

***Faith Working Through Love: The Message of Galatians.*** By M.T. Robbins. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2025. 184 pages. \$28.00 Softcover

Paul's epistle to the churches of Galatia is a highly significant book for those who would understand the Bible as a whole, and especially the doctrine of soteriology. Therefore, good commentaries on it are welcome any time. Our church in the Bronx benefited greatly from a detailed series through Galatians to combat the false gospel of conditional salvation ("can I lose my salvation" being the wrong question - "can God lose someone He has saved" being the right question). M.T. Robbins has recently published his commentary *Faith Working Through Love: The Message of Galatians*, and I am happy to recommend it as an addition to pastors for their libraries and churches for their classroom study.

I was also very interested to read a commentary written by a man who serves as a "bi-vocational pastor." Many use this label when in reality they are one of several on a staff of pastors, and their "day job" is teaching in Christian education or something like that. But M.T. Robbins is truly a "bi-vocational pastor," serving as the senior pastor of Sleater Kenney Road Baptist Church in Olympia, Washington, as well as working full time as a claims investigator for the state government. We are impressed and thankful for his efforts, and can appreciate how difficult, exhausting, and often thankless this particular vein of "tent-making ministry" is.

Robbins' work is a down to earth, practical, and straight shooting overview of the message of Galatians. He seems to have labored to express himself clearly and forthrightly, and to try to break down big concepts into understandable sentences and paragraphs, including charts and graphics spread out over 13 chapters. The book has a list of abbreviations, an author's preface, an introduction, a bibliography, as well as a Scripture index and a subject / name index.

The book reads like it was culled from material which Pastor Robbins taught to his congregation, which is a good thing. Many chapters begin with relatable / colloquial illustrations taken from literature, film or current events.

The introductory chapter seeks to illustrate "two completely different approaches to a relationship with God: one Christian and the other pagan" (2), and introduces a theme that will come up many times in the book, namely, that the law of Moses is "a sort of mirror that reflects the awful truth of ourselves back at us" (6) and not a means of salvation either in the past or now. The introductory chapter also covers the definition of justification, the occasion of Paul's writing to these churches, and the impetus for Christians to understand this letter today. Robbins concludes this chapter with a side by side comparison of viewpoints of Galatians, including Dispensational, New Perspective, Reformed, and his own view, and while there is much overlap within these four systems, the reader can appreciate the time invested in fleshing out some of the distinctives of each approach.

Chapter 2 deals with 1:1-9 and uses the popular concept of "fake news" to illustrate what the Apostle Paul was dealing with in regards to false teachers, false apostles, and false gospels. Robbins describes true Christianity as "a rescue religion" (22, citing Stott), and expounds on Paul's exasperation toward the Galatians because their "emphases and understanding of Jesus'

message are now so backward that it no longer qualifies as a Christian message” (23). We also want to highlight something Robbins states in passing in this chapter, that Galatians “isn’t a letter to a single church. It’s addressed “to the churches of Galatia,” which is roughly equivalent to a portion of modern-day Turkey. It was evidently meant to be physically passed along from one church community to the other” (21). This is an important point Robbins makes as it relates to the relationship between Bibliology and Ecclesiology, in that the local church is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15) and has the custodial stewardship responsibility over the words of God (Matthew 28:20), and that the Bible is to be identified and received by Christ’s churches, not by parachurch organizations such as “The Academy” or “Bible Societies.”

Chapter 3 covers 1:10-2:10, and Robbins gives a fine overview of these important verses as to the background information they provide for the reader of Galatians. The only significant point we would make here is that the NIV rendering of ἵστορέω is “to get acquainted” and is not a particularly good way to handle this verb, as that English phrase can often convey merely an exchange of pleasantries. The KJV’s more literal and more general “to see” allows the reader to understand the historical information that Paul and Peter were exchanging in their purposeful meeting.

Chapter 4 covers 2:11-21 and is entitled “The Trouble in Antioch.” Robbins is no doubt right to see the church at Antioch as being Paul’s “home church” (35) and that it of course was a multiethnic congregation. This chapter has a lengthy and interesting excursus on “Why Did So Many Jews Not Like the Gentiles, Anyway?” Leaning heavily on Neusner (who hasn’t for this topic?) Robbins does a thorough job showing how the Jewish Mishnah would have deeply colored the way Jews would have interacted with the Galatians, even prior to Paul’s ministry. This information helps the reader understand the significance of Paul’s famous confrontation with Peter. And of course with 2:20 being such an important verse on soteriology, Robbins has a lengthy discourse (with many charts and illustrations) discussing the definition and significance of justification. We appreciate his conclusion, “There is no “Jesus + something = salvation.” There is only “Jesus = salvation” (56).

The shortest chapter is number 5, covering Galatians 3:1-6. Using the classic television program “Bewitched” as a launching point, Robbins explores Paul’s exasperation with the Galatians having been “bewitched” (KJV following Tyndale) by the Judaizers. And the sixth chapter covers 3:7-14, showing again that 1) the law was never intended for salvation, and 2) the Gospel was always also intended for gentiles. This chapter has several helpful charts suitable for use in classroom settings. This is also as good a chapter as any to point out how frequently Robbins is compelled to correct erroneous translation choices in the NIV. “Contra NIV, which obscures the nuance of the Greek” (75), “once more the NIV elides the nuance of the Greek” (78), “The NIV translation once again tries to help too much” (80). Errors in the NIV are pointed out throughout the book.

Chapter 7 covers 3:15-22, and the significance of the seed of Abraham. Robbins notes, “This is critical: 1) God did not make his promises to Abraham and all the ethnic Jewish people. 2) Instead, he made his promises to Abraham and to one special descendent - Jesus” (91). It

would be good in a future second addition to see how Robbins understands the land promise to Abraham. (Later in the book Robbins does note, “In this letter Paul simply isn’t concerned about a future for Israel - turn to Rom 9-11 if you want to see that discussion” (166)).

Chapter 8 covers the highly significant section of 3:23-4:7, and is entitled “Who Are God’s True Children?” This chapter has several helpful charts and illustrations as Robbins traces Paul’s argument that Abraham’s faith is the basis of salvation, not the Mosaic law, and that one’s confidence is not in his Jewishness or other characteristics, but in Christ alone. This section of Galatians seems to echo John the Baptist’s preaching in Matthew 3. We do want to point out here that Robbins seems to wrongly equivocate Paul’s phrase “into Christ” (εἰς Χριστόν) in 3:27 with his phrase “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) in other passages. Our church understands the phrase in 3:27 to be an accusative of reference, with Paul making reference to their post-salvation water immersion in the churches of Galatia as their outward identification (“put on”) with Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection. (Of the countless Baptists who have held this view on Galatians 3:27, see John Gill as one example).

Chapter 9 overviews 4:8-20 and Paul’s exasperation with the Galatians returning to bondage under the Law at the expense of the freedom that is in Christ. Robbins explains: “Paul sounds anguished. At wit’s end. Frustrated in a compassionate sort of way. He’s like a mother in childbirth, waiting for a baby to enter the world. Will these “believers” in Galatia turn out to be real Christians after all? Paul wishes he were there so he could understand. He’s perplexed, confused. He wishes he could speak in kinder tones - if only he could chat with them in person. What Paul wouldn’t have given for Zoom!” (118).

Chapter 10 comments upon 4:21-5:12, which contains Paul’s famous use of the Hagar narrative from Genesis 16 as well as the beginning of some of the more practical theology of the epistle. Robbins well observes, “Anytime you add something to Jesus’ “repent and believe” (Mark 1:15), you destroy the gospel. False teachers are claiming the equation is “Jesus + obey the Mosaic law = salvation.” This is why some of these “foolish Galatians” (Gal 3:3) want to “be under the law.” They’ve been fooled to believe in that false equation” (121). This chapter contains several helpful charts and diagrams to help the reader appreciate the real differences between Sarah and Hagar and what they represent.

The rest of Galatians 5 is examined in chapter 11, which includes good explanations of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, and Galatians 6 is covered in chapters 12 and 13 as the book concludes. These are very helpful and practical chapters that could be used with great benefit in an adult class in church or study groups. Two side points in these chapters we would observe:

First, we appreciate Robbins’ discussion of 6:16 (“Israel of God”) and it gave us a lot to think about. He cites Hovey, Longnecker, Stott (could have cited Sperry Chafer) and notes, “So, in that vein, the “true Israel” are those people (Jewish, Canadian, Azeri, Chilean, or whatever) who understand that the new creation is the only that that matters for relationship with God, because it’s the only thing that establishes that relationship! There are not “two peoples” of God, nor does church “supercede” or “replace” Israel. Instead, non-Jewish believers have been

adopted into Israel and treated as if we were born there (see the analogy of the olive tree at Rom. 11). Then, together with the believing ethnic Jewish people, all true believers are the nation of “Israel.” Gentiles are grafted into the nation of Israel in the same way foreigners become naturalized American citizens - they’re not born as Americans, but they become Americans” (166-167).

Second, on page 152, Robbins comments on Galatians 6:2 and says, “Not a spirit of eager condemnation, but of loving correction (see John 7:53-8:11).” We would simply point out here that of the seven English translations that Robbins quotes from in his book (NIV, ESV, NRSV, RSV, CEB, NLT, and NEB), none of them are based on a Greek text that includes this passage he cites as part of the text of Scripture. The *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA 28) that I am holding in my hands as I write this has the passage offset and double bracketed meaning it is not to be included in any Bible. The Tyndale House Greek New Testament (ed. Dirk Jongkind) that I am holding in my hands as I write this ends John 7 at verse 52 and begins John 8 with verse 12, completely omitting the passage that Robbins refers to his readers. The UBS 5 in my hands also has the entire passage double bracketed with the note to “omit.” As we have pointed out numerous times, this is part of the problem with being King James Never or Textus Receptus Never (the other extreme of King James Onlyism, which we also do not identify with). We would suggest that a second edition of Robbins’ book either include the KJV (or Tyndale, Geneva, Matthews, NKJV, MEV, etc.) as one of the Bibles cited (along with an explanatory footnote), or that this sentence on page 152 be edited out to avoid being a source of confusion to students of God’s Words.

Once again, we are very happy to recommend this book to those who are studying the book of Galatians either in their personal Bible study or in the setting of the local body of Christ, which is the pillar and ground of the truth, the NT immersionist assembly. We trust that it will help further the Gospel of Christ, which is of grace and unto liberty, and not under the Law to bondage.