

GALATIANS

PAULS FIRST RECORDED SCRIPTURE

BY
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INTRODUCTION

The first question we must ask is “Who were the Galatians”? This should not be a difficult question. But. Some obscure early writers and theologians muddied the water with ideas of clandestine journeys in the north of Galatia. These ideas and thoughts have been overwhelmingly rejected by the Fellowship of Christ. They suggested that Paul had made some “unrecorded” journeys to northern Galatia to unnamed cities where he established churches. They claimed that Derby, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian-Antioch were not even part of Galatia. Well, that was true in 50BC. But Paul did not go to Galatia in 50BC he went there in 46AD. You see, by about 5BC the Romans had conquered all that region and combined several kingdoms into one administrative region they called Galatia. Derby, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian-Antioch were in the southern most area of that region. If Paul had evangelized northern Galatia Dr. Luke would surely have mentioned it in Acts. Paul and Luke were very close. So, I will assume for this document that the Churches of Galatia are Derby, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian-Antioch. However, references to the old ideas do pop up in second through fifteenth century commentaries and therefore find their way into modern writing. So just be aware, these ideas are still out there.

So on to the background for the letter. Paul has completed his first mission trip. Most of this trip was concentrated in southern Galatia. Southern Galatia in 46-

48AD included Pisidian-Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. He made a loop from Pisidian-Antioch to Derbe and back to Pisidian-Antioch visiting Lystra and Iconium both ways (see map on cover). Paul invested quite a lot of time and effort in these 4 cities explaining the Gospel of Christ in great depth.

After completing the first mission trip Paul was back in Antioch-Syria and there was trouble in the fellowship of Christ. There were two distinct factions growing in the Fellowship of Christ. There were those of the Circumcision and there were those who promote freedom in Christ. The Circumcision said, Christ is the Messiah, but did not want to stray from the Jewish worship traditions. They want to stay connected to temple worship as a “hedge” on salvation. They said you must be circumcised and become a proselyte Jew to receive salvation through Jesus the Jewish Christ. Then there were the Freedom in Christ followers who were brought to Christ through Paul’s teaching. To them salvation comes through faith by the Holy Spirit.

People of the circumcision were following behind Paul and preaching a different Gospel. They brought their version of the gospel to Antioch Syria while Paul and Silas were ministering there following their mission to Galatia. Paul knew it would do no good to back track his first mission journey and try to defend his Gospel as long as the leadership core, that is James the brother of Jesus, Cephas and John did not accept his Gospel to the Gentiles. He would be “running his race in vain”. So, in what becomes

typical for Paul, he took it to the top (see Acts 15:1-35). He goes to Jerusalem addresses the leadership council of the way. With the backing of Cephas, he receives the blessing and approval of the leadership of the Church in Jerusalem. A letter is drafted and sent to the churches in Antioch-Syria, Issus and Tarsus that gives full validation to Paul's Gospel to the Gentiles. Problem, the letter, carried by Barsabbas and Silas is addressed only to these three cities. There is no evidence the letter went any further. It will be another 15 years before Dr. Luke will quote it in Acts (Acts 15:23-29).

Many theologians and academics, feel that Paul wrote Galatians shortly after his return to Antioch-Syria from the Jerusalem Council. I accept this interpretation. Paul knew that the "circumcision" group had not given up and was already in Galatia distorting Christ's Gospel of salvation. He wanted to correct the "fake news" being spread and perhaps set the stage for the return visit he was surely planning. He wanted the readers of the time and all times to understand that salvation is a free gift of God. A gift made possible only by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and not dependent upon any works on our part. By sending the letter we call Galatians out ahead of his return visit he accomplishes several tasks. In advance of his revisit, he reasserts Faith over Law. He also condemns anyone who alters his Gospel.

Paul displayed deep wisdom in his approach to a solution of the immediate problem. He forced a ruling on his Gospel of Salvation *before* issuing any rebuttal. Paul

could now state that his Gospel to the Gentiles had the blessing of the Jerusalem leadership, and this was a powerful statement. Opposition from Messianic Jews did not end but their legitimacy was severely damaged.

Keep in mind as you explore Galatians that this letter was the very first New Testament document written. Think about that, no other written guidance existed. *Note the significance*, the very first written document of the New Testament was a validation of Paul's mission on earth. As preparation for a study of the letter to the Galatians you are encouraged to read Acts 13, 14, and 15.

There are two main themes to the letter. First the insistence of justification before God is by faith in the redeeming act of sacrifice by Jesus Christ. Second, it is the Holy Spirit who instills in our hearts a desire to turn to Christ, and who assures us that Christ dwells within us.

Let's review where we are just before Paul writes Galatians. Paul has been teaching the Gospel given him by Christ for about 11 years. The circumcision group has been gaining strength. They were following Paul and diluting his Gospel. Paul has gone to Jerusalem, confronted the "circumcision" and won a theological battle. But, the war is not over. The Judaizers have been dealt a serious blow. They can no longer claim the support and blessing of the Jerusalem Church. Paul, his mission and his Gospel have been VALADATED! It is from this Position of strength that Paul writes GALATIANS.

Chapter 1 and 2

Paul's credentials

Chapter 1.

NO OTHER GOSPEL

It is important that we keep in mind that Paul invested quite a long time in each of the cities in Galatia. He has taught and instructed the Gospel of Grace through Jesus the Christ, in great depth to the Galatians. This letter is not a lesson in the Gospel of Grace, it is a validation of all that Paul has already taught and instructed. It will also serve as an introduction and validation to all of Paul's letters that follow. You will not find a great, in-depth clarification of the Gospel or the Christian way of life here, we will get that later in Romans.

Paul opens with a statement of "by who's authority" and moves directly into a synopsis of the Gospel given to him, through revelation, by Christ and not influenced by any man. Wasting no time, he moves quickly to why he is writing this letter. With the confidence he gained from his recent trip to Jerusalem he soundly rebukes those who would distort the Gospel given him by Jesus. (verses 1-7)

Next, he moves to a very strong rebuke of those attempting to distort his Gospel of Grace. Paul goes so far as to curse anyone that would alter or pervert the Gospel given him by Christ. Remember Paul is not the origin of the Gospel he preaches he is merely the vessel carrying it. Paul was called by God to preach God's word. Not called by any man for any man's purpose, but by God for God's purpose. (verses 8-12).

Paul's life history testifies to his dedication to his search for God. He knew that from the time of his birth God had been preparing him to serve the Gospel of Christ. After his experience on the road to Damascus he spent a time of revelation in the desert of Arabia. He paid Cephas a short visit and moved on to preach his Gospel in Syria and Cilicia. The word of his conversion and teaching of salvation through Christ was praised by the "Way". (verses 13-24)

Chapter 2 THE VALIDATION

Paul completed his first mission trip. He was back in what was his “home” church, Antioch-Syria. People from Jerusalem came to Antioch-Syria, Issus and Tarsus preaching the need to become a proselyte in order to receive salvation. It was at this time Paul realized that he must go to Jerusalem and receive validation from the “Way” for his Gospel to the Gentiles. Only in this way is he to have any hope of successfully completing the task given him by Jesus. Note two important statements, “--they added nothing to my message” and “—gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.” (verses 1-11)

Later back in Antioch-Syria Paul demonstrated his confidence as he corrects Peter. Peter lets the law take control of his behavior. His conduct went so far as to corrupt Barnabas. Paul sees this and in typical Pauline fashion takes it to the top. He rebukes Peter. Peter is the highest-ranking member of the “Way” present at the time. He reminds Peter of the relationship of Justification and Faith. Justification is from Christ not from the law. (verses 1-18)

Chapter 2 closes with one of the most powerful statements in the New Testament; “-- *for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!*” If the law brings salvation, righteousness or justification then Jesus is not the Christ, son of God and our New Testament is invalid. (verses 18-21)

Chapter 3 and 4

Law/Faith

Chapter 3

The Rebuke (verses 1-14)

Paul reminds the Galatians that the crucifixion of Christ is a matter of current historic fact. The fact that they did receive rebirth by the Holy Spirit testifies to the truth of the resurrection. Paul asserts that it would be foolish to accept any other teaching that is contradictory.

The last word in verse 3 is interesting. Flesh is translated from the Greek word *Σαρκ* which in the first century meant, of human nature in opposition to the Spirit. That would make verse 3 read; *Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by your own means in opposition to the Spirit?* Here, Paul is suggesting a blasphemy of the Holy Spirit

He goes on to explain how Abraham achieved righteousness 500 years before the law existed. How? By faith. By faith all nations will be blessed.

Parenthetically, I would like to inject a personal thought. What do we mean when speaking of the law? What are we speaking of when we speak of the commandments? In my view the Ten Commandment and the Law are separate and distinctive. The Ten Commandments are the articles of the covenant between God and His people. As was the custom the articles of the covenant were written in stone. The Mosaic law of social justice and religious rites were dictated by God and written on scrolls by Moses. The laws were defined, explained and

expanded by scribes and priests. The “Commandments of the Covenant” were never altered by man. So, when Paul dismisses the law he by no means is dismissing a covenant of God or the Ten Commandments. Remember Jesus expressed all of the Ten Commandments in a simple statement, “Love God and Love Your Neighbor”. That was not an alteration of the covenant which the Pharisees were trying to get Jesus to do. It was a simplification so that even the Pharisees could understand it.

In verses 10 - 15 Paul starts a clear and concise definition, delineation and separation of the law and the promise. The law was a guide for the people until the Christ came. The law prevailed until the Christ came and made the faith, that is the Holy Spirit available to all that believe.

Verse 3:22 starts a rather cryptic section of this letter. Not so much that Paul was being enigmatic but, the meaning has been distorted via translation. I get the clearest meaning if I substitute ‘Holy Spirit’ for ‘Faith’ in verses 3:23 through 26. This is significant enough to warrant a quote and insertion.

NIV Galatians 3:22B - 29

*“Children of God. ²³Before the coming of this **Holy Spirit**, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until **the Holy Spirit** that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by **the Holy Spirit**. ²⁵Now that this **Holy Spirit** has come, we are no longer under a guardian. ²⁶So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through **the Holy Spirit**, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile,*

neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Paul finalizes this section with the understanding that if you belong to Christ then no other label such as Jew, Gentile, slave, free, old, young, male or female can describe, define or limit who you are.

CHAPTER 4

In verses 1 to 20 Paul uses topics the first century Roman society was well aware of. A social code they lived with daily; the slave status of minors, adoption into a household, and also redemption from debt or slavery. In short there is redemption from the law for the Jew, and redemption from sin for the Roman, by way of the Holy Spirit. Paul very astutely places the righteous goal for the Roman and the Jew in the Gospel of Christ by way of the Holy Spirit. He encourages them to return to the freedom in Christ and cast away special days, months, seasons and years. There is no salvation in ceremony but only in faith through grace.

Next Paul drops the theological argument and opens a personal appeal. What happened to the unity and love they shared before? You blessed me then do you curse me now. Have I become an enemy?

The Judaizers were zealous but what was the root of their zeal? Did they labor to bring the Galatians to God or to THEMSELVES? To whom did they want the glory? Paul was heavily grieved by their anxiety and wished to be reunited with them.

Now there is a major shift in the target audience. In verses 21 to 31 Paul specifically targets the Jewish base in the Galatian Churches. He draws from Jewish scripture, the principles of inheritance. Paul even states that he is speaking figuratively. Bottom line, the off-spring of a slave cannot inherit. If the offspring is adopted then full

rights of inheritance are endowed. By virtue of the Holy Spirit all Christians are adopted children of the promise.

Paul skillfully places this Jewish scriptural discussion here to shake the shoulders of the Jews in the Galatian Church He is sending a wakeup call to the sons of Abraham, the Messiah has come, the Spirit is here, you better pay attention to the Gospel of Christ.

Chapter 5

Freedom in Christ and Life in the Spirit

We should read this next section (5:1-6) carefully. Paul offers two choices. The law or the Gospel. The law offers definition and condemnation for sin. The Gospel offers salvation and freedom in Christ through grace. If you choose the law you reject Christ and blaspheme the Holy Spirit. If you choose Christ you gain the Holy Spirit and grace.

In verses 7-12 I believe Paul is trying to lighten the mood a bit. He starts off with a couple clichés and states his confidence in the resolution of their dilemma. Then he states a wish for a mishandled circumcision on the Judaizes. Wow that was extreme.

In the next section we again, see the use of “flesh” or “σαρξ” in the Greek. Remember that carries the meaning of by human nature in opposition to the Spirit.

In verse 13 Paul starts toward the closing of this letter. He purposefully moves the tone of the correspondence to instruction, love and caring. “do not use your freedom to indulge...”. Serve and love and all will be well. Stay in the Spirit and you will retain righteousness.

Just to remove any ambiguity Paul offers a list of the acts of the flesh we are to avoid. This is a very disquieting statement. Paul does not talk around the topic of salvation. There is no salvation for people who live in this manner.

He follows this definition and warning with a list of fruits of the Spirit of which there are no prohibitions. If we live by the fruits of the spirit we will not fall victim to the acts of the flesh. The acts of the flesh (in opposition of the Spirit) will not, then, corrupt our fellowship. The authenticity of our fellowships is determined by fruit of our lives.

Chapter 6

CLOSING INSTRUCTIONS AND BLESSING

Chapter 6

Paul opens this section of the letter with the word *adelphoi*. We translate this as “Brothers and Sisters”. This word has a deeper meaning, it refers to all members of a group (ekklesia) regardless of age, gender, class or race and implies an equal value to all members of the group. This is key as applied to the rest of verse 1. All members of the Fellowship or ekklesia, regardless of their cultural standing are responsible for the “gentle restoration” of sinners in their Church. It is not just the deacons, elders and other leaders of the church who are responsible for the success of the fellowship.

Many people get confused by the words of 6:2 and 6:5. Galatians 6:2 says we must bare one another’s burdens. Galatians 6:5 says we must bare our own load. ??? In 6:2 the word translated as burden is the Greek “barE” the literal translations of this word is life’s heavy loads such as grief, fear, sadness and sickness.

The Greek word used in 6:5 is “φορτίον” (phortion) which is literally translated as “portions, rations, or supplies”. The Greek word “φορτίον” (phortion) was colloquialized in the first century to mean the pack or pouch that soldiers or travelers carried containing all their sustenance for travel. They were personally responsible for their own “phortion” and could not or would not expect any one other than a slave to carry it for them. In other letters Paul is more blunt, ‘you don’t work, you don’t eat.

But life's heavy loads are different. Sometimes we must help a fellow Christian when the "BarE", load, "BURDEN" is too difficult to handle alone. Sometimes sharing the load is just a reinforcement of the shared fellowship. Sometimes it is lifesaving. **Always** it is a pleasing aroma to our Lord.

This is a basic instruction, living by grace is, giving by grace and receiving by grace.

Once again, we have the sow and reap theme. If you sow only to reap for yourself comfort, pleasure and security in this life there is a high probability that you will succeed. But, your eternal life will be lost. If instead you sow the light of Christ you will reap eternal life. Your mortal life is the first, last and only chance you have to develop fellowship with your Creator.

Then out of nowhere comes, "See what large letters I use....." We will see this in other letters Paul writes. **MAKE NO MISTAKE about the origin of this letter!!!**

There is a lot going on in verses 12 through 15. The Judaizes were unsure. They wanted the promise of Christ but they did not want to lose the tradition of the temple. They wanted Christ, but they wanted him confined to the temple. They did not want to lose their status in the synagogue. Paul soundly rebukes this perversion of the Gospel.

Paul closed this letter with a hope of peace and mercy, a statement of his dedication and a blessing for the *adelphoi*.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

YEAR	PAUL'S LETTERS WRITTEN	OTHER LETTERS WRITTEN	SIGNIFICANT TO TIME
49	GALATIANS		COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM
50		JAMES	
51	1&2 THESSALONIANS		
55	1 CORINTHIANS		
56	2 CORINTHIANS		
57	ROMANS		
59		LUKE	
60	EPHESIANS		
61	PHILIPPIANS PHILEMON		
62	COLOSSIANS	MARK	
63	1 TIMOTHY	ACTS	
64	TITUS	1 PETER	
65		2 PETER & JUDE	
67	2 TIMOTHY		PAUL MARTYRED
68		HEBREWS	
70			TEMPLE DESTROYED
71		MATTHEW	
80		JOHN'S Gospel	
83		2 JOHN	
88		1 JOHN 3 JOHN	
95		REVELATION	Jewish council of Jamnia brands all Christians as heretics

