

Galatians – The Gospel

The gospel is a big deal, according to the apostle Paul. It's astonishingly great, particularly because it's full of astonishing grace. Paul is astonished that anyone would ever even consider turning away from it. So he writes this letter to the Galatians.

These six talks hopefully capture the flow and the feeling of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Talk 1 – Galatians 1.1-10

1. An Astonishing Gospel (Galatians 1.1-5)

- The gospel is truly extraordinary. Paul's introduction is far more than just cursory—it serves to highlight in a couple of short sentences some of the grand aspects of the message of Jesus. He's the Son of God, raised from the dead, the one who brings grace and peace through giving himself for our sins, he's delivered us from this present evil age, according to God's eternal and glorious plans. It's an astonishing gospel!

2. An Astonished Apostle (Galatians 1.6)

- Given such an astonishing gospel, the apostle Paul is astonished that anyone would ever consider turning away from it (Galatians 1.6)! The idea that the Galatians might be deserting the grace of Jesus causes a real and visceral reaction in Paul. How could this be?!

3. An Astonishing Problem (Galatians 1.7-10)

- Paul lays out his reason for his astonishment. There is no other gospel (7). Some want to distort the gospel in Galatia (7). The integrity of the gospel is high stakes (8-10).

Applying it to us

- *How astonishing would it be for us to make the mistake of deserting the grace of Jesus! We ought to feel astonished at the mere thought of it. This should motivate us to explore the many ways we can lead one another and encourage one another in the gospel of grace in Christ.*

Talk 2 – Galatians 1.11-2.14

The Gospel of Christ (Galatians 1.11-12)

- These are key verses that set up the section. The gospel, Paul says, concerns Jesus, the Messiah, God's specially chosen and appointed king and rescuer. And because of this, the gospel cannot simply be departed from, or changed on a whim. Paul lays out the evidence for the gospel he preached (cf. Galatians 1.1-5) being the gospel of Jesus.

Exhibit #1 (Galatians 1.13-17)

- Exhibit 1 is Paul's transformation. Acts 8-9 tells the full story. The gospel of grace turned Paul's life on its head, totally transforming his priorities and zeal for God.

Exhibit #2 (Galatians 1.18-2.10)

- Exhibit 2 is the veracity of the gospel. Each detail Paul lays out builds the case that he has not added anything to the full gospel he received from the Lord Jesus (2.6). The other apostles agreed that he had received the full gospel of Christ.

Exhibit #3

- Exhibit 3 is Paul's disagreement with Peter. Peter hesitated from the gospel of grace out of fear. Paul was willing to disagree with Peter so as to keep in step with the truth of the gospel.

Applying it to us

- *If, as Paul says, the gospel message of grace is the revelation of Jesus, the Messiah, God's specially chosen and appointed king and rescuer, then like the Galatians, we would have to be dumb to challenge it, change it, or doubt its truth.*

Talk 3 – Galatians 2.15-3.29

1. "We know..." (Galatians 2.15-21)

- Paul appeals to what we know. We know (2.15-16) we're justified by faith, not by works of the law. The life we live is life in Christ, not life in our own flesh.

2. "O foolish Galatians!" (Galatians 3.1-14)

- Paul now returns in earnest to expressing his astonishment (cf. 1.6) – if we know we're justified by faith and not by works, why would we act as if we're justified by keeping the law?! It just doesn't make sense to live this way.

3. An example (Galatians 3.15-29)

- Paul gives a slam dunk Old Testament example (3.15). Abraham wasn't justified by keeping the law. So why would the Galatians think they are?

A tricky section

- *This is a difficult part of Galatians to preach. There is a lot of rich doctrine present, and every effort should be made to bring the beauty of the grace of the gospel to the fore here. However Paul goes back and forth a bit, and the main themes of break up I have suggested sort of bleed into each other. There is also a lot that could be said about the Old Testament and Abraham. The challenge is to keep the main thread of Paul's argument clear, even if that means not saying a lot that could be said.*

Talk 4 – Galatians 4

1. Afraid (Galatians 4.1-20)

- Paul is afraid he may have laboured in vain (4.11), and afraid for the Galatians as they come toward a full understanding of the gospel (4.19). He dearly wants them to grasp the fullness of the gospel of Christ. Paul draws out some of the implications of the gospel in these verses.

2. Allegory (Galatians 4.21-27)

- Paul tells the story of Hagar and Sarah, which he calls an allegory (4.24). The allegory is explained in 25-27: those who live according to the law are slaves, those who live in Christ are free.

3. Application (Galatians 4.28-31)

- Paul applies all this to the Galatians: they are children of promise (so don't go back to slavery).

Applying it to us

- *There is a lot here that does not apply to us, as we are (likely) not descendants of the Jewish patriarchs or matriarchs. The identity statement is a great launch pad for application because it is as true for us as it was true for the Galatians: we are children of promise (note how 4.28 circles all the way back to 4.4-6).*

Talk 5 – Galatians 5

1. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5.1)

- Following on closely from the previous section, this is the main point of chapter 5. Paul will break this down for the Galatians, telling them what freedom isn't, what freedom is, and what freedom looks like.

a) Freedom isn't... (Galatians 5.2-12)

- Circumcision isn't freedom. Circumcision negates grace.

3. Freedom is... (Galatians 5.13-15)

- Freedom is serving one another through love.

4. Freedom looks like... (Galatians 5.16-26)
[application: so don't use your freedom for the flesh, but to serve in love!]

- Paul gets practical on what it looks like to serve one another through love. The Galatians have been set free from the things of the flesh, to live according to the fruit of the Spirit.

Applying it to us

- *5.13 provides a great launchpad for practical application, and the fruit of the Spirit (contra the works of the flesh) provide specifics.*

In the final chapter the apostle Paul summarises his argument, and sets out a better way of thinking, resetting the mindset of the Galatians with the richness of the gospel. Each point of the outline below seeks to capture the way Paul turns the Galatians from their old way of

thinking to a new way of thinking about the gospel.

Talk 6 – Galatians 6

1. Keep the Law (of Christ) (Galatians 6.1-5)
 - Fulfil the law of Christ, rather than the Jewish law.
2. Do (gospel) good (Galatians 6.6-10)
 - Don't grow weary of doing gospel good.
3. Circumcision counts (for nothing) (Galatians 6.11-18)
 - Circumcision counts for nothing, but becoming a new creation by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ counts for everything!

Tristan Merkel
Bathurst Presbyterian
2024