

The Book of Galatians

**FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
PASTOR'S CLASS—FALL, 2020**

The Book of Galatians

Overview

From the first chapter to the last, Paul's letter to the Galatians is a letter about God—outlining his grace, affirming his sovereignty, and tracing his purposes in the proclamation of God's gospel. This gospel is the good news of justification by faith in a crucified and risen Savior. In fact, there is no better place to explore the depths of this gospel than the Book of Galatians. The six chapters of this letter, with its 149 verses, bristle with passion, sarcasm, and anger. At the same time, we see Paul's tenderness as he speaks to the Galatians as his "dear children." Indeed, he speaks with the compassion of a parent again enduring the pains of childbirth, because his children, who should have known better, were in danger of committing spiritual suicide.

We also see Paul's perplexity at the departure of these churches from the truth of the gospel, which, in a human sense, he had given birth to. It is with astonishment that he reveals his fears that the Galatian churches have been bewitched and deceived. As the basis for his authority and concern for the Galatian churches, the Apostle Paul outlines his own personal deliverance from the darkness and death of sin into the light and life of Christ. He makes it clear that the revelation which he received from the risen Christ was the true meaning of God's historical dealings with his ancient people. The law, covenant, temple, Old Testament sacrifices and the destiny of Israel—and indeed the fate of the world itself—are now illuminated in the light of God's intervention through the life, death and resurrection of his promised Messiah Jesus. The burden of Paul's life was to proclaim this good news with clarity and definition to all peoples everywhere.

Commentary

The optional commentary we will use is *Galatians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)* by R. Alan Cole. Class members are responsible for ordering their own commentaries, available at this writing from online vendors such as Amazon.com, Christianbook.com, and ivpress.com.

Registration

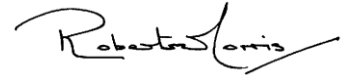
Registration opens in mid-August at 4thpres.org/ministries/Sunday-school. Online registration is required. Only those who register online will receive emails with important information about the class, including a weekly email with a direct link to my recorded lecture for that week.

Groups

Groups will meet remotely this semester. Your group leader will be in touch regarding meeting details.

Thank you for spending the time to take this class, and for contributing to the fellowship and mutual learning in your groups. My hope is that the effort you put into this class will be rewarded many times over in your daily Christian walk, and in the years to come.

Warmly in Christ,



Rob Norris

The Author

Galatians is, without a doubt, the most secure of all of Paul's letters, and perhaps all of the books in the New Testament. F.C. Baur, the father of the Tübingen school, accepted its authenticity. Galatians is quoted or alluded to in 1 Peter, Barnabas, 1 Clement, Polycarp's letter to the Philippians, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. Both Marcion's and the Muratorian Canon list it. The internal grounds for asserting its authenticity are overwhelming.

Destination/Audience

The key introductory issue in Galatians is the destination. Until comparatively recent times, biblical scholars assumed that this epistle was sent to the churches in the geographical region known as Galatia, in north central Asia Minor. Thus, Paul would have visited the region on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:6; 18:23) and his visit to Jerusalem (recorded in Galatians 2) would correspond to Acts 15. Thus, the epistle would have been sent sometime on Paul's third missionary journey, perhaps from Corinth (Acts 20:3), in 55/56 AD. This view is known as the "North Galatian Theory," since the churches would be in the geographical region of Galatia, which was in the north.

But in fairly recent times, largely due to the archeological efforts of Sir William Ramsey, a new theory has been proposed—the "South Galatian Theory." Both Ramsey and the majority of New Testament scholars today would hold that Paul wrote this letter to the churches in the political province of Galatia—i.e., an area which the Roman government designated as Galatia. This province included cities substantially to the south of the geographical region of Galatia, including Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium—cities Paul had visited on his first missionary journey. If the South Galatian theory is true, then there is no need to identify Galatians 2 with Acts 15, for the events described in Galatians 2 may well have happened on an earlier visit to Jerusalem. The letter would then have been written sometime before the events of Acts 15—as early as 47-49 AD, depending on when the Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 is to be dated.

What is at stake here is both the date of this epistle and the interpretation of Galatians 2:1-10 (in terms of its historical setting). Less directly, the historical value of Acts is involved, as well as evaluating the theological development in the mind of Paul between the writing of Galatians and Romans. Finally, if Galatians is dated earlier as is maintained by the South Galatian Theory, then this likely becomes the first canonical Pauline epistle.

The South Galatian Theory, though not unassailable, seems by far the most satisfactory. In particular, the arguments that seem most compelling on its behalf are:

1. the number of visits implied in Galatians 2:1 and mentioned in Acts,
2. Paul's proven use of Roman provincial terms to describe what Luke would normally describe with geographical/ethnic terms, and
3. the absence of any mention of the decree in Galatians 2:1-10, which would so dramatically serve Paul's purposes and prove, once and for all, that the Judaizers were not representative of James or apostolic/Jerusalem Christianity.

Date

According to the South Galatian Theory, this epistle must have been written before the Council of Acts 15, between autumn, 46 AD and autumn, 48 AD. As we are told in Acts 15:1, Judean visitors came to Syrian Antioch and started to teach the Christians there that those who were not circumcised in accordance with the law of Moses could not be saved. It is antecedently probable that others who wished to press the same argument had visited the recently formed daughter-churches of Antioch, not only in Syria and Cilicia, as the apostolic letter indicates (Acts 15:23), but also in South Galatia. If so, then the letter to the Galatians was written as soon as Paul got news of what was afoot, on the event of the Jerusalem meeting described in Acts 15:6. This, it is suggested, would yield the most satisfactory correlation of the date of Galatians and Acts as the most likely dating of Galatians. It must be conceded that, if this is so, Galatians is the earliest among the extant letters of Paul.

Occasion/Purpose

The purpose of this letter was obviously to refute the Judaizers' false gospel—a gospel in which these Jewish Christians felt that circumcision was essential to salvation—and to remind the Galatians of the real basis of their salvation. It was the urgency of this situation which moved Paul to write this epistle, even before the Jerusalem Council convened, for the churches of Galatia were at stake.

Theme

Galatians has been called the book on which the Protestant Reformation was founded. The key to this epistle is seen in 2:16: “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.” Paul links Christ’s complete faithfulness to the old covenant as grounds for its abolition as the basis of our salvation. In a nutshell, we are justified by faith in Christ because Christ was faithful.

Argument

Paul begins his letter to the Galatians in a manner different from all his other canonical epistles. Although there is a short greeting (1:1-5), there is no thanksgiving to God for the Galatians. Instead, what follows is a denunciation of the Galatians for having deserted the grace of Christ and following after a false gospel (1:6-10).

The body of this epistle deals with three things:

1. A defense of Paul’s apostleship (1:11–2:21), since the very message of his gospel was at stake.
2. A defense of what that message entails in terms of justification by faith (3:1–4:31), since the Galatians’ standing before God was at stake.
3. A defense of Christian liberty—which grows out of justification by faith (5:1–6:10), since the Galatians’ walk with God was at stake.

In the first section (1:11–2:21), Paul defends his apostleship in two ways. First, it was received by revelation (1:11-12). Thus, its source was divine, not human. Second, it was independent of the Jerusalem apostles (1:13–2:21)—again, stressing its divine roots. Paul elaborates on this second point by taking pains to show that he did not consult with any of the apostles in the first three years after his conversion (1:13-17). When he first visited Jerusalem, his time there was brief, and he only met with Peter (1:18-24). Finally, when Paul did consult with the apostles (2:1-10) they both required nothing of Titus as to circumcision (2:1-5) and gave hearty approval to Paul’s gospel (2:6-10).

So strong was this approval, in fact, that Paul later felt the freedom to rebuke the chief of the Jerusalem apostles, Peter himself, when the two were in Antioch (2:11-21). The recording of such a rebuke should prove that truth was on Paul’s side, and hence his gospel was from God. (Most likely, the Judaizers had given a biased report of this incident to the Galatians, using it in support

of their “gospel.”) Paul’s rebuke was not concerning Peter’s gospel, but concerning his inconsistent behavior with it, for out of fear Peter himself had tacitly agreed with the position of the Judaizers, to the harm of the Gentile converts (2:11-13). It was for this hypocrisy that Paul rebuked Peter (2:14). The basis for the rebuke is then given, although it is unclear whether Paul is quoting himself when he confronted Peter or is now turning to the readers (2:15-21). In essence, to add law to grace is to destroy grace and to make a mockery of the cross (2:21).

The second major section (3:1–4:31) is the heart of this epistle, for Paul clearly sets forth what justification by faith really meant and why it was true. He begins with a justification of justification (3:1-18). The basic gist of his argument was that:

1. the Spirit was received by faith, not by works of the law (3:1-5),
2. the example of Abraham illustrates that one is justified by faith, not by works of the law (3:6-14), and
3. the law, which came 430 years after God’s covenant with Abraham, cannot invalidate the promise (3:15-18).

But such vindication of justification by faith raises a problem: Why then was the law given (3:19)? If the same God gave the promise, why would he add the law? Paul answers this question (3:19–4:6) with two responses:

1. The law was temporary in nature, given to remind/warn the nation of Israel that a righteousness by works was thoroughly inadequate, though its standard of perfection anticipated the coming of the Messiah (3:19-25).
2. The law had an inferior status, effectively enslaving those who would be sons (3:26–4:7). Thus, the law had its place—to point the nation of Israel to its need for Christ.

The apostle now turns to his readers with a direct appeal (4:8-31). Having just demonstrated that the law enslaved, he points out that the Galatians, too, had experienced slavery as pagans worshipping false gods (4:8-9). By accepting the Judaizers’ message, they would simply replace one kind of slavery with another (4:10-11)! The effect that the Judaizers’ message was having on the Galatians (4:12-20) both alienated them from Paul (4:17) and robbed them of their joy in Christ (4:15). Paul concludes his appeal employing Hagar and Sarah as an allegory for law and grace (4:21-31).

Having argued his case for the truth of justification by faith, Paul launches into his final major section of the epistle. Here he shows how justification by faith should work itself out in one's life (5:1–6:10). Christian liberty is at stake, for as Paul has repeatedly shown, the law enslaves. Consequently, the apostle begins with this very issue—the enslavement of the law (5:1-12)—and argues that the law harms liberty in five ways:

1. It enslaves the believer (5:1-2).
2. It turns the believer into a debtor (5:3).
3. It alienates the believer from Christ, causing him to fall from grace (5:4-6).
4. It hinders the progressive sanctification of the Christian (5:7-10).
5. It removes the stigma of the cross, making Christ's death unnecessary (5:11-12).

On the other hand, Christian liberty does not give one license to do whatever he wants (5:13-26). Paul writes preemptively to the Galatians about the effects of license (5:13-21), in hopes that they would heed his message, but not go beyond the bounds of grace. In essence, the liberty of justification is the liberty to live for God, not the liberty to sin. Paul then shows how one should live for God, as well as the result of living for God by the Spirit (5:22-26)—resulting in character qualities “against which there is no law” (5:23).

The value of liberty not only relates to our godly character development but has value for others as well. True liberty is liberty to love and serve others (6:1-10). The spiritual should serve by gently rebuking the weak and modeling responsibility for the corporate body of Christ (6:1-5). The congregation should exercise its liberty by loving all people, but especially other believers (6:10).

Paul closes his epistle (6:11-18) by unmasking the true motives of the Judaizers (6:12-13) as compared with his own motives (6:14-17), followed by his customary benediction (6:18).

PASTOR'S CLASS

GALATIANS—FALL, 2020

Week	Date	Scripture
1	06-Sep	Galatians 1:1-10
2	13-Sep	Galatians 1:11-24
3	20-Sep	Galatians 2:1-14
4	27-Sep	Galatians 2:15-21
5	04-Oct	Galatians 3:1-9
6	11-Oct	Galatians 3:10-14
7	18-Oct	Galatians 3:15-29
8	25-Oct	Galatians 4:1-7
9	01-Nov	Galatians 4:8-20
10	08-Nov	Galatians 4:21-31
11	15-Nov	Galatians 5:1-15
12	22-Nov	Galatians 5:16-26
13	29-Nov	Galatians 6:1-10
14	06-Dec	Galatians 6:11-18

Week 1—September 6..... Galatians 1:1-10

1. These verses lay the foundation upon which the rest of the epistle is built. Note what Paul says about:
 - a. God
 - b. Christ
 - c. himself
 - d. the gospel

2. Why does Paul need to defend himself as he opens this letter?

3. How does 'turning to a different gospel' mean that they have 'deserted' Christ?

4. What crisis exists in the Galatian churches that prompts Paul to write as he does? What is going on that is 'troubling' Christian communities?

Week 2—September 13..... Galatians 1:11-24

1. How does Paul show that the gospel is a revelation of God? What does his personal testimony demonstrate? What is the significance for Christians today?
2. Paul completed three years of training in Arabia before making a two week stop in Jerusalem, visiting only Peter and James. Why does he give these details?
3. If “tradition is the living faith of the dead and traditionalism is the dead faith of the living,” what does Paul mean when he speaks of the “traditions of his fathers?” How did that shape his newfound zeal?
4. Discuss the radical change in Paul, who was “called by his grace” (1:15). How is this experienced today?

Week 3—September 20..... Galatians 2:1-14

1. Why does Paul consider his Jerusalem visit significant? What issues were at stake and what facts were confirmed?
2. What crucial issue did Paul raise with his opponents concerning Titus? How did the other apostles in Jerusalem respond to Paul's Gentile friend?
3. Paul was asked by the apostles to remember the poor (2:10). How does Paul do this? How does ministry to the poor and the proclamation of the gospel go together?
4. Paul says hard things about Peter and his decision to refrain from eating with Gentiles. What do you think prompted Peter's decision? Was it theological conviction or fear?

Week 4—September 27 Galatians 2:15-21

1. What were Paul’s motives for his opposition to Peter? How does he justify the stand he took?
2. What does Paul mean when he refers to being “justified” (2:16)? [See Romans 3:4, quoting Psalm 51:4.]
3. Paul says he died to the law and his former ways came to an end (2:19). What is he speaking about?
4. Paul’s new life is now characterized as one “united to Christ.” In practical terms, what is “union with Christ?”

Week 5—October 4 Galatians 3:1-9

1. What are “the works of the law?” If we are not perfected or sanctified in the flesh by doing the works of the law, how are we perfected?
2. What does the example of Abraham teach us about our justification and sanctification?
3. What does it mean that God preached the gospel beforehand? How were Old Testament saints saved?
4. What comfort can believers draw from the fact that we are “sons of Abraham?”

Week 6—October 11 Galatians 3:10-14

1. What type of obedience does the law require? In other words, to what degree and duration must someone fulfill the obligations of the law? [See Leviticus 20:22; Deuteronomy 27:26; Jeremiah 11:3.]
2. What does it mean to be “under the law” and “under a curse?”
3. How is the nature of the law opposed to the nature of faith, such that the two ways of salvation cannot be mingled?
4. What is the blessing of Abraham that comes by faith by virtue of union with Christ? [See Genesis 17:1-8; Romans 4:16-24.]

Week 8—October 25 Galatians 4:1-7

1. In what ways does Paul demonstrate the amazing privileges and position of a Christian?

2. These verses affirm the reality that all Christians are heirs of God's promise given to Abraham (Genesis 17). Why then does the apostle say that such a one is no different from a slave (4:1)?

3. What is meant when Paul uses the terms ‘guardians’ and ‘managers’ to describe the way that the heavenly Father administered the covenant of grace under the ministry of Moses?

4. When God the Spirit unites us by faith to God the Son, he gives us a new language with which to speak to God the Father from our hearts. What does this mean for Christians today?

Week 10—November 8..... Galatians 4:21-31

1. How did Paul address the legalistic people (4:21)? What is the vital difference between Hagar's son and Sarah's son (4:22-23)?
2. How do the two women represent two covenants (4:24-29, Exodus 19:3-8)? What does scripture say about the slave woman and her son, and what did Paul want to say through this symbolism (4:28-31)?
3. Paul's opponents claim authority from Jerusalem. Who or what does Paul say are the two Jerusalems (4:25-26)?
4. Paul makes the remarkable statement in 4:28 that the Galatians, who are Gentiles rather than Jews, are children of promise in the line of Isaac. How is this so?

Week 11—November 15..... Galatians 5:1-15

1. What challenge did Paul set before the Galatians (5:1)? What challenge does this passage set before our church?
2. How did Paul describe the Galatian Christian's experience (5:7)? What are the side effects of trying to be saved by keeping the Law?
3. How had false teaching affected the Galatian church (5:8-9)? What unnecessary rules and regulations do Christians tend to impose on one another today?
4. How were the Galatian Christians to use their freedom (5:14)?

Week 13—November 29..... Galatians 6:1-10

1. Having encouraged humility (6:3), Paul immediately says we can also have reason for pride (6:4). How do these fit together?
2. “Carry your own load” (6:5) would seem to contradict “carry each other's burdens” (6:2). How do you balance these two commands?
3. What are Paul's rationales for contributing to the work of the church?
4. The apostle warns in 6:9 against losing enthusiasm and becoming weary of right living. What causes this weariness and loss of enthusiasm?

