

Galatians

(The Gospel That Sets Us Free)

Theme: Spiritual Freedom through the Gospel

Author: The Apostle Paul (1:1)

Destination and Recipients: Churches in South “Galatia”
(political use of the term)

Date of Writing: c. A.D. 48 – 49 (if correct, probably Paul’s first epistle)

Place of Writing: Uncertain

Purpose in Writing:

1. To rebuke the Galatians for forsaking the gospel
2. To explain what the gospel is
3. To present the doctrine of justification by faith
4. To combat the false teachings of the Judiazers who were leading the Galatians into theological error with a false gospel

Galatians: “Set Me Free!”

Writer: The apostle Paul

Theme: Spiritual Freedom through the Gospel

Date: c. A.D. 48-49 (may be Paul’s first letter)

Key Words: *gospel, faith, law, promise, Spirit, flesh*

Key Verse(s): 2:16; 5:1

Occasion:

Galatians is a letter filled with passion and zeal. Paul had heard that the Galatian Christians were falling away from the true gospel of grace and turning to a legalistic/works approach to salvation. He desired to turn them back to the freedom of salvation by faith alone. In doing so, he argued that not only is the sinner *saved* by grace, but the saved sinner also *lives* by grace. Grace is the way to life and the way of life.

Introduction 1:1 – 10	Personal Address	Doctrinal Argument	Practical Admonition	Conclusion 6:11 – 18	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compromise (1:1-10)• Clarification (1:11–2:10)• Correction (2:11-21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Works versus Faith (3:1-29)• Legalism versus Justification (4:1-18)• Bondage versus Freedom (4:19-31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't be enslaved (5:1-12)• Walk in the Spirit (5:13-26)• Bear one another's burdens (6:1-10)• Let us do good for God's glory (6:11-18)		
	Grace and the Gospel				
	Grace and the Law				
	Grace and Godliness				
The Gospel is Real		The Gospel is Superior		The Gospel is Liberating	
The Authority of Paul's Apostleship		The Impotency of Legalism		The Liberty of God's Spirit	

Purpose Statement for Galatians:

Paul wrote to the Galatians to assert the essential doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, and to refute false teachers who were advocating a faith plus works doctrine of salvation.

Introduction to Galatians

I. Author

Paul is the author of this letter (1:1). This fact is not contested, even by liberal scholars. His conversion (Acts 9) and missionary activity (Acts 13-28) is recorded prominently in the Book of Acts, and he is the author of 13 of our New Testament epistles. Galatians may have been Paul's first epistle.

II. The Importance of the Epistle

1. It sets forth the apostolic authority of Paul.

The only other epistle that approximates Galatians in its defense of Pauline apostleship is 2 Corinthians.

2. It presents the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Paul demonstrates that the way of salvation for a sinner is by grace through faith plus nothing. Salvation had been going on before there was any Law of Moses, and the way of salvation was then, as it is now, and always will be, through faith alone, apart from Law-works.

3. It defends Christian Liberty.

Paul's defense of justification is the foundation on which Paul builds his structure of Christian liberty. Galatians is a declaration of freedom from religious externalism and personal frustration in one's spiritual life.

4. It presents a picture of the apostolic age.

In its biographical allusions and its references to the conflicts and struggles of the apostolic period, the epistle yields significant information on a dimly known era.

5. It affirms clear differences between Christianity and Judaism.

6. It was a catalyst to the Reformation.

No other biblical book played a larger part in the Reformation than did Paul's epistle to the Galatians. Martin Luther (1483–1546) was so impressed with the epistle that he referred to it as his wife. "The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine" (the name of Luther's wife).

III. The Date and Recipients of the Epistle

This is a major point of debate. It largely depends upon whether Paul is using Galatia in a geographical (North Galatia Theory) or a political/provincial (South Galatia Theory) sense. The latter seems to be more probable. Hence, the Galatians in view are South Galatians, those persons evangelized by Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–14:28). Paul normally used political divisions when he referred to land areas; the enthusiastic welcome described in Gal. 4:14 fits well with Acts 14:11; and the references to Barnabas in Gal. 2:1, 9, and 13 imply he was well known to the readers (Barnabas traveled with Paul only on his first missionary journey). In this light, the date of the epistle is probably A.D. 48-49, just before the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15). This would make Galatians Paul's earliest epistle.

IV. The Occasion of the Epistle

The occasion of the epistle is clearly stated in Gal. 1:1-10. Judaizers had infiltrated the Galatian Churches and had attempted to pervert the gospel by supplanting it with a Judaizing interpretation. The attack of these Judaizers was two-fold. First, they discredited the apostleship of Paul. Second, they preached a substitute gospel, a gospel of faith plus works for salvation. For this reason, Paul defends his apostleship in the first two chapters of the book, contends for the true doctrine of grace and faith in chapters three and four, and finally makes a practical application in the last two chapters of the epistle. This is a slight variation of the usual Pauline structure of belief and behavior, creed and conduct, doctrine and deed.

V. The Purpose of the Epistle

Paul has several reasons for writing this epistle:

1. To expose the false teachings of the Judaizers who were undermining the faith of the new converts by advocating a works salvation (3:1-9)
2. To defend his apostleship, which was being challenged by the Judaizers (2:1-10).
3. To emphasize that salvation is by grace through faith alone, not faith plus Law-works (2:16-21).
4. To exhort the Galatian Christians to live in the liberty and freedom brought by Christ (5:1) and to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23).

VI. Distinctive Characteristics of the Epistle

1. Many contrasts (e.g. law/grace; flesh/spirit; bondage/freedom; slave/son) (see also chart below)
2. Strong statements—Paul was understandably upset over the destructive work of the false teachers. Twice in the opening chapter he writes, “Let him be accursed.” “Every sentence is a thunderbolt,” says one writer of the epistle. Paul is a fearless fighter and a staunch defender of the true gospel.
3. Clear distinction between “faith” and “faith plus works” as the means of salvation.
4. Classic treatment of Christian liberty. This epistle has been called “The Magna Charta of Spiritual Emancipation.”
5. No congratulations or words of praise. This is unique to the Pauline letters. There were certainly things commendable about the Galatians’ spiritual lives. However, the epistle was written under the strain of urgency over a situation of grave emergency. Paul would be having personal interaction with the churches later; then he could inspire them through commendation if they heeded his correction.

VII. The Theme

The theme of Galatians could be seen as Christian liberty. The doctrine of justification by faith is emphasized in this context because it is the foundation on which the building of freedom is erected.

Contrasts in Galatians

Chapter	The Lower	The Higher
1—2	lost in sin all die physically in sin another gospel (false) man's reasoning	saved in Christ all live spiritually in Christ the true gospel God's revelation
3—4	law works curse of death condemnation by works servants in bondage (defeat) old covenant (symbolized by Hagar)	grace faith blessing of life justification by faith sons of freedom (victory) new covenant (symbolized by Sarah)
5—6	living in the flesh works of the flesh falling from grace world or self the object of glorying	walking in the Spirit fruit of the Spirit standing firm in grace the cross the sole object of glorying

Galatians
(The Magna Carta of Christian Liberty)

Theme: Spiritual Freedom through the Gospel (5:1)

I. THE PERSONAL ADDRESS: GRACE AND THE GOSPEL (ch. 1-2)

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|---|---------|
| 1. Grace is declared in Paul's message | 1:1-10 |
| 2. Grace is demonstrated in Paul's life | 1:11-24 |
| 3. Grace is defended in Paul's ministry | 2:1-21 |
| a. Before the church collectively | 2:1-10 |
| b. Before Peter personally | 2:11-21 |

II. THE DOCTRINAL ARGUMENT: GRACE AND THE LAW (ch. 3-4)

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|---------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. The personal argument for grace | 3:1-5 |
| 2. The scriptural argument for grace | 3:6-14 |
| 3. The logical argument for grace | 3:15-29 |
| 4. The historical argument for grace | 4:1-11 |
| 5. The sentimental argument for grace | 4:12-18 |
| 6. The allegorical argument for grace | 4:19-31 |

III. THE PRACTICAL ADMONITION: GRACE AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (ch. 5-6)

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| 1. Freedom is to be desired, not bondage | 5:1-12 |
| 2. The Spirit is to be in control, not the flesh | 5:13-26 |
| 3. Others are to be first, not one's self | 6:1-10 |
| 4. God's glory is to be sought, not man's praise | 6:11-18 |

The Gospel: No Place for Condemnation

Galatians 1:1-10

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| I. | <u>Establish your authority as a Christian minister</u> | 1:1-5 |
| 1. | You have a commission | 1:1 |
| 2. | You have companions | 1:2 |
| 3. | You have a confession | 1:3-5 |
| II. | <u>Express your anxiety over the Christian message</u> | 1:6-7 |
| 1. | Confront those who desert the gospel | 1:6 |
| 2. | Confront those who distort the gospel | 1:7 |
| III. | <u>Expose your adversaries concerning the Christian ministry</u> | 1:7-9 |
| 1. | Deal with those who initiate confusion | 1:7 |
| 2. | Deal with those who invite condemnation | 1:8-9 |
| IV. | <u>Explain your attitude concerning Christian motives</u> | 1:10 |
| 1. | Do not be a slave to men | |
| 2. | Do be a servant to Christ | |