

What is in view

When we speak about the truth of the Gospel, there is one "risk" that we face. Some might come to think that the Christian life is about grasping, in a cognitive way, the content of the good news. But Paul wants us to understand that our grasp of the objective truth of the Gospel should usher us into a rich and subjective experience of life in the Spirit. We need both, the truth and the Spirit!

What is helpful to note

As we look back on the overall thrust of Paul's words in Galatians three and into the first part of four, it is clear that he wants his readers to recognize and hold onto the truth of the Gospel and the solid teaching he is offering that is rooted in the Old Testament. But there is something else going on in this section as well.

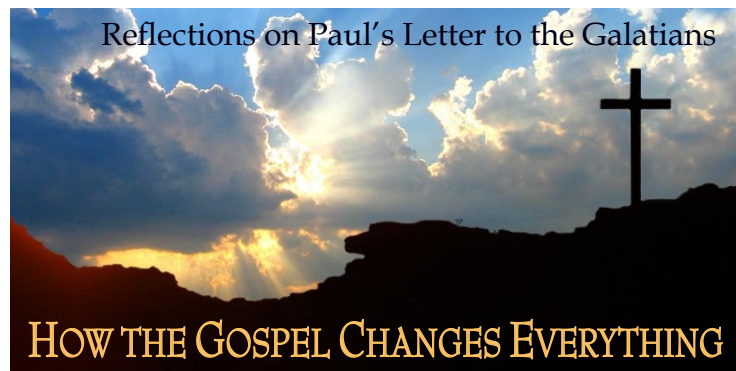
As you read 3:1-4:7 (remember, the chapter divisions are not inspired!), you might notice that this section is "book-ended" by a common thought: an experience with the Spirit.

In 3:2, Paul alerts them to the reality of their experience of the Spirit when they first came to place faith in Jesus. (The "receiving of the Spirit" is part and parcel of their initial coming to faith as is clear from its connection to: the portrayal of Jesus as crucified before them and the reference to "having begun" that way.) What is startling about this is that Paul asks them to assess his theology by the experience they personally had with the Spirit.

When Paul makes mention of the Galatians "suffering" (3:4), he uses a word that probably isn't referring to persecution or hardship as much as "experiencing;" it's not difficulty that is in view but merely "going through stuff." And, again, apparently

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Gordon Fee




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he is calling them to pay attention to their experience. In 3:5, the focus is still on the Spirit and the present and ongoing experiencing they continue to have with Him.

When we turn to the other "bookend" in 4:4-7, it's hard to miss the experiential, "the Spirit in my life" focus. It's not just that the Galatians heard the message about Jesus and accepted that. Of course that's true; they embraced the Gospel truth that God "sent His Son into the world." But they also experienced God sending "the Spirit of the Son" into their hearts and the result was that there arose from their own hearts a passionate and deeply-felt expression of love and longing for God.

The word Paul uses for "cry" in 4:6 speaks of a vocal expression of deep feeling. And to use the word "Abba" as address for God is to focus on intimacy and affection. That word (used by Jesus Himself in Mark 14:36) is one that passes beyond just an affirmation of theological truth (although it would imply that). It is a word that would usher from the heart of a child in warmth and adoration for his or her father: "Dearest daddy!"

What we must not miss is that this life that Jesus has procured for us and that we enter by faith is a life of *real relationship with a real Person*. As such, the reality of that relationship must include feelings, and affection, and experience. And, the Spirit of God, sent by the Father because of the work of the Son, is the personal agent for just such experiences in our lives.

What to talk about with your group

As you open, the initial question should help all your group realize that every relationship has "experience" attached to it. To say one has a relationship with a person without ever having any experience of that other person is nonsensical. Sadly, many Christians seem to affirm their relationship with God through Christ without ever acknowledging or grasping the place that *an experience with the Spirit* rightly must have in that life with God.

It is true that the Gospel is objectively true. Jesus really lived and died and rose and redeems. The Scriptures readily affirm the offer of life to those who put their faith in Jesus to do for them what the Gospel offers. But the objective truth of the Gospel is supposed to come home to the hearts of believers in a real and vital subjective experience of the Spirit.

"There are dimensions of the promise given to Abraham that transcend the promise of land. It would seem that Paul is concentrating on that aspect of the promise in his remarks here in Galatians 3 and 4. The inheritance [what was promised] is primarily the blessing of justification by faith and the gift of the Spirit."
David Huttar

Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion

Thinking . . .

When you think about being “in relationship” with someone, how do you assess the character and quality of the relationship?

Reflecting . . .

In exploring Galatians, we’ve been focusing on Paul’s proper insistence on the truth of the Gospel—the message of what Jesus did for us on the cross. But Paul also anchors his thoughts in another facet of life. Read Galatians 3:1-5 & 4:4-7.

What is Paul calling the Galatians’ attention to in these two passages?

How do you think he anticipates they would answer the questions asked in 3:1-5? What do you think he hopes they will realize through what he affirms in 4:4-7?

Why would it be important for Paul to call these believers’ attention to the Spirit’s manifest presence in their lives? How does that augment or fit in with what he has been writing about the truth of the Gospel?

Responding . . .

By believing the truth about Jesus and what He did in dying for you, you entered into life with God that involves ongoing experience with the Spirit of God. Where have you “tasted” or “sensed” that present work of the Spirit?

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Reflections on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians



HOW THE GOSPEL CHANGES EVERYTHING

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