

Galatians

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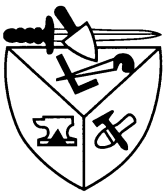
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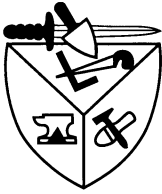
Galatians

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Dedicated to my father-in-law

Charles H. Withers

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Publisher's Introduction

The book of Galatians has been particularly used by God to reform and revive His church throughout the centuries. Its influence on the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century is unquestionable. Martin Luther produced two commentaries on Paul's letter to the Galatian churches and called it, "My own epistle, to which I have plighted my troth: my Katie von Bora." In a day when there is so much misunderstanding on the basic nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul's letter to the Galatians should be commended, studied, preached and learned with great zeal by all who love the Lord and desire to see Him known and honored throughout the world.

This republication of Dr. Curtis Vaughan's study guide on Galatians will be of great help to anyone who wants to understand this letter for today. Originally published in 1972 by Zondervan Press, Founders Press is delighted to make it available to a new generation of pastors, teachers and students of the Scripture.

Dr. Curtis Vaughan, now retired Distinguished Professor of New Testament, began his teaching career at Southwestern in 1950. He has helped train thousands of pastors, missionaries, and church leaders through his writings and classroom instruction. It is our hope, through the reproduction of this and other books in his Study Guide Commentary series, to see his ministry continue and prosper into the future.

Introduction

Galatians, which fills approximately thirteen or fourteen pages of the Greek New Testament, is really only a small tract. It is not distinguished by literary beauty, its arguments are in places quite elusive, and its thought seems sometimes to be far removed from the issues which confront the modern world. Placed in the context of the great writings of antiquity the letter may to the superficial reader appear to be inconspicuous and unimportant. Few books, however, have more profoundly influenced the minds of men, have so significantly shaped the course of human history, or continue to speak with such relevance to the deepest needs of modern life.

The occasion of Galatians.

The letter was written primarily to counteract the teachings of the Judaizers, who taught that Gentiles, in order to be saved, had first to become Jews. Specifically, these errorists challenged Paul at two points. First, they challenged the truth of his Gospel by asserting that salvation is not of sheer grace, that it comes not by faith alone. They did not deny the need for faith in Christ, but they did teach that faith apart from obedience to the Mosaic law was inadequate for full salvation. Second, they challenged Paul's right to preach the Gospel. That is, they argued that he was not a true apostle and that his teaching carried no authority. This double aspect of the Galatian heresy is never lost sight of in the epistle.

The recipients of Galatians.

This is a question to which the commentaries devote much attention. The problem turns upon the manner in which Paul uses the word "Galatia." In the present Study Guide the matter is discussed briefly in connection with the treatment of the opening paragraph of the epistle.

The date of Galatians.

The date which one assigns to this epistle is determined in large measure by the position which he takes relative to the identity of the first readers. Generally those who subscribe to the North Galatian theory date the epistle in the mid-fifties of the first century. Those who subscribe to the South Galatian theory as a rule date Galatians nearer the time of the Jerusalem Conference (A.D. 49). Among these scholars there is a growing tendency to see Galatians as the first of Paul's extant letters and to date it just prior to the Jerusalem Conference.

The message of Galatians.

Galatians is concerned with the question "What makes a person a Christian?" Is it observance of the Mosaic law? Or is it simple faith in Christ? The answer is pinpointed in Galatians 5:6: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love" (ASV). (Romans expounds the same theme more fully.) The epistle is concerned then with the heart of the Gospel, indeed, with the very essence of Christianity. In the apostolic period it sounded the death-knell for the Judaizing controversy and paved the way for the full liberty of the Gospel. Centuries later its message was the dominant theme of the preaching of the Reformers. "The Epistle to the Galatians," said Luther, "is my epistle; I have betrothed myself to it; it is my wife."

Unquestionably the message of Galatians is as urgently needed today as at any time of the past. Our generation, as every other generation, needs to be reminded of the sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ for human redemption. Galatians serves as a clarion call for vital religion rather than formal ritual, for personal submission to a living Savior rather than subscription to a dead creed, for glorying in the cross rather than dependence on self, for a life inspired and controlled by the Spirit rather than one regulated by rules. Several key verses within the book epitomize its major themes. Perhaps the most significant are 1:1; 2:16; 5:1, 6, 13, 14, 25; and 6:14, 15.

Galatians

CHAPTER 1

The Prologue

(Galatians 1:1-10)

The opening verses of Galatians contain the salutation (verses 1-5) and a statement of the circumstances which occasioned the letter (verses 6-10). To an unusual degree the passage also reflects the apostle's frame of mind at the time of writing and gives a forecast of the contents of the letter. Its three main themes — the divine origin of Paul's apostleship, the sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work, and the new life made possible by the believer's rescue from the present evil age — all are touched upon.

I. THE SALUTATION (1:1-5).

All of Paul's letters begin in much the same way, that is, with a brief description of the writer, an identification of the readers, and a wish for the well-being of the readers. Galatians follows this general pattern, but it is characterized by a certain fullness of statement not found in most of the other letters.

1. *The author* (verses 1, 2a). The writer identifies himself by name ("Paul") and office ("an apostle") and makes mention of his associates at the time of writing ("all the brethren which are with me").

Paul refers to his apostolic office in the salutation of each of his epistles except Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Here, however, the matter is given special prominence by the abruptness with which it is introduced and by descriptive phrases which qualify it. The Greek word for "apostle," which means "one sent," was used to denote an authorized ambassador, that is, one commissioned to represent and speak for another. Among the rabbis it was a common saying that "one sent by a man is as the man himself." Paul's use of the word reflects his sense of authority. It was his way of saying to the Galatians that his letter came to them with the full authority of Jesus Christ behind it.

Paul's appointment to apostleship was from God. It came *not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead* (verse 1, ASV). The opening phrases contain two contrasts, one suggested by the prepositions ("from" and "through"), the other brought out by the plural "men" and the singular "man." In addition, there is in the overall statement a contrast between "men"/"man" and "Jesus Christ"/"God the Father." The meaning is that the ultimate origin of Paul's apostleship was "not from men" (that is, any group of men such as the Jerusalem apostles), and the means by which it was communicated to him was not "through a man" (that is, any single human being). His commission, like that of the other apostles, came directly "through Jesus Christ, and God the Father." Thus, in reference both to its origin and its instrumentality, the Pauline apostleship was divine, not human. Paul does not here tell us when he received his commission, but the statement of verse 15 suggests that it came in connection with his conversion experience.

In characterizing God as the one "who raised him [Jesus] from the dead" stress is laid on the fact that Paul's call, unlike that of the Twelve, who were commissioned by Christ during His earthly ministry, came from the risen and glorified Christ. The entire description of Paul's apostleship, however, is designed to show that both his and that of the Twelve rest on the same basis. They stand or fall together, for the authority behind the one is the authority behind the other.

Associated with Paul at the time of writing this letter were certain "brethren" (verse 2a) who are not named. There is no way of being absolutely sure of their identity. They obviously had nothing to do with the writing of the letter, for it is written throughout in the first person. The mention of them should be seen as a gesture of courtesy. Associated as they were with the apostle, it is probable that they shared his views and were one with him in affection for the Galatians.

2. *The readers* (verse 2b). This letter, written to a group of Christian assemblies identified simply as "the churches of Galatia," is the only Pauline epistle in which no qualifying epithet is added to the designation of the readers. The Corinthians are "the church of God," "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2); the Philippians are "saints in Christ Jesus" (1:1); the Colossians are "saints and faithful brethren in Christ" (1:2); the Thessalonians are "the church . . . which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 1:1); and so forth. Here there is no title of honor, no mention of graces and privileges. The absence of modifying words and

phrases is an early indication of Paul's distress over the spiritual declension of the Galatians. John Chrysostom, a Christian writer of ancient times, observed this and wrote in his commentary: "Mark how he [Paul] already shows his deep displeasure here."

All are agreed that the Galatian churches were in that section of the world that we know as Asia Minor. As to the precise location within Asia Minor, there are different opinions. The traditional view is that they were located in the north central part, a section invaded and settled by the Gauls in the third century B.C. Modern Ankara, the capital of Turkey, is in this region. Paul is thought to have visited this part of the world on his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 16:6; 18:23).

In recent years most scholars have inclined to the view that "Galatia" is used of the Roman province which bore that name. This included both ethnic Galatia (described above) and a large area to the south which included the cities of Antioch (of Pisidia), Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and so on. Those who subscribe to this theory feel that the churches to which this letter was sent were probably those established by Paul on his first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13-14). The South Galatian theory was championed by Sir William M. Ramsay and is held today by most British and American scholars. The North Galatian theory is still advocated by many continental scholars.

3. *The greeting* (verses 3-5). The greeting contains a prayer (verse 3), a statement (verse 4), and a doxology (verse 5). The prayer is for "grace" and "peace" to be experienced by the readers. Luther spoke of grace as that which "releaseth sin" and peace as that which "maketh the conscience quiet." The Greek word for "grace" means essentially "that which causes joy," but the word came to mean any free gift. In the New Testament it usually denotes the divine favor.

Williams thinks that "peace" is used to refer "chiefly to external peace, God's protection encircling believers" (p. 14). Among the Jews the word had a connotation of wholeness or well-being. Morris therefore defines it as "prosperity in the widest sense, especially prosperity in spiritual things" (*Thessalonians*, p. 33).

Verse 4, an expansion of the greeting, makes a statement concerning the redemptive work of Christ. He *gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father*. At least three matters are emphasized: First, Christ's atoning work consisted in the giving of Himself, that is, in the laying down of His life in death for our sins. The words "gave himself" put stress upon the voluntary nature of Christ's death. "For

our sins” means that Christ’s death was a sacrifice made necessary by our sins and offered with a view to their removal. In the Greek version of the Old Testament a similar expression was used for sin-offerings. The closest parallel to this statement in Paul is 1 Corinthians 15:3, “Christ died for our sins.”

Second, the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice was to “deliver us out of this present evil world” (verse 4b, *asv*). The verb “deliver,” says Lightfoot, “strikes the keynote of the epistle” (p. 73). Used by Paul only in this place, it means “to pluck out” (cf. Matt. 5:29), “to rescue from danger” (cf. Acts 12:11; 23:27), or “to deliver from bondage” (cf. Acts 7:10, 34; 26:17). The present passage seems to combine the ideas of rescue from danger and deliverance from bondage.

That from which believers are delivered is “this present evil world.” “World” is more literally “age,” that is, the world considered in reference to time rather than in reference to space. The Jews customarily distinguished between “this age,” a period dark and evil, and “the age to come,” the glorious Messianic era. The New Testament reflects this same concept, setting the “present age” (cf. Rom. 12:2; Eph. 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:17) over against “the age to come” (Matt. 12:32, Mark 10:30, et al.). The former is under the domination of Satan, the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4); the latter, which already has been introduced and whose benefits Christians already experience in foretaste (Heb. 6:5), is under the control of Jesus Christ.

The position of the Greek word for “evil” makes it somewhat emphatic. Lightfoot renders it “[the world] with all its evils” (p. 73). Bruce understands the whole construction to mean “the present course of the world, dominated as it is by evil.”

Third, Christ’s redemptive work was in accordance with “the will of God” (verse 4c). The thought is that both the self-sacrifice of Christ and the purpose in that sacrifice flowed from the divine will. That is to say, it was God’s will that we be delivered, and it was His will that this be accomplished by the redemptive deed of Christ. Christ, therefore, did not die in order to gain God’s love for us but because God already loved us and willed to save us.

Verse 5 is a doxology, doubtless called forth by the mention of the mercy of God in the preceding verse. Some commentaries call attention to the fact that it was a custom of the rabbis to add a doxology whenever the name of God was mentioned. With Paul, however, the use of the doxology was an expression of real feeling, not mere obedience to a custom (cf. Rom. 11:36; 16:27; Eph. 3:20, 21, etc.).

The verse may be taken either as a prayer (a wish) or as an affirma-

tion. If it is a prayer, it is a request that "glory" (in the sense of praise, honor) may be ascribed to God "for ever and ever" by His creatures. If the verse is an affirmation it asserts that "glory" (in the sense of splendor, radiance) is an essential attribute of God for ever.

II. THE OCCASION OF THE LETTER (1:6-10).

The salutation in Paul's letters is followed ordinarily by an expression of gratitude and appreciation for the readers. Even when writing 1 Corinthians, in which there are many harsh things said of the Corinthian church, Paul begins with a grateful acknowledgement of their wealth of spiritual gifts. In Galatians, however, the apostle begins with an indignant remonstrance and pronounces an anathema (a curse) upon anyone who dares to preach a gospel other than that preached by him.

The paragraph is developed in such a way that it gives us insight into the conditions which created the occasion for writing this letter. Mention is made of (1) the defection of the Galatians (verses 6, 7a), (2) the arrival in Galatia of "some" who were perverting the Gospel of Christ (verses 7b-9), and (3) a malicious assault (doubtless by the same teachers of error) on Paul's personal integrity (verse 10).

1. *The defection of the Galatians* (verses 6, 7a). Paul is alarmed about the situation in Galatia, and he expresses himself with startling vehemence: *I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel* (verse 6). "I marvel," which denotes surprise at the unexpected, translates a word used by Paul only here and in 2 Thessalonians 1:10. In the latter passage it expresses pleasurable surprise; here, combining the ideas of astonishment and bewilderment, it denotes painful surprise. Norley translates it, "I am dumbfounded."

"So soon" may refer to the short time which had transpired since the conversion of the Galatians. On the other hand, the suggestion may be that the Galatians' defection had come soon after the arrival of the false teachers. In that case Paul is expressing surprise at the ease with which the Galatians have shifted their loyalty. Weymouth translates it "so readily."

"Are . . . removed," which represents a Greek present tense verb, would be better rendered by an English continuous present, such as "are . . . turning away from" (Goodspeed), "are moving away from" (Rotherham), "are . . . deserting" (Weymouth). The present tense shows that the defection of the Galatians was not yet final and complete; it was a process still going on. Paul's hope in writing this letter

was to arrest the process and avert spiritual disaster. The verb itself was used in secular literature of military desertions, of political revolts, of changes in religious opinion, of defections in morals, and so on. In 2 Maccabees 7:24 it is used of turning away from the customs of one's ancestors. Liddell and Scott cite the case of Dionysius of Heraclea, who went over from the Stoics to the Cyrenaics and was called a "turncoat" (translating another form of the Greek word used here). The Galatians, then, were in process of becoming "turncoats."

Their defection was from God ("him that called you") to "another gospel." The Greek word rendered "another" denotes a qualitative distinction, "another of a different kind." Some versions attempt to bring this out in translation. The ASV, for instance, has "a different gospel" instead of KJV's "another gospel." Verse 7a shows that it was "different" because it was really no gospel at all (cf. ΤΟΝΤ). "Gospel" means "good news," but what the Galatians were being asked to accept was a message of bondage. Such a message was a perversion ("a travesty," Phillips) of the good news. The TEV expresses it clearly: "Actually, there is no 'other gospel,' but I say it because there are some people who are upsetting you and trying to change the gospel of Christ."

2. *The heresy of the Judaizers* (verses 7b-9). Paul has expressed his amazement at the instability of the Galatians (verses 6, 7a). Now he denounces those who are leading them astray. Their identity is not made known, but Paul does describe their activity (verse 7) and pronounce their doom (verses 8, 9).

In reference to their activity two things are said: first, they "trouble" the Galatians. The Greek word, which was used in secular writings of physical agitation, mental disturbance (e.g., fear, excitement, confusion), and military and political activity (e.g., throwing into disorder, inciting revolt, etc.), is found more than fifteen times in the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 2:3; John 5:7; 14:1; Gal. 5:10). Burton understands it here in the sense of mental disturbance. Guthrie thinks the context, which employs the metaphor of desertion, lends support to the idea of seditious activity. The NAB says, "Some . . . must have confused you."

Second, they *pervert the gospel of Christ* (vs. 7b). The Greek word suggests a change from one thing to another; more specifically it means "to reverse," that is, "*change to its very opposite*" (Plummer, p. 428). In Acts 2:20 it is used of the sun being "turned into darkness"; in James 4:9, of laughter being "turned to mourning" and of joy being turned to heaviness. In light of what we are told elsewhere in the

epistle we may conclude that the persons Paul had in mind were "Judaizers." These were Jews who professed to be Christians but taught that Gentiles in order to be saved had first to submit to the ritual of the Mosaic law. Thus, they perverted the Gospel by substituting a doctrine of salvation by works for a doctrine of salvation by grace. (The controversy created by the Judaizing heresy is dealt with in Acts 15.)

Having described the pernicious activity of the Judaizers, Paul now pronounces a curse upon them — and upon anyone else who would distort the Gospel. *But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema* (vs. 8, asv). This should not be interpreted as an outburst of personal anger. As Guthrie states, "It was not an issue of personal prestige. The essence of the gospel itself was at stake" (p. 64). The reasoning is that there is only one authentic Gospel, and it is Christ's (see verse 7). Because it is Christ's it is complete, final, and unchangeable.

"But though" means "even if" or "even though," suggesting a very remote contingency. "We" refers to Paul and those associated with him in the original mission to Galatia. "Or an angel from heaven" shows the unbounded confidence of Paul in the truth of his message. Even a messenger claiming the highest conceivable authority must be rejected if what he says is subversive to the Gospel preached originally to the Galatians by the apostle. "Any gospel other than that which we preached" may mean either of two things: (1) any gospel *besides* or *in addition to* that which we have preached, or (2) any gospel *contrary* to that which we have preached (cf. NEB: "at variance with"). Most recent interpreters decide for the latter meaning.

"Accursed (kjv) is the rendering of the Greek word *anathema* (cf. asv). Originally, it was used of anything devoted to God — whether in a good sense, that is, for God's service (as the sacrifices, Lev. 27:28), or in a bad sense, that is, for destruction (as the city of Jericho, Josh. 6:17). Later, the word took on the more general sense of the disfavor of God, and it is in this sense that it is used here. Thus the sentence expresses Paul's feeling that anyone who perverts the Gospel should for so doing incur the wrath of God. The NEB has, "he shall be held outcast." The TEV renders it, "may he be condemned to hell!" Phillips puts it, "may he be damned!" The extreme language reveals the seriousness with which Paul viewed the differences between Christ's Gospel (preached by the apostle) and the message of the Judaizers.

Verse 9 repeats the thought of the preceding verse, the repetition

serving to stress the gravity of the matter under discussion. The wording, however, is slightly altered. Verse 8, for instance, is in the form of a future supposition. That is, it envisions a hypothetical situation. The grammar of verse 9 is changed so as to describe a present, concrete situation.

As *we said before* (verse 9) presumably does not refer to the statement of the preceding verse but to oral pronouncements made by Paul on an earlier visit. That the apostle had thus warned the Galatians suggests that there were even then some apprehensions of trouble. Moreover, the fact that the Galatians had been forewarned made their reception of the false teachers more culpable. They knew that a false gospel involved an anathema, but in spite of this knowledge they were following those who preached such a gospel. *Any man* is literally "any one"; thus the statement is general enough to include angels as well as men.

3. *The attack on Paul's personal integrity* (verse 10). Verse 10 implies that Paul's opponents had accused him of courting the favor of men, of being a compromiser. They may have seized upon Paul's having Timothy circumcised as a basis for charging that he was not above accommodating himself to Jewish prejudice or heathen customs as the occasion demanded. (The same allegation is dealt with in 5:11.) Paul was indeed willing to make many concessions to those he sought to win, so long as no vital issue was at stake (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23; Acts 21:17-26). But where the truth of the Gospel was the issue, he would entertain no thought of compromise. The present passage testifies to that. In effect, Paul says: "Read what I have just written. Does that sound like the utterance of one who is trying to ingratiate himself with men? My only concern is to please God."

The first part of verse 10 contains two rhetorical questions: *For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men?* The TEV expresses the drift of the first question: "Does this sound as if I am trying to win men's approval? No! I want God's approval!" The second question, added for the sake of emphasis, employs a verb which suggests currying favor with a view to being popular. TEV: "Am I trying to be popular with men?" Paul does not answer either question, but the reply is obvious. It is God's approval that he seeks, and he does not court the favor of men. The last half of verse 10 enforces this thought by affirming that the desire to please men (i.e., curry favor with them) and the desire to serve Christ are incompatible. *If, after all these years, I were still courting the favour of men, I should not be what I am, the slave of Christ*" (Knox's translation). The apostle's

pre-conversion life might have been characterized by a desire to win the approval of men, but as a Christian his consuming passion was to serve Christ. Paul's words are a sort of reiteration of the words of our Lord that "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24).

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Read Galatians in a translation you have not used before. Watch for distinctive words and phrases.
2. Read the accounts of Paul's three missionary journeys in the Book of Acts.
3. Read articles on "Galatia," "Apostle," and "Gospel" in *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (or some other similar work).
4. In Charles H. Spurgeon's *Treasury of the New Testament* (published by Zondervan) there are eleven sermons on texts in Galatians.