

What is in view

As Paul brings his argument for the truth of his Gospel to a close, he appeals to two different bases for assessing truth claims. He calls the Galatians to recognize the truthfulness of what he has been writing in that it corresponds to their own personal experience, and he calls them to recognize the truthfulness of what he has been writing in that it lines up with what God Himself has said in the Scriptures. These two lines of thinking—the reality of our experiences and the veracity of the Scriptures—form the stable base for building our understanding of the Gospel.

What is helpful to note

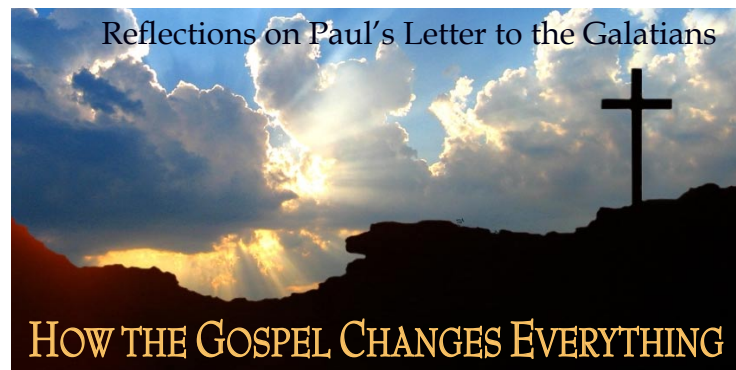
Last discussion we also focused on Galatians 3:1-5. It might be of help for you to review those notes before diving in to these discussion notes. Last time, we focused on the Spirit's role in salvation. But, this time we want to notice something different.

When you read the questions that Paul raises for the Galatians, notice that their answers would all be rooted in their own experiences.

In fact, Paul really underscores this by stressing that “this is the only thing I want to find out from you” (3:2, NASB; “this only I want to learn from you,” NKJV; “I would like to learn just one thing from you,” NIV). He is focusing on one basic question. And it is this: What experience have you had with the Spirit? He is seeking to demonstrate the validity of his Gospel (that life with God is available solely by grace through faith in Jesus) on the basis of how they have experienced that Gospel message in their own lives.

The other questions that Paul develops in this section all

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are anchored to this idea. He wants the Galatians (and, us, too!) to reflect on how we have come to experience this life with God as one way to affirm the truth of the message he is proclaiming. If we do, in fact, experience the Spirit's power and presence in our lives by grace through faith alone (apart from works), then this substantiates Paul's claim that this is the way the Gospel “works.”

But Paul doesn't stop there. He adds one more “grounds” for truth. This is found in Galatians 3:6-9. He presents Abraham as the model, the pre-eminent example of how someone can be made right with God. (The “even so” opening phrase in 3:6 [“Just as,” NKJV; “consider,” NIV] is presented as something that is to be considered the norm or standard. Their experience should be “just like” Abraham's.)

Paul is turning back to the Scriptures as the other leg on which to build his case. Not only does the experience the Galatians have with the Spirit substantiate Paul's case, but their experience is right in line with what the Scriptures, in fact, teach (as seen in the example of Abraham).

This is both a brilliant and helpful way for Paul to make his argument. In a sense, he is affirming two things:

Do you not see that this “rings true” in your own experience? And

Do you not see that this “rings true” in the straight-forward presentation of the Scriptures?

What to talk about with your group

As you talk with your group about “truth claims,” you will have to explore different ways we assess truth. Some appeal to authority; some look to their own experience; some try and pull in “common sense.” As you walk through the passage, focus on Paul's two “grounds” for helping the Galatians assess the truth of his message:

We know that life with God is available solely by grace through faith because . . .

This is how we have experienced the Spirit (3:1-5)

This is how the Scriptures present it (3:6-9)

Some Christians seem to privilege one of these “grounds” over the other; Paul was comfortable asserting both. It is a joining of “Word” and “experience.” The Gospel is true because it is God's message and work, and we “taste” the truth of it as we come to experience this for ourselves.

Paul has made his case for justification by grace through faith in Christ alone—this is the Gospel he proclaimed. Now to further substantiate his case, Paul turns to two lines of thought: What does your experience of the Gospel tell you? What do the Scriptures themselves assert? And, those two lines of “proof” should carry weight with us as well.

*Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion**Thinking . . .*

We all deal with “truth claims” of one kind or another. Whether assessing the truthfulness of what your child told you or determining which “news report” is telling it “like it is,” we use different methods to assess truth. What kinds of factors help you assess whether something is true or not?

Reflecting . . .

In Galatians, Paul is seeking to establish a very specific “truth claim;” specifically, that life with God is available on the basis of grace through faith in Jesus alone. With that truth claim in mind, read Galatians 3:1-5.

How is Paul substantiating his claim in these verses? By answering these questions, what proof do the Galatians provide to substantiate Paul’s Gospel?

Now read Galatians 3:6-9. Notice how verse 6 begins; Paul is tying 3:1-5 together with 3:6-9. So, to what does Paul now appeal to further substantiate his truth claim for the Gospel?

To help us grasp Paul’s idea, let’s restate the “arguments” Paul has made by completing the following sentence for each section (3:1-5 and 3:6-9):

We know that life with God is available solely by grace through faith because . . .

Responding . . .

How do these two lines of thinking shape your way of both affirming and living out the truth of the Gospel?

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Reflections on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

