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Faith Working Through Love: The Message of Galatians

by M. T. Robbins

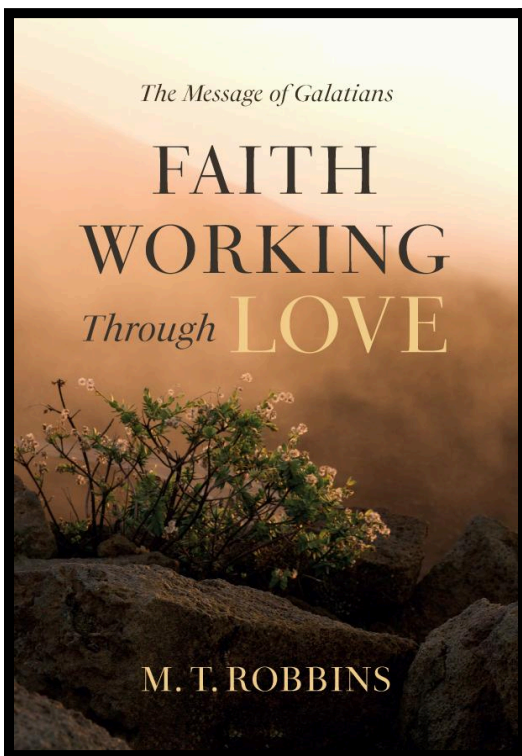
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New Title from M. T. Robbins

Faith Working Through Love: The Message of Galatians



The message of Galatians is that life in God's family is about faith working through love—nothing else matters. If believers trust in anything but Jesus and his message to declare them righteous in God's sight, then they have missed the boat. Paul wrote this letter to a group of churches that were confused and misled by false teachers with bad motives—people who accepted a dash or two of Jesus but also wanted to bring their resumes to God. Things aren't so different today.

But Galatians can be confusing. So many people have so many different opinions about it! How did one become a believer under the Old Covenant? Is it different now that Jesus has come? What are the “works of the law” that Paul writes so much about, and what do they have to do with salvation? Was a believer's motivation for serving God different in King David's day than it is since Jesus came?

This commentary by a bi-vocational pastor will help Christians understand the letter to the Galatians. It explains the apostle's timeless message in everyday language for ordinary people so they can love God more and serve him in love.

M. T. Robbins is a bi-vocational pastor at Sleater Kinney Road Baptist Church in Olympia, Washington. He is a graduate of Maranatha Baptist Seminary (Watertown, Wisconsin) and is also a full-time investigator for a Washington state agency.



Interview with M. T. Robbins

Why did you write a book about the letter to the Galatians?

I come from a background that was very negative about the Old Covenant law. My tradition almost (but not quite) taught that life for Moses, David, and the psalmists in the Old Covenant was a slog—that relationship with God was more about works and less about loving obedience. It framed Old Covenant life as a series of tests and failures and covenant curses ... until Christ came to bring us grace. So, my tradition often gave the impression that justification by faith (and not works) was a new thing. They didn't say this, and the movement's teachers didn't teach this, but that's how it came across—and so many Christians are confused about what Paul is saying to the Galatians.

What is the message of Galatians?

The message is that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal 5:6). We bring nothing meritorious to the table when we come to God for salvation. There is no merit, no earned credits, no consideration of your moral resume. There is only your faith in Jesus, which works or expresses itself by means of your love for him. The Galatians had become confused about this, and Paul wrote to set them (and us) straight.

Why do Christians need to understand the message of Galatians?

For at least two reasons, which Paul explains over and over again to us in the letter.

First, the foundation for a believer's relationship with God has always been loving obedience. We love God, so we want to do what he says. It was true under the Old Covenant. It's still true under the New Covenant. What has changed is not the way of salvation (it's always been through Jesus), but the covenant shape of our relationship with God.

Second, we need to know (to really, truly know) that God makes us right with him (what the bible calls “justification”) by grace alone, through faith alone.

Why is Galatians so important for understanding salvation the right way?

First—if you think the way of salvation is new or radically different from the way it was for Moses, David, and Isaiah than it is for you, then you'll read your bible all wrong. You'll be confused. You won't understand the Christian story. It'll be like those newspaper pictures that are printed slightly misaligned—everything will be out of focus.

Second, if it were possible to be good enough, smart enough, righteousness enough, obedient enough to be saved by obeying the Old Covenant law, then Christ came here and died for no reason (Gal 2:21)! So, we really need to understand how we can become right with God, and Paul tells us all about it.

What makes your book about Galatians worthwhile? Aren't there other books about the same thing?

There are lots of great books about Galatians! Here are a few reasons why mine is worth your time:

I'm a bi-vocational pastor, which means I work full-time in the real world and am used to "translating" Christianity into English for normal people! Nerdy stuff stays in the footnotes, and the text just explains what Paul says, section by section, in everyday, non-technical language.

I spend a lot of time emphasizing the right way to understand the Old Covenant law and the whole Christian story, considering what Jesus has now done. I try to set the Galatians "episode" in its place in God's bigger story.

And, it's short!

An Excerpt from *Faith Working Through Love: The Message of Galatians*

Throughout this letter, Paul grounds his explanation of “justification by faith” in the Old Covenant scriptures and shows us that this isn’t a new thing, a new doctrine. It’s the way it has always been. Teachers (then and now) who claim different are wrong. They preach “another gospel.”

Jewish agitators who believed themselves to be Christians were on the move among the churches in Galatia. Sure, they believed that Christians must trust in Jesus and His message, but they also believed we must observe Jewish boundary markers like the sabbath, circumcision, Old Covenant feast days, and other culturally “Jewish” ways of life.

These agitators were likely right-wing, hardline Jews who had “converted” to Christ and had not shed their Pharisaic tendencies. David deSilva characterizes them as a sort of clean-up team that sought to “fix” Paul’s “liberal” approach to the Mosaic law (cp. Acts 15:1–4; Phil 3:2–21). “[T]hey wanted to preserve fully the Jewishness of the new Christian movement and keep it firmly anchored within Judaism.”

In their eyes, Paul was a libertine who had tossed the Mosaic law aside. He couldn’t be trusted. He wasn’t teaching the truth, because he had forsaken the God-ordained cultural identity markers that made the Jews “God’s people.” So, the agitators attacked Paul’s authority. Their perspective shared some kinship with the more “Jewish flavor” of the congregation in Jerusalem, which was never entirely comfortable with Paul’s perspective on the Mosaic law’s role in the life of a New Covenant believer (Acts 21:21–22).

On the other side, Paul believed these agitators were not preaching the Christian message, but “another gospel” entirely. “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ,” (Gal 1:6–7).

Paul wrote this letter to warn the churches in southern Galatia against these false teachers. The letter is tinged throughout with a kind of hurt outrage—not bitterness, but wounded sorrow. “[H]e writes to the Galatians in the agony of heart which comes of the feeling that his work in Christ is being undone by false teachers, factious rivalries, and a mixture of stupidity and vice.” He wonders if he’s wasted his time on these believers (Gal 4:11). His relationship with them is particularly special because he first preached the gospel to them while ill, and the Galatians nonetheless welcomed him and listened to what he had to say (Gal 4:13).

But now so much has changed. They don’t trust Paul—the agitators have poisoned their minds against him. He’s forced to defend his credentials (Gal 1:11–2:10). He asks, “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (Gal 4:16).

So, Paul writes to explain the truth of the Gospel to them once again, to defend his own teaching, and to explain why “works of the law” can never be the vehicle for salvation.

Praise for Faith Working Through Love: The Message of Galatians

“*Faith Working Through Love* is an absolute gem! Exegetical without being tedious; thorough without being burdensome; engaging alternate views without being confusing, Robbins keeps the reader focused on Paul’s main argument throughout Galatians: we are justified by faith in Christ and not by works of any kind. Writing from a Reformed perspective, the author begins by identifying the theological concerns raised in Galatians and then with unusual clarity shows how Paul deals with each of them and how they are relevant to today’s audiences.”

—**Mark Jacobson, retired associate professor of ministry, Corban University**

“In *Faith Working through Love*, Pastor Robbins has presented a winsome layman’s guide to Galatians and a clear presentation of the message of the gospel. This book represents a modern accounting of the background and content of Galatians in the language of the everyday man. The reader will walk away with a clear understanding of the gospel expressed by Paul to the churches of Galatia.”

—**W. Scott Hollander III, adjunct professor of Old Testament, Western Reformed Seminary**

“It’s not often that a pastor is able to combine careful awareness of important academic discussions with a popular style. Tyler Robbins is a diligent reader and attentive expositor who has done this very thing. The chapters in this short book read like sermons but still provide, often through footnotes, real substance to students of Paul’s important letter to the Galatians. Robbins makes insightful contemporary applications, too. Much appreciated.”

—**Mark Ward, YouTuber and web designer**

