

What is in view

This is a second “big picture” reflection on Galatians where we are trying to think on some of the implications of Paul’s words for our congregation and our purpose as a church.

This week we turn to the idea of how the truth of the Gospel can and should shape the kind of community we are and we are becoming. Does the way we “do life” together reflect well the basis of the life we now have?

What is helpful to note

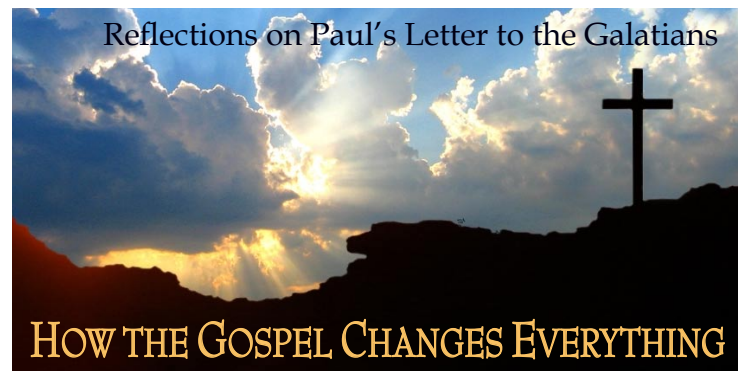
We are returning to sections of Galatians that we have already discussed in earlier weeks (and previous messages). However, we are coming back to these particular passages to reflect on how the Gospel message—the message of grace—could and should impact the way we relate to one another.

Later in this letter, Paul will provide us some specific insights into how grace shapes living, but this week we want to do some of our own thinking about the implications of the message of the Gospel.

When you turn to discuss the passages, you will notice that Paul intimates a great deal about what we all have in common. Look first at 3:22-29. There we see such things as:

Everyone stands equally condemned, under sin.
Everyone has been “shut up” to faith; driven to find life through faith in Jesus alone.
Everyone who comes to faith in Jesus is equally a child of God.
Everyone stands on equal footing because all people are “one in Christ Jesus.”

“All of us are sinners and I am not sure that some sinners are really greater than others. It is just that some sins are more visible. If there is one place where we ought to be able to come with our sins and our feelings exposed and find help and healing, it is the church. But more and more it has become the one place where we must be most careful to hide.”
Gayle Erwin



These incredible truths would certainly impact the way we relate to others. We would not hold ourselves aloof, seeing ourselves all that different from others. We would more readily extend the grace to others that we ourselves had found in Christ. And, the way this grace message impacts relationships is reflected in the other passages in view.

When you turn to Galatians 2:11-16 take note that Paul’s primary concern with Peter is that he was living inconsistent with the truth that he, himself, affirmed.

If the Gospel is true (and it is!) then it should shape the way we do life with others. Peter had, apparently, initially lived in relationship with the Gentiles in a way that was consistent with the Gospel of grace; but when he came under the influence of some “Judaizers,” he ended up opting to live in an inconsistent way. It became a matter of treating some as if they were “in” and some as if they were still “out.” And such treatment is inconsistent with the Gospel where, by the grace of God and through the work of Christ, everyone becomes someone who is “in.”

Talking to your group

The opening questions will, hopefully, get your people thinking about times in their own lives where they felt they were on the outside looking in. Most people have had a time or two when they were rejected because “y’all aren’t from around these parts.”

When you turn to the passages to be read, you might consider looking at them in the order laid out here in the “Leaders’ Notes.” Tackle 3:22-29 first; then turn to the Galatians 2 passage as an example of what you have noted. Once you’ve explored the passages, move onto the questions in the discussion guide as a way of drawing the focus onto what should characterize a community of grace, a group of people who have experienced the life that Jesus offers.

“The church is a community of people on a journey to God. Wherever there is supernatural togetherness and Spirit-directed movement, there is the church – a spiritual community. And this togetherness in Christ encourages movement toward Christ.”
Larry Crabb

† W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1966).

Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion

Thinking . . .

Have you ever been in a place where you felt singled out because you didn't "belong"? If so, when did that happen? What was it like?

Why do you sometimes "fit in" a certain group while at other times you don't seem to "fit"?

Reflecting . . .

Reflecting on some of what we've already learned out of Galatians, we want to focus on how the truth of the Gospel shapes community. So, with that in mind, read Galatians 2:11-16 and 3:22-29. What is common to all those who have come to faith?

From what you read here, what kinds of things should distinguish them or separate them from one another?

Although these passages do not lay out Paul's practical guidelines for experiencing life together in community, based on what he does say about what is common to those who have come to faith, what would you expect such a community to be like?

Responding . . .

What kind of place do you think a "church" really should be: one where people are welcomed and helped to feel that they "fit," or one where people have to work hard to "make a place for themselves"? Why?

How should Gospel truth impact community life?

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Reflections on Paul's Letter to the Galatians

