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Galatians

Paul wrote this letter to churches he had started in Galatia (now central or southern Turkey). It deals with some problems in these churches that were being caused by some teachers who disagreed with Paul. This was not unusual. It was something Paul had to deal with in other letters, like the letter he later wrote to the Romans. But it is clear from the beginning of this letter to the Galatians that their problems were urgent.

Paul usually begins his letters with thanks to God for the people he is writing to. But he does not have good things to say about the Galatians. After only a few words of greeting, Paul begins by telling the believers how angry he is with them. He is shocked that they have turned away from the Good News he had told them not so long ago. Some Jewish-Christian teachers had come to Galatia after Paul had left. And they had persuaded the Galatian believers to accept some ideas that were very different from what Paul had taught them.

It seems these teachers were saying that Paul's teaching was not complete. They said it was based on Paul's own ideas. Paul's teaching, they said, left out circumcision and other necessary Jewish rules. They accused Paul of trying to make his message more pleasing to non-Jews. They said Paul was not faithful to the teaching of the apostles in Jerusalem. So these teachers caused the Galatians to doubt Paul's authority as an apostle of Jesus.

In this letter, Paul defends himself. He makes clear that the Good News he told the Galatians came from the Lord. He reminds them about his life long ago as an enemy of the followers of Jesus. But Jesus had changed him and chosen him to tell the Good News to non-Jews. Paul says he received the Good News message from Jesus himself, not from anyone else. Paul adds that the apostles in Jerusalem had accepted him and his message. They had encouraged him in his special work among the non-Jews.

The main issue in this letter is whether non-Jewish followers of Jesus need to do something more than just believe in Jesus. Must they become like Jews? Must they be circumcised and follow other Jewish laws in order to be full members of the family of God? Paul's answer is strong and clear: No! What God had done through Jesus was for everyone, both Jews and non-Jews. Jesus died for all people. The Good News is that anyone can be a part of God's family because of what Jesus has done. Also, God's gift of the Holy Spirit provides all believers in Jesus, both Jews and non-Jews, the power they need to overcome sin.

Paul also reminds the Galatians how they had received the Holy Spirit. It was not by following the Jewish law. They had received the Spirit by hearing and accepting the Good News about Jesus. Paul also makes this key point: All people who put their trust in Jesus are true children of Abraham because they believe God as Abraham did. And as children of Abraham, they will receive the promise of blessing that God made to Abraham.

In this letter to the Galatians, Paul...

Is shocked that they have turned away from the Good News (1:1-10)

Tells about his life and work to defend the Good News for non-Jews (1:11 – 2:21)

Offers arguments against the need to follow the Jewish law (3:1 – 5:15)

Instructs them to follow the leading of the Spirit (5:16 – 6:10)

Adds the final words in his own handwriting (6:11-18)

1 Greetings from Paul, an apostle. I was chosen to be an apostle, but not by any group or person here on earth. I did not receive my authority from any human. It came directly from Christ Jesus* and God the Father, who raised Jesus from death. ²Greetings also from all those in God's family who are with me.

To the churches in Galatia:†

³I pray that God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ will be good to you and give you peace. ⁴Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice for our sins to free us from the evil powers that rule this world we live in. He did this because it is what God our Father wanted. ⁵Glory to God for ever and ever! Amen.

We Told You the Only Good News

⁶A short time ago God chose you to follow him. He chose you by the grace that comes through Christ. But now I am amazed that you are already turning away and believing something different from the Good News we told you. ⁷There is no other message that is the Good News, but some people are confusing you. They want to change the Good

News about Christ. ⁸We told you the only Good News. And I ask that God's curse fall on any person who tells you a different message—even if that person is one of us or an angel from heaven! ⁹I will say again what I have said before: may God's curse fall on anyone who tells you something different from the Good News you have already accepted!

¹⁰Does this sound like someone who tells people only what they want to hear? No, I am trying to please God, not people. If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Paul's Authority Is From God

¹¹Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the Good News I told you was not made up by any human. ¹²I did not get my message from another person. It is not something I was taught. Jesus Christ himself revealed to me the Good News I tell people.

¹³You have heard about the things I did in the past when I was devoted to the Jewish religion. I persecuted the church of God terribly. In fact, it was my goal to destroy it. ¹⁴That's because I was more serious about our Jewish way of life than most other Jews my age. I did more than any of them to make sure we all followed the traditions we received from our ancestors.

¹⁵But God had special plans for me even before I was born.‡ So he chose me through his grace. It pleased him ¹⁶to let me see and know his Son so that I could tell the Good News about him to the non-Jewish people. And that's the

***1:1 Christ Jesus** Or "King Jesus". The term "Christ" is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah", a royal title. See Mark 15:32; Luke 23:2. See also Christ and Messiah in the Word List.

†**1:2 Galatia** Perhaps the area where Paul began churches on his first mission described in Acts 13 and 14. But it also could have been the area further north.

‡**1:15** See Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5.

very next thing I did. I did not ask for advice or help from anyone.¹⁷ I did not go to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was. Instead, I went away to Arabia. Later, I went back to the city of Damascus.

¹⁸Three years later I went to Jerusalem to meet Peter.⁴ I stayed with him for 15 days. ¹⁹I met no other apostles—only James, the brother of the Lord. ²⁰God knows there is nothing untrue in any of this. ²¹Later, I went to the areas of Syria and Cilicia.

²²But during that time, the churches in Judea that belong to Christ had never met me. ²³They had only heard this about me: “This man was persecuting us. But now he is telling people about the same faith that he once tried to destroy.” ²⁴And they praised God for what he was doing with me.

The Other Apostles Accepted Paul

2 After 14 years I went back to Jerusalem with Barnabas and took Titus with me. ²I went there because God revealed the need for me to go. I explained to them the Good News that I tell the non-Jewish people. I also met alone with those who were considered to be the leaders. I wanted to be sure we were in agreement so that my past work and the work I do now would not be wasted.

³Titus, who was with me, is a Greek. But these leaders still did not force him to be circumcised. ⁴We needed to talk about this because some who pretended to be our brothers had come into our group secretly. They came in like spies to find out how they could take away the freedom we have as those who belong to Christ Jesus. They wanted us to obey

them like slaves. ⁵But we did not agree to anything they demanded so that the truth of the Good News would remain unchanged for you.

⁶And those men who were considered to be important leaders there did not add anything to the message I tell people. (It doesn't matter to me if they were “important” or not. To God everyone is the same.) ⁷But these leaders saw that God had given me a special work, the same as Peter. God gave Peter the work of telling the Good News to the Jews. But God gave me the work of telling the Good News to the non-Jewish people. ⁸God gave Peter the power to work as an apostle for the Jewish people. God gave me the power to work as an apostle too, but for those who are not Jews. ⁹James, Peter and John are the ones who seemed to be the main leaders.⁸ And they saw that God had given me this special gift of ministry, so they accepted Barnabas and me as co-workers. They agreed that we should continue to work among those who are not Jews, while they continued to work among the Jews. ¹⁰They asked us to do only one thing—to remember to help those among the believers there who are poor. And this is something I have made every effort to do.

Paul Shows That Peter Was Wrong

¹¹When Peter came to Antioch, he did something that was not right. I stood against him, because he was wrong. ¹²This is what happened: When Peter first came to Antioch, he ate and associated with the non-Jewish people. But when some Jews came from James, Peter separated himself from the non-Jews. He stopped eating with them because he

¹**1:18 Peter** Literally, “Cephas”, the Aramaic name for Peter, one of Jesus’ twelve apostles. Both names mean “rock”. Also in 2:9,11,14.

⁸**2:9 main leaders** Literally, “pillars”.

was afraid of those Jews who say that even non-Jewish believers must be circumcised.¹³ So Peter pretended to agree with something he knew was wrong, and the other Jewish believers there followed him in being dishonest. And this caused even Barnabas to pretend that he agreed with them.¹⁴ They were not following the truth of the Good News. When I saw this, I spoke to Peter in front of everyone. I said, “Peter, you are a Jew, but you don’t live like one. You live like someone who is not a Jew. So why are you trying to force those who are not Jewish to live like Jews?”

¹⁵“We are Jews by birth. We are not like those non-Jews we consider to be ‘sinners’.¹⁶ But we know that following the law cannot make us right before God. It is trusting in ^{**} Jesus Christ that makes us right with God. So even we Jews have put our faith in Christ Jesus, because we wanted to be made right with God. And we are right with him because we trusted in ^{††} Christ, not because we followed the law. I can say this because no one can be made right with God by following the law.

¹⁷“So we are trusting in our relationship to Christ, not the law, to make us right with God. If that makes us look like non-Jewish ‘sinners’, does it mean Christ is causing an increase of sin? Of course not!¹⁸ The law put up a wall between us Jews and everyone else—a wall that I have worked to tear down. I would really be wrong to put that wall up again.¹⁹ It was the law itself that caused me to end my life under the law. I died to the

law so that I could live for God. I have been nailed to the cross with Christ.²⁰ So I am not the one living now—it is Christ living in me. I still live in the same body, but I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God. He is the one who loved me and gave himself to save me.²¹ I will not reject as meaningless God’s free gift of grace. I mean, if following the law is how people are made right with God, then Christ died for nothing!”

God’s Blessing Comes Through Faith

3 You people in Galatia, have you lost your minds? I thought you understood why Jesus Christ was hung on a cross! I made it so clear, like a picture painted right before your eyes. Has someone used a magic spell to make you forget?² Tell me this one thing: did you receive the Spirit because of something you did—obeying the law’s commands? No, you received the Spirit because of something God did—sending the message about Jesus for you to believe.³ You began your new life with the Spirit. How can you possibly think you can be made complete with something so weak as circumcision^{‡‡}?⁴ Were those powerful experiences you had all for nothing? I hope not!⁵ Does God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you because you do those things the law commands? No, God gives you these blessings because you heard the message about Jesus and believed it.

⁶The Scriptures say the same thing about Abraham. “Abraham believed God, and because of this faith he was ac-

^{**}2:16 *trusting in* Or “the faithfulness of”.

^{††}2:16 *because we trusted in* Or “through the faithfulness of”.

^{‡‡}3:3 *with ... circumcision* Literally, “with the flesh”. Paul often uses this phrase to mean sinful human weakness. But in this letter, he also uses it to refer specifically to circumcision (6:12,13), a subject that was at the centre of Paul’s disagreement with those who were “confusing” the Galatian believers (see 1:7).

cepted as one who is right with God.”^{¶¶}
⁷ So you should know that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith. ⁸ The Scriptures said that in the future God would make the non-Jewish people right through faith. God told this Good News to Abraham before it happened. God said to Abraham, “By blessing you, I will bless all people on earth.”^{§§} ⁹ So this blessing is for all those who, like Abraham, put their faith in God.

¹⁰ But people whose hope is based on obeying the law’s commands are always under the threat of a curse. As the Scriptures say, “Everyone who fails to keep on doing everything written in the book of the law is under a curse.”^{*} ¹¹ So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by obeying the law’s commands. The Scriptures say, “The one who is right with God by faith will live.”[†]

¹² The law does not depend on faith. No, it says that the only way a person will find life by the law is to obey its commands.[‡] ¹³ The law says we are under a curse for not always obeying it. But Christ took away that curse. He changed places with us and put himself under that curse. The Scriptures say, “Anyone who is hung on a tree[¶] is under a curse.”[§] ¹⁴ Because of what Christ Jesus did, the blessing God promised to Abraham was also given to the non-Jews. Christ died

so that by believing in him we could receive the Spirit that God promised.

The Law and the Promise

¹⁵ Brothers and sisters, let me give you an example from everyday life. Think about an agreement that one person makes with another. After that agreement is made official, no one can reject it or add anything to it. ¹⁶ God made promises to Abraham and his descendant.^{**} The Scripture does not say, “and to your descendants”. That would mean many people. But it says, “and to your descendant”. That means only one, and that one is Christ. ¹⁷ This is what I mean: The agreement that God gave to Abraham was made official long before the law came. The law came 430 years later. It cannot cancel the agreement and change God’s promise.

¹⁸ The blessing God has for his people does not come through the law. If that were true, then it would not be God’s promise that brings it to us. But God freely gave his blessing to Abraham as a promise.

¹⁹ So what was the law for? The law was given to show the wrong things people do. The law would continue until the Descendant of Abraham came. This is the Descendant mentioned in the promise, which came directly from God. But the law was given through angels, and the angels used Moses as a media-

^{¶¶}3:6 Quote from Gen. 15:6.

^{§§}3:8 Quote from Gen. 12:3.

^{*}3:10 Quote from Deut. 27:26.

[†]3:11 Quote from Hab. 2:4.

[‡]3:12 *the only way ... commands* See Lev. 18:5.

[¶]3:13 *hung on a tree* Deut. 21:22-23 says that when a person was killed for doing wrong, his body was hung on a tree to show shame. Paul means that the cross of Jesus was like that.

[§]3:13 Quote from Deut. 21:23.

^{**}3:16 *descendant* Literally, “seed”, which could also mean “family”. In that case, it would refer to the one family of God in Christ.

tor to give the law to the people. ²⁰ But when God gave the promise, there was no mediator, because a mediator is not needed when there is only one side, and God is one.††

The Purpose of the Law of Moses

²¹ Does this mean that the law works against God's promises? Of course not. The law was never God's way of giving new life to people. If it were, then we could be made right with God by following the law. ²² But that was not the law's purpose. The Scriptures put the whole world in prison under the control of sin. As a result, the only way for people to get what God promised would be through faith in‡‡ Jesus Christ. It is given to those who believe in him.

²³ Before this faith came, the law held us as prisoners. We had no freedom until God showed us the way of faith that was coming. ²⁴ I mean the law was the guardian in charge of us until Christ came. After he came, we could be made right with God through faith. ²⁵ Now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law to be our guardian.

²⁶ That's because you all belong to Christ Jesus and are God's children through faith. ²⁷ Yes, you were all baptized to be united with Christ. So now Christ covers you completely like a new change of clothes. ²⁸ Now, in Christ, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or free, male or female. You are all the same in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ You belong to Christ, so you are Abraham's descendants. This means that all

the blessings God promised to Abraham belong to you.

4 This is what I am saying: When young children inherit all that their father owned, they are still no different from his slaves. It doesn't matter that they own everything. ² While they are children, they must obey those who are chosen to care for them. But when they reach the age the father set, they are free. ³ It is the same for us. We were once like children, slaves to the evil forces that rule people's lives. ⁴ But when the right time came, God sent his Son, who was born from a woman and lived under the law. ⁵ God did this so that he could buy the freedom of those who were under the law. God's purpose was to make us his children.

⁶ You are now God's children. And that is why he has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. It is the Spirit inside us that cries out, "Abba,¶¶ Father." ⁷ Now you are no longer slaves. You are God's children, and you will receive everything he promised his children.

Paul's Love for the Galatian Believers

⁸ In the past you did not know God. You were slaves to gods that were not real. ⁹ But now you know the true God. Really, though, it is God who knows you. So why do you turn back to the same kind of weak and useless forces you followed before? Do you want to be slaves to those things again? ¹⁰⁻¹¹ It worries me that you follow teachings about special days, months, seasons and years. §§ I wonder if all my work for you has been wasted.

††3:20 Literally, "But the mediator is not of one, but God is one."

‡‡3:22 *faith in* Or "the faithfulness of".

¶¶4:6 *Abba* An Aramaic word that was used by Jewish children as a name for their father.

§§4:10-11 *special days ... years* This probably refers to Jewish holy days that the Galatian believers were being told they must honour.

¹²Brothers and sisters, I beg you to be like me, just as I became like you. You did not do anything wrong to me. ¹³Surely you remember when I told you the Good News the first time. I was travelling through Galatia and stopped there because I was sick. ¹⁴And my sickness made it difficult for you. But you did not avoid me out of disgust or fear.* Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel from God. You accepted me as if I were Christ Jesus himself! ¹⁵You were very happy then. Where is that joy now? I can say without a doubt that you would have done anything to help me. If it had been possible, you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶Am I now your enemy because I tell you the truth?

¹⁷Those people[†] are eagerly showing interest in you, but they are not seeking what is best for you. They want to keep you away from us so that you will show more interest in them. ¹⁸It is always good to have someone show interest in you for the right purpose. That's what I did when I was with you, and it should happen whether I am there or not. ¹⁹My little children, I am in pain again over you, like a mother giving birth. I will feel this pain until people can look at you and see Christ. ²⁰I wish I could be with you now. Then maybe I could change the way I am talking to you. Now I don't know what to do about you.

The Example of Hagar and Sarah

²¹Some of you people want to be under the law. Tell me, do you know what

the law says? ²²The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons. The mother of one son was a slave woman, and the mother of the other son was a free woman. ²³Abraham's son from the slave woman was born in the normal human way. But the son from the free woman was born because of the promise God made to Abraham.

²⁴This story can have another meaning for us. The two women are like the two agreements between God and his people. The woman named Hagar represents the agreement that was made at Mount Sinai. Hagar's children were born to be slaves. ²⁵So Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia. And she is like today's Jerusalem, because she and her children are slaves. ²⁶But the heavenly Jerusalem that is above is like the free woman, who is our mother. ²⁷The Scriptures say,

“Be happy, woman—you who cannot have children.

Be glad you never gave birth.

Shout and cry with joy!

You never felt those labour pains.

The woman who is alone[‡] will have more children

than the woman who has a husband.”[¶]

²⁸My brothers and sisters, you are children who were born because of God's promise, just as Isaac was. ²⁹But the other son of Abraham, who was born in the normal way, caused trouble for the one who was born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same today. ³⁰But what do the Scriptures say? “Throw out the slave woman and her son! The son of

***4:14 avoid ... fear** Literally, “despise or spit”. This describes a common reaction in that time to misfortune or disease. People spit into the air to keep away any evil they felt was threatening them.

†**4:17 Those people** The false teachers who were bothering the believers in Galatia. See Gal. 1:7.

‡**4:27 woman ... alone** This means her husband has left her.

¶**4:27** Quote from Isa. 54:1.

the free woman will receive everything his father has, but the son of the slave woman will receive nothing.”[§] ³¹ So, my brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman. We are children of the free woman.

Keep Your Freedom

5 We have freedom now, because Christ made us free. So stand strong in that freedom. Don't let anyone force you into slavery again. ² Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you start following the law by being circumcised, then Christ cannot help you. ³ Again, I warn every man who agrees to be circumcised that he must then obey all the other rules in the law. ⁴ If you try to be made right with God by following the law, your life with Christ is finished—you have left God's grace behind. ⁵ I say this because our hope of being right with God comes through faith. And the Spirit helps us feel sure as we wait for that hope. ⁶ When someone belongs to Christ Jesus, it doesn't make any difference if they are circumcised or not. The important thing is faith—the kind of faith that works through love.

⁷ You were doing so well. Who caused you to stop following the truth? ⁸ It certainly wasn't the one who chose you. ⁹ Be careful! “Just a little yeast makes the whole batch of dough rise.”^{**} ¹⁰ I trust in the Lord that you will not believe those different ideas. Someone is trying

to cause trouble among you. Whoever it is will be punished.

¹¹ My brothers and sisters, I don't teach that a man must be circumcised. If I do teach circumcision, then why am I still being persecuted? If I still taught circumcision, then my message about the cross would not be a problem. ¹² I wish those people who are causing you trouble would add castration^{††} to their circumcision.

¹³ My brothers and sisters, God chose you to be free. But don't use your freedom as an excuse to do what pleases your sinful selves. Instead, serve each other out of love. ¹⁴ The whole law is made complete in this one command: “Love your neighbour^{‡‡} the same as you love yourself.”^{¶¶} ¹⁵ If you continue hurting each other and tearing each other apart, be careful, or you will completely destroy each other.

The Spirit and Human Nature

¹⁶ So I tell you, live the way the Spirit leads you. Then you will not do the evil things your sinful self wants. ¹⁷ The sinful self wants what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is against the sinful self. They are at war with each other. This means that you are not free to do whatever you may want to do. ¹⁸ But if you let the Spirit lead you, you are not under the control of the law.

¹⁹ The wrong things the sinful self does are clear: committing sexual sin, being

§4:30 Quote from Gen. 21:10.

**5:9 *Just ... rise* A proverb meaning that a small thing (like a little wrong teaching) can make a big problem or that just one person can have a bad influence on the whole group.

††5:12 *castration* Paul uses a word that means “to cut off” in place of “circumcision”, which means “to cut around”, to show how angry he is at the false teachers for forcing non-Jewish men to be circumcised.

‡‡5:14 *your neighbour* Or “others”. Jesus' teaching in Luke 10:25-37 makes clear that this includes anyone in need.

¶¶5:14 Quote from Lev. 19:18.

morally bad, doing all kinds of shameful things,²⁰ worshipping false gods, taking part in witchcraft, hating people, starting arguments, being jealous, angry or selfish, causing people to disagree and divide into separate groups,²¹ being filled with envy, getting drunk, having wild parties, and doing other things like this. I warn you now as I warned you before: the people who do these things will not have a part in God's kingdom.²² But the fruit that the Spirit produces is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. There is no law against these kinds of things.²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their sinful self. They have given up their old selfish feelings and the evil things they wanted to do.²⁵ We get our new life from the Spirit, so we should follow the Spirit.²⁶ We must not feel proud and boast about ourselves. We must not start arguments with each other or be jealous of each other.

Help Each Other

6 Brothers and sisters, if one of you does something wrong, you who are following the Spirit should go to the one who is sinning. Help make that person right again. Do this in a gentle way, and be careful, because you might be tempted to sin too.² Help each other with your troubles. When you do this, you are following the law of Christ.³ If you think you are too important to do this, you are wrong. You are only fooling yourself.⁴ Look only at what you have done to see if you have anything to be proud of. Don't compare what you have

done to the failure of others.⁵ You are each responsible only for what you do.

Never Stop Doing Good

⁶ Whoever is being taught God's word should share the good things they have with the one who is teaching them.

⁷ If you think you can fool God, you are only fooling yourselves. You will harvest what you plant.⁸ If you live to satisfy your sinful self, the harvest you will get from that will be eternal death. But if you live to please the Spirit, your harvest from the Spirit will be eternal life.⁹ We must not get tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of eternal life at the right time. We must not give up.¹⁰ When we have the opportunity to do good to anyone, we should do it. But we should give special attention to those who are in the family of believers.

Paul Ends His Letter

¹¹ This is my own handwriting. You can see how big the letters are.¹² Those men who are trying to force you to be circumcised are only doing it so that their people will accept them. They are afraid they will be persecuted if they follow only the cross^{§§} of Christ.¹³ They are circumcised, but they don't obey the law themselves. They want you to be circumcised so that they can boast about what they did to you.

¹⁴ May I never boast about things like that. My only reason for boasting is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' death on the cross the world is dead* to me, and I am dead to the world.¹⁵ It doesn't matter if anyone is circumcised or not. The only thing that matters is being the new people God has created

§§**6:12 cross** Paul uses the cross as a picture of the Good News, the story of Christ's death to free people from sin. The cross (Christ's death) was God's way to save people. Also in verse 14.

***6:14 is dead** Literally, "has been crucified".

in Christ.[†] ¹⁶Peace to all who follow this new way. And may God have mercy on his people Israel.[‡]

¹⁷So don't let anyone give me any more trouble. I have scars on my body that show[¶] I belong to Jesus.

¹⁸My brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with each one of you. Amen.

[†]**6:15 being ... Christ** Literally, “a new creation”. See 2 Cor. 5:17.

[‡]**6:16** Or “Peace and mercy to all who follow this new way—to all God's true people.”

[¶]**6:17 scars ... show** Many times Paul was beaten by people who tried to stop him from teaching about Christ. The scars were from these beatings.