

GALATIANS

Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

Galatians 1:1-5

The book of Galatians is truly one of the great books of the Bible because it defends the truth of gospel from all perversion and compromise. The theme concerns the liberty a justified person has in Christ. Therefore, this letter has been called the “Bill of Rights of the Christian Life” or the “Magna Carta of Christian Liberty” or the “Emancipation Declaration” from all of legalism and bondage in Christianity. It was this book that deeply touched the heart of Martin Luther and gave him strong convictions on justification by faith.

There is a close connection between the Book of Romans and the Book of Galatians for they both stress salvation by grace through faith in Christ. However, there is a distinct difference in these two books. Romans has a very positive emphasis, proclaiming what the gospel is in a calm, orderly, logical way. Galatians has a negative emphasis, proclaiming what the gospel is not, and it is written in a rash way, showing anxiety and distress by the writer, for the true gospel was perverted. When the truth of the gospel was at stake, Paul got stirred up and became stern and even caustic at times.

We too should be concerned about the truth of the gospel. We should know it defend it and be ready to die for it if called upon to do so. Without the truth of the gospel, there is no true Christianity. We should be passionate for the gospel.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

Galatia was in North-central Asia Minor but these people were Europeans and not Asiatic. Galatia comes from the same Latin root word for Gaul. Anyone who took Latin in school remembers the beginning of Julius Caesar’s works, *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres*, “Gaul as a whole is divided into three parts.” Gaul is the ancient name for France. Around 390 BC some Gauls invaded the Roman Empire and sacked the city of Rome. They turned into northern Greece and suffered a military defeat at Delphi. They then migrated into Asia Minor where Attalis, King of Pergamos defeated them and confined them to North-central Asia Minor and this area became known as Galatia. In 189 BC, Galatia became a Roman Province.

The Galatians were fickle (unstable, quick to change), war-like, treacherous, mystical, superstitious and ritualistic. Julius Caesar said of the Gauls: “The infirmity of the Gauls is that they are fickle in their resolves, fond of change and not to be trusted.” This cultural characteristic of fickleness and quickness to change showed up in the Galatian Christians, for they had left the true gospel for a perverted gospel (Gal. 1:6 **“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.”**)

Our cultural backgrounds have a great deal to do as to how we view Christianity. This is why we must constantly be asking ourselves what the Bible says and not trying to read our cultural backgrounds into the Bible.

THE OCCASION FOR THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

Acts chapters 13 and 14 tell us that Paul and Barnabas came into Galatia, preaching the gospel in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra. In all these Galatian cities, Paul and Barnabas received persecution, and in Lystra Paul was stoned and left for dead. However, because of their faithfulness in preaching the truth of the gospel and the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in calling men to salvation, some responded to Christ and local churches sprang up in these cities. Paul established these Christians in the gospel of grace. They knew the real gospel of grace but they were being swept away by false teachers in Paul’s absence from them so this was the occasion for writing this letter.

These false teachers who were troubling the Galatians were called Judaizers. Judaizers were Jews who claimed to be followers of Christ, who claimed to be born again, but taught that one had to keep the Mosaic Law and the Talmud (Jewish historical law) in order to be saved. These false teachers would follow the Apostle Paul wherever he went preaching this perverted gospel. When Paul would leave a city, the Judaizers would come right in behind him with their false gospel. These Judaizers were teaching that in order to grow and really become genuine Christians, the

Gentiles would have to be circumcised, keep the ceremonial law and obey the Old Testament ritual. The Judaizers basically wanted Gentile Christians to keep the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law. The Judaizers were trying to add something to the grace of God in salvation through Christ. They were legalists who taught a works system in salvation and this system was opposed to the biblical teaching that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ.

This was a very subtle perversion of the gospel, for they had not denied Christ, his death or resurrection, but added to the work of Christ. They said that one must have Christ AND the law to be saved. The teaching of the Judaizers contradicted the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone, insisting that for salvation more than faith in Christ was needed.

These Judaizers were clever, for they not only attacked Paul's gospel but also attacked his authority. They challenged the apostolic authority of Paul. They claimed that he was not one of the original Twelve, that he had no authorization from any important Christian body and he was a self-appointed impostor. The goal of the Judaizers was to get the Galatians to deny Paul's authority, for if they could discredit Paul's authority, they could discredit his message. These Judaizers resorted to "mud-slinging" and character assassination to achieve their diabolical ends.

Almost all the cults like Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons get most of their converts from people who have been exposed to the gospel of Christ.

PAUL, GOD'S MAN TO WRITE THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

The Book of Galatians is all about grace verses legalism, faith verses law-works in salvation. It was a heated controversy in the early church, so much so that the Jerusalem Council was called to discuss this very issue. In the providence of God, Paul was God's man to handle this theological controversy. God had prepared Paul from his youth for this task.

Understood Hebrew Culture. Paul was a Hebrew by birth and a Pharisee by choice. He studied the Mosaic Law under Gamaliel, one of the leading Jewish leaders of the day. Paul (Saul) before conversion to Christ gained the reputation of being a student and teacher of the Law. He passionately loved his people, their customs, their traditions and their beliefs. He hated Christians and the Christian Church and sought to imprison and kill all Christians.

Understood Gentile Culture. Paul also knew the Gentile world. He was born in the Gentile city of Tarsus and was a Roman citizen. He was well versed in Greek and Roman culture. Yet, being a Jew with a clear understanding of Gentile culture did not make him qualified to deal with this grace verse legalism question.

Understood Christianity. There was a need for a third ingredient. Paul knew the resurrected Christ personally. He caught a vision of the glorified Christ; he saw his atoning death was a fulfillment of Jewish ceremonial law and that His resurrection vindicated His claims of Lord, Savior, Messiah and King. Paul was a man deeply touched by the grace of God, understanding that salvation was supernatural from beginning to ending.

How has God prepared you to minister? What is your background? What talents do you have? What sins did you fall into before conversion to Christ? What race do you belong to? What education and training do you have? All these God will use to give you a ministry for Christ. How has God prepared you?

THE OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

The outline of the Book of Galatians is quite simple. In chapters 1 and 2, Paul gives a personal vindication (defense) of his apostleship. In chapters 3 and 4, Paul gives a doctrinal explanation about justification by grace through faith. In chapters 5 and 6, he gives a practical exhortation to sanctification by grace through faith.

The first two chapters presents the Apostle of Liberty; the second two, the doctrine of liberty; the last two chapters the life of liberty.

THE SALUTATION TO THE GALATIANS 1:1-5

"Paul, an apostle" -- Paul wastes no time to defend his apostleship. I believe Paul was claiming his right to be one of the original Twelve Apostles. This, of course, necessitates that Matthias was a human choice, not God's choice

to fulfill the vacancy left by Judas Iscariot. It was God's plan to make Paul the twelfth Apostle. To be one of the original Twelve, a person had to be called personally by Christ Himself and had to see the resurrected Christ. Both of those happened to Paul on the road to Damascus when he was saved by Christ.

“Sent not from men not by man”-- Paul, claimed his apostleship had no human origin but its source was clearly in God. He was not appointed to be the office by any authorized group of men such as the original Twelve or the Church at Jerusalem or the Church at Antioch, nor did any delegate from these bodies confirm his Apostolic office on him.

“But by Jesus Christ and God the Father” -- Paul's apostolic appointment came directly through Christ and the Father. It was supernatural and of divine origin.

“Who raised him from the dead” -- The resurrection is mentioned here because it was the resurrected Christ who called the Apostle Paul to his office on the Damascus road. Paul insists that this is one of the requirements to be an Apostle (1 Cor. 9:1 **“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?”**).

Why did Paul so vigorously assert and defend his apostleship? Was he a vain braggart who had an inflated ego? No. It was because the gospel he preached was at stake. If Paul was not an Apostle of Jesus Christ, then men could, and no doubt would, reject his gospel. He therefore defended his apostolic authority in order to defend his message.

“And all the brothers with me” -- These brethren are Paul's co-laborers in the gospel who were with him in Corinth as he wrote this letter. He mentions these brethren because he wanted the Galatians to know that they were also preaching the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ and not some works salvation.

“To the churches in Galatia” -- This was a circular letter to all the churches in the various cities in Southern Galatia. Paul wanted all the Christians to know that his apostleship and message were from God.

Paul had absolutely no word of commendation to the Galatians. This shows how serious he thought their defection was and he was not about to tolerate it for one moment. This heresy just didn't affect an isolated church but many churches and it was a threat to all of Christianity.

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” -- This is a normal greeting in a letter written in that time, but it has a double meaning. Paul greeted them with the words of “grace” and “peace,” and they both come from God. Grace and peace were the essence of Paul's gospel. Grace is the source of salvation; it is God's free favor, irrespective of any human merit, act or works, and is bestowed on those who deserve nothing but judgment and hell. The nature of salvation is peace - peace with God, peace with men and peace with ourselves.

“All of Grace” by *Doddridge*:

Grace first ordained the way to save rebellious man,
And all the steps that grace displays
Which drew the wondrous plan.

Grace first inscribed my name in God's eternal Book;
Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb,
Who all my sorrows took.

Grace led my roving feet to tread the heavenly road,
And now supplied, each hour I meet,
While pressing on to God.

Grace taught my soul to pray, and pardoning love to know;
And grace has kept me to this day,
And will not let me go.

“Who gave himself for our sins” -- Grace and peace are related to a historical event - the death of Jesus Christ for sin. The death of Christ was not primarily a display of God's love, nor an example of heroism but a sacrifice for sin, a substitution for sin and sinners. Since salvation is by grace, Paul wants men to know that Christ secured their

salvation at the cross. He died as a sinner's substitute and salvation is a free gift, apart from works, to all who receive Christ as personal Lord and Savior. Since Christ in his death purchased a person's salvation, then nothing can be added to it. His death is complete, perfect and finished and nothing can be added to taken away from it.

Since Christ died to secure a perfect salvation for sinners, men must stop trusting in their own righteousness to get them to heaven and trust in Christ who substituted for poor lost sinners.

Spurgeon used to say that any poor lost sinner can know that Christ died for him. When he died, he knew your name. He knew your first name—POOR, your middle name—LOST, and your last name—SINNER. Admit your sinfulness before a holy God and come to the Savior for cleansing and you shall know Christ who died for you.

“To rescue us from the present evil age” -- The word rescue means “to pluck out” or “to deliver.” Christ died to rescue and deliver true believers in Christ out of this present evil age. He does not remove the Christian from the present evil age but rescues or plucks him out of it. This evil age is controlled by Satan (2 Cor. 4:3-4 **“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**).

The Bible speaks of the present age and the age to come in the future kingdom. Christians are not just saved for the future kingdom but are rescued out of the present evil age. The gospel is a rescue message; in fact, Christianity is a rescue religion, for Christ died to rescue men and women and boys and girls from this present evil age. The spreading corruption of the present age has as its foundation a wrong religion. The great mark of this age is that it teaches salvation by works. All religions teach salvation by works except Christianity, which teaches salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Christian conversion means being rescued out of this age positionally and being transferred into the new age yet to come. Christ also died to rescue us experimentally and make us a different people from the world. Christians do not belong to this age and will never feel comfortable in it. The Christian will always have tension between living in the present evil world which he hates and longing for the new world which will be his someday.

The Christian life is living in the present evil age as rescued people by Christ, to show the present world what the age to come will be like (Tit. 2:14: **“[Jesus Christ], who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”**)

Both justification and sanctification are by grace through faith in Christ. It was this assault upon these truths that so deeply disturbed the Apostle Paul. He knew that anything that challenged them is false doctrine that will lead its victims into heartache, bondage, desolation of spirit and damnation. No wonder Paul was so disturbed with the Judaizers and their false, twisted and perverted gospel!

“According to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” -- The whole process of salvation by grace through faith in Christ is according to the sovereign will of God. Paul is quick to remind all Christians that the act of Christ rescuing them is not according to their plan or because of anything they did but according to the Father's sovereign will. We cannot earn or work for something Christ has already procured and secured for us. All we can do is receive it. Salvation is given free, gratis, as a gift and can only be appropriated through faith in Christ.

We often hear the expression, “There are no free lunches.” By that people mean there is nothing free in this world. There are always strings attached or a cost to pay. Yet, there is one thing in the world which has been, is and will always be free and that is salvation through Jesus Christ. The gospel is freely given and freely received.

CONCLUSION

Have you received Christ as your Savior? Do you really know what it means to be saved by grace? Have you been born of the Spirit of God? You can do nothing for salvation but receive it by faith.

Works cannot and will not save any person, but God's grace can and will save all who trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord (Eph. 2:8-9 **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”**).