

Paul, then, writes as an apostle—as one who has been called personally by Jesus Christ ... He expects the Galatians to listen; **he knows that disagreement is no longer dialogue; disagreement is heresy when it comes to the essentials of the gospel.** [McKnight, S. (1995). *Galatians* (p. 49). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.]

[John] Calvin also pointed out that the dispute over circumcision was no mere squabble over ceremonies but rather controversy over how one obtains a right standing before God. Hence Paul “takes his stand on this argument: *If ceremonies have no power to justify, then the observance of them is unnecessary. Yet he does not treat only of ceremonies but disputes of works in general; otherwise the whole argument would be weak ... The controversy was not concerned with some insignificant trifle but with the most important matter of all, the way we obtain salvation.*” [George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, pp. 70–71). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.]

MODERN GOSPELS | More importantly, can you distinguish between the true gospel and all the false gospels in the contemporary church? **We worship in a church of many gospels.** There is *the gospel of material prosperity*, which teaches that Jesus is the way to financial gain. There is *the gospel of family values*, which teaches that Jesus is the way to a happy home. There is *the gospel of the self*, which teaches that Jesus is the way to personal fulfillment. There is *the gospel of religious tradition*, which teaches that Jesus is the way to respectability. There is *the gospel of morality*, which teaches that Jesus is the way to be a good person.

What makes these other gospels

so dangerous is that the things they offer are all beneficial. It is good to be prosperous, to have a happy home, and to be well behaved. **Yet as good as all these things are, they are not the good news.** When they become for us a sort of gospel, then we are in danger of turning away from the only gospel there is.

Raymond Ortlund Jr. has tried to imagine the church without the gospel. “What might our evangelicalism, without the evangel [the gospel], look like?” he asks.

- a passionate devotion to the pro-life cause
- a confident manipulation of modern managerial techniques
- a drive toward church growth
- a deep concern for the institution of the family
- a clever appeal to consumerism by offering a sort of cost-free Christianity Lite
- a sympathetic, empathetic, thickly-honeyed cultivation of interpersonal relationships
- a determination to take America back to its Christian roots through political power
- a warm affirmation of self-esteem

[Ryken, P. G. (2005). *Galatians*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (pp. 20–21). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.]



The mood of Galatians ... the storm is approaching: The spiritual atmosphere is charged. It is sultry, sweltering. A storm is threatening. The sky is darkening. In the distance one can see flashes of lightning; one can hear faint muttering sounds.

When each line of verses 1–5 is read in the light of the letter’s occasion and purpose, the atmospheric turbulence is immediately detected. The apostle, though in perfect control of himself, for he is writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is greatly agitated, deeply moved. His heart and mind are filled with a medley of emotions.

- For the perverters there is withering denunciation springing from holy indignation.
- For the addressed there is marked disapproval and an earnest desire to restore.
- For the One who has called him there is profound reverence and humble gratitude.

Now in these opening lines there is, to be sure, a measure of restraint. The most vivid flashes of lightning and the most deafening peals of thunder are reserved for later. Nevertheless, even now the storm is definitely approaching.

[Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Galatians* (Vol. 8, p. 29). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.]