul brings to the forefront the issues of works of the law, justification, and the setting

¹¹⁸Wetherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 90.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 150-51.

¹²⁰The flow of the argument and the language lead to this conclusion. Schreiner confirms this as an address to Peter (*Galatians*, 150). Betz states that Paul is responding to Peter "formally, and the Galatians materially" (*Galatians*, 114).

apart of faith “as the indispensable channel of salvation.”¹²¹

In this same verse, Paul emphasizes exactly what the gospel *is not* with a triple-negation: “*not* justified by works of the law . . . *not* by works of the law, because by works of the law, *no one* will be justified” (v. 16, emphasis added). If anyone could gain godliness through the law it was Paul. He is a Jew by birth (v. 15) and a ranking Jew by works: “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Phil 3:4-6). Even so, Paul pleads his justification through Christ alone (v. 16).¹²²

The triple-negation in verse 16 corresponds to a three-fold use of the term “justified” (δικαιόω) also found in verse 16. “Justified” appears in the letter five more times (2:17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4) and represents God’s verdict of not guilty against any accusations on the day of judgment (Rom 2:13).¹²³ Justification by faith appears in contrast with the three uses of the phrase “works of the law” (ἔργων νόμου). Paul uses this idea eight times in his epistles (Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16 [3x]; 3:2, 5, 10).

¹²¹Boice, *Galatians*, 448.

¹²²Paul’s extended argument on justification by faith alone is in Rom 3.

¹²³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 1557. Schreiner contends that “God declares those who are sinners to be in the right before him if they trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation. This is extraordinary because such a verdict violates the normal and just procedure for a judge. Judges who declare the guilty to be righteous violate the standards of justice, Paul, of course, does not think God violates any standard of justice for Christ bears the curse that sinners deserved (3:10-13).” Part of Paul’s meaning is that humans are righteous by faith (Gal 2:16; 3:6, 11; 5:5) which is contrasted with righteousness achieved by works. Schreiner develops his argument with reference to Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 263-73.

These “works of law” could refer to legalism, the social boundary markers of the law, or the deeds commanded by the law. Schreiner evaluates all three and adopts the position that legalism (favor with God on the basis of achieving good works) is not in view. Schreiner instructs:

It is likely that the Judaizers were attempting to base their standing before God on their obedience to the law (5:4). Still, such a view must be distinguished from a *definition* of the phrase ‘works of law.’ The phrase ‘works of law’ does not denote legalism (the desire to gain righteousness on the basis of works performed) in and of itself. ‘Works of law’ refers to the deeds demanded by the law.¹²⁴

Understanding “works of the law” as a reference to obeying all the works of the Mosaic law also concurs with Paul’s injunction in 3:10 that all who depend on works are cursed; and 5:3, “I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.” Paul answers the only way that one is justified: “through faith in Jesus Christ” (v. 16).

Paul, dealing with circumcision issues in 2:1-10, and with food issues in 2:11-14, now teaches the proper understanding of the law in relation to the gospel. This lesson in law and gospel begins in this section (2:15-21), continues in Paul’s teachings in chapters 3-4, and overflows into his application of the gospel as the law of Christ in

¹²⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 158-59. John Calvin, *Galatians*, 67-68. Schreiner rejects the work of E. P. Sanders who argues for covenantal nomism: believers come to the covenant by God’s grace and then maintain their status by obedience. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). The New Perspective on Paul proposes that these “works of law” refer to all the Mosaic law, but the emphasis is on the identifiers of food, circumcision, and Sabbath. Therefore, the main issue is not legalism or keeping the law but ethnocentrism. Leaders of this view include James D. G. Dunn “The New Perspective on Paul” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65 (1983): 95-122. Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990). Another leading proponent of the New Perspective is N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

chapters 5-6.

In verse 17 Paul anticipates a question: does justification in Christ make Jesus a servant of sin? His reply is stern: “Certainly not!” (v. 17). Paul answers this assertion by supplying a negative example, rebuilding what is torn down as that which makes one a transgressor (v. 18). He references the OT law that he destroyed with the preaching of the gospel. To rebuild the wall is to rebuild the law. Peter preaches the gospel on the one hand, but on the other he insists on the works of the law as a test of Christian fellowship. Paul understands the Galatians’ temptation to do the same.¹²⁵ Rather than Christ promoting sin (v. 17), those who seek to live according to the law who are the real transgressors.¹²⁶ Paul commends dying to the law “so that I might live to God” (v. 19).¹²⁷ To die to the law is to leave behind the old system of Mosaic laws and to embrace the cross of Christ.

This leads Paul to exult: “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. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Gal 2:20-21).

If Galatians is the Declaration of Independence of Christian freedom, then these two verses are Paul’s bold signature. Galatians 5:1, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery,” stands as the

¹²⁵Ryken, *Galatians*, 71.

¹²⁶Schreiner, *Galatians*, 169.

¹²⁷Cf. Romans 6:11, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

ultimate application upon which the Christian stands in freedom rather than bows in servitude. Even so, 2:20-21 is the backbone of this posture.

Every verse that Paul writes in chapters 1-2 leads up to (2:15-21). This positional statement (2:20-21) is what Paul defends in chapters 3-4, and is the substance of his gospel application in chapters 5-6. These verses (2:20-21) are the Christian's identity, chapters 3-4 are the Christian's testimony, and chapters 5-6 are the Christian's ability. Standing firm (5:1), walking in the Spirit (vv. 16, 25), bearing each other's burdens (6:2), and doing good to everyone (6:10) are the hands and feet that overflow from a heartbeat of "Christ who lives in me" (2:20). Boice exposit, "The verses that conclude this chapter contain capsule statements of some of the most significant truths of Christianity."¹²⁸

Defending the Gospel, Galatians 3:1-6

In chapters 1-2 Paul appeals to his spiritual autobiography to define one true gospel. In chapters 3-4 he explains the theology of this one true gospel.¹²⁹ Specifically in 3:1-6, Paul defends the gospel by appealing to their account of Jesus Christ and his crucifixion (v. 1). He defines that the Spirit comes by hearing with faith and that growth continues by the Spirit (vv. 2-3). He affirms that the Spirit works not through the law but "by hearing with faith" and he references Abraham's belief as an example (vv. 4-6). Paul continues to define what the gospel is not: "works of the law" (vv. 2, 5) or "being perfected by the flesh" (v. 3). Paul defends the gospel by clarifying that a righteous

¹²⁸Boice, *Galatians*, 448.

¹²⁹The summary of Galatians chapters 1-2 and 3-4 is supplied by Ryken (*Galatians*, 81).

standing with God comes from knowing Jesus Christ crucified, and “by hearing with faith” (vv. 2, 5). They do not need to be circumcised or observe the law to be God’s people. They are his people by receiving the Holy Spirit as “the reception of the Spirit is *the mark* that signifies that one belongs to the people of God.”¹³⁰

Paul expands his rebuke of Peter to the “churches in Galatia” (Gal 1:2). Paul uses four rhetorical questions to defend the gospel:

1. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? (3:2)
2. Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (v. 3)
3. Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? (v. 4)
4. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness? (v. 5)

The aim of these questions is: “Does the Christian obtain the Holy Spirit by working the law or by hearing with faith?”¹³¹ This is the first time in the letter that Paul mentions the Holy Spirit (3:2). Paul grants to them that they have the Spirit (v. 2), have “begun by the Spirit” (v. 3), suffer in the Spirit (v. 4), and God supplies the Spirit to them and works miracles among them (v. 5). Paul teaches they begin their life in Christ in the Spirit and continue in him until the end.

He emphatically begins this exhortation, “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (3:1). “Foolish” (ἀνόητος) implies the actions of one who can think but

¹³⁰Schreiner, *Galatians*, 178.

¹³¹Ryken, *Galatians*, 86.

does not use his powers of awareness.¹³² Paul uses the language of his day to express that “it is as if a magician has cast a spell over them, preventing them from seeing what is blatantly obvious, i.e., the significance of the cross of Jesus Christ.”¹³³ He reminds them of their sight, “It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (v. 1). “Publicly portrayed” (προγράφω) can be translated “publicly proclaimed” and “means that the significance of Christ’s cross was vividly communicated when the gospel was announced.”¹³⁴

“Crucified” (σταυρόω) means that Christ is the one proclaimed; Christ is once again the focus of Paul’s letter.¹³⁵ Paul states that he always preaches “the word of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18), that he preaches “Christ crucified” (v. 23), and that he resolves “to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). “Paul’s gospel was the gospel of the crucified Christ. It centered on the death of God’s own Son on the cross, and on the implications of that death for the salvation of the world.”¹³⁶ “Crucified” is in the perfect tense, noting a past event that continues significance into the present. Since these Galatians believe that enchantment comes through an evil eye to be “bewitched,” Paul knows they need to refocus on the gospel.¹³⁷

¹³²Boice, *Galatians*, 453. Paul also uses this word in Rom 1:14; 1 Tim 6:9; Titus 3:3. Luke uses the same word on one occasion, 24:25.

¹³³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 181.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 182.

¹³⁵*Ibid.* Cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 100-01.

¹³⁶Ryken, *Galatians*, 84.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 83.

Later in this passage he reminds them of their ears: their faith began “by hearing with faith” (vv. 2, 5). Paul’s parallel passage to 3:2 is Romans 10:17, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” According to Schreiner, “In both cases the emphasis is on faith or trusting God, and what was heard was the gospel. . . . They received the Spirit when they heard the gospel preached and placed their faith in the gospel. Believing—not doing—was the pathway to receiving the Spirit.”¹³⁸ John Calvin argues that faith is more than mere intellectual understanding but an actual embrace of Christ and giving oneself to him fully.¹³⁹

Paul warns that they cannot be “perfected by the flesh,” but by the same way they began in Christ, “by hearing with faith” (v. 2, 5). The “flesh” (σάρξ) in this context must mean the rite of circumcision and the exercise of effort in keeping the law. Paul seeks to reveal the absurdity of coming to Jesus for salvation and then letting Moses finish what Christ began¹⁴⁰ or to depend on self-effort in keeping the law to help the Spirit. As Paul instructs the Philippians: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (1:6). F. F. Bruce captures the spirit of the text: “The gospel of Christ crucified, as Paul saw it, so completely ruled out the law as a means of getting right with God that it was scarcely credible that people who had once embraced such a gospel should ever turn to the law for

¹³⁸Schreiner, *Galatians*, 183.

¹³⁹Calvin, *Galatians*, 84-85.

¹⁴⁰Ryken, *Galatians*, 89.

salvation.”¹⁴¹

The rhetorical questions allow Paul to defend the gospel with a “*not this but this*” strategy. He teaches that they receive the Spirit *not* “by works of the law” *but* “by hearing with faith” (v. 2); that believers continue *not* “by the flesh” *but* “by the Spirit” (v. 3); and that the Spirit continues to act *not* “by works of the law” *but* “by hearing with faith” (v. 5).

Paul breaks with this pattern to teach that belief in God accords right standing before Him: “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness” (v. 6). Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, even before the law was given to Moses (Gal 3:17), belief is the basis for righteousness. Paul repeats his citation of Genesis 15:6 and reminds the Romans “that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness . . . before he was circumcised” (Rom 4:3, 9-10).

Witherington argues that Paul views the Scriptures not as many stories of redemption but one story of faith from Abraham to Christ and continuing. Paul views a right relationship with God as one reckoned as righteousness based not upon legal courts “but of the story of God’s gracious choice of Abraham and Abraham’s grateful trusting response.” Witherington also argues that a correct reading of the Pauline corpus (especially large portions of Galatians, Romans, and the Corinthian letters) is interpreting Abraham’s promise and people as they relate to the story of Moses all “in the light of Christ.” In this view, Witherington argues, Paul sees only one true Israel, not simply an “Israel according to the flesh” (Rom 9:6-7); but “there is also only one group to whom

¹⁴¹F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 148.

the scriptures always and everywhere apply. Jew and Gentile united in Christ are seen by Paul as the continuation of the true Israel that began with Abraham, indeed, as the fulfillment of the double promise to Abraham of seed and of being a blessing to all nations.”¹⁴²

The temptation for the Galatians to add to the gospel (circumcision, keeping the Mosaic law) is so strong that Paul calls them “foolish” and “bewitched” (Gal 3:1). He defends the gospel by reminding them of Christ crucified (3:1; cf. 1:1, 4); by continuing the theme that salvation is in no way attributed to keeping “works of the law” (3:2, 5; cf. 2:16); and with belief in God for righteousness (3:6; 2:21) and for justification (2:16-17).

Paul defends the gospel against those false brothers who slipped in seeking to add to Paul’s gospel. To them the idea of justification is “entry-level gospel.”¹⁴³ Ryken offers a fitting conclusion:

The gospel is for Christians just as much as it is for non-Christians. We never advance beyond the good news of the cross and the empty tomb. There is nothing else to add to faith as the ground of our salvation because faith unites us to Jesus Christ. Works have no part in establishing the basis for our salvation, but are added to faith in much the same way that a building rests upon and rises from its foundation. Therefore, the Christian always looks back to the gospel and never to the law as the basis for his righteousness before God.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 38.

¹⁴³George, *Galatians*, 213.

¹⁴⁴Ryken, *Galatians*, 90-91.

Proclaiming the Gospel, Galatians 3:7-4:7

Paul proclaims the gospel in these passages by giving examples of what the gospel is and what the gospel is not. As a guide for this section, Boice offers a simplified outline for how Paul presents “The true gospel” against “The legalizers’ ‘gospel.’”¹⁴⁵ He offers a “Test Question” to the Galatians: are they going to believe what they heard by faith like Abraham (3:6-9), as the covenant prescribes (vv. 15-18), and as true heirs understand (vv. 23-29)? Or, will they seek a relationship with God by “observing the law” which is under a curse (3:10-14), reveals transgressions (vv. 19-22), and leads to bondage (4:1-7)? The body of this section uses Boice’s chapter and verse delineations as a guide to trace Paul’s argument as he proclaims the gospel to the Galatians in examples both positive and negative.

Phillips summarizes the entirety of chapters 3-4 by stating, “Paul expounds his gospel in the light of the Old Testament and ruthlessly exposes those who would seduce the believer into bondage.”¹⁴⁶ Witherington proposes a perspective from which to read Paul’s arguments in chapters 3-4. He believes Paul writes from the Hebrew scriptures to unfold the story of Jesus and his followers. He finds that Abraham’s story is incomplete, for he did not live to see the promises made to him by God fulfilled; rather:

For Paul, the completion and fulfillment of the story comes in the story of Christ and those who are in Christ. This all important connecting of the Abrahamic and new covenants, this reading of the Abrahamic story as revealing that God had

¹⁴⁵Boice, *Galatians*, 455.

¹⁴⁶J. B. Phillips, *Exploring the New Testament Book by Book: An Expository Survey, The John Phillips Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 128-29.

always had a gospel plan—indeed, the gospel had been proclaimed to Abraham first—required a very different sort of reading of the story of Moses.¹⁴⁷

Galatians 3:6-9

Paul proclaims the gospel in these verses by reminding the Galatians that Abraham’s righteousness is by faith. This righteousness by faith pattern continues for his true sons. The “works of law” that Paul references earlier recall the lawgiver, Moses (Gal 3:2, 5; Exo 20, 24). Paul predates Moses by introducing Abraham to remind these tempted believers that God in his foresight will “justify the Gentiles by faith” (Gal 3:8). This giving of the law stands 430 years before the Israelites receive the law (v. 17).

Knowing that he will justify these Gentiles, God “preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’” (v. 8, quoting Gen 12:3). This proclamation of the gospel in advance (προεὐαγγελίζωμαι) is used only here in the NT.¹⁴⁸ According to Witherington, “Abraham is the prototype of Christian faith because he heard the first preaching of the Good News and responded appropriately.”¹⁴⁹ Imbedded in this pre-gospel is the blessing to all “nations” (ἔθνος), which is used in the NT interchangeably with “people” and “Gentiles.”¹⁵⁰ Paul concludes that “those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (v. 9). Paul reminds them that the gospel is the promise made by God himself to the father of the faith and all nations are blessed by faith in Christ and not by works of law.

¹⁴⁷Witherington, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World*, 50.

¹⁴⁸*Lexham Analytical Lexicon*, s.v. “gospel beforehand.”

¹⁴⁹Witherington, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World*, 40-41.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*

Paul offers even more details about the father of the faith in Romans chapters 4 and 9. Romans 4 mirrors Galatians 4:6 in the claim that Abraham believed and his faith was counted as righteousness (vv. 3, 9, 22). Paul defines what this righteousness is and is not: “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (4:4-5). Romans notes that Abraham is declared righteous before circumcision: “The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (Rom 4:11-12).

Abraham’s belief is counted to him as righteousness (Gal 3:6; Rom 4:3, 9, 22). While Paul uses the faith of Abraham as an example to these Galatians, the availability of this same faith is clear: “But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:23-25). Witherington notes, “Abraham, despite the fact that his body was as good as dead (4:19), hoped against hope and believed God’s promise that he would produce a miracle child out of a situation where no new life seemed possible, so also Christians have believed in new life out of death in the case of Jesus, and it was reckoned to believers as righteousness.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹Witherington, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World*, 44.

Galatians 3:10-14

Paul proclaims what the gospel is not in this passage. The gospel is not relying on “works of the law” which are “under a curse” (v. 10). Paul applies the curse of Deuteronomy 27:26, given to their forefathers, and applies it to these Galatians: they must “abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them” or they will be cursed (Gal 3:10; Deut 27:16).

In verse 11 Paul assures that “no one is justified before God by the law”; rather, “The righteous shall live by faith” (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Heb 10:38). The escape from this curse comes from one source: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’” (Gal 3:13; Deut 21:23). J. Vernon McGee observes, “This is a very strange law since the method of capital punishment under the law was by stoning. But if the crime was aggravated and atrocious, the body of the criminal was taken after death and hung up to display the seriousness of the crime.”¹⁵² Paul then proclaims what is really good news: The blessing of Abraham, Christ Jesus, comes to the Gentiles and to the Jews: “So that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14).

Galatians 3:15-18

Paul argues in these verses that the gospel is like a contract between men, but even greater. The gospel rests upon a covenant from God to man. Paul applies a legal example while using a lesser-than versus greater-than device: If a man-made contract may not be annulled or added to once ratified, how much more so if the covenant is made

¹⁵²J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 110.

by God and guaranteed by Christ (vv. 15-17). Paul supplies “a human example” of a “man-made covenant” (v. 15). What Paul clarifies is the promise of the contract made with Abraham: the covenant God makes with Abraham (Gen 12:3) is made with his “offspring” (singular) and not to his “‘offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ” (Gal 3:16).¹⁵³

Paul revisits the legal theme to say that God’s covenant contains the idea of a will by inserting the idea of an “inheritance” (κληρονομία): possessing a “transcendent salvation for God’s children.”¹⁵⁴ The emphasis for Paul is not what the inheritance is, but how this gift comes, “God gave it to Abraham by a promise” (v. 18). In Romans 4 Paul connects the offspring and the inheritance in contrast with works of the law: “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void” (vv. 13-14).

Paul revisits the idea of heir/inheritance in 4:1-7. Before he develops the idea of the heir who is an adopted child in chapter 4, Paul wrestles with the relationship of the law and the gospel.

¹⁵³Witherington underscores the background of the word “offspring” as found in Gen 12:3 and 17:6-7: “I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” In this background he finds that both Jew and Gentile Christians are in Christ. “If he is the seed of Abraham, so are they by way of Christ, and therefore ‘seed’ [offspring, ESV] still has a collective sense in Gal. 3:16, though in an indirect manner” (*Paul’s Narrative Thought World*, 46-47).

¹⁵⁴Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “inheritance.”

Galatians 3:19-22

Paul anticipates the very question the Galatians may pose in response to his teaching about father Abraham (3:6-18): “Why then the law?” (v. 19). Paul proclaims the gospel in this passage by stating that the law “was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made” (v. 19). Paul teaches that the law and the promises are not contrary; rather, “the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (vv. 21-22).

Galatians 3:21-22 summarizes the difference between the two covenants. God establishes an original covenant with Abram in Genesis 12 with a basis of faith in God’s promise of offspring. The next covenant with Moses “was added because of transgressions” (v. 19) but only until the coming of the promise. Paul’s conclusion is that the covenant with Moses does not annul the one with Abraham (v. 17) nor is the law in opposition to the promise (v. 21); “it is simply that the two were given for different purposes and function on different bases.”¹⁵⁵ Paul states that the law reveals transgressions, ensures imprisonment, and develops a yearning for a Messiah. Witherington argues that in light of the covenant with Abraham and the new covenant, the Mosaic one “must be seen as a parenthesis, an interim, and thus a temporary arrangement between the promises given to and in Abraham and the promises fulfilled to and in Christ. This by no means suggests that the Law is a bad thing, only a temporary

¹⁵⁵Witherington, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World*, 48.

one, given as a guardian to keep God's Jewish people in line until the messiah should come."¹⁵⁶

Romans 4 informs, "For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all" (vv. 15-16).

Galatians 3:23-29

Paul proclaims the good news in this passage by expanding the idea from verse 22 of the law imprisoning all things under sin: "Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed" (v. 23). He defines the law as a guardian that stays until Christ comes "in order that we might be justified by faith" (v. 24). He teaches the Galatians that in the NT era, "We are no longer under a guardian" (v. 25). Schreiner traces several ways that the "guardian" (παιδαγωγός) functioned positively and negatively in the Roman world. He then teaches that specific to the Galatian letter, "the precise focus is neither negative or positive. What comes to the forefront is the temporary role of the law. It *functioned* as a kind of babysitter until the fullness of time came."¹⁵⁷ The guardian is dismissed when faith comes. Paul returns to his theme of faith in Christ as the key to becoming "sons of God" (v. 26).

¹⁵⁶Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought World*, 47-48.

¹⁵⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 249.

Paul applies the lessons on law and gospel to these Galatians: if they are baptized in Christ, they “have put on Christ” (v. 27). Then he claims, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (v. 28). Paul, by dismissing the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, also discharges the demands of the false teachers: the need for circumcision and keeping of the law.

In writing to the Ephesians, Paul summarizes that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ, no longer strangers or aliens, but those who share in the great covenant promise:

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. (Eph 2:11-17)

Paul’s concern in 3:28 is the gospel. This passage is about soteriology not ecclesiology. Salvation is available through the promise of Christ for all nations regardless of whether they are Jew or Greek. The gospel has no concern for their earthly status as either slave or free or regard for their gender as either male or female.¹⁵⁸

Certainly the gospel recognizes ethnicities because of John’s vision that “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages . . . crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation

¹⁵⁸Schreiner notes that “Jews are not superior to Gentiles, those who are free are not more important than slaves, and men are not worth more than women. All those

belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:9). Paul understands that earthly status matters as he instructs slaves to submit to their masters (Eph 6:5-9), and sends an entire letter to a slave owner on how to treat his slave and brother in the Lord (Philemon). Paul knows that God created them male and female and that women and men have equality in their relationship to the Lord while maintaining different roles (Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-19; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Tim 2:8-12).

While certain that God knows their nationality, rank, and gender, Paul insists that in terms of receiving the promise, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women can become “one in Christ Jesus . . . Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (3:28-29).¹⁵⁹ Phillips summarizes Galatians 3:6-29: “The purpose of the law (which was added to a redeemed people long after the principle of salvation by faith had been firmly established) was to convict, not to convert. Its twofold function was (a) to probe the soul for sin (vv. 19-22), and (b) to prepare the soul for Christ (3:22-29).”¹⁶⁰ Paul continues to develop the theme of heirs and slaves in his next segment, 4:1-7.

In Romans, Paul states that the law is holy, righteous, good, and spiritual (7:12, 14). Second Corinthians 3-4 enlightens the message of Abraham’s gospel and Moses’

who are united to Christ are equal as members of Abraham’s family. . . . Equality as members of Abraham’s family does not rule out all social distinctions” (*Galatians*, 258).

¹⁵⁹Christians for Biblical Equality uses Gal 3:28 to assert equality for women’s roles in the church and in the home. Christians for Biblical Equality "Men, Women and Biblical Equality" Ltd. [on-line]; accessed 1 August 2013; available from www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/men-women-and-biblical-equality, Internet. For a full treatment on Gal 3:28 maintaining equality in salvation yet distinction in roles, see, Richard W. Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999).

¹⁶⁰Phillips, *Exploring the New Testament*, 130.

law. Paul defends the glory of the law and the splendor of Moses receiving them from God. Even so, when Paul compares the Mosaic covenant with the new covenant, he states that the letter kills and the Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:6). Witherington summarizes: “The fact is, however, that its glory or splendor has been eclipsed by the greater splendor of the new covenant, and so not only the glory on Moses’ face but the Mosaic covenant itself is being annulled (2 Cor. 3:11).”¹⁶¹

Paul then argues that Christ takes away the veil of hard unbelief because Moses’ covenant is temporary, eclipsed by a greater light: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). In this letter Paul contends that the law is “brought to an end” completely (καταργέω, 2 Cor 3:7, 11, 13, 14), or abolished.¹⁶²

Witherington notes,

The argument is not about human attitudes toward the Law, nor about approaches to the Law; nor even is Paul suggesting that the Law was defective in character—only inadequate to accomplish what fallen humans needed done to them. . . . It is this same salvation-historical perspective that undergirds the entire discussion in Gal. 3-4 as well and leads Paul to see the Mosaic covenant and its Law as having a temporal and temporary purpose in God’s larger salvation plan. What Gal. 3:19, 23, 24 indicates is that the age of Mosaic law was a parenthesis between promise and fulfillment, and that believers are now beyond that era in the salvation history timetable.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World: A Comparative Study in New Testament Eschatology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 109

¹⁶²Witherington, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World*, 53.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 54-55.

Galatians 4:1-7

Paul proclaims the good news in this passage by reminding the Galatians that the gospel is their emancipation proclamation. No longer under the law, they are not slaves but sons who have an inheritance. In verses 1-3 Paul states that a free child and a slave child are alike, the difference is that the heir is “owner of everything” (v. 1). How odd this comparison would be to the Galatian ears, especially to the slaves. Paul then explains his equation: both must serve under the watchful eye of another, “he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father” (v. 2). So those under the law are under its guardianship until they come to a full understanding of Christ as their Messiah. When faith comes they are no longer under a guardian (3:25).

In verses 4-6 Paul details the time “set by the father” as referenced in verse 2. The sending of Jesus happens “when the fullness of time had come” (v. 4). He teaches that the Messiah is “born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (vv. 4-5). Paul highlights the humanity of Christ, “born of woman,” and the fact that Christ is not above the law or indifferent to the law, but is “born under the law,” not to usurp it but as the One who fulfills it.¹⁶⁴

Christ is born “under the law” even as he comes to “redeem those . . . under the law” (vv. 4-5). Later Paul will instruct them that “the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (4:14) and that they need to “fulfill the law of Christ” by bearing each other’s burdens (6:2). The parallel passage for this text (4:1-7) is Romans 8. In this writing Paul instructs that keeping the Mosaic law is not the

¹⁶⁴Jesus states, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17).

requirement, but the focus is on the law of the Spirit:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:1-4)

The result of God sending his son to redeem those under the law is “so that we might receive adoption as sons” (v. 5). As sons, believers do not cry out to a master, but cry out “Abba, Father!” (v. 7). Paul assures that as sons, the redeemed ones are “an heir through God.” Paul supplies even more details about this life in the Spirit in his writing to the Romans:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom 8:15-17)

Willmington provides a fitting conclusion about the differences between a son and a servant: a servant keeps his old nature, a son enjoys that of his father; a servant has a master, a son has a father; a servant obeys out of fear, a son out of love; a servant has no inheritance, a son inherits all things.¹⁶⁵

In Galatians 3:7-4:7 Paul proclaims the gospel by providing examples of what the gospel is: becoming the sons of Abraham through the offspring of Abraham, Jesus Christ. These passages also define what the gospel is not: keeping the works of the law. The gospel is not serving in slavery under the guardian of the law. The gospel is redemption from the law, adoption by the father, and crying “Abba! Father!” (4:1-6).

¹⁶⁵Willmington, *Guide to Bible Knowledge*, 258.

Defending the Gospel, Galatians 4:8-20

Paul defends the gospel in this passage by entreating these spellbound Galatians to “become as I am” (v. 12). He means that they need to walk in the freedom of Christ rather than voluntarily enslave themselves to the law. He began chapter 4 with their birthright (4:1-7); now he defines their betrayal.¹⁶⁶ They are “in Christ Jesus . . . sons of God, through faith” (3:26); they “are Christ’s . . . heirs according to the promise” (v. 29); and “no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (4:7). This is why Paul is “perplexed” about them (v. 20) and is “again in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (v. 19).

Galatians 4:8-11

Paul begins this passage by shifting from the past, “formerly,” to the present (v. 8). He moves from the gospel given to Abraham in the vast metanarrative of the OT to the same gospel of their recent history. He states what he knows to be true of the Galatians: “When you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods” (v. 8). With the echoes of his contrast between one who is a slave under the law and one who is a freeborn heir (3:22-4:7) still ringing in their ears, Paul asks in exasperation just how they can “turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?” (v. 9). He accuses them: “You observe days and months and seasons and years!” (v. 10). Paul fears, “I may have labored over you in vain” (v. 11).

¹⁶⁶Phillips, *Exploring the New Testament*, 130.

Paul's perplexity is summarized in three words: "But now . . . how?" (v. 9). He confirms their understanding of and belief in the gospel: they "have come to know God or rather to be known by God." "Formerly" he states they did not know Jesus (v. 8), "But now" that they do know him, he marvels at "how" they want to "turn back again" (v. 9). In contrast with its positive usage in Peter's sermon, "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19), Paul states these Galatians "turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world" (Gal 4:9). To this emptiness they wish to enslave themselves "once more" (v. 9).

Paul's exasperation continues as he understands that they betray the gospel they profess by re-possessing the calendar of the Mosaic law. Willmington defines these "days" as Jewish holy days such as Sabbaths and feast days; "months" as celebrations of new moons of the Jewish lunar calendar; "times" as week-long festivals; and "years" as sabbatical and Jubilee.¹⁶⁷ Paul understands that the gospel frees them from these rigid observances. Paul instructs that believers can honor a day in reverence to the Lord (Rom 14:6), and not be judged about food or drink or a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath (Col 2:16). Ryken discerns, "there is an eternity of difference between the optional observance of such a day and making it mandatory as a means of justification."¹⁶⁸

He fears he "labored" over them "in vain" (v. 11). In presenting his gospel to the pillars of the church in Jerusalem, Paul made sure he "was not running or had not run in vain" (Gal 2.2). Now he fears that his gospel proclamation to these Galatians is

¹⁶⁷Willmington, *Willmington's Complete Guide to Bible Knowledge*, 259.

¹⁶⁸Ryken, *Galatians*, 172.

without fruitfulness. Therefore, he passionately defends this gospel against their natural bent to slavery.

Galatians 4:12-20

Paul defends the gospel in these next two sections, Galatians 4:12-20 and 21-31, from the perspective of his personal relationship with these believers. He references his own conversion by the gospel (1:11-2:21), appeals to their experience of the Holy Spirit (3:1-5), argues from biblical history and theology (3:6-14), and uses examples from daily living (3:15-4:7).¹⁶⁹ In the middle of chapter four, he begins a personal appeal that defends the true gospel.

Paul entreats them, “Become as I am for I also have become as you are” (4:12). This cry to “become as I am” is, according to Schreiner, “thrust at the beginning for emphasis. Indeed, the first imperative calling the Galatians to action is found here.”¹⁷⁰ Literally this imperative reads, “Keep on becoming as I am.”¹⁷¹ He wants them to become like him “in full faith in Christ” and “in Christian liberty.”¹⁷² He argues that he no longer lives under the law of Moses and neither should they.¹⁷³ “For I also have become as you are” (4:12) refers to Paul being like the Gentiles, free from the law.¹⁷⁴ He

¹⁶⁹Ryken, *Galatians*, 169.

¹⁷⁰Schreiner, *Galatians*, 285.

¹⁷¹Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, 304.

¹⁷²Boice, *Galatians*, 478.

¹⁷³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 282.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 285.

also identifies with them “in order to preach the gospel to them.” This is similar to Paul’s evangelism principle to “become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22).¹⁷⁵

Paul contrasts Hagar and Sarah as examples of the slave and the free (vv. 21-31). Before he does this review, Paul compares (1) how these Galatians are acting now with their initial acceptance of him and (2) how he treats them in comparison to the false teachers.

He came to them with a “bodily ailment” that was a trial to them (vv. 13-14). Despite his needs, Paul reports their loving behavior: “You did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus” (v. 14). In his illness he shares the gospel of Jesus, “who called you in the grace of Christ” (1:6). Paul does not separate his calling as an apostle from suffering, but as “a *corollary* of Christ’s sufferings.”¹⁷⁶ They receive Paul and the good news of Jesus as a “blessing” and feel so deeply for him they “would have gouged out [their] eyes and given them” to Paul (4:15).

His fear that he may have labored over them in vain (v. 11) is now met with wondering if he is their enemy for telling them the truth (v. 16). Ryken notes that Paul writes as “a wounded lover,” lamenting about verse 16, “His gospel has not changed. He is still proclaiming the good news about the cross and the empty tomb. He is still preaching justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Yet the Galatians were starting to reject the one true gospel. Unwilling to hear the truth, they

¹⁷⁵Boice, *Galatians*, 478.

¹⁷⁶Additionally, “Paul regularly teaches that his sufferings were the means God used for the dissemination of the gospel (e.g., 2 Cor 1:3-11; 2:14-15; 4:7-12; 11:23-29; 13:4; Col 1:24-29).” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 286, emphasis original.

were treating Paul like an enemy.”¹⁷⁷ Their turning away comes from the false brothers who question Paul’s gospel, Pharisees and Judaizers who view him as an enemy.¹⁷⁸ Verse 16 finds opposition to Paul as equal to rejecting the gospel just as their receiving of Paul corresponds to receiving the good news.¹⁷⁹

Paul exposes the false teachers who act as if they exalt the Galatian believers when they really want to “shut [them] out” and lead them to “make much” of these teachers (v. 17). To “shut you out” is literally to “lock you up” (ἐκκλείω). While the function of the law imprisons (3:23), the purpose is to lead men to salvation. Conversely, the false teachers imprison these believers so they will be separate from Jesus and then serve these teachers.¹⁸⁰ Rather, Paul leads these Galatians to gospel freedom so that they may make much of “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (1:3-5). Ryken observes the differences in discipleship offered to these Galatians: the false teachers who want their own disciples “as false teachers always do. So they tried to win the Galatians away from Paul by flattering them and courting their affections.” Conversely, Paul had no interest in having his own disciples who only “follow Paul” (1 Cor 1:12), but “the only disciples he had any interest in were the kind

¹⁷⁷Ryken, *Galatians*, 175.

¹⁷⁸Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, 305.

¹⁷⁹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 288.

¹⁸⁰Boice, *Galatians*, 480.

that follow Christ.”¹⁸¹ These Galatians must become zealous for the true gospel or follow the false gospel of the Judaizers.¹⁸²

Paul is different than these Judaizers who wish to enslave them because he treats them as family. They are his “little children” over whom he is “again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in [them]” (4:19). Paul functions here, according to Schreiner, “as a mother who gave birth to the Galatians, but now he fears their premature death by miscarriage and longs for Christ to be formed in them.”¹⁸³

Paul also defends the gospel in this passage by continuing to use family language. They are his brothers,¹⁸⁴ but he is also like a father addressing his “little children” and like a mother in the pains of labor (v. 19). Like a father who would rather celebrate his children than chide them, Paul wishes he could “change [his] tone” for he is “perplexed” about them (v. 20). As Robertson explains, “Paul could put his heart into his voice. The pen stands between them. He knew the power of his voice on their hearts.”¹⁸⁵ Boice summarizes, “This does not mean that he would change his teaching or be less exacting in expecting them to conform to it, but his approach would be different. He could ask questions. He could find out why they were in the process of turning from freedom to bondage . . . as he nevertheless continued to call them to the gospel.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹Ryken, *Galatians*, 176.

¹⁸²Schreiner, *Galatians*, 288.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁸⁴Galatians 1:11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18.

¹⁸⁵Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, 306.

¹⁸⁶Boice, *Galatians*, 480.

In Galatians 4:8-20 Paul defends the gospel against their bent toward slavery under the law. He preserves the good news by reminding them of their initial acceptance of him and his message of good news. He guards the gospel by exposing the true motives of the false teachers and by pleading with them as a parent. Paul, in the last portion of chapter four, returns to the OT to set before them the example of Hagar and Sarah. He continues to use familial language to remind them who their true mother is.

Paul yearns for the Galatians to be like Christ and “he knew that one way for them to learn how to do this was to become like him. He said the same thing to the Corinthians: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul wanted the Galatians to enjoy the kind of freedom he had as a son of God, freedom from the legalism of godless religion.”¹⁸⁷

Proclaiming the Gospel, Galatians 4:21-31

In Galatians 1-4 Paul alternates between proclaiming and defending the gospel. In this final portion, Paul proclaims the gospel by holding up Isaac and reminding these Jews of the promise given to Father Abraham that an offspring will come through him as Savior. Paul proclaims what the gospel is not: a life of slavery to the flesh without hope of inheritance. Paul also proclaims what the gospel is: a life of freedom in the Spirit with an inheritance. He reminds these “brothers” that they “are not children of the slave but of the free woman” (v. 31). Paul’s argument begins with the “historical situation” (vv. 22-23), moves to the “allegorical interpretation” (vv. 24-27), and ends with the

¹⁸⁷Ryken, *Galatians*, 177.

“practical application” (vv. 28-31).¹⁸⁸

Tracing the temptation of these Galatian believers to its logical conclusion, Paul presses them to consider: if they “turn back again” to the law (4:9), if they follow their “desire to be under the law,” are they really “listen[ing] to the law?” (v. 21). Ryken concludes that Paul is using a legal argument by applying the very same law to make his point: “The law itself tells you not to be under the law!”¹⁸⁹ Schreiner finds the verse “rich with irony.”¹⁹⁰

Paul returns to the example of Abraham by contrasting two sons from two women¹⁹¹ who represent two covenants that correspond with two Jerusalems (vv. 22-27). Paul instructs them that Abraham is their father if they are “those of faith who are the sons of Abraham” (3:8); that God is their father because they are “no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (vv. 25-26); and that God is their father “because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (4:6).

Paul is not the only NT writer who finds that the Jewish people suffer from identity confusion. John the Baptist understood that Jews found misplaced faith in their physical descent from Abraham: “And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children

¹⁸⁸Ryken, *Galatians*, 182.

¹⁸⁹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 181.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.* Schreiner notes that the names of the women are not the focus but their social status is mainly in view. Paul assigns spiritual significance to slave and free.

for Abraham” (John 3:9). Jesus accuses the Pharisees, who trace their lineage to Abraham, of having no spiritual inheritance with him (John 8).¹⁹² Paul presses these ideas by reminding the Galatians that Abraham had two sons by two mothers. Paul proclaims the gospel by teaching them the importance of knowing who their mother is.

Paul reminds them that Hagar had a son “according to the flesh” (v. 23) who, “allegorically,”¹⁹³ represents Mount Sinai bearing children for slavery and “present Jerusalem” who is “in slavery with her children” (vv. 24-25). Schreiner discerns that the connection of Hagar to Sinai and present Jerusalem to slavery as a ploy “to startle the readers so that they will see the truth of his gospel from a different angle.”¹⁹⁴ Paul is referencing both geography and spirituality. Certainly, faithful believers reside in the city of Jerusalem, for he cites that the other apostles, the “pillars,” affirm his gospel (2:1-10). Paul also interprets the “present Jerusalem” negatively (4:25). Schreiner finds Paul referring to the Jews and Judaism as the “institution of Jewish religion.” Paul insults these false teachers by saying that even though they are Jews by flesh, “they [are] really Ishmaelites, spiritually speaking!”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹²Boice, *Galatians*, 483.

¹⁹³Robertson notes that “allegorically” is a compound word meaning to speak something else than what the language means: “Paul does not deny the actual historical narrative, but he simply uses it in an allegorical sense to illustrate his point for the benefit of his readers who are tempted to go under the burden of the law.” Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, 306. Schreiner understands the passage as both allegory and typology: Paul argues typologically with Isaac and Ishmael vv. 21-23; 28-30 and accords with his salvation-historical view of all Scripture. Allegory is found in the identification of Hagar with Sinai. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 300.

¹⁹⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 300.

¹⁹⁵Ryken, *Galatians*, 185.

Schreiner observes that this illustration “is astonishing for surely the Judaizers saw themselves as descendants of Isaac! Paul, however, identifies them as the descendants of Ishmael and sees the Galatian converts as sons of Isaac.”¹⁹⁶ Paul affirms that they are children of Father Abraham, but of the wrong child.

Spurgeon summarizes the trap of slavery:

If I could keep all God’s law, I should have no right to favor; for I should have done no more than was my duty, and be a bond-slave still. This law is the most rigorous master in the world; no wise man would love its service; for after all you have done, the law never gives you a ‘thank you’ for it, but says, ‘Go on, sir, go on!’ The poor sinner trying to be saved by law is like a blind horse going round and round a mill, and never getting a step further, but only being whipped continually; yea, the faster he goes, the more work he does; the more he is tired, so much the worse for him. The better legalist a man is, the more sure he is of being damned; the more holy a man is, if he trusts to his works, the more he may rest assured of his own final rejection and eternal portion with Pharisees. Hagar was a slave; Ishmael, moral and good as he was, was nothing but a slave, and never could be more. Not all the works he ever rendered to his father could make him a free-born son.¹⁹⁷

The son of the flesh still persecutes the one born of Spirit (v. 29; cf. Gen 21:9). Paul proclaims the gospel despite the promise of persecution. Citing Genesis 21:10, he reminds them that the command of Scripture is to cast out both mother and son: for believers in the Lord, Hagar is not your mother (vv. 30-31). Ryken adjudicates, “In the eyes of God everyone is either an Ishmael or an Isaac. Ultimately, their story is about the gospel of God’s free grace.”¹⁹⁸

Paul reminds these “brothers” that they are “not children of the slave but of the free woman” (v. 31). She bears children through a promise. Allegorically, she represents

¹⁹⁶Schreiner, *Galatians*, 300.

¹⁹⁷Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1975; Reprint 1857), 2:126.

¹⁹⁸Ryken, *Galatians*, 184.

“Jerusalem above [who] is free, and she is our mother” (v. 26). Paul speaks of this Jerusalem in present, not future terms, as an example of his “already but not yet eschatology.”¹⁹⁹ Therefore these Galatian believers, “like Isaac, are children of promise . . . born according to the Spirit” (vv. 28-29).

To illustrate the Jerusalem from above, Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1: “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.” Paul reminds them that Sarah received a promised child even though she was barren and Abraham “was as good as dead” (Rom 4:19). In the context of Isaiah, the Jews return from exile like a barren woman who lost her children. Yet, she will multiply and prosper, and God’s covenant of peace will prevail (Isa 54:10). Schreiner notes, “The return from exile has arrived in the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . not in the physical return of Israel from exile, but in the conversion of Gentile Christians in places like Galatia. . . . The gospel proclaimed by Paul brings freedom.”²⁰⁰ Gentiles receive the gospel of Jesus, even in remote places like Galatia, and they are born of the Spirit. These are “born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). These believers are born from above, “of water and the spirit”; for “that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (3:3-6). The law could never produce such children. Ryken summarizes the allegory of Sarah: “In the new covenant, God does not say ‘Thou shalt’ and ‘Thou shalt not.’ Instead he says, ‘I will’: ‘I will be your God’; ‘I will redeem you from your sins’; ‘I will give you the free gift of eternal

¹⁹⁹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 303.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 304.

life.’ The new covenant is the gospel, which gives salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”²⁰¹ Martin Luther offers a summary for how Paul defends the gospel in 4:21-31:

Those who try to achieve the status of sons and heirs by the righteousness of the Law or by their own righteousness are slaves, who will never receive the inheritance even though they work themselves to death with their great effort; for they are trying, contrary to the will of God, to achieve by their own works what God wants to grant to believers by sheer grace for Christ’s sake.²⁰²

Paul proclaims the gospel in Galatians 4:21-31. The placement of Galatians 5:1, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery,” is debated. Some understand it to conclude the last passage; others conclude that it begins the exhortation passages in chapters 5-6. Schreiner contends that the verse is transitional, operating as a summary of the argument in 4:21-31 and beginning the next section.²⁰³ Galatians 5:1 deserves mention here as the immediate conclusion to 4:31: “So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free” The next section includes 5:1 as foundational for understanding how Paul applies the gospel that he so passionately proclaims and defends in Galatians chapters 1-4.

Applying the Gospel, Galatians 5:1-6:18

This dissertation establishes Paul’s proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central

²⁰¹Ryken, *Galatians*, 186-87.

²⁰²Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 26:449.

²⁰³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 307.

theme of preaching. The first section of this chapter asserts that in Galatians chapters 1-4 Paul alternates between proclaiming and defending the gospel. This segment contends that Paul applies, in chapters 5-6, the gospel he so passionately proclaims and defends. He reminds these Galatians what the true gospel really is (proclaims), and he protects this good news against the invasion of false brothers (defends). Since they are free sons who received the Spirit by “hearing with faith” (3:2, 5), he wants them to “stand firm” in their freedom (5:1, applies).

Paul’s letter to the Galatians establishes that what they do (chapters 5-6) flows from who they are in Christ (1-4). Witherington traces the relationship in Pauline letters from the indicative to the imperative: “Paul’s theology is not merely some theory, but rather implies a definite way of living for Christians. The imperative grows out of the indicative in Paul’s thought world. And Paul’s thought world is a narrative thought world full of stories about major figures, and these figures provide examples, either negative or positive, of how Christians should not or should behave.”²⁰⁴ Ryken notes that “we are justified by faith alone. However, once we have been justified, we need to be sanctified. When it comes to living for Christ, we must obey the gospel truth. What we believe and how we behave cannot be separated. . . . It is not merely a belief system or a moral code; it is a theology that comes to life.”²⁰⁵ An unbreakable bond exists between theological integrity and spiritual vitality.²⁰⁶ Stott assesses the relationship between belief and behavior, “Our creed is expressed in our conduct and our conduct is derived

²⁰⁴Witherington, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World*, 93.

²⁰⁵Ryken, *Galatians*, 207.

²⁰⁶George, *Galatians*, 364.

from our creed.”²⁰⁷

Jerome Murphy-O’Connor notes, “Paul never put pen to paper except when it was absolutely imperative. A letter for him always had a definite goal; he designed it to accomplish something. Lacking any mechanism to impose his will, he could not enforce; he was inescapably bound to persuasion.”²⁰⁸ Murphy-O’Connor also observes classical types of oratory shared by Greeks and Romans and declares Galatians to be both deliberative in thrust and corrective in persuasion.²⁰⁹

Schreiner refers to chapters 5-6 as an exhortation that “comes at this juncture in the letter because Paul has now completed the theological foundation (2:16-5:1) by which the Galatians will be able to grasp the rationale for his command and the seriousness of the issue.” He also notes that the “imperative grows out of the indicative” as is the pattern of Paul’s writings.²¹⁰ Danny Akin, in his overview of Galatians, instructs that chapters 5-6 offer at least thirteen imperatives that flow from the twenty-nine indicatives found earlier in the letter.²¹¹

²⁰⁷John R. W Stott, *The Message of the Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), 135.

²⁰⁸Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 69.

²⁰⁹Ibid., 69-70.

²¹⁰Schreiner, *Galatians*, 312. He recognizes the first imperative in the letter is found in 4:12, “I entreat you, become as I am” and that this command functions as the main idea of 4:12-20. Ibid., 283.

²¹¹Danny Akin, “Gospel in Galatians” sermon [on-line]; accessed 10 January 2012; available from <http://apps.sebts.edu/multimedia/?p=2480>; Internet.

Polhill observes that Paul’s letters follow a common form of three sections: introduction, body, and conclusion. Part of the body in all of his letters is the *paraenesis*, the extensive ethical advice which Paul sent his congregations. Polhill cites the “moral instruction” section in Galatians as 5:1-6:10.²¹² Specific to Galatians, this thesis agrees with Polhill’s overall structure but assigns the passage in 5:1-6:18 as application of the gospel that Paul proclaims and defends in chapters 1-4. As Ryken instructs, “Beginning with chapter 5, the apostle takes the good news of the cross and the empty tomb and applies it to daily life.”²¹³

Applying the Gospel, Galatians 5:1-15

Paul applies the gospel in this section by commanding these believers to “stand firm” (στήκω, “to keep on standing”²¹⁴) in the freedom Christ establishes²¹⁵ (v. 1) and by dismissing the outward, fleshly, work of man that is circumcision: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love” (v. 6). Paul concludes his contrast of Hagar and Sarah (4:21-31) by proclaiming the gospel freedom of the believer: “So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman” (v. 31). Now, in chapter five, he commands them to be confident in their freedom (v. 5:1) even as he embraces “confidence in the Lord that

²¹²John B. Polhill, *Paul & His Letters* (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 122-125.

²¹³Ryken, *Galatians*, 192.

²¹⁴Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, 309.

²¹⁵Stott defines this kind of freedom as, “freedom from my silly little self, in order to live responsibly in love for God and others.” John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 55.

[they] will take no other view than [his]” (v. 10). Ryken summarizes that Christ frees us from the law:

This is the law that we break when we sin, that Satan uses to accuse us of our guilt, and that sentences us to death. But the gospel of free grace says that the law no longer has that kind of power over me. . . . Now I am free to be who God wants me to be and to do what God wants me to do. There is nothing I have to do to win God’s acceptance. Now that God has accepted me through Jesus Christ, I am free in him. And this freedom is the key to gospel holiness.²¹⁶

Paul compares these believers’ return to the law like a beast who is released from his yoke of burden and then bows his head to receive it again. In the OT the yoke is commonly applied to one person or people living in servitude to another (Gen 27:40; Lev 26:13-16; Deut 28:48; 1 Kgs 12:9-11). At the gathering of the Jerusalem Council, Peter recognizes that the law is a yoke of bondage if applied to the neck of Christians: “Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:10). Rather, the gospel preached beforehand about a Messiah to come promises that his arrival breaks the burden of oppression (Isa 9:2-4). This same offspring promises, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:29).

Paul traces salvation based upon works to its logical conclusion: “If you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you” (v. 2); and that if anyone holds to the need for circumcision, he must keep the entire law (v. 3, referring to 3:10)²¹⁷. Schreiner notes that circumcision stands for the entire law: “All that Paul wrote about the

²¹⁶Ryken, *Galatians*, 195.

²¹⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 314.

law in 2:15-5:1 applies to circumcision.”²¹⁸ Ryken notes that these Judaizers “were adding the law to the gospel. They were saying that Moses had to finish what Christ could only begin. . . . His finished work cannot be refinished; it can only be destroyed.”²¹⁹

Paul uses a clever play on words to argue that those who follow the knife in circumcision “are severed from Christ”; those justified by the law are “fallen away from grace”²²⁰ (v. 4). Those who depend upon circumcision have lost more than flesh, they lose Spirit. Those who believe they fulfill the law for salvation lose the gift of Christ.²²¹ Schreiner summarizes, “The Galatians will either trust in circumcision or in Christ; no middle ground exists. If they choose the former, they have no profit from the latter.”²²² The weight of this gospel application, or lack thereof, finds eternity in the balance. “Christ will be of no advantage to you” refers to the final judgment.²²³ The gospel that Paul proclaims and defends in chapters 1-4, he clearly applies by stating that law and grace are opposites: law establishes righteousness by doing, grace by receiving.

²¹⁸Schreiner, *Galatians*, 311-12.

²¹⁹Ryken, *Galatians*, 199.

²²⁰Robertson asserts about the phrase “fallen away from grace” that Paul is not dealing with occasional sin but a “far more serious matter, that of substituting law for Christ as the agent in salvation” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 309).

²²¹Ryken states that modern modes of circumcision may be work done for the church, frequency of devotions, decision made for Christ by walking down an aisle or a gesture at an evangelistic meeting, baptism, or confirmation. “If we try to be justified before God by anything we do, no matter how small it is, we are not free” (*Galatians*, 198).

²²²Schreiner, *Galatians*, 311.

²²³*Ibid.*, 313; Betz, *Galatians*, 259; Witherington, *Galatians*, 367.

Paul continues to apply the good news: “For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus . . . only faith working through love” matters in salvation (vv. 5-6).²²⁴ Schreiner notes the logical relationship of the gospel overflowing in love: “The life that pleases God is characterized by trust in God and Christ, and love for others is the fruit or result of that faith.”²²⁵ The abrupt warnings found in verses 2-6 are not to encourage “obsessive perfectionism” but to encourage believers to not “trust in yourself but trust in Christ. Look to him alone. He is your hope, your strength, and your shield. Don’t trust in your strength, your intellect, your wisdom, or your accomplishments. Look only to Christ.”²²⁶

Paul emphasizes the actions of love: when believers “through love serve one another” and love their neighbors as themselves (vv. 13-14). Paul reminds them that they started in faith and belief by “running well,” but are now “hindered . . . from obeying the truth” (v. 7). Ryken explains, “What Paul meant by ‘the truth’ was *the* truth—what he had called ‘the truth of the gospel’ (Gal. 2:5; 14).”²²⁷ Later in writing to the Corinthian church, Paul also applies the running analogy, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it” (1 Cor 9:24).

²²⁴Schreiner notes the eschatological promise in the phrase “we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness” (Gal 5:5). The law looks to self but believers look away from self to the work of the Spirit (*Galatians*, 316).

²²⁵*Ibid.*, 317.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 320.

²²⁷Ryken, *Galatians*, 207.

Paul then reminds them of the false teachers who tickle their itching ears²²⁸: “This persuasion is not from him who calls you” (Gal 5:8, referencing the false teachers mentioned in 2:4).

Paul then teaches that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (v. 9).

Following the flow of Paul’s reasoning, the leaven is the persuasion of the false teachers. Leaven is fermented dough injected to corrupt other dough. In the NT leaven is used as a symbol of corruption of the body of believers. Ryken laments, “In the same way, a pinch of law thoroughly contaminates the whole gospel. . . . If the Judaizers could persuade the Galatians to get circumcised, then they would have to keep the rest of the law as well, in which case the whole gospel would be overturned.”²²⁹ Jesus warns his disciples about the corrupting leaven of the Pharisees’ teaching and hypocrisy (Matt 16:5-12; Luke 12:1). Later, Paul urges the Corinthians to rid themselves of arrogant wickedness and to become fresh unleavened loaves of sincerity and truth (1 Cor 5:6-13).²³⁰

In verses 10-12, Paul emphasizes the power of the gospel by persuading the Galatians to share his view that these false teachers will “bear the penalty” (v. 10). Paul hypothetically asks, if he still preaches circumcision as he did as a Pharisee,²³¹ “Why am I still being persecuted?” (v. 11). If Paul preaches the need of circumcision, then “the

²²⁸In Paul’s last letter, 2 Timothy, he teaches, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (4:3-4).

²²⁹Ryken, *Galatians*, 208-09.

²³⁰Barbara J. Bruce, “Leaven,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. C. Brand et al. (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 1022.

²³¹MacArthur, *Galatians*, 141.

offense of the cross has been removed” (v. 11). According to D. K. Campbell, “If Paul were still preaching circumcision, the offense . . . of the Cross would have ceased to exist in his ministry. But it had not because people still found the gospel message, which proclaims man’s total inability to contribute anything to his salvation, offensive. Thus the Cross marked the end of the Law system and rendered circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law unnecessary.”²³² Paul, earlier in the letter, confesses about his “former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it” (1:13). The cross nullifies the law and all their respected rabbinic traditions.²³³ Paul is beaten, arrested, imprisoned, stoned, and left for dead; “Paul was persecuted for preaching salvation in Christ alone.”²³⁴ Schreiner broadens the scope of persecution: “The fundamental root of all persecution is resistance to the gospel. . . . When the message of the cross breaks upon the human consciousness, we either repent or are enraged at such an affront to our egos. We long for a gospel that commends us, makes us feel good about ourselves, and exalts us. The cross, however, renounces human potential.”²³⁵

Paul wishes that these false teachers who insist on circumcision do more than remove foreskin; he proposes castration: “I wish those who unsettle you would

²³²D. K. Campbell, *Galatians*, in vol. 2 of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 606.

²³³MacArthur, *Galatians*, 142.

²³⁴Ryken, *Galatians*, 211.

²³⁵Schreiner, *Galatians*, 329.

emasculate themselves!” (v. 12).²³⁶ This may represent a supreme act of religious dedication that mirrors pagan self-mutilation. MacArthur summarizes, “To add *any* human effort or act to God’s gracious provision through the death of His Son is to exchange the saving gospel of Jesus Christ for the damning falsehood of Paganism.”²³⁷ Ryken notes that Paul may be referring to the OT prohibition against eunuchs entering the temple (Deut 23:1); so these Judaizers are “cut off from the church.”²³⁸

In the remaining verses of this passage, Paul continues to apply the gospel by issuing a cry for freedom (5:1) with responsibility, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (v. 13). Ryken defines the “flesh” (σάρξ) as “the part of me that does not want what God wants, my corrupt human nature in all its weakness and depravity.”²³⁹ Paul reminds them of their freedom from the OT law: “The burden of attempting to be right with God on the basis on one’s obedience no longer applies to believers, for they enjoy the freedom of being redeemed from the curse of the law through the cross-work of Jesus Christ” (3:13; 4:4-5). They are free from the law and freed to live “in freedom and joy as God’s children.”²⁴⁰

²³⁶Longenecker believes this sentence to be the “crudest and rudest” expression in Pauline writings (*Galatians*, 234). Schreiner calls the phrase “shocking” (*Galatians*, 327).

²³⁷MacArthur, *Galatians*, 142.

²³⁸Ryken, *Galatians*, 210-11.

²³⁹*Ibid.*, 217.

²⁴⁰Schreiner, *Galatians*, 333.

Paul anticipates the licentious risk of abusing gospel freedom. Schreiner finds the word “only” (v. 13) as a qualifier not to corrupt this freedom with the flesh.²⁴¹ Paul hypothetically asks the Romans, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” and then emphatically answers, “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom 6:1, 2). Paul accompanies the negative warning with a positive imperative, “but through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13). Ryken marks the paradox of this imperative: “By setting us free to serve, the Holy Spirit enslaves us to one another in love.”²⁴² Believers are set free from self-enslavement in order to serve one another. Luther summarizes, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”²⁴³

Conversely, abusing the freedom found in the gospel is a misapplication. Schreiner exposit, “Freedom suggests to human beings an open door to fulfill natural desires, but subjection to such desires is not freedom but slavery. True freedom liberates believers from their selfish will so that they find joy in serving others. Freedom manifests itself as love, as a desire to fulfill the needs of others.”²⁴⁴

Paul continues his gospel application by explaining, “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (v. 14). Paul emphasizes that “in Christ Jesus” what is of true importance is “only faith working

²⁴¹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 333.

²⁴²Ryken, *Galatians*, 221.

²⁴³Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, trans. and ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 27:56.

²⁴⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 334.

through love” (v. 6); what matters in actions is “through love serve one another” (v. 13); and what summarizes the law is the “one word” of “love” applied to neighbor as to self (v. 14).

Schreiner highlights the paradox of Paul’s dismissal of the law and yet fulfillment of it: “It is astonishing that Paul speaks here of fulfilling the OT law after emphasizing in such detail that believers are no longer under the OT law.” He explains the sharp distinction according to context: the earlier appeal in chapter 5 negates keeping the law for salvation while the fulfilling of the law in 5:14 is an application of the Spirit’s power.²⁴⁵ Paul simply echoes Jesus’ answer to the question of which commandment is the greatest: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 22:37-40, Lev 19:18; Deut 6:5). As Ryken explains, “We are free from the law; now the Spirit uses the law to help us exercise our freedom. What enables us to live a holy life is not simply the outward constraint of the law, but the inward compulsion of the Spirit. This is what the prophets meant when they promised that God’s law would be written on our hearts (Jer. 31:33), or what the apostle James meant when he spoke of ‘the law of liberty’ (James 1:25).”²⁴⁶

Paul instructs the Romans that the fulfillment of the law is love:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other

²⁴⁵Schreiner, *Galatians*, 334.

²⁴⁶Ryken, *Galatians*, 224.

commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Rom 13:8-10)

Part of the commandment of love found in Galatians 5:14 and Romans 13:8-10 is the freedom to read the OT in perspective of the fulfillment of the law in Jesus Christ, “For he is the sovereign interpreter of the law (cf. Matt 5:17-48).”²⁴⁷

Paul warns against a misapplied gospel in verse 15, “But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” These actions represent the antithesis of gospel-centered loving and serving. Paul implores them not to act like the serpents of the OT (Gen 49:17; Num 21:6, 8, 9; Deut 8:15; Eccl 10:8), but to live life in the Spirit.²⁴⁸ Schreiner offers a fitting summary for this section,

What is true freedom? Paul tells us what true freedom is. We are living by grace if we don’t become angry when we disagree with one another. If we shout and yell to win arguments, we are not secure in the gospel. . . . Love must stand as the heart and soul of a biblical ethic, and it can never be completely codified or detailed in a modern day Mishnah. Love asks how others can be served and edified in a way that accords with the gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁴⁹

Applying the Gospel, Galatians 5:16-26

Paul applies the gospel in this passage by insisting that believers “walk by the Spirit” (v. 16) and “keep in step with the Spirit” (v. 25). Schreiner finds that walking in the Spirit develops the principle of serving one another through love (5:13-15) and happens as believers continually yield to the Holy Spirit day by day.²⁵⁰ Betz understands

²⁴⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 337.

²⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 336.

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 337.

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 342-43.

that “keep[ing] in step with the Spirit” is not mere possession of the Spirit nor is it an exemption from daily struggles.²⁵¹ A Christian lifestyle in the Spirit produces the “fruit of the Spirit [which] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (v. 22). The “Spirit” (πνεῦμα) is the source of power that enables the fruit to prosper in the believer.²⁵² The first attribute on the list is love, the sign of new life in Christ (1 Cor 13), and is the “heart and soul” of Paul’s gospel, “For it is love that fulfills the law (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:6, 13, 14).

Paul states that the flesh and the Spirit war against each other, which prevents believers from “doing the things you want to do” (v. 17). Schreiner notes the tension and yet the victory in this verse, “Believers are not immune to the desires of the old Adam. They still beckon them and are immensely attractive, but believers triumph over those desires as they walk in the Spirit. . . . Believers are also indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit within them impels them to righteousness, so that believers have powerful desires for goodness as well.”²⁵³ Verse 18 teaches that those who are led by the Spirit are not under the law. In the full treatment of the letter “under the law” is “under a curse” (3:10), “under sin” (3:22), “under a guardian” (3:25), “under guardians and managers” (4:2), “enslaved to the elementary principles of the world” (4:3), and in need of redemption (4:4-5). As Schreiner observes, “Freedom from law does not, according to

²⁵¹Betz, *Galatians*, 293.

²⁵²Schreiner, *Galatians*, 349.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, 343.

Paul, mean freedom *to sin*; it means freedom *from sin*.”²⁵⁴

Paul contrasts this spiritual fruit with the works of the flesh (vv. 19-21). “The flesh” (σὰρξ) is the source of these evil deeds stemming from the old Adam.²⁵⁵ He also clearly warns the Galatians of gospel consequences, “Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21). The phrase, “those who do such things” (πράσσω) refers to habitual action, not occasional sin against better judgment.²⁵⁶ Schreiner traces that those who commit these sins do not inherit the eternal kingdom but face the judgment on the final day (6:8; Eph 5:5).²⁵⁷ Robertson teaches, “The *habit* of these sins is proof that one is not in the Kingdom of God and will not inherit it.”²⁵⁸

Paul assures these Galatians that if they “walk by the Spirit [they] will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (v. 16). Ryken summarizes what walking with the Holy Spirit means: “Contrary to what so many Christians seem to believe, true spiritual growth does not come from some special experience of the Holy Spirit. Instead, it comes from walking with the Spirit every day until, finally, keeping in step with him becomes a holy habit.”²⁵⁹ Paul’s solution for a lifestyle of Spirit-filled living is not to bring the Galatians back to the law but to motivate them from the gospel: “And those who belong

²⁵⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 345.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 346.

²⁵⁶Ryken, *Galatians*, 231-32. Also Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 313.

²⁵⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 346.

²⁵⁸Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 313 (emphasis original).

²⁵⁹Ryken, *Galatians*, 240.

to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (v. 24). Schreiner teaches that believers belong to Christ Jesus (genitive marking possession) and “have crucified the flesh” when they “were crucified with Christ” (2:20). He summarizes Paul’s gospel application in this passage:

The death of the flesh does not mean that believers do not feel the tug of fleshly desires (5:17). Still, the flesh has been dealt a decisive blow at the cross. The passions and desires of the flesh are not absent, but they no longer rule and reign. Those who walk by the Spirit and who are led by the Spirit find themselves, even though imperfectly and partially, triumphing over the passions of the flesh that formerly dominated them. . . .

The Galatians are not called upon to work at being more virtuous. They are summoned to walk in the Spirit and to be led by the Spirit. Living in a way that pleases God is the fruit of his miraculous work, not the result of self-effort, though human beings are called upon to walk in the Spirit and yield to the Spirit.²⁶⁰

Applying the Gospel, Galatians 6:1-18

This final chapter, if read independent of the flow of the letter, can incorrectly be read as a list of moral obligations for law-abiding Christians. Verses 1-10 provide a litany of demands easily misapplied as Christian moral codes: “restore,” “keep watch,” “bear one another’s burdens,” “test [your] own work,” “share,” “sow” and “reap,” “do good to everyone,” and even the idea to “fulfill the law of Christ.” Even so, the imperatives Paul supplies flow from the indicatives of gospel truth. Paul begins by addressing them as “Brothers”: those who know the gospel message Paul originally preached to them (4:13-14) and the gospel to which he warns them to return (1:6-9; 3:1-6; 5:1).

Paul’s arguments in chapter 6 continue his application of the gospel that he proclaims and defends in Galatians 1-4 and begins to apply in chapter 5. Verses 1-5

²⁶⁰Schreiner, *Galatians*, 351-52.

apply the gospel to the need to care for one another. The one caught in transgression needs restoration by “you who are spiritual” who also resist temptation (v. 1). This transgression, according to Ryken, is not habitual sin, but an “unexpected sin” or one done against sound judgment and may be one of the sins in the previous vice list.²⁶¹ Schreiner contends the “spiritual” are not an elite corps of believers as all of them received the Spirit when they heard the gospel (3:2, 5, 14), have the Spirit as sons (4:6), and live by the Spirit (5:25).²⁶² “The spiritual,” according to Robertson, are “spiritual experts in mending souls” who restore the fallen like the mending of nets (Matt 4:21).²⁶³

Believers bear one another’s burdens even as each “bear[s] his own load” (vv. 2, 5). Paul explains that the bearing of one another’s burdens “fulfill[s] the law of Christ” (v. 2). Earlier Paul instructs that the “whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (5:14). Paul, in verses 5:14 and 6:2, instructs that when believers care for one another, they display the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ who loved the church and “gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25).²⁶⁴ This “law of Christ,” notes Schreiner, interprets the OT law christocentrically, “so that it comes to its intended completion and goal in Christ.”²⁶⁵ The command to “bear his own load” (v. 5) and the

²⁶¹Ryken, *Galatians*, 245.

²⁶²Schreiner, *Galatians*, 358.

²⁶³Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 315.

²⁶⁴Paul’s injunction to “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” corresponds with the insight John shares in his gospel, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34); and in his letter, “And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:21).

²⁶⁵Schreiner, *Galatians*, 360.

need to “bear one another’s burdens” (v. 2) do not exist in contrast but in complement: the word in verse 2 describes the weight of cargo on a freighter while the burden of verse 5 is comparable to a backpack.²⁶⁶ Paul applies the gospel by insisting upon community harmony and individual responsibility.

Verse 6 applies the gospel from the learner to the teacher: “Let the one who is taught the word²⁶⁷ share all good things with the one who teaches.”²⁶⁸ Verses 7-9 apply the gospel by explaining the law of sowing and reaping: “The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (v. 8). Betz observes those who sow to the flesh place their “hope for salvation upon circumcision and obedience to the Jewish Torah, a move which would result in missing salvation altogether.”²⁶⁹ Schreiner observes that reaping carries an eschatological reference to the final judgment. He also notes the balance of gospel grace and works: “Paul’s gospel of grace in Galatians does not countenance moral laxity. Righteousness is not based on works, but those who do not practice good works do not receive the final inheritance. The Pauline gospel of grace does not provide a foundation for license.”²⁷⁰ Paul relates the sowing and reaping principle to encourage perseverance

²⁶⁶Ryken, *Galatians*, 252.

²⁶⁷Schreiner notes that “the word” in verse 6 “refers to the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 1:18; 2:4; 15:2; 2 Cor 1:18; 2:17; 4:2)” (*Galatians*, 367).

²⁶⁸Paul echoes what Luke teaches (Luke 10:7) and what Paul also writes to the Corinthian congregation that those who proclaim the gospel shall make their living by the gospel (1 Cor 9:14).

²⁶⁹Betz, *Galatians*, 308.

²⁷⁰Schreiner, *Galatians*, 369.

in the journey: “Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (v. 9). Paul then emphasizes living out the gospel by serving those outside and inside the church: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (v. 10). This verse applies the gospel by instructing believers to “do good to everyone” which includes sharing the gospel while doing good works for unbelievers and living out the gospel with those who are “members of the household of faith.”

Verses 11-18 apply the gospel by reviewing Paul’s major arguments in the letter. He grants a final warning against those who insist upon circumcision for the sake of their own boasting. Ryken finds this section “more than a hastily written postscript, the afterthought of an apostle. Instead, these verses constitute a summary of the entire letter.”²⁷¹

In 6:13, Paul accuses those who promote circumcision as guilty of not keeping the law but rather their motives are to boast in the flesh of those who follow in circumcision. Paul’s indictment of their motives mirrors Jesus accusation of the motives of the heart (Matt 23).²⁷² Ryken accuses: “They were the very worst kind of preachers. They were unwilling to endure persecution for the cause of Christ. They sought the glory of their own success. They never practiced what they preached. Worst of all, by trusting in circumcision rather than in the cross, they denied the free grace of the gospel.”²⁷³

²⁷¹Ryken, *Galatians*, 269

²⁷²Schreiner, *Galatians*, 378.

²⁷³Ryken, *Galatians*, 273.

Paul claims that the only proper boast is in the gospel: “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (v. 14). The gospel even applies to boasting, “Those who boast in the cross put all their confidence in what Christ has done for them. They acknowledge that salvation is wholly of the Lord.”²⁷⁴ Ryken notes that Paul teaches that Christ-centered boasting flows from gospel understanding: “Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone means boasting in the cross alone. To understand this is to understand Galatians. More than that, it is to understand the gospel.”²⁷⁵ According to John Stott, this boasting is more than bragging, it is an obsession with the glory of Christ.²⁷⁶

The Apostle Paul, full of education and accomplishments, has reason for “confidence in the flesh” according to his spiritual resume (Phil 3:3-9). Denying the flesh, he sows to the Spirit as he makes the cross his boast: “I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20); he wrote of this Jesus who “was publicly portrayed as crucified” (Gal 3:1); and he preached “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). As Ryken observes, “He spoke the message of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18), the offense of the cross (Gal. 5:11), the triumph of the cross (Col. 2:15), and the wonder of the cross (Phil. 2:8).”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 379.

²⁷⁵Ryken, *Galatians*, 269-70.

²⁷⁶John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 349.

²⁷⁷Ryken, *Galatians*, 275.

Paul applies the gospel by raising it above circumcision: “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (v. 15). This echoes what Paul summarizes in 5:6: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” Ryken states the issue in Paul’s day is that the Judaizers defined the gospel as the “cross plus circumcision.” He warns that the current church faces the same temptation “for the church to turn the gospel into the cross plus something else. Whether that ‘something else’ is a deed or a duty, a sacrament or a social cause, the problem is always the ‘plus.’ For the gospel to be the gospel, the cross has to stand alone.”²⁷⁸

Paul, dismissing the significance of circumcision or uncircumcision, focuses on what is important, “a new creation” (v. 15). He continues an eschatological perspective as he notes that circumcision is of the old order, old creation, while the cross brings a new age. Schreiner instructs, “Eschatology, then, plays a vital role in Galatians, for the Judaizers were attached to the old age and failed to see that the new has come.”²⁷⁹ This eternal perspective informs their earthly walk, “And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God” (v. 16). Even this peaceful farewell is an application of the gospel, “This benediction grants peace and mercy—peace between Jew and Gentile and mercy from God for sinners. But notice that the blessing is conditional. Peace and mercy are only for those who ‘walk by this rule.’ . . . [which is] salvation through the cross alone.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸Ryken, *Galatians*, 270.

²⁷⁹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 379.

²⁸⁰Ryken, *Galatians*, 278.

Paul then finalizes his arguments, “From now on let no one cause me trouble,” and he reminds them that he personally applies the gospel through good works, “for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (v. 17). The ethos of Paul’s gospel proclamation, defense, and application are the scars and wounds on his body. In this verse, “Paul is most likely alluding to the wounds and scars which he received in the service of Jesus.”²⁸¹ Schreiner observes, “Paul as an apostle of Jesus Christ suffers for the sake of the gospel: the marks on his body authenticate his apostolic ministry.”²⁸² Ryken contrasts the scars of circumcision that the Judaizers triumphed against the marks of Paul whose “insignia . . . came from glorying in the cross, and not in himself. He was bruised and beaten for boasting in the cross. His scars were a badge of his faith in Jesus Christ.”²⁸³

As he began the work with a blessing of God’s “grace to you and peace,” so he closes the letter with a blessing, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen” (v. 18). Schreiner provides a summary of Paul’s gospel application in Galatians: “Galatians focuses on the grace of God in Christ and insists that righteousness cannot be derived from the law. Paul concludes by reminding the Galatians of the power of such grace, and he prays that such grace will continue to be unleashed in their lives.”²⁸⁴

²⁸¹Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “marks.”

²⁸²Schreiner, *Galatians*, 384.

²⁸³Ryken, *Galatians*, 280.

²⁸⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 385.

Conclusion

This dissertation establishes Paul's proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. This chapter provides an analysis of how each passage of Galatians proclaims, defends, or applies the gospel.

Paul proclaims and defends the gospel in Galatians 1-4. Paul's conclusion to the letter could come at the end of chapter 4 as he informs the Galatians that they are "not children of the slave but of the free woman" (4:31). His conclusion could come one verse later: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1). Instead, Paul details just how those who know the gospel may apply it with humble confidence in chapters 5-6.

The careful indicatives that Paul defines in chapters 1-4 he applies as imperatives in 5-6. Paul carefully laces together gospel freedom and responsibility, congregational care and personal responsibility. The gospel, clearly proclaimed and defended, overflows into serving one another (5:13), and loving neighbor as self (v. 14). Gospel freedom is exercised by walking in the Spirit and not the flesh (vv. 16-26), by restoring the fallen and bearing one another's burdens, by careful cultivation of the Spirit, and by perseverance (6:1-10). Finally, Paul applies the gospel as boasting in Christ alone as a new creation as believers walk in the peace and mercy of Christ (vv. 11-18).

CHAPTER 5

PAUL'S USE OF THE GOSPEL IN GALATIANS AS A GOSPEL-CENTERED PREACHING PARADIGM

Introduction

This dissertation establishes Paul's proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. This work establishes the need for gospel-centered preaching, reviews how the gospel of Jesus dramatically changes Paul's life, provides the overview and occasion of the Galatian letter, and contends that it may serve as a sermon. The previous chapter explores how Paul proclaims and defends the gospel in his letter to the Galatians in chapters 1-4, and how he specifically applies this good news in chapters 5-6. The main idea of this chapter is to provide a gospel-centered preaching paradigm.

Paul's Gospel-Centered Preaching Paradigm

The preacher who seeks to have the gospel as the central theme of his preaching may look confidently to Paul's epistle to the Galatians to understand how to proclaim, defend, and apply the gospel. The Galatian letter is gospel saturated as every verse proclaims, defends, or applies the gospel. The gospel-centered preaching paradigm uses these three categories to explore any biblical text and to build the sermon. The gospel-centered preaching paradigm asks:

- 1) How does this passage proclaim the gospel?
- 2) How does this Scripture defend the gospel?

3) How does this text apply the gospel?

As this dissertation establishes, these questions frame the essential ideas in Galatians. This paradigm helps a pastor evaluate any passage of Scripture to understand how the biblical author communicates the gospel to his people in his time *and* how pastors may craft a gospel-centered sermon. The goal of this chapter is to explore each of these questions by using Paul's work in Galatians as the primary guide and then appealing to a broader context.

The answers to the questions in the gospel-centered preaching paradigm inform the development of the sermon. The extent to which a passage proclaims, defends, or applies the gospel is the degree to which the pastor may reflect this emphasis. The point to which a text proclaims the gospel is the way in which the sermon should reflect gospel proclamation. The amount of weight that a text gives to the defense of the gospel should be reflected in the sermon. Correspondingly, the ways in which the Scripture under consideration applies the gospel can be emphasized in the preaching. Passages of Scripture will vary in the degree to which they proclaim, defend, and/or apply the gospel.

This gospel-centered preaching paradigm is provided as a tool to help expositors build their sermons. The questions in the paradigm function as guides, not dictators. The responsible expositor is not bound to the exact location of the gospel in the text becoming the exact setting of the gospel in the sermon. The ways in which the biblical passage defends the gospel in that particular context may need to be updated. The specific application of Scripture in a technological age differs from its usage in the agrarian culture of first-century Israel. Biblical principles and precepts do not change.

The pastor who uses the gospel-centered preaching paradigm must exercise wisdom while considering the main idea of the passage, the overall context and content of the Scripture, and the needs of the congregation. He seeks to be faithful to the message the biblical author communicated to the original audience and to the word the Holy Spirit continues to speak to congregations today from God's Word.

This paradigm is effective for pastors who are committed to the authority of God's Word. These expositors allow the meaning of the text to become the meaning of the sermon. As Hershael W. York and Bert Decker contend, "A high view of Scripture means that the Bible *is* what God says, and what God says is what we must say when we preach. If a preacher mounts the pulpit with a conviction of the truth and sufficiency of the Word of God, his preaching will be marked by passion and power. A high view of Scripture is the *sine qua non* of exposition."¹

Paul exhorts Timothy about the inspiration and usefulness of every passage: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Preachers who are committed to centering their sermons on the gospel may confidently apply the gospel-centered preaching paradigm to any biblical text.

While using this paradigm, expositors do well to heed the instruction of York and Decker:

¹Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 19, emphasis original.

Admittedly, even though all Scripture is equally inspired, it is not all equally profitable. In other words, you will find a lot more spiritual nourishment in Romans 8:28 than in the list of returning exiles in Nehemiah chapter 7. They are both the Word of God, but God did not pour equal amounts of beneficial material in them. That is why we may sometimes be able to take large blocks of Scripture and preach the one central truth that is revealed in it, while at other times we may spend several sermons in a single verse or small passage. But the true expositor will nonetheless make it his goal to preach the whole Word of God, lashing his sermons to the text and refusing to skip over passages that are difficult to explain.²

Preachers observe that some texts, like passages from the gospels and NT letters, burst with the gospel proclamation, defense, and application. They learn that other passages, like long genealogies and exacting Jewish standards, must be understood in their overall redemptive context.

Asking each question ensures that the pastor will center the overall theme of his sermons on the gospel. This chapter seeks to answer each of the questions in the gospel-centered preaching paradigm by exploring Paul's methods in Galatians, by offering other supporting ideas, and by suggesting some final considerations.

How Does this Passage Proclaim the Gospel?

As the gospel-centered expositor approaches a biblical passage to understand its meaning and to craft the sermon, he starts with the gospel in mind. The pastor asks: How does this passage proclaim the gospel? The expositor looks to Paul as his guide for a gospel-centered solution. R. Albert Mohler Jr. summarizes the gospel-centrality of the preaching ministry of Paul: "He was fairly well described as mono-maniacal about his understanding of the preacher's task. It was simply the preaching of the gospel, the

²York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 22.

preaching of the Word.”³

Understanding the letter to the Galatians as a sermon,⁴ Paul models how he proclaims the gospel in various places in the sermon, in its pure simplicity, and through redemptive history. This section reviews how Paul proclaims the gospel from his epistle and then evaluates supporting evidence for how contemporary expositors find gospel proclamation in any passage or in the broader context of the biblical book and in God’s unfolding story of salvation.

Paul Proclaims the Gospel in Various Places in the Sermon

Paul proclaims the gospel at least four times in his sermon to the Galatians (1:1-5; 2:15-21; 3:7-4:7; 4:21-31). Since these passages are full of gospel proclamation, sermons emanating from these texts also announce the good news. Paul’s sermon to the Galatians proclaims the gospel even in the introduction (1:1-5). He also places the gospel in the introduction to some of his other letters (Rom 1:6, 7; 1 Cor 1:2, 9; Eph 1:18). A survey of books on preaching finds much instruction about how to build introductions that capture the audience’s attention and prepare them to hear the Scripture. While agreeing with the importance of a solid beginning, Paul’s gospel-centered preaching paradigm suggests locating the gospel in the introduction.

As this dissertation contends in chapter 4, Paul alternates between proclaiming

³R. Albert Mohler Jr., “General Session 5,” The Shepherd’s Conference, 2006 [on-line]; accessed 25 June 2013; available from <http://www.shepherdsconference.org/media/?year=2006>; Internet.

⁴Chap. 2 of this dissertation offers supporting evidence for understanding the letter as a sermon.

and defending the gospel in Galatians 1-4. Viewing the Galatian letter as a sermon, the preacher learns that Paul's gospel-centered preaching paradigm shares the gospel in multiple locations even in the same sermon. When the expositor comes to a text that he will preach and asks, "How does this passage proclaim the gospel?" he will observe the clearest place or places to proclaim the gospel in the sermon. The gospel may be clearly presented in the beginning, middle, or end of the Scripture. The entire text may be overflowing with the gospel or unusually quiet about God's good news. As the expositor writes the sermon, he uses the passage as his guide for the location of gospel proclamation in the sermon.

Paul Proclaims the Gospel in Simplicity

Paul's paradigm of gospel-centered preaching includes proclaiming the gospel in its pure simplicity (Gal 2:15-21). He begins by preaching justification before God by faith alone in Christ alone (v. 16). Paul continues to model the importance of clarifying that justification is "not by works of the law" (v. 16). Gospel-centered expositors preach the theme Paul articulates: "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" (2:20). Pastors faithful to the gospel preach what Paul did to the Romans, "You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11). Expositors explain that God "made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:5).

Following Paul's model, faithful expositors explain theological realities like justification: the act of God, bought by the work of Christ on the cross, which allows a

sinner to be given the right standing of Christ before a holy God.⁵ Gospel-centered pastors proclaim the cure for all mankind who break God's law, "A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:16). Preachers lead the flock to rejoice in the only hope for a better righteousness: "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Gal 2:21).

Gospel-centered pastors carefully lead their people to understand how easily they can base their justification on their own works. The gospel-centered expositor dismisses false justification and law keeping. Contemporary expositors can address the temptation congregants face to keep a manmade law while missing the simplicity of the gospel Jesus already accomplished. Some of these false justifications include:⁶

1. Law of Law: keeping the 10 commandments.
2. Law of Self-Justification: believing that good works outweigh bad deeds.
3. Law of Sacraments: trusting in confirmation, baptism, sprinkling, etc.
4. Law of Attendance: trusting in perfect church attendance.
5. Law of Experience: having an emotional experience at a camp, revival, etc.
6. Law of Heritage: trusting in growing up in a religious home.
7. Law of False Assurance: securing salvation to a religious act years ago without consistent worship.
8. Law of Non-Judgment: claiming not to judge other people for any reason as

⁵James White, "Justification," in Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, ed. C. Brand et al. (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 970.

⁶This list is based upon my own work spanning twenty-one years of ministry. The list is not exhaustive but provides some of the more common types of false justification in which professing Christians trust.

righteousness.

9. Law of Judgment: trusting in the works of avoiding particular behaviors while embracing healthy lifestyles.
10. Law of Biblical Ignorance: trusting false passages like “God helps those who help themselves.”
11. Law of the Rule: keeping the Golden Rule for salvation.
12. Law of Success: trusting in worldly success as evidence of God’s blessing.
13. Law of Service: believing that much service at church confirms God’s blessing.
14. Law of Legalism: following all the prescribed rules of a church or group.
15. Law of Programs: participating in the latest popular book or series.

Informing congregants of these false justifications allows the brilliance of the true gospel to shine more clearly. Philip Ryken explains the simplicity of the gospel that Paul proclaims:

Galatians is a letter for recovering Pharisees. The Pharisees who lived during and after the time of Christ were very religious. They were regular in their worship, orthodox in their theology, and moral in their conduct. Yet something was missing. Although God was in their minds and in their actions, he was not in their hearts. Therefore, their religion was little more than hypocrisy.

The Pharisees were hypocrites because they thought that what God would do for them depended on what they did for God. So they read their Bibles, prayed, tithed, and kept the Sabbath as if their salvation depended on it. What they failed to understand is that God’s grace cannot be earned; it only comes free.⁷

Martin Luther illustrates the frustration and bondage of self-justification as he confesses:

I was a good monk and kept my order so strictly that I could claim that if ever a monk were able to reach heaven by monkish discipline I should have found my way there. All my fellows in the house, who knew me, would bear me out in this. For if

⁷Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, Reformed Expository Commentary Series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 3.

it had continued much longer I would, what with vigils, prayers, readings and such other works, have done myself to death.⁸

The testimony of Luther is that his freedom came when he discovered the gospel in its simplicity as not what he should do for God but what God already accomplished in Christ.

Paul Proclaims the Gospel through Redemptive History

Paul's epistle to the Galatians and his other letters consistently appeal to OT stories, history, and illustration. Paul proclaims the gospel through the life of Abraham (Gal 3:7-14): "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'" (v. 8). Teaching the OT as the background to the NT and as the promise of a coming Messiah allows congregants to trace the developing gospel in the OT to its fulfillment in the NT.

Expositors may proclaim the gospel even from the OT law. They warn congregants that "all who rely on works of the law are under a curse" if they fail to obey "all things written in the Book of the Law and do them" (v. 10). Gospel-centered ministers follow Paul by boldly proclaiming the full weight of the law, burdening the congregation with the law's demands. Expositors proclaim the gospel by preaching the impossibility of the law rather than transitioning them to a moral code. The full expectation of the law allows congregants to understand their moral bankruptcy and to cling to the cross alone.

⁸Bernard M. B. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (London: Longman, 1981), 51.

The repentant cast themselves on Jesus who “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (v. 13). Believers rejoice that the blessing of Abraham still comes to Gentiles that they “might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (v. 14). Congregations deepen in their understanding of the richness of the gospel as they find its roots in the OT.

Paul proclaims the gospel in the OT through redemptive history, the gradual unfolding of God’s plan of salvation. In Galatians 3:15-29, Paul examines the place of the law in salvation history. Since the promise is made first to Abraham (3:8), the law of Moses which comes “430 years afterward” does not cancel the original agreement (v. 17). As Ben Witherington explains, Jesus is the promised “offspring” (v. 16) and the law acts as a parenthesis, a temporary arrangement, between Abraham and Christ.⁹

Congregants can understand that the law increases transgressions and creates a yearning for the promise to come, for the offspring (vv. 17-19). This passage proclaims that righteousness before God comes by faith alone and not by keeping the law (v. 21). Gospel-centered pastors preach that the law acts as a “guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith” (v. 24). These portions of Scripture allow the pastor to teach the people how to read and to interpret the OT in light of the NT.

Contemporary expositors may face audiences who have feminist agendas, racial alliances, and scars from a heritage marked with slavery. Following Paul’s model, these pastors proclaim the gospel by teaching that the law is fulfilled in the coming of Christ. This truth allows Christians to know that they “are all sons of God through faith”

⁹Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 48, 54-55.

(vv. 25-26). Preachers explain that while God is not blind to color, status, or gender, in their salvation, “you are all one in Christ Jesus” (v. 28). Gospel-centered pastors equip their members to know that any race, status, or gender can become “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (v. 29).

Pastors can follow Paul’s model as he proclaims the redemptive history of the OT by teaching about the sovereign arrival of the Messiah (Gal 4:1-7). He announces the completing of the OT hope and promise: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son” (v. 4). The promised son is born “of a woman” to identify with humanity, and he is “born under the law” in order to fulfill the law (v. 4). Preachers teach about salvation in this Savior who comes to “redeem those who were under the law” who “receive adoption as sons” (v. 5). God’s unfolding work allows these redeemed to cry out, “Abba! Father!” (v. 6). The passage concludes with the eschatological hope of a coming inheritance. Gospel-centered pastors preach the continual unfolding of redemptive history from the OT to the time of Christ, through the church age, and to the return of the Christ who assures the inheritance.

Paul models proclaiming the gospel from the OT in Galatians 4:21-31. He starts with a doctrinal question, transitions to an illustration that surveys the life of Abraham, and points to the promise of a coming kingdom. Earlier in the letter, Paul clarifies that the rightful sons of Abraham are those who come in faith (3:6-9; 16-19). Now, Paul leads them to define who their proper mother is: the slave woman or the free woman? Paul equates Hagar’s slavery to the law given from Mount Sinai with the attitude of the Jews in Jerusalem in his day (v. 25). He contrasts the earthly, enslaved Jerusalem with the heavenly, eternal “Jerusalem above [who] is free and she is our

mother” (v. 26).¹⁰

Paul’s gospel-centered model includes an appeal to biblical history and prophecy. Starting with Abraham’s story in Genesis, he reviews Sinai, and then quotes the prophet Isaiah (54:1). Paul uses the redemptive history of Abraham’s story to proclaim the gospel to these Galatians: “Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise” (v. 28). These followers are born according to the Spirit and are sons of the free woman (vv. 28-31). Pastors who follow Paul’s gospel-centered preaching paradigm understand how to preach the gospel from the patriarchs, the law, the prophets, and the NT letters.

Paul’s gospel-centered preaching is driven by redemptive history. Rather than reciting their blood lineage, Paul reminds them of the promised offspring born of the Spirit. Pastors following Paul’s model celebrate when people, no matter their lineage, come to the Savior. According to Galatians 4:21-31, Paul assures that even those born of the slave woman, of the lineage of Ishmael, can become “like Isaac . . . children of promise” through the Spirit (v. 28).

How Does This Passage Proclaim the Gospel? The Broader Context

This question evaluates how the passage in either the OT or the NT proclaims the gospel. Greg Gilbert summarizes the gospel with the four words: God, man, Christ,

¹⁰Paul does *not* serve as a paradigm of allegorical interpretation. When he states that Abraham’s two wives “may be taken allegorically,” he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who is giving the interpretation. For information about the history and abuse of allegorical interpretation, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Kermit A. Ecklebarger (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1993), 26, 32, 35, 38, 336-37.

and response.¹¹ Expositors answer this question by asking what the text teaches about these four elements of the gospel. How does this passage proclaim the attributes of God? It may highlight his wrath against sin, his holiness, his standard of righteousness, his mercies and compassion. How does this passage proclaim the gospel in its teaching about man? It may highlight his sinfulness or point toward redemption.

Bryan Chappell teaches that a text reveals the Fallen Condition Focus of mankind: “*The FCF is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage.*” He expounds, “Specific sins are frequently the FCF of a passage, but a sin does not always have to be the FCF of a sermon. Grief, illness, longing for the Lord’s return, the need to know how to share the gospel and the desire to be a better parent are not sins, but they are needs that our fallen condition imposes and that the Scriptures address.”¹²

How does the text proclaim the gospel by teaching about Christ? Since all Scripture points to Christ (Luke 24:25-27), something in the text should anticipate his coming, highlight the need for his grace, respond to his commands, explain the cross, or reflect him in some way. Graeme Goldsworthy responds to Luke 24:27 by summarizing, “The gospel is the new hermeneutic.”¹³ The proclamation of the gospel calls for man to

¹¹Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

¹²Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 42-43, emphasis original.

¹³Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 54.

respond. Gospel-centered pastors proclaim the gospel *and* call for a response.¹⁴

The pastor who seeks to be gospel-centered in his sermons must find Christ in the Scripture he studies. Sidney Greidanus offers a broad definition of preaching Christ as “preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament.”¹⁵ He offers a summary of how to preach Christ from any passage: first, understand the passage in its own historical context, then, understand the message in the broad contexts of the whole canon of redemptive history, and finally, move toward Jesus Christ as the center.¹⁶

Goldsworthy summarizes the way an expositor can find Christ in any passage by asking, “How does this passage of Scripture, and consequently my sermon, testify to Christ?”¹⁷ He understands the gospel to be the hermeneutical key of biblical understanding: “The proper interpretation of any part of the Bible requires us to relate it to the person and work of Jesus.”¹⁸

Owen Strachan, when asked how every sermon can point to Christ, explains:

¹⁴Matt Chandler and Jared Wilson agree with Gilbert’s gospel categories and add that preachers can ask what the passage proclaims about the gospel in terms of creation, fall, reconciliation, and consummation (*Explicit Gospel* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012]).

¹⁵Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 10.

¹⁶Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 227-37.

¹⁷Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 21.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 54.

Every sermon impinges on the gospel—anchoring listeners whether converted or unconverted on how this particular text relates to our sin, God’s greatness, his sovereignty, how we are saved through the work of Christ, how God is working in Christ to bring all things to a sweeping end that will most glorify him—maximally glorify him. . . . In not every text is there a direct type of Christ, but [we must] find deeper rich gospel themes in all of our texts. And if we are working with great care and skill, many of our sermons will have their ultimate conclusion in the person and work of Christ.¹⁹

How does this passage proclaim the gospel? As the pastor considers a text for preaching, he is assured there is a way to the cross. When Adam and Eve sin in the garden, a sacrifice of blood is made and the promise given that an offspring will come who will crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). The victor over the serpent is Jesus Christ (Rom 16:20; Heb 2:14; Rev 20:1-3, 10). Abraham is promised an offspring who will bless all the nations (Gen 12:1-7). Paul teaches the Galatians that this offspring is Christ (3:16). God promises David that his kingdom is established forever and that he will always have a son on the throne (2 Sam 7:12-17). The NT establishes that Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise (Matt 1:1; Luke 1:32-33; Heb 1:5). The law establishes the standards of a holy God and reveals the sinfulness of mankind. Jesus comes as the one who can fulfill the law (Matt 5:15-20). Jeremiah promises a new covenant will come with a law written on the heart (Jer 31:31-34). The NT secures this reality (2 Cor 3:3-6; Heb 10:16-18). The NT fulfills the promises made in the OT in the person of Jesus and then proclaims that he is a returning King.²⁰ The final cry of the Word clings to gospel hope: “Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all” (Rev 22:20-21).

¹⁹Owen Strachan, “Christ-Centered Preaching, Christ-Plus Preaching” [online]; accessed 26 June 2012; available from <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/files/2012/06/Owen-Strachan-2.mp3>; Internet.

²⁰Mark Dever summarizes the relationship of the OT and NT in his two-volume set on the message of the Bible (*The Message of the Old Testament: Promises*

How Does this Passage Defend the Gospel?

Preachers center their sermons on the gospel as they defend the good news. Jesus promises that false prophets come “in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt 7:15), that “many false prophets will arise and lead many astray,” and that “false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (24:11, 24). Paul’s Gospel-centered preaching paradigm includes defending the gospel against false teachers and human weakness.

Paul Defends the Gospel against False Teachers

The Galatians fulfill Jesus’ warnings by deserting Christ and “turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:6-7). Paul mirrors this exhortation to the Corinthian church by warning them of those who preach “another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough” (2 Cor 11:4).

John MacArthur reviews Galatians 1:6 to highlight the tremendous need for preaching today:

The Galatians had been privileged to be taught by the greatest teacher the church has ever known apart from the Lord Himself; yet they readily rejected the truths of grace they had learned from him. *There is still a great and urgent need for preaching and teaching that continually repeats the central truths of the gospel* (see 2 Pet. 1:12–15). It is possible even for longtime believers to lose a firm grip on

Made [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005]; *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006]).

those truths and allow themselves to be weakened and perverted by ideas that purportedly improve on the pure and plain teachings of Scripture.

These Galatians were true believers who had come to salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit (3:3, 5; 4:6, 8–9). They were Christian brothers (1:2, 11; 3:15; 4:12, 31; 5:13) who had become seriously confused.²¹

Paul reports that these Galatian believers listen to “some who trouble you” (Gal 1:7). He warns that these messengers may even appear as angels (v. 8). These same voices tickle the ears of contemporary church members through programming on television and the Internet. Pastors do not need to ask *if* wolves in sheep’s clothing are circling their flock, but *who* are these messengers? They should not ask *if* they are listening to a false gospel, but *what* distorted gospels are they tempted to believe?” The shepherd guards his flock by proclaiming and defending the true gospel.

Faithful pastors need follow Paul’s lead as he boldly denounces these false teachers with the two-fold condemnation: “Let him be accursed” (1:8, 9). Timothy George understands the difficulty of this phrase and the need for it today:

In these verses Paul intensified the antithesis between himself and his Galatian opponents by pronouncing a solemn curse upon anyone who proclaimed a counterfeit gospel. The fact that Paul issued this condemnation in the strongest words possible and then repeated it for emphasis makes this one of the harshest statements in the entire New Testament. It does not set well on modern ears accustomed to tolerance at any price and a doctrine of God devoid of the notions of judgment and wrath. Yet here it stands, stubbornly and ominously, at the forefront of Paul’s concern.²²

Paul models defending the true gospel against false teachers. Paul states the message he proclaims “is not man’s gospel . . . [but] . . . a revelation of Jesus Christ” (vv.

²¹John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 13, emphasis added.

²²Timothy George, *Galatians, The New American Commentary*, vol. 30 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 97.

11, 12). Paul knows that the gospel is good news “related to God’s action in Jesus Christ,” and that pastors are “commissioned to do the proclaiming.”²³ Pastors herald good news from the King.

Paul’s gospel-centered preaching paradigm defends the gospel by defining that his apostleship comes from Jesus (1:11-2:10). He understands that to discredit the office is to undermine the message. Pastors follow Paul’s lead by defending their office to the extent that any attack undermines the good news. Paul’s message to these Galatians is a guide for pastors to spend themselves laboring to proclaim the gospel rather than to worry if their church is user-friendly, entertaining, or relevant.²⁴

Shepherds defend the freedom that believers have in Christ. Paul notes that the false brothers have a formula to replace “our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery” (2:4). Satan seeks to deceive and to distract believers not by completely removing a good thing but by tainting it: replacing the freedom of God-exalting worship with slavery to self-worship, subverting servanthood into selfishness, perverting biblical sexual freedom to slavery to sexual sin, replacing enjoyment of good foods with the bondage of gluttony. Pastors encourage their flocks to enjoy all freedoms Christ gives while guarding against deception and temptation.

Gospel-centered ministry includes rebuking one another from the gospel as Paul rebuked Peter (vv. 11-13). Positively, it ensures “that [our] conduct [is] in step with

²³Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), in Logos CD-ROM (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2013), s.v. “gospel.”

²⁴John F. MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes like the World*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 57-101.

the truth of the gospel” (v. 14). A pastor who oversees other staff and leaders of the church may appeal to Paul’s example of confronting Peter in hopes of modeling the gospel to the church and protecting its purity.

Paul defends the gospel against false teachers and their false teachings (3:1-6). He rebukes the Galatians for their culpability: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (v. 1). Pastors follow Paul’s lead by instructing their congregations that gospel waywardness is foolish and those who follow after other gospels are like those under a magic spell. Pastors can join Paul’s voice by instructing their congregants: “it was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (v. 1).

Pastors find in this passage a paradigm for the place of the rhetorical question in the sermon. Paul rebukes the Galatian congregation with four rhetorical questions:

1. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? (3:2)
2. Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (v. 3)
3. Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? (v. 4)
4. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness? (vv. 5-6)

These rhetorical questions seek to show the Galatians, and the church today, the folly of false teaching. Gospel-centered preaching includes asking rhetorical questions to reprove the foolishness of confusing justification and sanctification, beginning in the Spirit but seeking perfection in the flesh (v. 3). Preachers instruct the members that the gospel is the good news that secures their initial belief and is the fountain from which they drink day by day.

Paul Defends the Gospel against Weakness

Paul defends the gospel against any weakness that entices a follower away from the purity of the good news (Gal 4:8-20). He defends the gospel against their turning “back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world” (4:9). Paul models in 4:1-7 preaching that celebrates the birthright of believers, while his preaching in 4:8-20 reproves any betrayal.²⁵

Paul knows the Galatians gospel story because he was the messenger of good news to them (vv. 13-14). Paul models for preachers the role of the pastor as an evangelist in the pulpit and person-to-person. Gospel-centered pastors do not just preach the full counsel of God. They also talk about the good news with lost persons. Just as Paul shared his testimony with others (Acts 22, 26; Phil 3:3-11), gospel-centered pastors never lose sight of their own conversion. These pastors enjoy sharing the gospel with the lost, and hearing the gospel stories of the saved. Evangelism, teaching, discipleship, correction, rebuke, and affirmation flow from gospel conversations.

Pastors follow Paul by correcting their congregation for any ways that they “turn back again” to elementary principles by observing “days and months and seasons and years” (Gal 4:9, 10). Following the false teachers admonitions to be circumcised and to follow Jewish law, these Galatians observe Sabbaths and feast days, the new moons of the Jewish lunar calendar, week-long festivals, and sabbatical and Jubilee years.²⁶

²⁵Harold L. Willmington, *Willmington's Complete Guide to Bible Knowledge* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991), 258.

²⁶Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 278-79.

The Galatians were tempted to follow the Jewish calendar. Congregants today have their own set of “days and months and seasons and years.” While pastors rightly instruct that taking a day to honor the Lord or to enjoy a Sabbath rest is appropriate (Rom 14:6, Col 2:16), the optional celebration of these days is significantly different than confusing their salvation with these observances. Members of churches are tempted to assign too much significance to days of baptism, confirmation, or walking an aisle to join the church. Interpretation of the OT Sabbath day regulations may confuse some who came of age in a culture of Sunday Blue Laws. High attendance days for churches occur on Easter, Mother’s Day, and Christmas as some believe these days to hold significance above other Sundays. Others may tie their justification to a revival week or to a church camp. Observing certain days or times are helpful if they provide a format to share the gospel, but these events and seasons should not be confused with the good news.

To combat the temptation to succumb to weaknesses, Paul implores the Galatians: “Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am” (v. 12). Paul models for pastors the freedom to tell people what they need to do. He does not assume his listeners know what to do, so he states it clearly and passionately. He longs for them to walk in Christian freedom. Paul teaches that the gospel spreads even through the weakness of suffering (2 Cor 1, 2, 4, 11, 13; Col 1). He practices what he preaches when he suffers from “a bodily ailment” and continues to share the gospel with them. Paul models that conditions do not have to be ideal to proclaim the gospel.

Gospel-centered preaching includes calling for the allegiance of the people to the good news rather than to false gospels or to gospel additions. Paul appeals for their loyalty against the fascination they have with the false teachers. He instructs that these

teachers, as in the contemporary church today, gather people who serve them and who “make much of them” (Gal 4:17). Paul understands that to abandon him is to dismiss the gospel. He yearns for them to abandon that which is false in order to stand firm in freedom. Paul does not want these believers to “follow Paul” or any other favorite teacher (1 Cor 1:12), for he wants them to follow Christ.

Paul models making a personal appeal to the congregants. He calls them his “brothers” (Gal 4:12) and “my little children” (v. 19) in pastoral, not condescending tones. Even so, he is not afraid to tell them that he is like a mother in the “anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in [them]” and like a father who has a harsh tone with them because he is “perplexed” about them (vv. 19-20). Contemporary pastors do well to defend the gospel against weakness and to instruct congregants to stand firm.

How Does this Passage Defend the Gospel? A Broader Context

Gospel-centered sermon preparation considers the text and asks, “How does this passage defend the gospel?” The passage may “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). The verses may confront and dismantle worldly wisdom and highlight the “foolishness of the cross” (1 Cor 1:19-30). Contemporary pastors may defend the gospel by following Paul’s lead to name those who desert the faith or oppose the gospel by name (2 Tim 4:9-14).

Goldsworthy warns that the gospel must be defended even from current church culture. He evaluates evangelical church practice and fears that

‘Jesus in my heart’ theology distorts the Trinitarian perspective of the NT and comes close to the internalized gospel of medieval Catholicism. When being born again is made to be the gospel, then objective and historical nature of the biblical

gospel is compromised. This becomes a subjectivist expression. Another problem is the evangelical focus on being happy and feeling good. Serious study, reading and exposition is minimized, feel good religion is similar to the liberal Friedrich Schleiermacher than to the evangelicalism of the Reformers.²⁷

R. C. Sproul exhorts pastors to defend the gospel by preaching the doctrine of justification over and over again. He laments the tragedy of a gospel easily-offered and quickly-assured.²⁸ R. Albert Mohler Jr. joins his concern and warns against a salvation that only preaches “give your heart to Jesus” when the whole gospel is emotive and affective leading the believer to yield his entire self to the Lordship of Christ.²⁹

How Does This Passage Apply the Gospel?

Paul proclaims and defends the gospel in Galatians 1-4. In chapters 5-6 he applies these gospel truths. Paul models for preachers that the indicative truths of the gospel overflow into imperative obedience. What believers do flows from who they are. This allows Paul to instruct believers to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel (Rom 6:4; 13:13; Gal 5:16; Eph 4:1).

Paul Applies the Gospel as Freedom

Paul models gospel-centered preaching by taking the indicative in 4:31 that

²⁷Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 124.

²⁸R. C. Sproul, “The Center of Christian Preaching: Justification by Faith,” Together for the Gospel Conference, 2006, general session IV, [on-line]; accessed 1 August 2013; available from <http://t4g.org/media/2006/05/the-center-of-christian-preaching-justification-by-faith-session-iv/>; Internet.

²⁹R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Expository Preaching Done Well” panel discussion at Together for the Gospel Conference 2006. [on-line]; accessed 25 June 2013; available from <http://t4g.org/media/2006/04/dever-duncan-mahaney-mohler-piper-panel-iv/>; Internet.

they “are not children of the slave but of the free woman,” and applying it: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (5:1). Paul applies the gospel by taking the false teachers insistence on circumcision to its logical end: “Christ will be of no advantage to [them],” they are “obligated to keep the whole law,” and they have “fallen away from grace” (vv. 2-4). Paul contrasts this undesirable scenario with life in the Spirit of Christ. This Spirit-filled life allows them to live by “faith working through love” (vv. 5-6). Preachers today follow Paul’s model of application by stating worldly philosophies, pursuing them to their logical means, and taking them captive to Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

Paul’s gospel-centered preaching paradigm applies speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Because he loves these Galatians, he is willing to confront them with hard truths: “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Gal 5:7). Paul is also unashamed to use abrupt language for those seeking to lead them astray: “I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!” (v. 12). Paul’s preaching applies gospel freedom while assigning personal responsibility (vv. 13-15).

Paul teaches expositors a great lesson about applying the gospel: the freedom to be offensive. The problem for many with gospel-centered preaching is the cross. Preaching that centers on politics, arts and culture, moralism, self-help, therapy, psychology, ecology, or any other type of preaching never has to include the cross. As York and Decker instruct, “A message that comes from any source other than the Word of God will fail to supply the listeners with the true source of salvation.”³⁰ Even so, the

³⁰York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 19.

Word of God contains what Paul calls “the offense of the cross” (Gal 5:11). Ryken instructs,

The problem with preaching the cross is that it has a way of offending people. . . . To preach Christ crucified is to invite ridicule, opposition, hardship, persecution, and even death. Paul called this phenomenon ‘the offense of the cross’ (Gal. 5:11). It was something he experienced almost every time he went out to preach the gospel. People were scandalized by what he said about the crucifixion.³¹

The “offense of the cross” continues today. While pastors do not need to be offensive in their dress, mannerisms, speech, or anything else, they cannot be inoffensive and claim to preach gospel-centered sermons. Ryken applies the offense of the cross to today:

Christ crucified—more than anything else, this is why Christianity is so offensive to a postmodern culture. Most people think well of Jesus Christ, at least as a moral teacher. Nor do people mind Christians very much, provided that we mind our own business. No, what people dislike about Christianity is the exclusive claim of the crucified Christ. The only Christianity they will accept is based on a Christ without a cross.

Realizing this helps us understand our mission to the world. The problem with most Christians is that we don’t know when to be offensive. We want to fit in with our culture. We want people to like us. At the very least, we don’t want to offend anyone. And as a result, we end up getting rid of the very thing that is supposed to offend people: Jesus Christ crucified. Not that we ourselves should be any more offensive than we have to be, of course. We should never add our own personal offense to the offense of the cross, which is offensive enough! But if Christianity must offend people, then let it be the cross that offends them. For where else can people see that they are sinners and where else can they meet the Savior?³²

Paul Applies the Gospel to the Spirit

Paul models gospel-centered preaching by teaching how to walk according to the Spirit, not the flesh (Gal 5:16-26). He instructs the believers to “walk by the Spirit”

³¹Ryken, *Galatians*, 213.

³²*Ibid.*, 215.

from the motivation, “and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (v. 16). Paul warns them what a life enslaved to the flesh is like by listing the “works of the flesh” (vv. 19-21). He then teaches exactly what life in the Spirit is by listing the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23). He presses them again to “live by the Spirit . . . [and] let us also walk by the Spirit” (v. 25). Paul’s gospel-centered preaching paradigm applies the good news by warning against the life of the flesh and by insisting on life in the Spirit.

Paul’s paradigm of gospel-centered preaching includes specific application for how to live life in the gospel. He does not negate that Christians will have “desires of the flesh,” and he addresses the reality of warfare between flesh and Spirit (vv. 16-17). He instructs that the “works of the flesh” are “evident” from an earthly perspective and that they are damning for eternity (vv. 19-21). Gospel truth means fleshly passions and desires are “crucified,” allowing the believer to produce the fruit of the Spirit by walking humbly by the Spirit (vv. 22-26).

Paul Applies the Gospel to the Church

Paul applies the gospel to the life of the church in Galatians 6:1-18. Pastors learn from Paul that the gospel is continuous. The good news is not just an invitation the pastor awkwardly attaches to the end of every sermon. As D. A. Carson and Tim Keller correct, “Some . . . think of the gospel as what tips us into the kingdom and gets us ‘saved,’ while the life-transforming elements in the Bible’s content are bound up with something rather different—wisdom, law, counsel, narrative paradigms, and small-group

therapy, but not gospel.”³³ Paul views the Christian life flowing from the gospel.

Paul’s paradigm of gospel-centered preaching includes applying the gospel by restoring those who are “caught in any transgression” (v. 1). The good news explains that Christians sin, transgress, and need restoration. It also means that those who are “spiritual” need to “keep watch” lest they are tempted in helping with restoration (v. 1). Applying the gospel means instructing the church to “bear one another’s burdens” which fulfills “the law of Christ” (v. 2). While caring for others, the gospel teaches each one to “bear his own load” (v. 5) and to “share all good things with the one who teaches” (v. 6).

Gospel-centered preaching includes the principle of sowing to the Spirit to “reap eternal life” while warning others that sowing to the flesh reaps corruption (v. 8). It includes persevering even while weary and “do[ing] good to everyone” (vv. 9-10).

Paul teaches in the final section of Galatians that gospel-centered preaching bears repeating. His concluding passage reviews the great themes of the book: defending the gospel against false teachers (vv. 12-13), proclaiming the gospel as both “crucified . . . to the world” and living as “a new creation” (vv. 14-15), and applying the gospel to those who “walk by this rule,” who have the peace, mercy and grace of Jesus with their spirit (vv. 16-18).

Paul does not assume gospel application in the lives of the Galatians. He details for these believers how to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Paul’s imperatives flow from his indicatives: what they do is an expression of who they are. Application asks of every text preached: “So what?” Gospel-centered expositors ask,

³³D. A. Carson and Timothy Keller, “Gospel-Centered Ministry,” in *The Gospel as Center: Renewing Our Faith and Reforming Our Ministry Practices* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 18.

“What does it mean that Christ is the once-for-all sacrifice?”

How Does This Passage Apply the Gospel? The Broader Context

Hershael W. York and Bert Decker assert,

Sermons are not about just imparting information. They should be custom-built to change lives. We don't want to fill their heads; we want the proclamation of the Word to grip their souls and motivate them to conform to the will of God. Our approach to the Bible and to preaching, therefore, has *application* as its ultimate goal. . . . people want to know *how* as well as *what*.³⁴

York and Decker admonish pastors to find the application of the sermon and then build it into the main points: “Don't bury it in the conclusion or even in the exegesis, but lay it out from the very beginning. Let application drive the sermon.”³⁵ Goldsworthy captures the idea of gospel-centered application:

Any sermon, then, that aims to apply the biblical text to the congregation and does so without making it crystal clear that it is Christ alone and through Christ alone that the application is realized, is not a Christian sermon. It is at best an exercise in wishful and piestic thinking. It is at worst demonic in its Christ-denying legalism.³⁶

The gospel is the bedrock of application. Why should Christians love their enemies? The gospel informs that Christ loved believers and died for them while they were still sinners, children of wrath following the prince of the power of the air (Rom 5:8; Eph 2:1-5). Why should believers forgive? The gospel says that they are forgiven and demonstrate this forgiveness toward others (Matt 6:12-15; 18:21-35). Why should Christians do good works? The gospel says that they are saved by his obedience and that

³⁴York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 11.

³⁵Ibid., 140.

³⁶Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 124.

Christ prepares good works for us that we should walk in them (Eph 2:8-10). Why should believers not be anxious? The gospel assures that the peace of God which transcends all understanding and will guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7). Why can Christians look forward to the future? The good news includes a returning King who will come back to gather his own (John 14:1-3).

Expositors who follow Paul's lead to be gospel-centered in their sermons, ask three questions of the text: How does this passage proclaim the gospel? How does this text defend the gospel? How does this passage apply the gospel?

Conclusion

This dissertation establishes Paul's proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. Earlier chapters evaluate the changes found in Paul's life as he encounters the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and serves as an apostle. His writing in the epistle to the Galatians is the template for understanding gospel proclamation, defense, and application.

This chapter offers a paradigm for gospel-centered preaching by asking:

- 1) How does this passage proclaim the gospel?
- 2) How does this Scripture defend the gospel?
- 3) How does this text apply the gospel?

The gospel-centered preaching paradigm is a tool to help contemporary expositors follow Paul's model and become gospel-centered in their preaching. The goal of these sermons is to help unbelievers receive the gospel and to continually become more like Jesus as they walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation establishes Paul's proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. This writing traces the lack of gospel-centered preaching today and introduces Paul as the Apostle of the Gospel. He writes a stinging letter to the believers in Galatia to restore them to the true gospel. In this epistle Paul proclaims and defends the gospel in chapters 1-4, and applies the gospel in chapters 5-6. This dissertation encourages pastors to look to Paul as a model for how to proclaim, defend, and apply the gospel in the pulpit.

Why the emphasis on gospel-centered preaching? The gospel is the main message. All passages in the Bible build toward it, are part of it, or overflow from it. The gospel is not the front door of the church or just the way into a relationship with Christ. In the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ believers live and move and have their being. Believers never outgrow the gospel and move into greater things like spiritual gifts, discipleship, serving on a ministry team, or becoming an elder. All of these good things flow from the gospel. The gospel is central because each day believers must deal with their own sins and the sins of those around them. They can respond and engage in love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

Christians wrestle with the yearnings of the heart, misplaced hopes, broken dreams, and unfulfilled expectations. These life issues are interpreted through the lense

of the gospel. Rightly understood and emphasized, the good news focuses hope, rebukes fears, educates social justice, motivates parenting, supplies courage, enables perseverance, encourages the heart, overflows in speech, guides meditations, provides perspective, buffers disappointments, and redirects yearnings.

Graeme Goldsworthy explains that the gospel is the work of Christ for us, the fruit of the Gospel is the work of Christ in us, and the consummation of the gospel is the work of Christ within us. He summarizes, “All preaching, to be true to the biblical perspective, must in some sense be gospel preaching.”¹

Paul Gericke names Paul the *Prince of Preachers* and explains why his sermons and writings are a gospel-centered example: “The apostle Paul is truly the model for ministers and churches in proclaiming the gospel to the world and fulfilling the great commission.”² James Denney encapsulates why Galatians, among all of Paul’s writings, serves as a gospel-centered model, “The aim of the Epistle to the Galatians is to show that all Christianity is contained in the Cross.”³

The Apostle Paul serves as a gospel-centered example specifically because he points to Christ and not to himself. He is the one who counts all things as loss compared to “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:8). The gospel Paul celebrates is about Jesus Christ. As F. F. Bruce explains, “The gospel preached by Paul

¹Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 92-95.

²Paul Gericke, *Prince of Preachers: The Apostle Paul* (Landham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 80.

³James Denney, *The Death of Christ* (New York: Armstrong, 1903), 152.

is not the true gospel because it is Paul who preaches it; it is the true gospel because the risen Christ gave it to Paul to preach.”⁴

Mohler evaluates the cultural shifts from 1993 to 2013 and notes that history will show twenty years of time passing, but “light years” of change culturally and intellectually. He believes these changes require new skills for gospel ministers: “I think we should learn very quickly that we’re going to speak less about ‘reaching the culture’ and ‘winning the culture’ and a lot more about how we share the gospel, preach the gospel and live the gospel in a culture that is changing right before our eyes.”⁵ Hershael W. York and Bert Decker and exhort:

No matter what anyone says, the greatest need of the twenty-first century is the gospel. And the greatest need of the gospel is a generation of passionate and convicted preachers who will stand and preach God’s Word with bold assurance. When preaching such as that thunders from the pulpits of our churches, evangelistic fervor and holy devotion will emanate from the pews.⁶

This dissertation establishes Paul’s proclamation, defense, and application of the gospel in his epistle to the Galatians as a paradigm for the gospel being the central theme of preaching. This work offers a paradigm for gospel-centered preaching by asking three simple questions:

- 1) How does this passage proclaim the gospel?
- 2) How does this Scripture defend the gospel?

⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 83.

⁵R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Mohler: Culture Changes Require ‘Whole New Set of Skills’ for Pastors,” *Towers* 12, no. 1 (August 2013): 11.

⁶Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 262.

3) How does this text apply the gospel?

This paradigm is a guide for expositors to use in order to center their sermons on the life changing work of Jesus. The heart of this dissertation is to encourage expositors to preach the fullness of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ for their own edification, for the equipping of the saints, and for the glory of God.

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ABSTRACT

PAUL'S PROCLAMATION, DEFENSE, AND APPLICATION OF THE GOSPEL IN GALATIANS AS A PARADIGM FOR GOSPEL-CENTERED PREACHING

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This dissertation uses Paul's letter to the Galatian Christians as a guide for gospel-centered preaching. The dissertation argues that evangelical Christianity suffers from a lack of gospel rich preaching, assesses that Galatians can be understood as a sermon, and then analyzes each passage in light of the gospel. In Galatians 1-4 Paul alternates between proclaiming and defending the gospel; in chapters 5-6 Paul applies the gospel. The final conclusion is that pastors who wish to be gospel-centered in their preaching do well to look to Galatians and ask three summary questions of any passage from which they will preach: 1) How does this Scripture proclaim the gospel? 2) How does this passage defend the gospel? 3) How does this text apply the gospel? The gospel-centered preaching paradigm is a tool to help contemporary expositors follow Paul's model and become gospel-centered in their preaching. The goal of these sermons is to help unbelievers receive the gospel and to continually become more like Jesus as they walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.

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