

Galatians

- Galatia is a province in north central Turkey
- Acts 16:6 Paul, Silas, and Timothy on Paul's second journey. Luke began his "we" passages when they arrived at Troas (16:10).
- Acts 18:23 Paul's third journey.
- Paul's first journey was not reported to go that far north, but Barnabas is mentioned as if the audience knew him (2:1).
- 1 Peter 1:1 included Galatia in the Jewish Christians of his first letter.
- James 1:1 addressed to Jewish Christians scattered abroad
- Time of writing: Likely when Paul was without his usual travelling companions; Timothy and Silas are not in the greeting. But, Paul was but among believers (1:2), so perhaps when he was in Corinth, in the second journey (Acts 18), having received information from the others on one of their visits, about the time of the writing of 1 Thessalonians. The location probably is not Ephesus (Acts 18:19) because he had not preached extensively there, yet.
- (1:1 – 5) Setting the tone
 - "Not from men" Paul asserts that his message is directly from God, not the result of study. The claim is repeated in 1:11 – 12 and 2:2 (*c.f.*, 1:8 – 10, 2:6 – 9). Evidence is supplied in 3:2 – 5.
 - "All the brethren" Paul's position is not his alone, but commonly accepted (*c.f.*, 2:2). Paul was not so arrogant as to stand alone.
 - "Grace and peace" This common opening (in every letter except Hebrews, James, 1 John, and 3 John) is not a standard greeting but sets the tone for that which follows. The letter should be viewed as an outgrowth of the grace of God and should result in peace for the reader. Overlooking the source and result leads to the distortions referenced in the various letters.
 - The aspects of grace mentioned in the letter are forgiveness (redemption), justification, the work of the Spirit (externally and internally), promises from God, inheritance, adoption, and overcoming the flesh.
 - The aspects of peace are connected not only to redemption (relief from the certainty of Judgment) but also contentment in earthly life.
 - Jesus may be described in many ways. The following list is essential to understanding Paul's objectives in this letter:
 - "Gave Himself for our sins" Forgiveness is based on what Jesus did, not based on our achievements. (Paul will address the other extreme, excusing bad behavior, in 5:13 – 26.)
 - "Deliver us from this present evil age" The gospel has a much wider scope than Judgment. Liberty is a key theme.
 - "According to the will of God" God planned this in advance.
 - "Glory forever" The character traits of Jesus are on parade continuously, which attracts people to the gospel (2 Peter 1:3).
 - All the corrections and admonitions that follow relate to these positive foundational appeals.
- (1:6 – 10) The problem
 - The competing message was not overtly different ("which is not another"), but enough different in focus to cause serious danger (1:8 – 9, 5:4).
 - Many of the Christians in Galatia had been deceived by this "new" teaching. Because of its rapid success, we may surmise that it was presented as an addition rather than a

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- correction to Paul's gospel. Certainly, the new teaching was in some way connected to observance of the Law and the practice of circumcision.
- Aside from the constant correction of the popular teachings of each era, the history of Christianity is littered with additions:
 - Icons
 - Crusades
 - Indulgences
 - Worship of saints
 - Buildings
 - Christians always will hold different ideas about how to understand and apply the gospel. Old teachings are in constant need of correction or adaptation. How do we distinguish between distortions and improvements?
 - Nearly all groups claim to base their beliefs on the Scriptures, including those who were convincing the Gentile Christians that observance of the Law was a better way.
 - Simplistic summaries:
 - The gospel is about character, not practices.
 - The gospel is about overcoming me by the power of God, not being the best I can be.
 - The gospel is about joy and peace, not worry and fear.
 - (1:11 – 2:14) The history of Paul's gospel
 - Credentials
 - (1:11 – 12, 16 – 17) By revelation, not from another person.
 - Was learning from an ordinary person a problem? (1 Corinthians 14:26)
 - See 1 John 2:20 – 27.
 - (1:13 – 15, 23 – 24) The change in me should tell you something
 - Paul did not change from evil to good, but from one set of beliefs to another.
 - God called Paul specifically, not in the way God calls all people.
 - See 2 Corinthians 4:7, 1 Peter 4:10 – 11, John 17:20 – 23, Matthew 5:16
 - (2:1 – 2, 6) I was not arrogant, but took precautions against self-deception
 - Even an inspired person can deceive himself (see 2:1 – 14)
 - An inspired person can be afraid (Acts 18:9 – 10).
 - (2:3 – 5, 7 – 10) The inspired leaders are in agreement
 - The specific problem centered about circumcision, so Paul cites the example of Titus, whom the Galatian Christians know.
 - Paul supplies the motives of those proposing circumcision (bondage)
 - The inspired leaders did different things but supported each other.
 - Applications
 - Lacking modern revelation, who decides what the Word really says?
 - How do we know when the Spirit is teaching or has taught us something?
 - Lacking proof of a special calling, who should be missionaries?
 - The change in us causes people to glorify the power of God. What else draws them? (see Romans 2:4 and 2 Peter 1:3)
 - Do we examine ourselves for potential self-deception?
 - Do we know the motives of others?

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- In what ways do we promote unity but not sameness?
- Where is the line between limited liberty and arrogant acceptance (1 Corinthians 5)?
- (2:15 – 21) Summary of how faith and law are different
 - This explains how Peter went wrong.
 - The repeated goal is justification: to be declared acceptable by God.
 - (15 – 16) Paul contrasts himself and Peter with Gentiles.
 - They had grown up in a right-and-wrong system, being told that obedience to this standard was the path to acceptance.
 - But “everyone” recognized that this was unattainable.
 - Instead, people are declared acceptable on the basis of Jesus’ faith.
 - Literally, “by the faith of Christ, and we into the faith of Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ.”
 - The key phrase shows the task of the individuals, not to have “faith in Christ Jesus,” but to be “into the faith of Christ Jesus.” If we are absorbed into the faith of Jesus, we are acceptable. Therefore, Jesus’ faith saves us, not our faith.
 - If the quality of our faith (“faith in Jesus”) were the criterion of acceptance, then we would have no more hope than those who sought acceptance through right-and-wrong because our faith would never be good enough. “Faith in Jesus” is another form of the works mentality.
 - Instead, the fact that we are “into” Jesus’ faith is the deciding factor. Therefore, without Jesus’ faith, we would have no hope.
 - What constitutes passing “into” the faith of Jesus? (see Philippians 3:7 – 16, especially v10, “that I may know Him.”)
 - (17) The fact that we make bad choices while pursuing the faith of Jesus does not mean that we are dragging our sin “into” Jesus. Rather, because I am now judged by being “in” the faith of Jesus, sin no longer condemns. So, Jesus does not serve “sinners,” because sin is not the criterion. Rather, He serves the faithful.
 - (18 – 19) Paul uses his own history to make the point that his building up the church which he formerly tried to destroy illustrates that his sincerely fervent service of God was off the mark. He did not need to validate his former path, as the Judaizing Christians were doing. Rather, his former path (the law) showed him its hopelessness, so he was able to give it up, which many Jewish Christians were having trouble doing. His illustration is a call to Jewish Christians to look deeply into the Law so that they, also, will come to the same conclusion.
 - Into what loyalties should we look deeply so that we can give them up?
 - (20) Crucified with Christ
 - See Romans 6:4 – 6, 12:1 - 2. From the outside, Jesus’ death was loss, focused on injustice and humiliation. From the inside, that death meant new life.
 - “The life I now live in the flesh I live in the faith of the Son of God.” Verse 16 reminded the reader of the transition “into” the faith of Jesus. Verse 20 describes the continuing habitation, “in” the faith of Jesus, in a new life.
 - The attraction of Jesus’ faith is His love, manifested in giving up His “self” for all people. Those attracted by a desire to “go to heaven” have not been

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- crucified with Christ Paul would have opted to be accused if that meant that his countrymen would take up the faith of Jesus (Romans 9:3).
- (21) Many view grace as God's constant forgiveness of our continued bad choices. From that point of view, abandoning the right-and-wrong mentality seems to be setting aside grace. If acceptability were governed by right-and-wrong (even adding in forgiveness due to sacrifice), then Jesus did not need to come. Jesus did not come to continually forgive (Hebrews 9:26), but to provide an alternative to the hopeless right-and-wrong mentality, the alternative being an earthly life governed by Jesus' demonstrated faith. Those focused on right-and-wrong cannot give up Law. Sinlessness does not equate with acceptance (3:21).
 - What constitutes living in the faith of the Son of God?
 - (3:1 – 14) Relative benefits of faith and law
 - (1) The portrayal of Jesus as "crucified" refers to 2:15 – 21. If the reader allows the thought to be separated by the artificial chapter boundary, Paul's point is lost, or even reversed. Paul's portrayal of the crucifixion was as an act of faith into which we immerse ourselves, not as a cure for continuing bad choices.
 - (2 – 3) Christians tend to forget their own transition from hopelessness to hope, from personal failure to trust in the promises of God, and become obsessed with proper behavior again, leading back to hopelessness. Instead, Paul reminds his readers of their own miraculous pasts and their former dedication to the things of the Spirit. In v3, "made perfect" refers to being consistent (*c.f.*, Colossians 2:23). If we follow a right-and-wrong system, we are repeatedly inconsistent and can be "perfect" only by being flawless. In the faith system, our faith can be consistent even if we make bad choices on occasion (as in the examples of Abraham, Moses, and David).
 - (4) At this point in church history, persecution arose only from the unbelieving Jews. If the Galatian Christians started observing the Law, persecution would stop. The Galatian Christians had endured much hardship. Paul's reminder is that they endured it by conscious choice, and that they need to remember why they had made that choice.
 - (5) Some Galatians Christians were Gentiles who had never followed the Law. The Spirit worked miraculously through them without the Law. This proof is based on the assumption that believers know that God has accepted them when they see the Spirit performing that which is humanly impossible.
 - (6 – 9) "Righteousness" is to have attained the standard of acceptance. Justification is the declaration of acceptance. Abraham was acceptable to God not because he was forgiven, but because he had faith. The descendants of Abraham are those of faith, not those who share Abraham's DNA. Therefore, the vast majority of Abraham's physical descendants were not "sons of Abraham." Rather, people of every nation would be among the faithful.
 - (10 – 14) Paul cites Deuteronomy 27:26 and Habakkuk 2:4 as proof that Law is hopeless, whereas faith leads to life.
 - His Jewish Christian readers should have already understood this, if they had been as zealous for the Law as they claimed (the same point as Paul made to Peter in 2:13 – 14).
 - (13) Jesus purchased us out of the hopeless right-and-wrong system (redeemed). In so doing, he became the fulfillment of the scapegoat ceremony

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of the Law in which the sins of all the people were, symbolically, laid upon the head of a goat which was then driven from the camp. That goat was considered cursed (although it was still just a goat). Jesus was considered accursed at His execution, in keeping with Deuteronomy 21:23. All of the types of sacrifices came to fulfillment in the death of Jesus: purification, sin driven from the camp, celebration, thanks, *et al.*

- (14) The purpose of that sacrifice was to allow those trapped under law to be free to pursue faith as Abraham did, that we may receive the help from the Spirit that we require in order to have acceptable faith. If we were merely released from debt incurred by law-breaking so that we could pursue faith on our own, the probability of success would be very low. Some described in the Old Testament developed that faith, but few. We have an abundant hope.
- (3:15 – 29) Why the Law, then?
 - (15) Illustration: After a contract is signed, it cannot be set aside or modified. Note: God used words in contexts people understood. The Scriptures do not have a specialized language. God chose the word, covenant or contract, because the hearers understood the concept.
 - (16 – 18) God made a contract with Abraham and with the future Jesus. Subsequent contracts cannot be in conflict with the earlier one. Therefore, the Law cannot be the means through which all nations are blessed.
 - (19 – 25) The purpose of the Law was to hold the physical descendants of Abraham together despite their sins (see Old Testament history) “until” the Seed should come.
 - (19, 25) Note the clear conclusion that the Law has an end (“until,” “no longer”). Compare to Romans 11:28 – 29.
 - Angels played a major role in keeping up God’s part of the contract.
 - (20) Moses was the mediator of that contract. It was not forced upon Israel, but was entered into freely. Moses argued with God on several occasions in behalf of the Israelites.
 - (21) If the purpose of the Law had been for acceptance, the promise to Abraham would have been made of no effect. Law codes are ineffective in achieving the desired result of acceptance (2:21). Sin and forgiveness are not the criteria but faith (3:9).
 - (22) Jesus primary purpose was not to forgive but to establish the promised faith in which we find refuge. The Law illustrates that we cannot achieve acceptance through Law, so the faith of Jesus becomes the only alternative.
 - (23 – 24) Before the faith of Jesus was demonstrated, the Law served to keep Israelites together so that they would be available for the completion of the promise to Abraham.
 - (26 – 29) People of all nations are acceptable by getting “into” (being obsessed by) the faith of Jesus.
 - (26) Those of faith (3:9) are declared to be sons of God because of Jesus’ faith. The necessary quality is supplied by Jesus. If acceptance depended on the quality of our faith, we would reach the same stage of hopelessness that the Law provides: we are never good enough.
 - (27) One of the symbols of immersion is climbing into the faith of Jesus, becoming overwhelmed by His faith, being obsessed with understanding and

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- experiencing it. This focus causes us to become like Jesus on earth, to the point that we are mistaken for Him (put on Christ).
- (28) Faithful people from all nations, socio-economic status, or gender are equally acceptable, and are uniquely united.
 - (29) The argument comes full circle (7 – 9). Acceptability is promised to those who have the kind of faith that Abraham had (Romans 4:16). The same argument of Galatians 3 is reproduced in Romans 4.
- (4:1 – 31) It's all about liberty
 - (1 – 12) Servants versus children of God
 - The argument applies to both Jewish and Gentile Christians.
 - Both are characterized as children.
 - Jewish Christians were described in this way in 3:24, but the argument was expanded to all people in 3:25 – 29.
 - The child image brings the Jewish Christian down from their claim of being the mature (the adults) in this new church.
 - The child image brings the Gentile Christians up to a position of equality. Their childhoods were no less managed by God (*e.g.*, Romans 1:19 – 20).
 - The Western church often adopts the superior attitude of the Jewish Christians in their dealings with people of other religions.
 - Both are characterized as being “in bondage to the elements” (3, 9) and “those who are not gods” (8).
 - Elements: 2 Peter 3:10, 12, Colossians 2:8, 20, Hebrews 5:14
 - All were trapped by the brokenness of the world, with no demonstrable hope. A few understood that God would need to fix this and rose above it by faith.
 - Obviously, Gentiles turned to idols. In grouping everyone together in this paragraph, Paul reminds the Jewish Christians that they were not much better, turning the Temple and its rituals into their gods.
 - In what ways is the modern church still in bondage?
 - At the right time, Jesus came (4 – 7)
 - Both groups are still in view, or the Gentile Christians are not adopted.
 - (5) The fact that Jesus was born Jewish does not make Jewish Christians more important, rather requiring redemption like the Gentiles.
 - (5) Jesus was born in the natural way, as were all people, so one group is not better than the other.
 - Why did Jesus not come sooner? What was the purpose of the long period of time before Jesus? Were the people prior to Jesus at a disadvantage?
 - The benefits of adoption
 - Redeemed from our debt to right-and-wrong
 - Adopted: not servants but family
 - The Holy Spirit in us that modifies our hearts to appreciate the value of family.
 - An heir of all that is God's.
 - Does the modern church appreciate the benefits?
 - (8 – 12) Compare the benefits of this “new” gospel to the original

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- Similar to 3:1 – 9
- Of course, some Gentile Christians had, previously, served idols. But many Gentile Christians were from the group that attended synagogue services and worshiped the God of Israel.
- The “weak and beggarly elements” refer to the practices of the Law that were being added to the gospel.
- Holidays in themselves are not the problem, but the importance assigned to them (Romans 14:5 – 6)
- Paul was afraid for them, not himself, although he would experience grief at the loss (1 Corinthians 3:12 – 15). The injury they would cause was only to themselves.
- (13 – 20) The gospel is about people, not rituals.
 - (13 – 16) Today, personal appeals often are used to sway people from one doctrine to another. Paul’s personal appeal was his message. Love was the point, not a means of manipulation.
 - (17) The Judaizing Christians tried to use exclusion (disfellowship) as a tool to gain adherence to their practices.
 - (18) Zeal often entices people to follow the wrong things. Zeal is not the problem; following the zeal of the moment is.
- (21 – 31) Ritual enslaves
 - Review of the Law of Moses
 - The Law was given to a specific group, not all people.
 - The target group was not faithful.
 - The purpose of the Law was to build illustrations to explain God.
 - Payment for this service was in big families, big crops, and victory in battle, not heaven.
 - The Law culminated in explaining Jesus.
 - The story of Hagar (Genesis 16:1 – 16, 21:9 – 21, 25:12 – 18)
 - Should we make allegories like Paul did with the story of Sarah and Hagar?
 - (23) The contrast is between what happens naturally and what God causes, between the best we can do and the promises of God.
 - (24 – 26) The Judaizing Christians were offering a system based on the best we can be, instead of being based on what God can do through us. The best we can be results in bondage to our shortcomings. We become free when we allow God to accomplish His promises.
 - (27) Isaiah 54:1 Isaiah’s description of the Messianic kingdom included this line that sounds a lot like Sarah.
 - (28) Isaac was born by a physically impossible process. The Judaizing Christians were trying to re-introduce the physically possible.
 - (29) Those who value their practices persecute those who do not agree.
 - (30) Is Paul telling the Galatian Christians to cast out the Judaizers?
 - In what ways is the modern church in bondage?
- (5:1 – 26) Recognizing lost liberty
 - Why do people give up liberty?
 - Fear (of being dominated, of failure to achieve a goal)
 - Feeling inadequate

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- Being convinced by clever deception
- Uncomfortable with the loss of tradition
- How liberty may be lost
 - (1:6) New and improved gospel
 - (1:11 – 2:10) Revelation versus an explanation of revelation
 - (2:12) Fear of controversy
 - (2:15 – 2:21) Losing sight of the basic concepts
 - (3:1 – 5) Losing sight of the power of the Spirit
 - (3:6 – 4:31) Forgetting the hopelessness of law
- What are the appropriate responses to grace? (See attached handout.)
- (1 – 4) Drifting into law has dire consequences.
 - Once saved always saved?
 - Revolving door salvation?
 - How do we reconcile this with security and confidence?
 - Why is Paul's response to those who promote law so extreme (4:30, 5:12)?
- How do we recognize the boundary between reasonable organization and law? (scheduled meeting times, finances, teaching topics, leadership, group efforts)
 - (5) Faith: Does every decision pass through a promise of God?
 - (6) Love: Is every decision based on what is best for the other person?
 - (7) Improvement: Were faith and love better in the past?
 - (11) Acceptance: Do those focused on rules now accept me?
 - (13 – 25) Behavior: Are the works of the flesh passing away?
 - (26) Superiority: Are we truly equal?
 - (6:9) Enthusiasm: Is it getting tiresome?
- (6:1 – 10) Examples of faith and love
 - (1) Be gentle and helpful with those who stumble along the way.
 - (2) Beyond helping those who stumble, share the burdens of life in general.
 - (3) Motivated by empathy, not superiority.
 - (4 – 5) Don't give yourself credit for the work of the group.
 - (6) Sharing with teachers is "right," not "a right."
 - (7 – 8) I cannot manipulate God into accepting me by attaining my own benchmark.
 - (5:16 – 25) Which crop are you seeing?
 - Sowing to the Spirit: (3:2 – 3, 3:27, 4:6, 4:15, 5:16) Act on the promises.
 - (9 – 10) Share with the brethren.
- (6:11 – 18) Personal summary
 - Use of stenographers was common (Romans 16:22, 1 Corinthians 16:21, Colossians 4:18, 2 Thessalonians 3:17).
 - (12) Law is a means of avoiding persecution (1:10, 3:4, 5:11).
 - (13) Law tends to boasting in the flesh (number of baptisms).
 - (14) The world (crucified) no longer oppresses me. The old me (crucified) is dead.
 - (15) New creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Note: this teaching brings persecution.
 - (16) Humor: the new "rule."
 - (17) Compare Paul's "marks" to those of his opponents.
 - (18) Grace is for your spirit, not your body. Pithy summary in a sentence.