

McCoy Memorial Baptist Church

Date: September 14, 2022

Fall Study: GALATIANS: "Letter of Liberation"

INTRODUCTION:

A quote from Dr. Merrill C. Tenney's Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty (c. 1950 & 1957).

RECIPIENTS / ORIGINAL READERS

The geographic location and identity of the Galatian churches has been intensely studied and debated in the 20th century. The problem stems from the fact that the term "Galatia" had two distinct meanings in the NT era. "Galatia" referred to *an ethnic-geographic region* (North) and *a political region* (South).

1. The North Galatian View

When used in the ethnographic sense **Galatia** designated the territory inhabited by the Celtic people in north-central Asia Minor. These Celtic tribes migrated into the region from ancient Gaul. The Gauls gave their name to the area. This "Galatia" was located in the mountainous regions of the north. It had no major cities & no significant Jewish population in Paul's day. Paul did not visit the area until he began his second mission to the Gentiles (Acts 16). Even then, Luke only records that "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia" (16:5).

2. The South Galatian View

In 189 B.C. the Gauls were subjugated and the area became a province of Rome. The process of conquest & assimilation was completed in 25 B.C. when Caesar Augustus declared the region an official Roman province and called it Galatia. Most importantly, the province was extended to the south and incorporated parts of Lycaonia, Phrygia, & Pisidia. Paul's first mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13-14) centered in the political entity known as "Galatia". In particular, the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were scenes of Paul's church planting ministry.

3. Original readers as described in Galatians

- A. There were _____ churches not just _____ (1:2). They all had one common problem: the infiltration of Judaizers (1:6-7; 5:7-9).
- B. The initial contact these churches had with the gospel came through _____ himself (1:8), and the churches were planted by Paul (3:1-3; 4:13-14, 19-20).
- C. They had responded enthusiastically to the message and had also embraced the messenger warmly (4:12-15). They _____ the apostle as if he were "an angel of God" (4:14).
- D. They loved the author enough to be willing to sacrifice their own _____ for him (4:15).
- E. They themselves had willingly endured _____ (3:4).
- F. They were apparently Gentiles, not Jews, because they had not been _____ (5:2). Likewise, Judaizing tendencies were not a part of their previous experience but were a new addition (5:7-12).
- G. They were _____ with the Old Testament Scriptures (3:6-9).
- H. They had been Christians long enough to have _____ in their faith but were still vulnerable to false teaching (5:7-12).
- I. The error to which they were falling victim was not slight deviation; rather it was a _____ and entirely _____ gospel (1:6-9).

TIME AND PLACE OF WRITING

Those who identify the recipients of Galatians as believers in the southern cities of Galatia generally consider that the epistle was written from Antioch of Syria in about A.D. 48 just before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). After the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) Paul & Barnabas returned to Antioch. Peter came down from Jerusalem to visit them, fellowshipped with them, and then withdrew from the Gentile Christians only to be publicly rebuked by Paul for his inconsistent behavior. Meanwhile, false teachers had infiltrated the churches in Galatia, denying Paul's authority as an apostle and teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Reacting quickly and vigorously to Peter's actions and the threatened lapse of the Galatians into legalism, Paul wrote this strong letter prior to attending the Jerusalem Council.

THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE ISSUE

The seriousness of the issue confronting the Galatian churches is evident in several ways:

1. In the _____ with which Paul writes (1:6; 3:1; 4:12-16).
2. In the absence of any _____ or _____ for the readers (unique to Galatians).
3. In the strength of Paul's _____ against the Judaizers, which indicates the importance he attaches to the issue (1:7-8; 3:1-3; 5:12).
4. By the fact that Paul wrote the letter by his _____, with great pain (6:11-17), and out of a _____ - _____ (4:12-20; 6:17).

THE PROBLEM AMONG THE GALATIAN CHURCHES

The *problem* of the letter to the Galatians was **Judaizing legalism**. Here's a definition of legalism according to what we find in Galatians: Judaizing legalism was a religious system that combined Christianity with Judaism in a way that demanded total commitment to Israel's law as the climax of one's conversion to Christ. This "demand", according to Paul, was a subversion of the adequacy of Christ's work and an abandonment of the Holy Spirit as God's way of guiding Christian ethics. The legalism of the Judaizers undermined the work of Christ and rejected the sufficiency of the Spirit for determining Christian practice. So, the legalism of the Judaizers is more than a problem: it had become a new message, a "different" gospel (1:6-7). It is this implication—that it is "a different gospel"—that forced Paul to action.

The *problem* of the letter to the Galatians reflected the Jew-Gentile problem; that is, the separation between Judaism and Christianity taking place. The specific controversy which moved Paul to write & send this urgent and emotional epistle, and what caused the Jerusalem Council to convene in Acts 15 centered on whether those converted to Christianity from outside of Judaism needed also to become Jews as well.

The Jew-Gentile Problem

It's easy to forget that the mission of Jesus the Messiah was restricted in his early ministry to Jews. Jesus was a Jew, his followers were Jews, and the earliest mission of the Apostles after the death and resurrection of Christ focused on the Jews.

When the Jewish religious leaders steered the nation into rejecting Christ & His kingdom, Jesus promised that He would build His church (Matt. 16:18). The church was subsequently formed on the Day of Pentecost with "God-fearing Jews fr. every nation under heaven" (2:5) and "converts to Judaism" (vs. 10). But the Jewish-Gentile problem is highlighted in the following chapters of Acts when two other ethnic people groups were added in the church. In Acts 8, believing Samaritans were brought into the church by the Holy Spirit through Peter and John. In Acts 10, the Gentiles were added in.

At first, the Jew-Gentile problem was more of a Gentile problem. The entrance of the Gentiles into the church was a puzzle to the Christian Jews in Jerusalem who had formed the nucleus of the church on the Day of Pentecost. They were not upset about the Gentiles being saved because the OT talked about the

salvation of Gentiles. But they were confused over the fact that the Gentiles were added into the body of Christ in the same way that they, as believing Jews, had been brought into the church. It didn't seem to match with what they expected from the OT's teaching about a coming kingdom. The Jewish Christians no doubt thought that the Gentiles who wanted to join the New Covenant church should go to Jerusalem & participate in some sort of proselyte ceremony as was required in the past. So, Peter explained to the Jews that the Holy Spirit fell on these Gentiles just as He had fallen on the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, and that information satisfied the Jerusalem Jews (see Acts 11:16-18).

The Jewish-Gentile problem was not answered once for all here in Acts 11. The first major church council was held to deal with the details of having Jew & Gentiles together on equal footing in the body of Christ (Acts 15). The specific controversy centered on whether *those converted to Christianity from outside Judaism needed also to become Jews as well*. The decision made was vitally important. "Gentiles can serve & honor the God of Israel apart from any identification with the nation of Israel."

"The grand distinctive of this age is not that Gentiles can now be saved; rather, it is that Gentiles can now be saved **as Gentiles**. The divinely ordained protocol for 2,000 years had been that Yahweh was uniquely and manifestly the God of Abraham, of the family that came from his loins and of the nation that issued from his 12 sons, and that to pledge allegiance to that God was to identify with His people. But now, a remarkable change in God's purposes: Gentiles can serve & honor the God of Israel apart from any identification with the nation of Israel." [D. Bookman, Forsaking Israel, p. 249]

So, what is going on in Galatians is that the Judaizers had not changed with the times; they failed to see that when Christ came, the era of the law ended. They could not accept this because they thought God worked through the Jewish nation to dispense the promises of Abraham. In God's plan of history, the law has now served its purposes, and therefore it is wrong to follow it and to demand that Gentiles accept it. It's wrong to think God still works in nationalistic ways. God's people now comprise individuals of all sorts from all nations.

THE PURPOSE OF GALATIANS

The Judaizers in Galatia both discredited Paul & proclaimed a false gospel. It was necessary that Paul vindicate his apostleship and message, a task he undertook in the first two chapters. In this autobiographical section Paul demonstrated convincingly that his apostleship and his message came by revelation from the risen Christ. In chapters 3 and 4 Paul contended for the true doctrine of grace, that is, for justification by faith alone. Finally, to show that Christian liberty does not mean license the apostle, in chapters 5 and 6, taught that a Christian should live by the power of the Holy Spirit and that when he does, he manifests in his life not the works of the flesh but the fruit of the Spirit.

THE MESSAGE OF GALATIANS

Paul's letter to the Galatians is a polemical letter, designed from front to back to be both a rebuttal of the Judaizers & a positive statement of the apostolic gospel. In Galatians Paul defends the gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, on the grounds of Christ's death alone, resulting in life lived by the Spirit alone. Galatians is a passionate defense of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in the cross work of Jesus Christ. It has a three-part structure.

INTRODUCTION (1:1-10): *Anathema to any other gospel!*

- Paul's Authority and Paul's Gospel (1:1-5)
- False Teachers and Faithless Galatians (1:6-10)

1. In the _____ section Paul defends the _____ of the gospel:
It is by personal and direct revelation by Christ (chs. 1, 2).

2. In the _____ section Paul defends the _____ of the gospel:
Justification by faith and faith alone (chs. 3, 4).
3. In the _____ section Paul defends the _____ of the gospel:
New life in Christ under the control of the Spirit not the flesh (chs. 5, 6).

CONCLUSION (6:11-18)

In his closing remarks, Paul emphasizes the principal themes of the Christian gospel.

- Is the essence of Christianity *outward* or *inward*?
Christianity is not a religion of external ceremonies, but something inward and spiritual, in the heart.
- Is the essence of Christianity *human* or *divine*?
Is it fundamentally a matter of what _____ do for God or of what _____ has done for us?

THE _____ OF GALATIANS (or, Legalism Then and Now)

- *Legalism then and now; applying God's Word to today's world.*
- *Moving the whole message of Galatians from ancient Turkey (A.D. 48) to modern society (A.D. 2022)*

Most people when they think about the book of Galatians, think about the topic of **legalism**. But legalism is a tricky term that gives rise to many fashionable applications tailored no doubt to our contemporary churches. For example, *for some people modern-day legalism is the institutional legislation of any specific Christian practice.* While the NT clearly contains commandments for Christians, *some believers think the legislation of anything is modern-day legalism; after all, it is argued, we (Christians) are to be led by the Holy Spirit.* But moving immediately from the word *legalism* to modern Christian practices is a potentially misleading application of Paul's message.

Before we can determine just what legalism is *today*, we must determine what legalism was *then*. Application must always follow exegesis & exposition of the Bible. Jumping the gun in Galatians—that is, finding applications of Judaizing legalism in our modern Christian framework before discovering what Paul had in mind—has led to many fashionable applications, and even (at times) to lawlessness. What Paul was concerned about was the transformation of the gospel into something more than Christ alone. What Paul was against was the legalism of the Judaizers because *it usurped the work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit and forced all converts to become Jews*. For Paul, the essence of Christian living was living in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. To find contemporary analogies to the legalism of the Judaizers, we must search for practices & features of modern Christianity that debunk the sufficiency of Christ and relegate the Holy Spirit to a non-essential feature of Christian living.

Who, then, are the primary targets of Galatians in our world? This is the best question we can ask of ourselves. The answer is not a specific group, whether that group be defined religiously, sexually, or culturally. *It does no good just to point fingers at others, for the real problem is far more subtle than that.* *The target of Galatians today is anyone who depreciates Jesus Christ as sufficient Savior and minimizes the power of the Holy Spirit as sufficient guide (or, as a non-essential feature of Christian living).* It is a disposition, often transcending or neglecting one's theological viewpoints, toward what God has done for us through Christ and in the Spirit. *Whoever minimizes the sufficiency of Christ or discounts the power of the Spirit finds the finger of Paul pointing right at him or her.*