Galatians: Overview

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[0:00] We're in the book of Galatians, and I don't have a primary passage to read for us this morning, but now that you're there, we're going to pray, and then just walk on through this this morning.

Father, thank you. Thank you for the chance to be here together, to look at your Word, to understand something of your mind, and I pray that you would speak with us, to us, through your Word, that we might be convicted of the truth, that we might come to love you more deeply.
And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. The second law of thermodynamics is the law of entropy. It's the law of basically things are going towards disorder.
I don't really understand all that, because I'm not a science person, but I do understand a cup of coffee. That if you pour that cup of coffee, and you set it there on the counter, and you don't get to it in the time that you want, that is going to get cold.
It's not going to spontaneously, on its own, go, Oh, whoops, let's get warm again. You have to do something to make it get warm. That kind of idea of going from order to disorder, from hot to cold, is an illustration of what has happened over the course of the last several decades in so many churches and denominations that have slid from a place of being white hot for the Lord and coming down to a place of being cold in their desire and their commitment to the Lord.
[1:43] It starts by abandoning biblical ethics, and then it moves to eventually abandoning the gospel altogether. Maybe there's another way that I can illustrate this.

I want you to imagine for a second that there's a chair right here, there's a chair right here, and there's a chair right here. Now, Bruce Wilkinson is the first one who made this illustration famous. In this chair, you've got Joshua, the son of Nun, who was with Moses sitting in this chair. Now, some of you know where this is going. You've already seen this, so that's good. You can hold on here with me.
Joshua saw the Lord's work. He saw the parting of the Red Sea. He saw the giving of the manna. He saw the things in the wilderness. And he saw the work of the Lord.
He knew the Lord. He crossed over the Jordan River. He goes in and disposes all of the people that are in the Promised Land and helps to give the land to God's people. The next generation, because you see, there was only Joshua and Caleb who were left of his generation.
[2:47] The next generation, they were taught by Joshua. They saw some things, but they didn't see everything that Joshua saw. But they heard. They were taught. They were instructed. So they knew the Lord because they were taught this.

But there came up a third generation, the book of Judges tells us, that did not know the Lord or the things of the Lord. The reason for that is because unless we keep the gospel front and center in our minds all the time, we will slide from the gospel.
A church, a denomination, will begin to compromise the gospel and find themselves fighting against God because we don't keep the gospel central.
The same thing can happen in your life. You could be in a place where you've believed the gospel, hold on to the gospel, you know the gospel, but because of life, because of trials, because of relationships, you can begin to compromise and slide off of the gospel.
So what we want to do is we want to study the book of Galatians. We want to study the book of Galatians for several weeks here together so that we can get the gospel right, keep the gospel central, and see the gospel work in our lives.
[4:23] Now a little background to the book of Galatians. This is probably one of the first books written in the New Testament. Before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Paul wrote Galatians.

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The only book that might be earlier is the book of James. But this is a writing of Paul. And you remember, Paul is the one who was going to Damascus to take Christians and haul them off to prison.
And he was knocked off of his horse by a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was physically blinded, but spiritually he was given sight to see. And he was called to be an apostle and a missionary to the Gentiles.
And on his first missionary journey, which is recorded in Acts chapter 13 and 14, he makes his way through several cities. He goes from Antioch, Poseidia, to Iconium, to Lystra, to Derbe.
And then he turns around and goes back through them and goes home to Antioch, Syria. While he's on this journey, he encounters a magician who blasphemes God, that God then blinded for a few days.
[5:33] He encounters opposition from Jews in every city because of their jealousy of the crowds that he was drawing. He saw Gentiles and Jews, some Jews, convert to Christianity.

Paul and Barnabas were mistaken for Zeus and Hermes. People tried to offer sacrifices to them. But there, outside of the city of Iconium, Paul was stoned and left for dead, and everyone thought that he was gone.
But he eventually got up, and the very next day, after being stoned, he goes on to the city of Derbe and preaches the gospel.
Now, it is to those cities that Paul writes this letter, and he says in chapter 4, verse 11, I fear for you that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.
Paul had expended so much of his life and his health to plead with these Gentiles, to prove to them in these cities that the gospel is the truth.
[6:56] But someone was disturbing them. Someone had come in to teach false things. Someone was preaching heresy, and Paul was afraid and upset.

And so he wrote the book of Galatians to help them, don't listen to the false teachers, don't listen to what's wrong, here's the true gospel, hold on to this.
And the way that the book of Galatians lines out is that he gives chapter 1 and 2, which is the gospel is from God.
He gives chapters 3 and 4, he defines, explains, and defends the gospel. And then chapters 5 and 6, he talks about how the gospel impacts your life.
And so I want you to know that we ought to be reading, studying, and preaching from the book of Galatians for those three reasons. The gospel received, the gospel defended, and the gospel applied.
[8:04] And I'm going to walk through those three things in a big picture, the whole book of Galatians in one sermon, and then we're going to come back over the next several weeks and dive into the details.

So let's take a look at that first thing. This is chapters 1 and 2 of Galatians, the gospel received.
Now in chapter 1, verse 1, Paul says this, Paul, an apostle, not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God our Father, who raised Him from the dead.
In other words, Paul is saying, I have this mission to preach the gospel. It's been given to me by God. It's been given to me by Jesus Christ, whom I saw in a vision.
So this man, Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, gave a vision to Paul of himself and told him, go preach the gospel. In that same chapter, verse 11 and 12, Paul says, For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.
For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Now the reason that this is important for us today to understand that the gospel is something that has been received by us, is that the gospel is not a matter of opinion.
[9:34] The gospel is not a story that we get to rewrite and fill out with our own emotions and ideas. The gospel is the absolute objective truth.

That's a good place for you to say amen. In case you're wondering. So many people look at the gospel as something that is a matter of opinion.
I just want you to imagine for just a second, that right here in front of me, there's a jar. Here we've got the lid, we've got this big old jar. This is for you, Jack. This is food. I'm just saying.
It's full of jelly beans. Now one way we could talk about this jar of jelly beans is we could ask a question like this. We could say, what is your favorite flavor of jelly bean?

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And if we were to survey everybody, we would find probably there's a lot of different opinions. There may be several of you that hold the same opinion, and there could be some of you that say licorice, and we would all laugh at you.
[10:41] But that is one way of looking at it, and that is a subjective opinion. The favorite flavor of jelly bean, a subjective opinion.

And so many people want us to believe that the gospel is about opinion, that it's subjective, that it's your favorite flavor.
But there's a better question to ask about the jar, and that is, how many jelly beans are in there? The answer to that is only one thing.
There's an objective, absolute truth about how many beans are in that jar. And I don't care if you are one jelly bean off from guessing, you're not right.
Correct? I mean, in the contest, you might be the closest one, and so they give it to you, but you still weren't right. You were just close. And it just doesn't count. The gospel is like that.
[11:43] It is an objective, absolute truth, because it has been received from God. So the thing we must believe from this is that the gospel is an objective truth.

If the gospel is from God, if it came from Him, then everyone, everyone, everyone, is obligated to believe it.
This is, if you're not a Christian, this is why we would say to you that you're lost unless you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, because you cannot be saved apart from that.
No unrepentant person will ever get into heaven. No person who tries to color their Christianity with their sin will ever get into heaven.
You must be able to see your sin, repent of your sin, and turn to Christ as more beautiful than anything else. That's why there's no such thing as a gay Christian, a murdering Christian, or a drunken Christian, because the gospel is an absolute truth, and you cannot mix it with anything, and you're obligated to believe it.
[13:02] And the promise of the gospel is that if you admit your sin and turn from being the boss of your own life, and turn from believing the falsehoods about God, and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then He will save you.

And as Christians, Christians, we need to understand that the gospel is not the training wheels of the Christian life. We don't take them off once we've got it underhand, and then now we can really ride our bike.
No. The gospel is the air we breathe. If we want, as Christians, to be bold in our faith, we need the gospel. If we want to live in a way that honors God, we need the gospel.
If we want to have relationships that are fulfilling and honoring to God, and truly based on love, we need the gospel. If we want to make a lasting impact in this world, then we need the gospel.
God Himself has given to us this message. It is not up for debate, and you as a Christian ought to believe that the gospel is absolute truth.
[14:17] Secondly, some of you are like, ah, don't be afraid, this is just true. You just go ahead and say, Amen. Second thing, let's get some water.

The gospel defended. In chapters 3 and 4, Paul walks through defending the gospel from a very specific attack.
The attack that is made on the gospel in these cities and these churches is not an attack where someone disagrees with Paul.
Now let that sink in for a second. These people don't disagree with Paul. Everything that Paul has taught, they're teaching.
They add one thing. They add one small thing. This is a very telling thing. This is something we really need to grasp and get a hold of.
[15:27] Because this means that it's going to be very possible for someone to look like they believe exactly what you believe, but they're wrong. And we have got to get our discernment up.

We have got to get our minds engaged to be able to see the difference. Paul says in Galatians chapter 3, he said, this is the only thing I want to find out from you.
Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish having begun by the Spirit you're now being perfected by the flesh? In other words, what he's saying is that these false teachers they teach like he does.

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Jesus is the Messiah. Check. We're all sinners. Check. Jesus died for our sins. Check. Jesus rose from the dead. Check. Okay, is that better?
Don't laugh at my check. You need to trust in Jesus to be saved. Check. They would teach all of those things.
[16:33] They would add, but, you got to start out as a Jew first. So all the men need to be circumcised. Paul is defending the gospel, explaining and showing how trying to mix the law with the gospel is wrong.

But this is our problem. This is the constant problem of our age. And it is that we mess with the gospel. When I say we, I mean we as the modern world, not we as a church are we as Christians. But the modern world messes with the gospel. Let me give you some examples. There's what I call the gospel of moral improvement. The gospel of moral improvement.
Instead of teaching people, you're a sinner and you need forgiveness, won on the cross by Jesus, they teach people, you can be a better husband. You can be a better father.
You can be a better wife. You can be a better son. You can be a better employee. It's just you have this thing in the way that makes you not so good. So if you'll just trust Jesus, He'll make you that better.
[17:53] Now, I don't deny that Jesus in your life can make you a better person, but that is not the gospel. The gospel is not. He's come to make you who are okay better.

The gospel, He's come to make you who are dead in your sins alive. He's come to make those of you who are His enemies, His children. He's not come to make good better.
The second way, the way I have a tendency to mess up the gospel is what I call the gospel of goodness. It's what some people call moral therapeutic deism. I just thought I'd throw that out there for you.
I call it the gospel of goodness because it's a lot easier to say. Instead of teaching people that they have violated God's law and their enemies and deserve death and hell, they teach people that there is a God.
He made this world. He expects us to be nice. He doesn't get involved unless we really, really need Him. And if you're a good person, when you die, you go to heaven. I'm sorry.
[18:57] There's no such thing. Let me just say this. You ever seen a Christian book called Why Bad Things Happen to Good People? That's heresy.

There are no good people. That is what we've got to get through our minds. There are no good people. There's not a single good person on the face of the planet. None of us are good.
None are righteous. None seek after God. It's funny to me sometimes you hear people talking. They'll talk about somebody saying, you know, he's a good person. And I know what people mean by that.
And that's fine. God. But don't be fooled. None of us are good. We all deserve death and hell.
There's a third way that people mess up the gospel.
It's what I call the do better gospel. The do better gospel. Instead of teaching that the gospel is that God saves those who do not deserve it without their help.
[19:56] they teach a gospel that says, well, you've got some problems in your life and if you'll obey this list of commands, then you can outweigh the bad that you've done.

You can get God pleased with you by doing so many good things. And I just want you to imagine for a second that you're standing there as Nathan the prophet talking to King David after he has sinned with Bathsheba and murdered her husband.
What would the gospel sound like if you were preaching one of these? If you preach the moral improvement gospel to David, you might look at him and say, well, you know, David, you can treat your new wife better.
You won't ever, you know, if you'll just trust Jesus, David, maybe you won't ever do that again. You know what the second gospel would teach them? Depending on who preached it, they would say something like, this, well, you're not really a good person, so you're done going to hell.
There's no hope for you. And the third gospel will say, now listen, David, you've done some bad things. If you will say this many prayers, give this much money, do this many good deeds, maybe it'll offset what you've done.
[21:12] Beloved, all of that is folly. None of that is the real gospel. The real gospel is this, that we're sinners and we've broken God's law.

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We have put other gods before him. We have violated his Sabbath. We have taken his name in vain. We've dishonored our parents. We've murdered, stolen, committed adultery. We've lied. We've coveted. and we deserve eternal punishment in a place called hell. But God in his rich mercy sent his only begotten son into this world to take our punishment. God sent his son, but his son willingly came and took our punishment so that he might be our substitute, that he might stand in our place.
And if you will take Christ, if you will receive Christ, if you will accept Christ as your Lord and your Savior, if you will accept Christ as your boss and your master, if you will take him as your substitute and your sacrifice, if you will take him for your joy, for your crown, for your glory, for your hope, for your freedom, then you will have Christ and he will have you.
It doesn't matter what you've done in the past because none of us deserve it. And that's what grace is, is that he saves those who can't do it, who don't deserve it. And oh, that you would come to Christ today.
[22:40] Oh, that you would just throw yourself wide open to him and say, Jesus, please save me. Christians, one of the things that this demands defending the gospel is that we must know the gospel.

I asked a church one time that I was pastoring, I said, do you know the gospel? I preached kind of like this, a little bit of ranty.
After church, one gentleman walks up to me and says, pastor, the gospel is four things. I was like, okay, this is good. He says, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.
I was like, okay. Yes, those are the gospel writings.
Yes, the gospel story is in them. But when we say the gospel, we're talking about what it is that we must know and believe what must be preached in order for someone to be converted.
[23:51] do you know the gospel? As Christians, do you know? And let me tell you why you need to know, because the gospel shares with us the hope of eternal life.

The gospel points us to our need of salvation and help. Our gospel points us to Christ. The gospel teaches us to live a godly life.
The gospel encourages us when we're ready to give up. The gospel empowers us to do the things for the glory of Christ. So we must learn the gospel.
The third thing then, this gets to chapters five and six. If you're the kind of person that likes to ask, so what? Why should I care? then you can go to chapters five and six and kind of see, because Paul takes all of this theology that he's been giving us and he puts practical hands to it, right?
He puts rubber to the road. He shows us how it plays out in our lives. And if you were to categorize it in just a really big summary, it would be avoid worldliness and live righteously.
[25:15] Avoid worldliness and live righteously. So Paul gives us a description of worldliness in Galatians 5, 19 through 21.

Listen to this. He says, now the deeds of the flesh are evident which are immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outburst of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing.
I have no idea what that word means, but we'll get there when we get to chapter 5. But don't be carousing. And things like these, that means that this is not an exhaustive list, of which I forewarn you just as I forewarned you that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. If this is your way of life, you will not inherit the kingdom of God. No unrepentant person ever makes it to heaven. The point that he is making is that he's trying to help them understand the gospel so that they might know how to avoid living in these ways.
But he goes on to point them to how they ought to live, that Jesus is not just about the by and by, but he's about helping them to live in the here and now.
[26:48] And so he comes to the fruit of the spirit in verse 22 that says that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such things there is no law.

Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. And if we live by the spirit, let us also walk by the spirit.
The point is that as Paul goes to apply the gospel, he is showing that the gospel applies to all of life. Your entire life, the gospel applies to everything. And if you're not a Christian, and in listening to this sermon, you find yourself saying, well, maybe I should become a Christian.

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Let me tell you a couple of things first. Just some things you need to understand. Number one, because the gospel applies to all of life, there's so much to the gospel, you need to understand that first, it is a free gift of salvation.
[27:59] Second, he adopts you to be his child, so his disposition towards you is no longer that of an enemy, but that of a father who loves you immensely.

Third, he will walk with you through this world to help you live for his glory and honor. He doesn't just save you and say, I'll see you one day when you get to heaven.
No, he is with you every moment of every day, walking through for his glory. Fourth, he gives you his Holy Spirit to live with you, to empower you, so you can make a difference in this world.
And fifth, he will walk you all the way through death's door. So you do not have to fear once you reach that last place.
If you're not a Christian, then let me tell you something, coming to the Lord Jesus Christ is the best thing that will ever happen to you.
[29:00] And if the Lord is working on your heart, if he is calling you to believe today, then I say to you, come. When this service is over, I'd be glad to talk with you. You don't have to walk the aisle, we can go to my office, you can meet me in the middle of the week, the invitation is never closed.

You come to Christ. I'd be glad to share with you how you can know the Lord Jesus Christ. But Christians, Christians, the gospel is everything for us.
It is supposed to be a part of every aspect of your life. And honestly, I really just want you to feel that.
There's a song written this year, came out this year, 2000, well, excuse me, last year, 2022. And I want to read you these lyrics. And maybe this will help capture your heart with the gospel.
There is one gospel on which I stand for all eternity. It is my story, my father's plan. The son has rescued me.
[30:17] Oh, what a gospel, oh, what a peace. My highest joy, my deepest need. Now and forever, he is my light. I stand in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is one gospel to which I cling, all else I count as loss. For there, where justice and mercy meet, he saved me on the cross.
No more I boast in what I can bring. No more I carry the weight of sin. For he has brought me from death to life I stand. in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
There is one gospel where hope is found. The empty tomb still speaks. For death could not keep my savior down. He lives and I am free.
Now on my savior I fix my eyes. My life is his and his hope is mine. For he has promised I too will rise.
[31:20] I stand in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And in this gospel the church is one. We do not walk alone.

We have his spirit as we press on to lead us safely home. And when in glory still I will sing of this old story that rescued me.
Praise to my savior the king of life I stand in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we walk through the book of Galatians together would that you would come to see the gospel as your joy.
Would that you would come to see the gospel as your hope. Would that you would come to see the gospel as your oneness with each other. Delight in what Christ has done.
This is the first step in treasuring Christ. We must know and we must love the gospel.
[32:30] Let's pray.

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