

GALATIANS AND YOU

Studies in the Epistle of Paul
to the Galatians

by

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Chapter One

Historical Background of the Epistle

Importance of the Epistle to the Galatians

Galatians is beyond question one of the most important books in the New Testament. No other sets forth the doctrine of justification by faith so concisely or more convincingly. Most fittingly has it been called the Magna Charta of Christian Liberty. In the hands of Martin Luther and other great leaders of the movement it proved to be "the hammer of the Reformation." And the epistle has lost nothing in force and pivotal importance with the passing of subsequent generations. It remains today a citadel of the evangelical faith. Lovers of the truth still turn to it as an arsenal of proof texts for the refutation of all man-made theories of salvation by works. In this day of loose thinking on the fundamentals of the faith, we who seek to advance the cause of CHRIST do well to recharge our batteries of doctrinal conviction by a mastery of the teachings in Galatians. Who shall say that revivals of tremendous sweep and magnitude may not yet be waiting to be launched upon the tides of prayer and renewed emphasis upon the doctrine of salvation by grace alone?

Who Wrote This Epistle?

The authenticity of no book in the New Testament is more solidly established than that of the Epistle to the Galatians. From the earliest times no breath of suspicion has rested upon its authorship. Along with Romans and the two Corinthians letters, it stands in that group of epistles which have been accepted as indisputably Pauline by even the most radical of higher critics. No other production of Paul so reflects the whole man as does this letter. His fiery personality flashes forth in almost every sentence and phrase. The authenticity of Galatians is impregably secure.

Where, When, and to Whom Was Galatians Written?

While there is some disagreement among scholars on this matter, the probability is that Galatians was written from a city in Macedonia about A.D. 56.

Whether this letter was written to churches in southern or northern Galatia has been, and

continues to be, a subject of warm debate. Strong arguments can be offered in favor of either position. To enter into the involved details of this problem is aside from our purpose and would not prove particularly profitable. Those of our readers who may be interested in the question are referred to a wealth of material to be found in articles in Bible dictionaries, books on New Testament Introduction, and critical commentaries. The writer of this course leans toward the northern Galatian view. But the question will perhaps never be satisfactorily settled this side of eternity. We can get firsthand information from Paul when we meet him on the other shore. In the last analysis, however, the doctrine and value of this book for us are not affected in the slightest degree by its original destination; its message is for the whole Church, regardless of time or place.

The Occasion for Writing Galatians

False teachers known as Judaizers had crept into these Galatian churches and were seeking to undermine the faith of the Gentile converts by insisting that they could not enter into the fullness of salvation unless in addition to their belief in CHRIST they submitted to the rite of circumcision and other requirements of the Jewish religion. As to whether these Judaizers were sincerely but sadly mistaken Hebrew Christians, or were merely professed believers who sought to use Christianity as a cloak for the propagation of Judaism, we must leave to the judgment of the LORD. Paul, who was in a much better position than present-day commentators to know the facts in the case, was rather thoroughly convinced that they were false teachers, wolves in sheep's clothing: **"And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage"** (Galatians 2:4) and **Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh"** (Philippians 3:2-3).

The objective of the Judaizers was twofold: (1) they sought to undermine confidence in Paul as a divinely commissioned apostle on a level with the Twelve; and (2) they wanted to subvert his teaching that men were saved by faith alone. Paul wrote Galatians to defend his apostolic authority and to establish the doctrine of justification by faith upon a secure basis of Scripture and reason. It is hardly needful to say that in writing the epistle he was so inspired of GOD that his exposition of the doctrine is divinely authoritative for all time to come.

Character and Content of Galatians

The style and thought of the epistle are in keeping with the end that Paul has in view. It is outstanding among the apostle's writings for its unity of purpose. As Romans is the most concise and vigorous presentation of Paul's evangel. Hewing to the line, it cuts right to the heart of the issue at stake. The phraseology sizzles with the passion of conviction. There is no mincing of words. Stern truth is not clothed in silken diction. The crisis forbids roundabout language. The Galatians must be rescued before they are swept over the brink of apostasy.

The structural outline of Galatians is very simple. After the introduction, comprising the ten opening verses, the epistle falls into a threefold division as follows: personal explanation, chapters 1 and 2; doctrinal exposition, chapters 3 and 4; practical application, chapters 5 and 6.

Having completed this brief preliminary survey of the background of the epistle, we are now ready to enter upon our expository studies. We take up first an interpretation of the Introduction as found in chapter 1, verses 1 to 10 exclusively.

INTRODUCTION

Galatians 1:1-10

Salutation (vv. 1-3)

"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father)"

In head-on collision with the false statements of the Judaizers, Paul contends that he has not been commissioned by men, has not received his instructions through human channels, but, contrariwise, has been as directly and as divinely appointed by the LORD as have any of the Twelve. Paul is concerned to defend his apostleship, not from any feeling of wounded pride, but for the sake of his readers, whose acceptance of his doctrine of justification hinges upon their confidence in his apostolic position. While the apostles continued a closed circle of men inspired of GOD and divinely invested with a unique and unparalleled authority in the Church for all time to come in matters of faith and practice, let it not be forgotten that all true ministers of JESUS CHRIST are called and equipped for their work by the LORD. For a Christian leader to forget his source of authority in CHRIST, is to forfeit his weight of authority with men.

"and God the Father who raised him from the dead." These words are freighted with profound significance. No one can read the New Testament with any degree of care and fail to note the prominence given to the resurrection of CHRIST in the preaching and writings of the apostles. Paul in particular stresses repeatedly that in raising CHRIST from the dead GOD the FATHER vindicated His claims to deity and certified the atoning efficacy of the blood shed on Calvary. Why, then, are sinners so reluctant to let the GOD who raised CHRIST *for* their sins: **"Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification"** (Romans 4:25) raise them *from* their sins: **"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins . . . Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"** (Eph. 2:1, 5).

"and all the brethren which are with me." In these words Paul points to the fact that the Christians among whom he is laboring are at one with him in his presentation of the true Gospel as contrasted with any and all counterfeits. Congregations well grounded in the Word are good sounding boards for the Gospel messages of their pastors.

"unto the churches in Galatia." How desperately these fickle churches needed the truth so uncompromisingly set forth in this epistle! And there are many churches today swayed by error that just as surely require a secure anchorage in the teachings of Galatians.

"Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ"

(Galatians 1:3). Grace may be defined as the undeserved - or perhaps we had better say, the ill-deserved favor of GOD toward sinners. And let it never be forgotten that all of us who have put our trust in JESUS are but sinners saved by grace: **" For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"** (Ephesians 2:8). Keeping this fact in mind

ministers to spiritual enrichment. Humility of heart heightens the sublimity of grace. Our riches in CHRIST lose much of their luster when taken for granted.

"Grace... and peace" Grace is the divine love manifesting itself to man, and peace is the state of mind resulting from a reception of that love. We must know the grace of GOD to have the peace of GOD.

"from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." This linking of the name of the SAVIOUR with that of the FATHER on a plane of equality is very characteristic of Paul's writings and is clear proof that he believed profoundly in the full deity of CHRIST.

Commendation of the True Gospel

Verse 4 certainly gives us the Gospel in a nutshell.

"who gave himself for our sins." What a world of meaning is wrapped up in these few simple words! CHRIST was both the Priest who offered the sacrifice and the Sacrifice that was offered. Let it never be forgotten that the value of the blood shed on Calvary rests upon the nature of the One who gave it. Unless JESUS CHRIST be indeed the very Son of GOD, His death on the Cross can avail no more than that of any one or all of the long line of heroes and martyrs through the centuries. The Cross of CHRIST is the one and only bridge of reconciliation between GOD and man.

"who gave himself." Spiritually our acquisitions wait upon our evaluations. As we experience ever sweeter joys in our friendship with JESUS, we do well to remind ourselves from time to time that CHRIST had to give Himself for us as the Author of our redemption before He could give Himself to us as the Object of our devotion.

"for our sins." CHRIST left His glory-lit throne to save our sin-stained souls. The atonement was the reason for the incarnation: **"And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin"** (I John 3:5). CHRIST gave Himself for my sins to save me from my sins. How can I, then, regardless of what the world may say, make light of *my sin* in the light of *His Cross*? Devotion to the CHRIST who died for my sin will bring forth abhorrence of the sin that put Him on the Cross.

"that he might deliver us from this present evil world." By "this present evil world" the apostle means the world system arrayed against GOD and His CHRIST, the spirit of the age that is no friend to grace: **"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience"** (Eph. 2:2). Deliverance suggests, of course, a bondage from which men need to be freed. Those out of CHRIST are in subjection to the world, the flesh and the devil. It is a master strategy of Satan, however, to keep men ignorant of their enslaved condition and of their need of a SAVIOUR: **"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them"** (II Corinthians 4:4). In passing, it might be observed that the enlightenment of the modern mind that rejects the message of salvation is nothing but the old-fashioned "endarkenment" of the sinful heart. Scoffing at the reality and enormity of sin, men are blissfully

unmindful of the fact that to deny the iniquity of sin is but to prolong their captivity to sin. Oh, that they would wake up to their desperate plight! The cost to CHRIST of redemption from sin appallingly emphasizes the cost to men of persistence in sin; for it is inconceivable that GOD would have allowed His only begotten Son to suffer and die for sin upon the Cross of Calvary were there any other road to salvation.

"that he might deliver us from this present evil world." In addition to their solemn import for the unregenerate, these words are susceptible of a most pertinent application to the hearts and lives of Christians. Particularly do they suggest the believer's attitude toward the world. We who have been redeemed by the precious blood of JESUS should view the world from a twofold standpoint, namely, (1) from the standpoint of what the world did to CHRIST, and (2) from the standpoint of what CHRIST did for the world. The first will cause us to shrink with loathing from any participation in the sins and follies of the world that put our LORD to death; the second will kindle within our breasts a love for souls that will send us forth to win from sin those for whom CHRIST died. All this obviously involves an obligation for the followers of JESUS to lead separated lives. And yet all too many professing Christians are more absorbed in being conformed to the world than in being transformed by the LORD: **"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"** (Rom. 12:2). Be not caught in what ought to be fought: **"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier"** (II Timothy 2:4). May we suggest this for a slogan for the Christian life, a guiding star in our service for the Master?

"according to the will of God and our Father." These meaningful words should serve to correct a widely prevalent misconception with regard to the atonement. There are those who speak and write as if CHRIST had to die in order to make GOD love and want to save sinners. There never was, however, and never can be, any conflict of will in the Godhead. All three Persons in the Trinity are one in the purpose and plan of salvation, although each one has His own peculiar office and function in connection with redeeming sinners. The GOD whose justice demanded an eternal penalty for sin is one and the same GOD whose mercy provided an eternal remedy for sin. JESUS did not die in order that GOD might love sinners, but because He did love them: **"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"** (Rom. 5:8). What clouds of misunderstanding gathering about the Cross would be dissolved were these simple facts but kept in mind!

"to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." As the apostle contemplates the wonder of God's redeeming love in CHRIST, his overflowing heart bursts forth into a doxology, a song of praise to GOD. How is it with us? Are we not all too prone to take grace for granted? Do we bow humbly and gratefully as we ought in adoration of the GOD of infinite mercy? While our worship does not, and of course, cannot, add one tiniest ray to the ineffable glory of GOD, it does bring immeasurable blessing into our own lives by opening our hearts, like flowers in the sunlight, to the riches of grace that GOD waits to shower upon us. We absorb what we adore; we appropriate what we appreciate; and we are enriched by what we revere. Ennoblement of spirit is enablement for service.

Condemnation of the False Gospel (vv. 6-10)

Paul turns in these verses from a commendation of the Gospel of grace to a condemnation of the

gospel of works.

"I marvel" The apostle's soul is a seething caldron of wonder, horror and anger as he beholds his Galatian converts being swept from their moorings by a legalism that contradicts and nullifies all that CHRIST died to procure for them. Oh, that we were more concerned over the perils of souls yielding to the deceitful snares of any form of works-righteousness!

"that ye are so soon removed." While the Galatians have not gone over bag and baggage in to the apostasy, they are giving such quick and ready ear to the false teaching of the Judaizers that a wholesale desertion of the faith is alarmingly imminent.

"removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." The apostle is at a loss to understand what possible attraction this false gospel can have for his readers if they have ever been really gripped by the truth and grace of CHRIST. And we find in our own day all too many professing Christians who are **"carried about with every wind of doctrine"** (Ephesians 4:14). A faith feebly held is lightly dropped. How can these who have drunk deeply of JESUS and His love think even for a moment of turning from Him to the broken and empty cisterns of legalism (Jeremiah 2:13)? Deceivers would make less spoil of the faith if believers found more spoil in it. Doubt preys on him who does not pray to GOD; for prayer keeps the verities of the faith fresh and green in our experience. There would be less falling from the LORD if there were more calling on the LORD. It will be noted that the apostasy is described as from a Person rather than from a doctrine. This is deeply significant; it attaches the stigma of ingratitude to backsliding. Disgrace lies in forsaking His grace. A deepened love for our SAVIOUR will result in a strengthened hold on His doctrine. Let us prayerfully ask ourselves this pertinent question: Would there not be less wandering from the truth of JESUS if there were more wondering at the love of JESUS?

"which is not another." There is but one Gospel; all others are counterfeits. Man has no substitute for God's Substitute. Substitution for the Gospel is opposition to the Gospel. If only men could be brought to see this!

"but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ." We may rest assured that any and all so-called improvements of the Gospel are deadly perversions of it - and no perversion of the Gospel can produce the conversion of a sinner. A revolutionized gospel is not a revolutionizing gospel. To add to it is to take from it. Wet gun-powder fires no shots.

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you... let him be accursed." The apostle seeks to drive home to his readers that the controversy is not between one teacher and another, but between truth and falsehood. Men are too easily lured from the Gospel by the brilliant reputations enjoyed by false teachers. Changing the label does not alter the contents of the bottle; poison remains poison. No man is as great as the Gospel he proclaims or perverts. Men do not give authority to the truth; truth gives authority to men. The glamour of a name is powerless to change the nature of a truth. Beware the false humility that shrinks from opposing the authority of the critic with the authority of the Bible. Alas, if we dread the scorn of scholars more than we love the souls of sinners!

"For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I

should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). Paul is saying in effect that, while in the past, before he knew JESUS, he may have trimmed his sails to the breeze of popular acclaim, he now has but one aim in life, and that is to please CHRIST to whom he owes complete and undivided allegiance. We who bear the name of JESUS need to learn that the surest way to lose the favor of the LORD is to seek the favor of the world. Whom we seek to please shows who pleases us. The more CHRIST pleases, the more earnestly shall we seek to please Him in all we say and do and think: **"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him"** (Colossians 3:17). The deeper and sweeter our communion with JESUS, the more repellent is any suggestion of compromise with sin or conformity to a world that is at enmity with GOD.

"If I pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Men will never be transformed by the gospel that is cut to the style of the time or the tastes of the crowd. Steer clear of a diluted gospel that flatters the pride of men. Souls that want to be flattered need to be flattened. Let us not think to advance the cause of CHRIST by whittling down the truth. When tempted to tone down our message to the whims of men, let us tune up our message to the Word of CHRIST.

**** What do I believe the author means by a "diluted Gospel?"*

Simply, it is a Gospel that substitutes the eternal blood of Calvary, shed for us for the remission of our sins - and continually applied to the mercy seat in the Heavenly temple for our intercession is replaced with something else.

The worse case of dilution is to replace the blood with water. To go to a bloodless sacrifice, a symbolic sacrifice - for it is only the blood that can save the lost soul - and not the water of a baptismal fountain.

Paul is dealing with Judaizers that sought to force circumcision upon grace as an addition to the work of CHRIST - today, unregenerate teachers seek to substitute the baptistry for the rite of circumcision - but hear what the apostle has stated so clearly:

"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Colossian 2:11, 12), *where we are shown that circumcision was a spiritual cutting away of our sins, and then linking it to baptism in such a way as to continue the thought of its symbolic nature; for it pictures our death, burial and resurrection in JESUS CHRIST at the instant of our salvation. *** BBB*

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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