

Spirit-Filled Living Series

The Purpose of the Gospel (Gal. 4:13-14, 19)

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

The Purpose of the Gospel

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: The Problem of Purpose

1. If we were sitting down having a conversation and I asked you the question, “What is the purpose of Christianity and the gospel?”, what would be your answer? I want to pause and give you the time to think about that for a minute. Pretend this situation is happening and think about your response. Formulate the words you would use in your mind.
2. Some people may think the obvious answer is so people will go to heaven. Those who think this way usually act as if they already have everything the Christian life has to offer because the purpose of the gospel is only to help them gain access to heaven when this life is over. When this happens, the Christian life becomes irrelevant practically. If a person is convinced they already have their ticket to heaven because Jesus has promised it to them, then Jesus and the Christian life have nothing left to offer them. There is nothing more they need to do or experience. Once a person thinks they are safe with God, spiritual complacency and laziness is likely to set in.
3. Individuals who approach the Christian life this way become very passive and uninterested in the Christian life, and understandably so. If the purpose of the Christian life has already been fulfilled in their life, what is left? While these disciples may regularly attend church, the Christian life is largely irrelevant to them. They go about their life as if God has nothing to do with their day-to-day activities, other than perhaps occasionally trying to tell others about Jesus, because the gospel is only relevant and important for those who don’t yet have their entrance into heaven secured yet. God may need to remind them they are loved and forgiven from time to time.
4. I don’t blame people for thinking this way; it seems to be the natural response to the teaching of the church. I thought this way myself for years. This happens because the modern church has done a poor job teaching the full gospel. As my knowledge of the word of God increased, the realization that this perspective of the purpose of the gospel was only partially true. The main purpose of the gospel is not to get people into heaven; getting into heaven is the beneficial result of the purpose of the gospel.

B. Some of us may be surprised to discover that Paul does not think the purpose of the gospel is to get people into heaven. If we are going to understand the impact the true gospel has on us and our lives, we must understand what Paul is teaching to the disciples in the Galatian churches about the purpose of the gospel.

C. Galatians 4:19 provides us with the intended outcome of the true gospel. Paul focused all his energy and abilities in ministry toward the purpose of the gospel. He wasn’t happy or content with those in the church until this spiritual objective had been reached. Let’s discover what the purpose of the gospel is.

II. Response to the Gospel

- A. Paul begins this section of the letter by describing how the Galatians responded to the preaching of the gospel when they first heard it. He does this so he can move on to explain what impact believing the gospel should have on a person's life.
- B. Here is how the Galatians responded to the gospel:

¹³ but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; ¹⁴ and you did not despise that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition, nor express contempt, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus *Himself*. (Gal. 4:13-14)
- C. The context of what we are learning is the gospel ("I preached the gospel to you the first time", v. 13). Throughout this letter, the apostle Paul is emphasizing the importance of a person's understanding of the gospel because it will determine how they carry out the Christian life—for good and for harm. Getting our understanding of the gospel right leads to a healthy approach and relationship with God. Getting our understanding of the gospel wrong leads to an unhealthy approach and relationship with God. Paul desperately wants these disciples to understand not only the true gospel, but also the genuine Christian life that flows from it. These disciples must understand what the Christian life is all about.
- D. While trying to encourage and motivate these disciples to get back on track in their Christian life, He reminds them of how positively they responded to the communication of the gospel when they first heard it. Their response is described in detail. The original circumstances that brought Paul to the region of Galatia have been variously explained by scholars. We don't know for sure what happened and what the "bodily illness" was that created the opportunity for Paul to be able to preach the gospel ("you know that it was because of a bodily illness", v. 13). It could have been the result of persecution or a devastating fever.¹ Ultimately, we aren't told because both Paul and the Galatians already knew what had happened. The circumstances don't matter because the response to the gospel is described.
- E. The way Paul, and every communicator of the gospel, is treated is a direct reflection of how the people are responding to the gospel. How a person responds to the messenger is how the person is responding to Jesus (Lk. 10:16). Paul was not dismissed as worthless or treated with disrespect ("you did not despise", v. 14).² Another negative reaction was avoided because they didn't disdain or dishonor the communicator of the gospel ("nor express contempt", v. 14). The Galatians, who were in the church, didn't view Paul and his message as worthless or distasteful, and didn't treat him poorly as a result. In short, these disciples didn't react negatively to Jesus.
- F. On the other hand, not only was there not a negative reaction, but they also weren't neutral, either. A positive response to Jesus was expressed toward Paul ("you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself", v. 14). Their affection, love, and hospitality toward Paul was motivated by a fondness for Jesus. While the relationship had changed in the meantime (Gal.

¹ David B. McWilliams, [*Galatians: A Mentor Commentary*](#), Mentor Commentaries (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2009), 168, William Barclay, [*The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*](#), The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 46–47.

² Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Galatians 4:13 "you did not despise"

4:16), it started off well. The gospel preached by Paul made these disciples happy at first (“that sense of blessing you had”, v. 15).

- G. The initial reaction of the Galatians was a very positive one, and they treated Paul well and had a good relationship with him as a result. The relationship Paul had with the churches in Galatia began to change after the false teachers showed up and promoted their own gospel. Paul and his message hadn’t changed; the mindset and attitudes of the Galatians changed, causing tension in the relationship. Paul consistently told the truth. At the beginning, there was a positive reaction, but now there was a negative reaction. The Galatians liked the truth when it benefited them, but didn’t like the truth when it corrected them.
- H. We should expect different reactions from others as they hear the true gospel of Jesus being communicated to them. Paul, as an experienced evangelist and church planter, had witnessed how others reacted to the message of Jesus many times. He took note of the wide discrepancy between the reactions (2 Cor. 2:16). While we share the same message with everyone, some reactions will be positive and others will be negative. The way others respond to our communication of the gospel has more to do with them than it does with us. We need to be prepared for that. If we accurately communicate the message of Jesus, we should be satisfied no matter what the reaction is. This is a difficult lesson to learn. We must learn to accept and stay the course no matter what type of reactions we receive. Jesus wants us to be faithful and trust Him to make our evangelism efforts fruitful.
- I. As we help others understand the teachings of Jesus and explain to them how to be made right before God, we need to be prepared to be insulted and mistreated, as well as being loved and appreciated. Some people will respond to Jesus by thinking we are foolish and out of touch with the modern world. They will look down on us, thinking we are inferior. As disciples, we need to be tough enough to endure and persevere when we are rejected and mistreated by others because of our association with Jesus. Others will respect and value what we have to say and will greatly appreciate our willingness to share with them. They may even think we are some of the most wonderful people they have ever encountered in their life.

III. Result of the Gospel

- A. After the disciples are encouraged to respond positively to the true gospel and Paul once again, they are instructed as to what the genuine Christian life is. Paul now precisely and concisely informs the Galatian disciples what happens when the true gospel is accepted and lived in. In doing so, he identifies the main point of emphasis and focus for all disciples as they pursue a life and relationship with Jesus.
- B. When a person accepts the true gospel, the whole Christian life is focused on one central outcome:
 - ¹⁹ My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— (Gal. 4:19)
- C. Not only is Paul imagined as a pregnant mother until his spiritual children are born with spiritual life, so, too, now are the Galatian disciples imagined as being pregnant (“until Christ is

formed in you”, v. 19).³ Jesus is to be growing inside every disciple the way a baby grows in a pregnant woman. It has already been asserted and assumed that Jesus is living in all true disciples as He does in Paul (Gal. 2:20, 4:6).⁴ Paul frequently speaks of disciples being “in Christ,” and now speaks of Jesus as being “in you”. Both expressions have to do with a vital personal relationship between those who trust and love Jesus and God.⁵ This relationship is dynamic and an impactful reality that makes a difference in the life of everyone who has it. A wonderful description of this comes from Henry Scougal in his classic work *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*:

They know by experience, that true religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul; or in the apostle’s phrase, *it is Christ formed within us*.⁶

- D. The imagery being used indicates that Paul will not be content until Jesus so dominates the lives of these disciples that there will be no possible change from a settled spiritual condition.⁷ As Paul emphasized in many of his letters, He desires disciples to grow to the point that their commitment to Jesus is unshakably firm (Gal. 5:1, 1 Cor. 15:58, 16:13, 2 Cor. 1:24, Eph. 6:11, 6:13, 6:14, Phil. 1:27, 4:1, 1 Thess. 3:8, 2 Thess 2:15). The general desire of spiritual parents is for their spiritual children to remain committed to Jesus no matter what.
- E. Not only will these disciples’ commitment to Jesus keep them safely attached to Jesus no matter what happens in life, they will also grow up spiritually to be like Jesus, or to be more precise, as Paul puts it, “Jesus will grow up within them.” The term “formed” is a verb used to describe the fetus developing into an infant.⁸ The ideas of growth and transformation are present. Paul is working until Jesus is shaped in them.⁹ Jesus is growing and maturing in the life of every person who trusts and loves Him. In this process of transformation, we become righteous as we become more like God’s Son, who comes to life within the believer by the action of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ The process of change in the soul due to the presence of God is described succinctly in 2 Corinthians 3:18.¹¹ This is an ongoing and active process of transformation that occurs throughout the Christian life (2 Cor. 4:16). Primarily this transformation process involves taking off the old person we once were before knowing Jesus and putting on the new person God has created us to be (Eph. 4:20-24).¹² Paul describes this as

³ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 330.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 212. Jesus described this same spiritual dynamic (Jn. 14:16-21).

⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 195.

⁶ Henry Scougal, *The Works of the Rev. H. Scougal* (London: Ogle, Duncan, and Co., 1822), 3.

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 289.

⁸ Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 203.

⁹ R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 175, Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 235.

¹⁰ David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 386.

¹¹ Hebrews 12:2

¹² Romans 8:9-11

clothing yourself with Jesus (Gal. 3:27) and putting on Jesus (Rm. 13:14). Every person's personal relationship with God is to be centrally focused on Jesus growing within us—this is what our relationship with God is all about.

- F. The transformation of each person to become like Jesus was the central ministry focus of the apostle Paul:
- ...²⁷ *the mystery* that is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, so that we may present every person complete in Christ. ²⁹ For this purpose I also labor, striving according to His power which works mightily within me. (Col. 1:27-29)
- G. The singularly focused ministry objective of Paul is to develop people until they are spiritually mature (“so that we may present every person complete in Christ”, v. 28). To be complete is to be spiritually mature—fully grown—which is further described as being like Jesus in all areas of life (Eph. 4:13-15). For this to be taking place, disciples must allow the word of God and more spiritually mature disciples to instruct (“teaching”, v. 18) and correct their behavior (“admonishing”, v. 28).¹³ Without these ongoing activities, a person will not be growing to maturity. So, as we seek to grow in Jesus by becoming a deeper human, we need to accept and embrace the truth that we will go deeper with Jesus no further than we go into Scripture.¹⁴
- H. The objective of being like Jesus in all areas of life is the target at which Paul aims all his ministry effort and work (Eph. 4:11-12). This objective should be the same for all healthy church leaders according to Paul in Ephesians 4. All Christian ministry should have as its intended goal the formation of a spiritually mature person or group who is like Jesus. While some kingdom efforts and activities will only serve one portion of this goal, all the church ministries should ultimately move in the direction of producing spiritually mature disciples.
- I. As we are following Jesus, like the Galatians, we are going to be confronted with choices about which teachers we are going to listen to. We need to develop our convictions carefully. The Galatians are being forced to decide between Paul and the false Jewish teachers from Jerusalem. While both appear to be teaching the Bible on the surface, when we peek under the hood, that is not the case. One is teaching the word of God in a way consistent with the true gospel and the message of God, while the other one is not. Discernment and knowledge are necessary to distinguish between the two. Each disciple needs to be familiar enough with the word of God to reject false spiritual teaching and accept/follow true spiritual teaching. One is to our personal benefit; the other one is not. These disciples find themselves in the middle of a significant and serious spiritual battle for their soul. On Paul's view, their very salvation is on the line.
- J. While we've been able to define what Paul means by the statement “Jesus being formed in disciples,” we still don't know how this process of transformation works. Thankfully, Paul very clearly explains how Jesus is formed in us in another letter to a different church:
- ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your

¹³ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁴ Dane C. Ortlund, [*Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners*](#), ed. Michael Reeves, Union (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 151.

hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:16-19)

- K. God is the One who is the source of all spiritual progress, and we must realize He needs to give it to us if we are going to have spiritual maturity and fullness (“He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory”, v. 16). When God is gracious to us, He gives us good benefits, advantages, and gifts that we don’t deserve and we didn’t earn. One of the greatest graces is the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives (“to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self”, v. 16).¹⁵ The work of God in our lives is an internal activity that happens inside us. It is the provision of strength and power from the Spirit. Disciples are influenced by and given the ability to have a soul capable of what is good and pleasing to God.
- L. What is the result of this work of God in us? Jesus is formed and dwells at the core of who we are (“so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”, v. 17). Jesus living in a person, this dwelling, is not merely the existence of Jesus in us through the Spirit since it is progressive in nature (“that you may be filled to all the fullness of God”, v. 19). The dwelling of Jesus being mentioned here seems to be a close parallel, if not the same idea, as Jesus being formed in us as mentioned in Galatians 4. The process of spiritual transformation happens as our soul is strengthened by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in us. This is the means of Jesus being formed in us.
- M. While we’ve been able to define what Paul meant by Jesus being formed in a disciple and we know how the process works, we still don’t yet have a clear picture as to what this spiritual goal leads to.¹⁶ What qualities are connected to spiritual maturity? What does it mean to be like Jesus? What is the outcome of Jesus being formed in us? To understand what it looks like to be like Jesus in all areas of life, we must pay careful attention to the life of Jesus found in the gospels. The more we observe and pay attention to Jesus, the greater our understanding of what it means to be like Him will be. We will only summarize a few important aspects.
- N. In yet another letter to a different church, Paul graphically describes what the outcome of putting off the old person and putting on the new person is when a person has accurate knowledge of Jesus:
 - ¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, *and* patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so *must* you *do* also. ¹⁴ In addition to all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Col. 3:12-14)
- O. The deepest parts of who we are—the core of our personality—changed (“put on a heart of”, v. 12). Then a list of specific character qualities are listed, and we can see each and every one is beautifully demonstrated in the life of Jesus. If a healthy and mature disciple could be opened

¹⁵ Romans 7:22, 2 Corinthians 4:16. See also Rm. 8:9-11.

¹⁶ An excellent classic resource is Henry Scougal’s *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. It is highly recommended. See also A.W. Tozer’s *The Pursuit of God*.

and peered into to view what their soul is like, Paul is giving us a description of what we would find. Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit, in similar fashion, in chapter five of Galatians. The character connected to the divine nature expresses itself in action as well (“bearing with one another” and “forgiving each other”, v. 13). This summary statement helps us formulate a picture of the type of person who has been strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit to allow Jesus to grow up in them. Much more detail will be provided later in Galatians on what a Holy Spirit-filled life is.

- P. As the apostle Paul cares for the church and continues to communicate truth to others, he is experiencing emotional pain and some of his relationships are becoming hostile. He is longing to see signs of Christian growth in the people he is spiritually caring for. So extensive is the discomfort that Paul uses the imagery of being a pregnant mother to describe it (“I am again in labor”, v. 19). While Paul’s intentions and motivations are good, the outcome of these intentions is causing anguish.¹⁷ Spiritually investing in the lives of others can be costly and painful. It can even cause strained relationships. As we give others opportunities to be build up spiritually and conform themselves to the standards of Jesus, others may not like what we have to say, and they may get upset with us, possibly even going so far as ending the relationship. Unfortunately, this happens far more often than we would like to think it does. As faithful workers for the kingdom of God, we need to be prepared for this. When this type of reaction happens, it is painful and unpleasant, but it is part of the cost of serving Jesus the way we should. Like Paul, we need to be a servant of Jesus rather than people pleasers.
- Q. On the other side of the relationship, those who are being discipled and taught by others need to realize that spiritual growth will often require hearing and responding in ways that seem unpleasant and unappealing to us—at least in our spiritual immaturity. Eventually, God will change our hearts to desire that which God says is good, but this takes time. Our spiritual parents will have to instruct us in truth that we might not want to hear so that our lives can adjust course in ways that are healthy for us. We should all be responsive to all accurate Biblical instruction, whether we like it or not.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The Christian life is about Jesus coming to life and being fully developed in a person’s life through the power and activity of the Holy Spirit. This results in a person being transformed at their core to possess the character of God Himself, resulting in a life lived demonstrating and acting on the priorities and passions of God. This is the description and direction of the genuine Christian life. There are no substitutes.
- B. Those who pursue Jesus for any other reason are off course and are living a distorted Christian life. Throughout the life of Jesus, people sought after Him for all sorts of different reasons, many of them that had nothing to do with Jesus, but only with what Jesus could provide them. The genuine Christian life can only develop and progress on the foundation of love and affection for Jesus, not merely the benefits He provides.

¹⁷ Timothy George, [Galatians](#), vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 329.