

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 71: The Book of Galatians, Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

The Book of Galatians is the only letter of Paul addressed to churches in more than one city. Even though Paul's epistles were shared, they were generally written to one fellowship in one city.

Another unique thing is that it is the only letter of Paul that does not include his typical commendation or thanksgiving section, indicating that he found nothing to rejoice about, since they had defected from the "true gospel" (1:6-9).

The City:

In New Testament times the word *Galatia* had two separate meanings:

1. ETHNIC:

The ethnic Galatians of Paul's day were descendants of the Celtic cults who migrated from Gaul (modern France) to set up a kingdom in North-central Asia Minor in the third century BC.

The Romans conquered the Galatians in 189 BC. but allowed them to run an independent kingdom paying tribute to Rome. In 25 BC. Rome formed a new province that incorporated the ethnic Galatians and gave the word a new meaning, which was...

2. POLITICAL:

By the time of Paul's letter, however, the Roman province of Galatia included territory well to the south of that original kingdom. In a political sense, *Galatia* became the name of the entire province including ethnic Galatians and many other groups. This territory included the cities of Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

This dichotomy makes it difficult to determine the true location of "the churches of Galatia" (1:2) Were they in the north or south? **Refer to a map of Paul's journeys in the back of your Bible.**

1. NORTH

If the letter is written to Christians in North Galatia, the churches were founded on his second missionary trip described in Acts 16-18 when he traveled through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia.

But, there is no record of Paul evangelizing or founding churches in this sparsely populated area. He may have done so, but it is unusual for Acts to give no account. This would seem to indicate Paul wrote to the:

2. SOUTH

If the letter is written to Christians in South Galatia, the churches were founded on his first missionary trip described in Acts 13-14, when he traveled through the southern part of the Roman province, but outside the ethnic Galatian region.

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Details of Paul evangelizing, discipling, teaching, and appointing leaders for the newly founded churches at Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe are given in detail. He would, then, have a reason to write.

Perhaps the strongest argument for this view lies in the theme of the book itself. The primary themes of Galatians are "the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:5, 14) and "freedom in Christ" (5:1), which were the focus of the Jerusalem Council reported in Acts 15.

If this were written after that church council, and to churches founded on his second trip, he would have undoubtedly referred to decision of Jerusalem as part of his argument. Since he did not, it is obvious he was writing to the churches founded earlier, before the council, i.e. the southern province churches.

The Author and Date:

There is not reason to question the authorship of Paul, which is, again, supported by internal claims and external evidence. He affirms it in 1:1 and virtually all early church documentation confirms his claim. It is likely that he wrote this letter at the end of the first trip, probably from Antioch, in 49 BC., just before the infamous Jerusalem Council in 49 or 50 AD. (Acts 15), and making it the earliest of all his letters.

The Problem:

One Bible scholar had likened Galatians to "a rough sketch for the finished masterpiece of Romans." That is aptly stated since:

- Both emphasize salvation by faith alone.
- Both declare man cannot save himself.
- Both present the concept of freedom from the law.
- Both remove any difference from Jew and Gentile.

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians to counter Judaizers, false teachers who were determined to undermine the doctrine of justification by faith. They spread their pernicious teaching *within* the church, which made them especially dangerous.

What did they teach? That Gentiles (all non-Jews) must first become a Jew and submit to the Mosaic Law before they could become a real Christian. What shocked Paul most was that the Galatians bought into this heresy. Many of them left "sound doctrine" to follow these teachings.

This not only stopped their spiritual growth, but it caused a gigantic split in the church. We know this because, of the fifteen "works of the flesh" Paul condemns in chapter 5, eight of them are sins of strife and division.

Paul dealt with the several of the key questions of the Christian faith and his teachings become our lessons for today:

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Lessons:

1. Q: How can man (sinful by nature) come to God (holy by nature)?

A: Only by accepting the salvation God, by His grace, made available through the death and resurrection of His son, Jesus.

2. Q: Can't we do/not do anything, obey anything, pay anything?

A: We are, by nature bent and weak and cannot live righteously.

3. Q: How then can we live righteously?

A: We live by faith and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

Homework:

Read: Or reread The Book Of Galatians.

Think: Why do I obey the Word of God?

Apply: Live this week in obedience to God because of what He has done for you, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ADULT EDUCATION CLASSES, VALLEY BIBLE CHURCH, GORDON KEMBLE

Bible Survey Lesson 72: The Book of Galatians, Part II

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

Introduction:

The book of Galatians has been called "The Magna Carta of Christian Liberty" or the "Charter of Christian Freedom." Paul proclaims this in chapter 5 verse 1 when he states, *"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject to the yoke of slavery."*

CHRIST HAS SET US FREE:

1. We are free from the law. That portion of God's Word in the first five books of the Bible that governed every aspect of a Jew's life.

2. We are free from sin. The power of the world system, the flesh, and the devil.

3. And we are free to serve. To respond to our savior and use our gifts for the benefit of fellow believers.

As we saw in the book of Acts, Christianity was born in Jerusalem and spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and throughout the rest of the known world. The first converts and most of the early leaders, therefore, were Jewish, men and women who accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah.

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They obviously struggled with their dual identity: traditional Jewish teaching driving them to strictly obey the law vs. newfound Christian faith inviting them to celebrate freedom from the law.

Not only was that dichotomy a dilemma, but what about the Gentiles, all those non-Jews? How could they possibly become a part of the Kingdom of Heaven when they didn't know God's Messiah in a Jewish way?

Keeping this controversy alive were the Judaizers, a group of Jews in the church, who taught that Gentiles had to submit to Jewish laws and traditions in addition to believing in Jesus in order to be true Christians.

Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians to refute this teaching and call believers, both Jew and Gentile, back to the pure gospel.

The Good News is the message that salvation comes to everyone by God's grace through faith in Jesus and nothing else. Its clear presentation of salvation by grace through faith alone made Galatians Martin Luther's favorite book.

FREEDOM FOLLOWS FAITH! We are not bound by any set of rules, traditions, or other man-made criteria, but are free to serve and obey the one who bought us at a great price and is our personal Father and Lord.

I. GOSPEL OF GRACE DEFENDED (Chapters 1 and 2)

I included the introduction of the letter in this first section because it includes, not only the authors name, Paul, and the audience, the Galatians, but also included several distinctive elements that are developed in the rest of the letter.

For example, the resurrection of Jesus is mentioned here, then assumed throughout the letter. There is also a uniquely worded capsule summary of the gospel in terms of redemption and our deliverance from "*this present evil age*" which is carried through the book as well.

A. Authority Asserted (1:1-10)

Paul's apostleship "*not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.*" is the first theme of the book. (v. 1)

In a sense, he will be defending that authority throughout the first and most of the second chapters. This is probably because he is writing in criticism and speaking against false teachers within the church who have challenged him and his authority.

Paul was "*amazed*" that they had defected from the gospel of grace and were accepting false teaching, stating that anyone, even an angel, who would pervert the "message" was accursed. (v. 6)

B. Authority Acquired (1:11-24)

Paul's claim to the authority of apostleship and his knowledge of the gospel message was acquired through direct revelation (Acts 9 and 26). To support this he presented a selected overview of his experience:

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1. He himself was "more *extremely zealous of my ancestral traditions*," (v. 14) eager to keep the law, and intense to persecute the church. His works as a Jew outshone the works of any of the false teachers who were criticizing him (Phil. 3:4-6).
2. He was called supernaturally and specifically to preach among the Gentiles (vv. 15 and 16), but did not consult with the apostles for three years about his calling or message.
3. He then had an interview with Peter but was still largely unknown by sight to the church as he trained workers and ministered in Tarsus and Antioch (Acts 11).

C. Authority Approved (2:1-10)

Fourteen years later Paul returned to the Jerusalem church with Barnabas and Titus giving them a decisive opportunity to correct his gospel of grace if it needed correcting. Peter, John, and James offered the right hand of fellowship and did not insist that Titus, a gentile, be circumcised. To the contrary, they blessed his ministry to the Gentiles.

D. Authority Acknowledged (2:11-21)

Sometime after the friendly meeting in Jerusalem Peter visited Antioch, the church led by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11-13). While there, visitors from Jerusalem pressured Peter into hypocritical behavior. His actions indicated that it was necessary for Gentiles to observe Jewish dietary rules even though God had taught him differently (Acts 11). Paul was forced to confront Peter because of this error and the fact that Peter yielded indicates that Paul's teaching was correct.

NOW . . . in vv. 15-21, continuing or emerging directly from his argument with Peter and writing under his well supported authority:

PAUL PRESENTS THE PURE GOSPEL MESSAGE!

This section not only crystallizes the essence of the gospel of grace versus the counterclaims of the Judaizers, but it also serves as the a major hinge in the letter. It prepares for a following exposition of justification by faith alone by clearly stating Paul's thesis.

READ GALATIANS 2:15-21

Paul's logic is airtight and makes his conclusions undeniable. (Notice the parallels to the book of Romans.)

1. Jews do not have to sin in the pagan ways of the Gentiles to be classified as sinners (Romans 1-3).
2. Nor does the message of grace encourage more and more sin (Romans 6:1-14).
3. No one can be justified by, "*the works of the law*," although the law of Moses does play a part in convincing us of our deadness in sin and our inability to save ourselves. (Galatians 3:10-25; Romans 7:7-12)
4. The only means of justification is faith in Jesus Christ, and the road of growth in the Christian is full identification with the death and resurrection of Christ by faith as well (Romans 6:1-11).

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II. GOSPEL OF GRACE EXPLAINED (Chapters 3 and 4)

Because the distorted "gospel" being spread by the Jewish false teachers was based on an understanding of the law of Moses and other Jewish teachings and traditions, Paul wisely builds his gospel of justification by faith alone from Old Testament Scriptures.

Paul moves back and forth between personal appeal and formal Scripture-based arguments to build an air-tight case.

A. Argument from Experience (3:1-5)

He begins with an appeal to the Galatians to examine their own experience. *"This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith?"* (v. 2)

Did they receive the Holy Spirit (salvation) by doing the works of the law or by believing the gospel message they heard from Paul?

Then a follow-up question: *"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"* (v. 3) It is foolish to be attracted to the message of Christian growth by works of the flesh when they have been clearly taught the truth of the continued working of God's grace through His Spirit. ***Their own personal experience points to salvation by faith alone.***

B. Argument from Abraham (3:6-9)

In order to support his rhetorical questions Paul refers to the example of Abraham, father of the Jewish nation, and his relationship to the law as presented in Genesis 15. How was Abraham justified, made right with God, saved? Was it by circumcision? No, circumcision wasn't instituted yet. Was it by Law? No, the Law was not written yet. How then was he saved?

". . . Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." (v 6)

Abraham's faith was credited to his account as righteousness, and, Paul goes on to say, all who follow that classic example are Abraham's spiritual children and are blessed in the same way he was. He says it so well in verse 9, *"So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."* Abraham's experience points to salvation by faith alone. ***Abraham's experience points to salvation by faith alone.***

C. Argument from the Law (3:10-4:11)

But, what if you'd rather go the route of keeping the law? What if you're a better doer than believer? Bad decision: (v 10) *"For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse;"* Why is everyone who is trying to reach God through keeping the law cursed? *"Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them."* (v. 10) No man or woman is able to keep the whole law, they cannot win!

Just exactly what is the curse of the law? Death! Fortunately, Jesus' death on the cross brought our curse on Him so we could receive the blessing of salvation by faith, just as Abraham did.

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This does not mean the law has no purpose:

1. It is the law that convicts us of sin and holds us captive until we can respond by faith.
2. It is the law which puts all people regardless of ethnic, social or sexual groupings in equal peril and in equal need of a Savior.

Paul ends this argument by asking the Galatians, "*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?*" (4:9)

Their experience with the law points to salvation by faith alone.

D. Argument from Life (4:12-20)

In this portion Paul gets very personal and appeals to memories of their past relationship. He was concerned about them in this time of spiritual sickness just as they had been concerned for him in his earlier time of physical illness (Acts 13).

He reminded them of when they had first received the gospel from him they had honored him and sacrificially nursed him back to health. He presented this as evidence of his concern, risking their friendship to tell them the truth. **His willingness to risk everything points to salvation by faith alone.**

E. Argument from Allegory (4:21-31)

As a climax to his argument concerning justification by faith from the Old Testament, Paul created an allegory from the two sons of Abraham: Ishmael and Isaac.

In a twist on the methods of the Judaizers, Paul paralleled Ishmael, the child of a slave, to the covenant of the law made at Mt. Sinai and the current slavery of Jewish legalism.

He presented Isaac, the child of free Sarah, in line with the promise to Abraham of a New Jerusalem, a New Kingdom, a Jewish hope for the future. He concluded by implying that those in "the line of promise" would be persecuted by those "in spiritual slavery." But that pressure would not last because those in slavery will be banished by the "father." Paul clearly tells of the doom of the false teachers as they come before the Lord in judgment. ***The final defeat of the Judaizers points to salvation by faith alone.***

III. GOSPEL OF GRACE APPLIED (Chapters 5 and 6)

Having nailed down his argument for freedom in Christ through justification by faith alone, Paul looks to the practical application of that freedom. While continuing his rebuke of legalism, he also attacks the opposite extreme, license.

Paul carefully shows that freedom in Christ is a Spirit guided life-style within the limits of a new "law" given by Jesus himself: the law of love.

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Henrietta Mears, in her very basic Bible survey book, *What the Bible is All About*, put it this way: "Liberty is not freedom from the law--that is reckless. Liberty is freedom in law. Paul speaks of the liberty we have "in Christ" (2:4), for "*where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*" (2 Corinthians 3:17) This is the one great secret of liberty."

A. Freedom from Ritual (5:1-12)

Paul begins by warning against circumcision since that was the central "work" presented by the Judaizers as necessary for salvation. He reminds them that it has no spiritual value of its own and is only one small part of the law. To be justified by keeping the law, of course, means keeping the whole law which is impossible. Freedom comes by faith in Christ alone.

Paul was crushed that the false teachers had stopped the forward progress of the Galatians when they, "*were running well*" (v 7). He longed for the end of these teachers so strongly that he wished they would "*mutilate themselves*" (v 12). This was a slap at their emphasis on circumcision and referred to castration, which would effectively end their species.

B. Freedom from License to Love (5:13-17)

The danger of misunderstanding freedom in Christ is a tendency toward self-indulgence, which can express itself in cruel words and actions toward other believers. True spiritual freedom shows itself in love, both for God and for others.

Since this kind of love tends to go against our natural inclinations, we need to live in the power of the Holy Spirit allowing Him to guide our attitudes, decisions and actions. The believer who is controlled by the Spirit shows qualities that reflect supernatural godliness that reaches far beyond the requirements of the law as Jesus explains in The Sermon on the Mount.

C. Freedom from Flesh (5:16-26)

This life of self control and love is not automatic. Even though the flesh was crucified with Christ, the tendencies toward pride and sinning still exist. We must be constantly filled with the Spirit.

D. Freedom from Bondage (6:1-10)

Mature Christians must, in the power of the Holy Spirit, restore sinning believers, support others who are overloaded with cares or responsibilities, and work very hard to carry their own responsibilities in the body without pride. Part of this load sharing is the support of biblical teachers who share with us.

These are the kinds of good works, brought by love, which bring about long-term harvests of eternal reward.

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E. Freedom from Pride (6:11-18)

Paul finishes his letter to the Galatian churches by taking the manuscript from his unnamed scribe and writing in a very familiar large script.

He summarizes the issues covered in the letter by pointing out the pride involved in trusting in works, in this case represented by circumcision, over trusting, by faith, in the Cross of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to make them a new creation.

READ GALATIANS 6:14-18

Lesson:

1. The true gospel states that faith in Jesus Christ is the only grounds for justification in God's eyes and our only eternal hope (2:16; 5:5).

2. The amazing transformation that takes place when a person trusts Christ is supernatural.

It is not by working hard, but a natural result as one becomes a new creature filled by the Holy Spirit (6:15).

3. After becoming a Christian, the need for faith in Christ does not diminish. Daily living takes the power of Christ (2:20), His Spirit (4:6), and God's guidance (5:18) to avoid sinful behavior.

4. Living by faith allows the power of the Holy Spirit to operate (5:5) for a loving, radiant life (5:6) that produces a spiritual harvest in both the short-term (5:22-23) and the long term (6:8-9).