

Ministry of Grace Church

Galatians Chapter 1

Preface:

Two weeks ago, we looked at the 15th chapter of the book of Acts. We saw that the church in Antioch was having a problem because men came down from the church in Jerusalem and were teaching that a person had to obey the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to talk to the apostles and elders about it.

The conclusion of the Jerusalem Council was that the Gentiles do not have to obey the Law of Moses in order to be saved. They sent a letter to the church in Antioch saying that the Gentiles should abstain from food offered to idols, abstain from sexual immorality, and abstain from eating meat from animals that had not had the blood drained from them. These were moral issues which, if followed, would avoid offending their Jewish brothers.

Unfortunately, this was not the end of the problem of Legalizers; it was only the beginning. In the book of Galatians, which we will be looking at now, Paul addresses the issue of people trying to add observance of the Law to salvation by grace through faith.

Introduction

Who Wrote This Letter?

The fact that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter has never been seriously questioned except by a few radical critics. This is because of the clear testimony of both internal and external evidence. In the opening salutation ([Galatians 1:1](#)) and later in the letter ([Galatians 5:2](#)), the author calls himself Paul. Also, his comment near the end of the letter, that he wrote it in “large letters” is widely believed to be a reference to his eye problem. This is further supported by the statement that the Galatians would have willingly plucked out their own eyes for him ([Galatians 4:15](#)). We talked earlier that Paul may possibly have contracted malaria in Perga, just after he and Barnabas left the island of Cyprus. One of the more common complications of malaria is an eye disease called retinopathy. We also see that most of Galatians chapters 1 and 2 is autobiographical and harmonizes consistently with the events of Paul’s life recorded in Acts. Finally, the theology of Galatians is the theology of Paul as taught in his other writings such as Romans.

The external evidence for Pauline authorship of Galatians is also substantial. Galatians has been attributed to Paul and quoted by a number of respected church fathers including: Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp, Ignatius, Justyn Martyr, Tertullian, and Origen. Even the heretics of that time, including Marçion, assumed it was written by Paul.

Therefore, we can conclude that no real doubt existed in the early church nor should any exist today regarding Paul as the author of Galatians.

When Was This Letter Written?

Although we can't be certain about the exact date that Paul wrote this letter, there are clues as to when it was written. In chapter 2 Paul describes his visit to the Jerusalem Council, so the letter must have been written after that. We know that the Council occurred in AD 49 or AD 50 and some believe that Galatians was written shortly after that. Another way of dating this letter comes from the fact that Paul was saved in approximately AD 34. In **Galatians 1:18** he tells us that after three years (most likely from the time of his conversion) he went up to Jerusalem for the first time since his conversion. Then, according to **Galatians 2:1**, fourteen years later he went up to Jerusalem again. This would work out to approximately AD 49, the year of the first Jerusalem Council. However, some people believe it was written after the second missionary trip which occurred between AD 49 and AD 52. Therefore, we can surmise that this book was written sometime between AD 49 and AD 55.

Greeting

Galatians 1:1-5

¹Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— ²and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Notes:

Warren Wiersbe said this about Paul's letter to the Galatians:

As you begin to read Paul's letter to the Galatian Christians, you can tell immediately that something is radically wrong, because he does not open his letter with his usual praise to God and prayer for the saints. He has no time! Paul is about to engage in a battle for the truth of the Gospel and the liberty of the Christian life. False teachers are spreading a false "gospel" which is a mixture of Law and grace, and Paul is not going to stand by and do nothing.

By the time of the writing of this letter, people had already challenged Paul's apostleship and some still questioned whether or not he was a Christian at all. This is understandable given his history of having been one of the most ferocious persecutors of the Christian church before his conversion. Here he defends his apostleship and in verses 11-24 he gives testimony of his salvation.

In the early church, although it is not absolute, it was generally regarded that in order for a person to be considered an apostle, he had to have seen the risen Savior physically and he had to have been commissioned directly by Jesus himself. The Greek word translated "apostle" means "one who is sent with a commission." Paul makes a specific point that he was not given the title of apostle by any man, but by Jesus, during his direct encounter with the Risen Lord. So, when challenged regarding his authority to write this letter, Paul relied on two facts. The first is that he is a genuine apostle and the second is the fact that he (assisted by Barnabas) was the one who initially established the churches in Galatia.

Every Christian is given a commission with two commands, Preach the Gospel (**Mark 16:15**) and make disciples (**Matthew 28:19**). Paul was very aware of God's expectations of him and did not

simply preach the gospel and make disciples. He went above and beyond, not just strengthening and encouraging the new disciples and helping the new churches get organized (see [Acts 14:21-23](#)), but directly combating false doctrine as it crept into the church.

He opens this letter with a typical blessing of “grace and peace.” Then he immediately makes two doctrinal statements that are often overlooked. The first is that Jesus “gave Himself.” You will recall as we studied through Matthew that Jesus’ life was not taken from him on the cross. He gave up His life. He did this knowing that it was His life that would pay for the sins of the whole world. The second is that Jesus lived his earthly life, and gave his life, to satisfy the Father’s will. He demonstrated with His life that he was submitted completely to the will of God the Father.

No Other Gospel

Galatians 1:6-10

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Notes:

Having dispensed with formalities, Paul now dives directly into the issue at hand and he is not nearly as gentle as he is in most of his letters to churches. He says that he is astonished that they have so quickly deserted God’s message to them. The word translated “deserted” actually means “to change sides” just as a deserting soldier might do in the middle of a battle.

Apparently, the Galatian Christians had been convinced that there was more than one gospel and that a greater one than the one they had originally believed was one that included obedience to the Law of Moses. But Paul is adamant that there is no gospel other than the one he had preached to them. And – he even goes so far as to say that anyone preaching another gospel should be anathema. This word means “to give over completely to destruction.” Even if that other preacher should be an angel from heaven! Ask your Mormon friends about who Joseph Smith got his gospel from.

Paul also implies that those who have spread this false gospel have done so for their own glory and aggrandizement. On the contrary, there is only one person who should get recognition and glory for the gospel message and that is Jesus Christ, himself. Anyone who is spreading the gospel or teaching God’s Word for their own glory and fame is not being a servant of Christ.

Paul Called by God

Galatians 1:11-24

¹¹For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹²For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

Notes:

Paul had been accused of several things. The first accusation was that he was not really an apostle because he did not see the risen Savior physically, but only had a vision of Him. Paul doesn't directly address this accusation. This is probably because his testimony was so well known throughout the church. Here he simply states that he did not receive the gospel from men, but by direct revelation from the Lord. He never tells us exactly when this happened, but it is quite possible that Jesus taught him about the Gospel during the three days that he was blind as a result of his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

The second accusation was that he wasn't really a Christian as evidenced by his attempts to destroy the church. Here he addresses his former persecution of the church. He does not deny it. In fact, he explains that he had been very zealous for the Jewish traditions. He had been so focused on Judaism that he had been advancing in Judaism faster and further than others his own age. Since, (and this is key) Judaism is so focused on works, and Paul had not yet learned that salvation was not earned, but a free gift, he had tried to stamp out anyone who taught against the Law of Moses.

Paul doesn't go into great detail here about salvation by grace through faith. This is perhaps because he was still grappling with the concept himself. It wasn't until his letter to the churches in Rome and Ephesus, that he really got into the meat of what salvation by grace means. Here he touches briefly on the doctrine of Election, which flows from God's grace, indicating that God set him apart for carrying the gospel to the Gentiles even before he was born.

Now he addresses the fact that he spent virtually no time at all with the apostolic leaders of the church in Jerusalem. In the first seventeen years of his Christian life, Paul only went to Jerusalem and conversed with the apostles on two occasions. Here he says that he only spoke with Cephas and James on the first occasion, and it was three years after he got saved. In Galatians chapter 2 he will explain about the other 14 years away from the apostles.

So What?

The main problem in the church in Galatia was that someone had added the requirements of the Law to the gospel. And, as Paul clearly states, the Gospel with anything added to it is *another* Gospel. Therefore, one of the first things we need to do is establish what the “Gospel” is. In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul stated it very clearly:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: *that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.* (1 Corinthians 15:1-5)

Notice the four facts he talks about: Christ died for our sins, He was buried, He was raised on the third day, and He appeared to many. Also notice that only two of these 4 things are actually the Gospel. We know this because Paul emphasizes the fact that these two things were “in accordance with the Scriptures.” The other two facts are supporting evidences of the first two. Also, notice that Paul did not say that Jesus died. He says that Christ died. This indicates a belief that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ.

This, specifically, is “the Gospel,” otherwise known as “the good news.” The word translated gospel is the Greek word *euangelion*. This is made up of *eu*, meaning “good” or “well” and *angelion*, which means “a message” or “news.” Therefore, the Gospel is the good news.

Because Paul was a Jew and a former practitioner of the Jewish faith, he was very familiar with the difficulty of keeping the Law. He also stated very clearly in the next chapter:

yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, *because by works of the law no one will be justified.* (Galatians 2:16)

Now to get a bit nit-picky. We are not saved by the Gospel. Let me say that again. We are not saved by the Gospel. It is *belief* in the Gospel that saves us. That’s why it is referred to as “saving *faith*.” Therefore, if the requirements of the Law are added to the Gospel, the act of trying to satisfy the Law is not what Paul is arguing against. It is the “belief” that one has to meet the requirements of the Law in order to be saved that Paul is preaching against.

Now, let me say this again. The Gospel “plus” anything else, is not the Gospel. Anyone who teaches that you have to believe that Christ died for your sins and rose again from the dead “plus” anything, is teaching a false gospel. Catholics, for instance, teach that you have to believe the Gospel and -- you also have to be a member of the Catholic church in order to be saved. That is a false gospel! It’s also why being excommunicated from the church is so scary for Catholics. Some charismatic churches teach that you have to believe the Gospel and – you have to speak in tongues in order to be truly saved. That is a false gospel! Other churches teach that you have to believe the Gospel and – you have to satisfy certain requirements of the church. That is a false gospel!

Now, here is kind of a trick question. Did Jesus teach another gospel? Yes, He did!

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.
(Matthew 4:23)

This is NOT our Gospel, it is the gospel of the Kingdom, the Millennial reign of Christ. This gospel is for the Jews. It is NOT for Christians. Why would that be good news for Christians? We will be raptured out of here at least 7 years *before* the Millennial reign of Christ.

Now What?

Okay, here's another question. How many of the commandments did Jesus tell us to keep? Two – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Do we have to keep these two commandments in order to be saved? No! If we truly love God then we will try to keep these two commandments, but our salvation is based on believing the Gospel and NOTHING ELSE!

Let's pray.

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