

What is in view

We want to build on what we have heard from Paul in the opening verses of Galatians. There we have watched him “draw a line in the sand.” There is one Gospel; only one. And any “modification” of that Gospel brings Paul’s curse. Apparently, Paul wasn’t about to shy away from controversy over doctrine . . . when it was necessary. What about us?

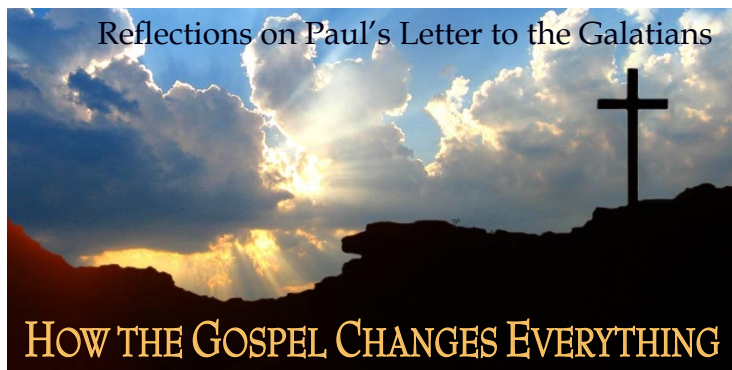
What is helpful to note

There’s a helpful way to pull together what Paul is saying by reading Paul’s thoughts in the opening verses in Galatians in reverse. He’s building to a point he’s going to address (and one that we will get to in the weeks to come); but to grasp his “big idea” it helps to go at it a bit differently. Notice this outline, drawing on the text:

- 1: 8-9: Some come preaching a different gospel.
- 1:7: Those different gospels distort the true Gospel.
- 1:7: Such distortion only leads to “disturbing” Christians.
- 1:6: The fruit of such distortion and disruption is a loss of intimacy and experience with God.
- 1:5: The God to whom all glory and praise belongs.
- 1:4: Because by His will alone He rescued us through Jesus.
- 1:3: That we might experience true grace and peace.

Obviously, you can look at this outline of thought just the way that Paul wrote it, but building on what we have been talking about regarding “different gospels,” this outline might be a helpful tool to keep in mind as you discuss the Galatians passage.

I am convinced that there is a need in the church today for much greater understanding of Christian doctrine. Not only pastors and teachers need to understand theology in greater depth—the whole church does as well. . . . I think that many Christians will find that understanding and living the doctrines of Scripture is one of their greatest joys.
Wayne Grudem




southside
FELLOWSHIP

What is it that Paul is so concerned with? As we have noted, his focus is not primarily on “sinful behavior.” (That is a concern of is as is clear from what he says later in this letter and in others of his epistles.) But what has stirred Paul up so powerfully is his concern about compromise and distortion to the core truths of the faith. He’s getting “worked up” over doctrine.

As we have already noted, for some Christians the idea of getting passionate about “theology” seems to be nearly impossible. So many conclude that “theology” is little more than “arguing about words.” But nothing could be farther from Paul’s heart; he is not interested in wrestling over anything that ultimately isn’t about God’s glory and isn’t about the good of the church. This is a big deal to him.

What to talk about with your group

When something really matters to us—when we realize that this or that really is a “big deal”—we tend to be more attentive to the details. That idea might be helpful in aiding your people to see why “doctrine” matters greatly to Paul.

As we have seen in Galatians (and as you will notice in the readings from 2 Corinthians and Jude), holding tightly to doctrinal truth matters. In Galatians, Paul recognizes that there are some who offer “another gospel” (which is not really *like* the true Gospel at all!). In the 2 Corinthians passage we find similar language where Paul speaks of how so many Christians seem to be so lax in their theological thoughtfulness that they tolerate “another Jesus” (that is, teaching about Jesus that is not at all really who He is!). And Jude calls Christians to “contend earnestly for the faith” using language that is reminiscent of hand-to-hand combat. Apparently, for these authors, doctrinal truth matters.

Why does it matter so much? As we already noted out of Galatians, to embrace distortion in the Gospel results in our ending up distant from God. The “other Jesus” Paul confronts in Corinthians is really nothing more than a message from hell itself! Thus, it makes sense to side with Jude and wrestle like those in a life-and-death struggle over the truths of the Gospel. The real question for us is, do such things really matter to us?

Jude calls Christians to “contend earnestly for the faith.” “The word [he uses] speaks of a vigorous, intense, determined struggle to defeat the opposition. Our word ‘agony’ comes from this word. . . . With such intense effort does Jude say that saints should defend the doctrines of Christianity.”
Kenneth Wuest

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

Think back to the last time you made a major purchase. (Perhaps a car or a home.) Did you pay attention to the contract you signed? Did you read most (some) of the “fine print”? If you did, why did you? If not, why not?

Reflecting . . .

When we’re facing such big issues like major life-purchases, most of us really want to know what we are getting ourselves into. Thus, we give attention to the details.

So, what about the “details” of your life with God? How attentive are you to what you really believe? How much do the details of your doctrine matter to you?

Read the following three New Testament passages: Galatians 1:3-10; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 12-20; and Jude 3.

What ties these passages together? What is the common concern?

How do you feel about the “call” given in these passages to “defend the faith”? What do you think that is supposed to look like?

Responding . . .

It would seem that “doctrinal laxity” was not well tolerated by the writers of the epistles. How do you feel about your own grasp of “sound doctrine”? Do you think you are able to “contend for the faith”? Why or why not?

I am convinced that there is a need in the church today for much greater understanding of Christian doctrine. Not only pastors and teachers need to understand theology in greater depth—the whole church does as well. . . . I think that many Christians will find that understanding and living the doctrines of Scripture is one of their greatest joys.
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Reflections on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

