

Gospel Transformation

Galatians 1:11-24

You have likely heard the phrase, “Pick your battles wisely.” That is good advice for your family relationships, for your business practices and for our national leaders! But it is REALLY important for various conflicts in Jesus’ church. If we err on the side of fighting over insignificant things, our relationships will be damaged and Jesus’ church will be weakened. But if we err on the side of peace in the face of evil, the devil will have free reign to destroy everything that is precious to us.

I remember when my son Danny was in high school and he told me that he was going to join the Air Force. A little catch welled up in my throat. On the one hand, I was proud of him, but on the other I knew that the life he was choosing was hard, dangerous and could lead to his death.

So I asked him, “Danny, why would you do that? Why do you want to fly planes for the Air Force?” And I was ready to give a counter argument to some of the answers he might give me.

He might have said, “*Because I would really love to fly planes!*” I would have said, “There are much safer ways to learn! Let us look into those.”

If he would have said, “*The Air Force Academy is offering me free college.*” I would have said, “Free college is not worth the sacrifice.”

If he had said, “*The military has a great retirement.*” I would have said, “God will provide. The best security for your family will be you. Let us look into something that is safer.”

But Danny did not give me any of those answers. Instead, he looked at me with calm courage and said, “*Dad, someone has got to do it.*” And I had no argument to give him. If our families are to be safe, if our nation is to survive, many someones have to be willing to fight necessary battles. If we are to be the land of the free, we have to have many who are brave to engage with evil and willing to pay the ultimate cost.

This conversation reminded me of a famous line by G.K. Chesterton

“The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.” -G.K. Chesterton

What are you willing to fight for? Pick your battles wisely. Not everything is worth dying for, but some things are! Not everything is worth risking a relationship over, but some things are.

Truth: A righteous person is marked by what he/she is willing to fight over and how he/she engages in the fight.

Our flesh chooses to fight over issues that are small and at the same time our flesh cowers from fighting over the issues that are huge!

After founding the churches in Galatia, Paul is faced with a decision. Some teachers came in to those churches after he had departed. These teachers began teaching a message that did not align with the message that he taught the churches. And the Galatian churches are swallowing what these teachers were serving for dinner!

What is godly Paul to do?

Should he overlook this as a minor offense to his relationship with them?

Should he write with a gentle nudge in hopes that they might take a hint?

Should he suggest a compromise . . . a middle ground between his message and the new message?

Or should he make war with these false teachers?

The letter to the Galatians reveals Paul's decision. Paul makes war.

"Galatians 1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— Galatians 1:7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ." (Galatians 1:6-7 [ESV](#))

"As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:9 [ESV](#))

Paul is a righteous man who chooses his battles carefully. And he knows that this matter related to the Gospel is worth fighting over. **To ignore this fight would be a failure of love both to God and to the churches in Galatia.**

Paul understands that the Galatian churches may hate him for confronting this problem. He knows that he is making war with false teaching that is being warmly embraced by many in the Galatian church. He is fully conscious that the churches may love a false Gospel and hate him for attacking it. **Why does he risk so much over this matter of doctrine?**

Main Idea: The defense of God's gospel is worth the fight. When the Gospel is distorted among fellow believers, contending for the Gospel is the right response. If we see the Gospel distorted and do nothing in its defense, we have failed the trust that God gives to us.

Paul is not alone in willingness to contend for the Gospel. The other apostles are with him too!

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." (Jude 1:3-4 [ESV](#))

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed . . . Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." (2 Peter 2:1-3 [ESV](#))

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works." (2 John 1:7-8, 10-11 [ESV](#))

Today, the Gospel is under siege in many directions.

Some of you have had to risk family relationships over Gospel issues in your own family and among your own friends. Sometimes those Gospel issues are moral like unbiblical divorces, pre-marital cohabitation, homosexual weddings, abortion . . . just to name a few. Other times those Gospel issues are doctrinal like a departure from grace to works righteousness or a sensual attraction from the Bible to mysticism or a self-satisfying loyalty from the Spirit to externalism..

The angles are countless at which the poison arrows of false teaching fly at the church. **Yet each arrow must be forcefully deflected if the church is to flourish through the One Gospel of Jesus the Messiah.**

Why is the Gospel worth defending? Paul presents four reasons in Galatians 1

1. The Gospel is God's possession.

“For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel.” (Galatians 1:11 [ESV](#))

The Gospel is God’s possession and He retains full rights as OWNER. Throughout scripture we see God claiming ownership over this message.

*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming **the gospel of God**, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”” (Mark 1:14-15 [ESV](#))*

*“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for **the gospel of God**,” (Romans 1:1 [ESV](#))*

As owner, God is jealous to preserve the value, the integrity, the power of His Gospel. This possession of God required a huge price from God to obtain it. So He places the highest value on this possession. It is a possession of God that uniquely possesses power to bring Him glory. It is a possession of God that He uses to create a people for Himself who know Him and enjoy Him forever and ever. So He cares how HIS Gospel is treated.

Illustration: If your house were on fire and you had 5 minutes to rescue some possession out of the house before everything is consumed by the fire. What would you take? The answer to that question reveals what you value the most.

God values this possession with a fierce, protecting love.

Question: But is this Gospel not MY Gospel too through faith? Yes! God imparts possession of this Gospel to all who believe in Jesus. And this Gospel’s benefits then flow to every person who believes.

*Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached **in my gospel**, for which I am suffering,” (2 Timothy 2:8-9 [ESV](#))*

Praise God that God’s gospel becomes ours. But God’s Gospel is not ours in the same sense or to the same degree as this Gospel is God’s. The Gospel is not “ours” in the sense that we can do anything we want with it. We benefit from the Gospel. As recipients of God’s Gospel, we have a stewardship from God to

guard it, to proclaim it, to obey it, to keep it, to enjoy it, and to hold it as precious. But we do not have ownership rights to discard it or to distort it.

Illustration: Imagine you are going to college. Your grandparents at great cost to themselves purchase a home near your campus and say, *“We are giving you this house to live in during your 4 years. We want you to enjoy it as your own. You do not have to ask us every time you have friends over. We trust you with it. We are entrusting its care to you. At the end of four years, we trust that you will return it to us in the same condition as when you received it.”* For four years, you are able to say to your friends, *“Hey, why don’t you come over to my house.”* You are even able to share your house and say, *“I have extra bedrooms in my house. Please room at my place.”* All this is within your “ownership”. But you do not have the right to sell it, to tear it down, to build additions on to it or to treat it with contempt.

If you are a responsible young man or woman, you would take GREATER care for this house because while it is “yours”, you know that it really is your grandparents. You care more for it because it is their possession. You want to honor them for having given you such a gift and having entrusted it to your care.

So with the Gospel, God ENTRUSTS a His possession that is precious to Him to us!

“On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised”
(Galatians 2:7 [ESV](#))

... we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God . . . but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.” (1 Thessalonians 2:2-4 [ESV](#))

Truth: The Gospel is God’s possession that He has entrusted to us. As recipients of God’s love, we care about His property.

*There is one Gospel on which I stand
For all eternity
It is my story, my Father’s plan
The Son has rescued me
Oh what a Gospel, Oh what a peace*

*My highest joy and 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*

--Words and music by Jonny Robinson & Rich Thompson

Why is the Gospel worth defending?

- 1. The Gospel is God's possession.**
- 2. The Gospel is God's creation.**

This is the main point that Paul is making as he confronts the Galatians for turning to a different Gospel. He presses the truth that the Gospel he preached to them did not originate from him or from other people. This Gospel originated in the heart of God for us.

“For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:12 [ESV](#))

The message of the Gospel is unique in its origin. Many religious books, philosophy books, self-help books, rule books, wisdom for life books, science books, history books, leadership books, etc . . . have been created by man for man's benefit. **But the Gospel did not come to us through any person sitting down and thinking, “What do I think God wants to say to man?”**

God Himself created the Gospel message and then revealed it to man.

The false teachers in Galatia gain influence through flattery and eloquent speech. One of the methods they use to gain loyalty from the Galatian churches is the undermining of Paul's person. They are saying, *“Who does Paul think he is? He is a flawed man who preaches a flawed message. The message he gave to you*

is his opinion and Paul's opinion is wrong. Let us tell you how you can please God and gain entrance into His kingdom."

Paul's response, "Yes, I am a flawed man. And yes, my opinions are often flawed. But the Gospel that I preached to you did not come from me, but from the flawless Son of God. Jesus Himself gave me this message. This words that I preached to you are not my words, but God's words.

Paul then PROVES that the Gospel originates with God and not man by sharing a part of his autobiography:

*For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I **persecuted** the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous **was I for the traditions of my fathers.**" (Galatians 1:13-14 [ESV](#))*

Paul says, "*I understand the message that the Judaizers . . . the false teachers are bringing to you. I understand the attractiveness of that false gospel. I was once there! The last message that I in myself WOULD EVER give to you is the message of grace. I hated grace. I hated the Gospel of Jesus. I hated the people who believed this message."*

*But when **he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal** his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles," (Galatians 1:15-16 [ESV](#))*

Remember that Paul brought the Gospel to these cities, he planted these churches, he spent personal time with these young believers to help them grow. He has already told them his testimony . . . his story of conversion. Here in vv 15-16, Paul is reminding them of this story so that they would be convinced that he DID NOT CREATE this message.

"I am a Jew, . . . educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, . . . and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

"As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' **And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'** Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do,

Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus." (Acts 22:3-11 [ESV](#))

He is reminding them that he came to faith in Jesus, not through the normal means of hearing a man preach the Gospel, but through Jesus personally meeting him. Why? To underline the origin of the message that Paul preaches. The Gospel I preach came to me directly from Jesus!

I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me." (Galatians 1:16-24 [ESV](#))

What is Paul's point? The Gospel comes by revelation from God Himself. The Gospel is not a really great message contrived in the hearts of the best of men.

Truth: The Gospel is the message delivered to us from heaven by His Son Jesus Christ. As such, the message is perfect for all men, for all cultures, for all time. Man cannot improve it and must not change it.

We fight to defend this Gospel because this message is uniquely from the LORD.

I labor to create sermons that reflect the Gospel. But my sermons are not THE GOSPEL. I pray that the Holy Spirit helps me in crafting sermons. But my sermons do not have the same quality that Paul is describing here.

It is OK if my sermons are heard for a short time and then discarded . . . and forgotten. No doubt that will happen. It is OK if someone takes a sermon of mine and then changes it to make improvements. It is kind of flattering if someone would use my sermons in this way.

But this is NOT what we do with the Gospel.

Why is the Gospel worth defending?

1. The Gospel is God's possession.

2. The Gospel is God's creation.

3. The Gospel is God's instrument of transformation.

Paul uses himself as Exhibit A to prove that God's Gospel . . . the Gospel that is uniquely revealed by God to man . . . is a Gospel that transforms lives. No other message has the power to do what the Gospel has the power to do in us.

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, " (Galatians 1:15-16 [ESV](#))

Paul shares his testimony, not to make much of himself, but to make much of God.

Notice the contrast between Paul's former life and his new life in Jesus. Before his life was "I . . . I . . . I" (Cf 13-14). Now through the Gospel, his new life is "God . . . God . . . God." (Cf 15-16)

Paul was not asking for mercy, but mercy found Paul. God not only does the work of PROVIDING the means for our new life, but God does the work of bringing us to faith in Jesus. Our salvation is ALL OF GRACE! He "called me by His grace".

Have you been transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
(Romans 1:16 [ESV](#))

We refuse to . . . tamper with God's word, but . . . even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, . . . For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, . . . For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ . . . "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 4:2-6, 5:17 [ESV](#))

Truth: This Gospel is necessary to BEGIN this work of transformation AND this Gospel is necessary to CONTINUE this work of transformation. If we as a church lose the Gospel, we will see no more new works of transformation. If we as a

church lose the Gospel, we will not experience the continuing work of transformation.

If we fail to fight for the Gospel we will lose any ability to become children of God . . . to overcome sin . . . to persevere in faith . . . to find comfort in trials . . . to stand under Satan's assaults . . . to bring hope to those who are despairing. The Gospel is God's only means for transformation . . . a transformation that is ongoing all the way until we see Jesus face to face.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? . . . Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:1-3 [ESV](#))

Why is the Gospel worth defending?

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- 4. The Gospel is God's mission.**

"was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles," (Galatians 1:16 [ESV](#))

And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me." (Galatians 1:22-24 [ESV](#))

Paul traveled the western world of the Gentiles with one Gospel. He did not adapt his message to cultures, but consistently proclaimed the same message over and over.

Illustration: Kimberly purchased a fly rod for my birthday. I have practiced cast it but never used it yet. Friend took me to Fly Fishing Expo. Seminar from one expert. He showed pictures of the 14 predator fish located in upper Midwest. And with he one he showed pictures of either the little fish or bugs that each of the fish ate. And then he showed picture of the fly that he tied to mimic the look of that meal. I have already learned that there are hundreds of different flies that you use in different seasons, different environments for different fish.

Jesus calls us to be fishers of men. Does this mean we have to use different messages to win men and women to Jesus? NO!!

Truth: One of the great errors of the modern church is the belief that we need different gospels to reach different people.

If we wish to win the intellectuals, we need this gospel. If we wish to win the progressives . . . conservatives . . . young people . . . Muslims . . . atheists . . . athletes . . . engineers . . . wealthy . . . poor . . . the various ethnicities . . . the various nationalities.

Not only does one Gospel reach every person in every age in every culture in every circumstance. But only one Gospel CAN reach every person with the salvation offered by God.

When Jesus calls us to be fishers of men, He calls us to use the one Gospel that has been handed down to us once for all.

Conclusion: What is the Gospel that is worth fighting for? More in the weeks ahead. But for now, a simple summary.

1. God created us to know Him and enjoy Him forever.
2. God demands complete obedience to stand in His presence. His righteous Law does not tolerate one small offense.
3. We have all sinned against God and fall short of His righteous standard. This places us under God's condemnation and guarantees death for us.
4. God in love sent His perfect Son to fulfilled the Law's demands for us and died as a perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.
5. When we place our faith in Jesus, His blood cleanses us of all our sin and His righteousness clothes us so that stand before God as perfect in His sight.

Do you believe the Gospel?

Why is the Gospel worth defending?

1. The Gospel is God's possession.
2. The Gospel is God's creation.
3. The Gospel is God's instrument of transformation.
4. The Gospel is God's mission.