

LESSON ON GALATIANS

May 1, 2019

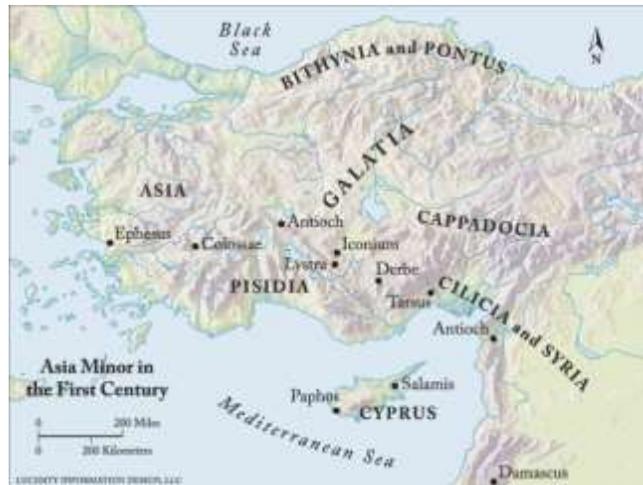
Background (40-50 AD)

Galatia was a region in central Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

Province was named after the Galatian people.

Galatian people were a tribe of Celtic origin that had migrated from Europe in 3rd Century BC.

In 25 BC Augustus created the province which included the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.



Paul established the churches in Galatia which were composed primarily of Gentiles.

While he was there the people received the Gospel eagerly.

Once he left, Paul learned that Judaizers persuaded the Gentiles to adopt Jewish practices.

Judaizers did not try to persuade Gentiles to abandon the Christian faith in favor of Judaism.

They were trying to blend Christian and Jewish practices (an important issue).

Paul states the gospel message is that we are saved by grace bestowed on us by Jesus Christ.

We are free from the constraints of the Jewish law.

Point is that we are saved either by adherence to the Law or by the grace of God.

New Testament makes it clear that the grace of God is what addresses the problem of sin.

Adopting Jewish practices takes the focus off grace and confuses the faith of the people.

Galatians 1:1-5

As in our other studies, it was customary for people to begin letters with an introduction.

Paul made a bold claim that he was an *apostle* (God has authorized his mission and message).

In other letters Paul also described himself as an apostle.

Unlike other letters Paul defended his apostleship in response to questions and/or accusations.

His apostleship was not an office conferred by humans but it was a divine commission.

In other letters Paul named the co-senders but in Galatians he mentioned unnamed associates.

In Greek the word *brothers* included both male and female members of the community.

Mention of a group of co-senders told the Galatians that Paul was not working in isolation.

Other letters are addressed to a church in a specific city.
Galatians is distinctive in being directed to the *churches* of a wider geographical area.
It was written as a circular letter to be read in several churches.

Standard Hellenistic greeting used in letters is replaced (by Paul) with *grace and peace*.
Only in Galatians is it expanded to include a compact narrative summary of the gospel.
The Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.
From the start Paul wants to underscore that the gospel is about Jesus' self-giving sacrifice.
For Paul, God made a gracious invasion into the world through Jesus Christ.

Paul will argue that in Christ the Galatians are already children of God.
For that reason they do not need to undergo circumcision.
Paul uses the word *sin* in the singular form and defines it as an oppressing power.
Therefore the death of Jesus marks the end of the power of the old age.
Jesus' death does not simply procure the forgiveness of sins.
It transposes us into an entirely new reality by liberating us.

Unlike his other letters Paul concludes his salutation with a doxology.
He has laid the theological groundwork for his response to the Galatians.

Galatians 1:6-10

Immediately following the salutation we expect to find a thanksgiving section.
In this letter Paul is too upset with the Galatians to give thanks.
He confronts them abruptly with a strong rebuke (charging them with abandoning God).
Paul is rebuking them for defection from his mission and from the grace of God.
In essence Paul believes they have turned themselves against God.

We assume the rival missionaries are Jewish Christians.
They were not urging the converts to renounce their newly found Christian faith.
Instead they were preaching a version of the gospel that invited them to be circumcised.
It would be a sign of their membership in the family of God.
The missionaries saw this as a completion of the gospel that Paul preached.

At the time of this writing the *gospel* was defined as the message that God was in control.
Message of the missionaries extended the gospel to include strict obedience to the Law.
In Acts 15 some came to Antioch from Jerusalem talking about this need to be circumcised.
Response of the leaders in Jerusalem church was very similar to that of Paul.
There was to be no compromise or dialogue with those distorting the gospel.
They were to be excluded and cursed.
Curse was to be applied to anyone who might proclaim a false gospel.

Paul was not asking for personal allegiance to him but to the gospel message.
In verse 10 Paul paused to reflect on a charge that was leveled against him.
Missionaries accused him of being a sophist (teacher who offers clever arguments).
In their view Paul told people what they wanted to hear.
It is why Paul did not tell the Galatians about the requirement of circumcision.

In their view, Paul offered the new converts a cheap, watered-down truth. He did not explain the full discipline offered in the Law of Moses. In other words, they accused Paul of being a *people pleaser*. In this verse he is asking them if he is a waffler seeking human approval. Paul chides the missionaries for questioning his motives.

Against these charges Paul has a rebuttal.

If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Word *still* – Paul admitted he was once a people pleaser (when a zealous Torah-observer).

He turned the accusation around to say that these missionaries were the ones seeking approval.

Galatians 1:11-12

In these verses we read the thesis that he will defend.

His gospel is of divine origin and his apostleship is not dependent on human authority.

Paul himself is an instrument of the power of the gospel.

Paul did not receive the gospel message secondhand but through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Revelation is an activity that belongs to God.

It is an eschatological event connected with the final judgment.

In his claim Paul affirms he has been given a privileged preview of the glory of Christ.

It was that revelation that determined the shape and content of the gospel he preached.



Galatians 1:13-24

The word *Judaism* appears in the New Testament only in these verses.

It refers not so much to a set of beliefs or doctrines as to a culture.

It designates a network of observances that characterize the Jewish people (set apart by God).

In his past Judaism was a moral culture in which he sought to excel.

One way in which he *excelled* was by violently persecuting the church of God.

In his zeal he attempted to preserve religious and ethnic purity by whatever means necessary.

He used force against those whom he considered enemies of the Law.

Paul relates his history of persecution in order to emphasize that God brought it to an end.

God had other plans for Paul.

In retelling the story he does not go into any details except to describe what God did.

Paul describes his calling by using language and imagery taken from Jeremiah and Isaiah.

It was for Paul a summons by the God of Israel to undertake a special prophetic mission. Paul knew that only by grace could he be called and embraced by God. It was God's purpose to make Christ manifest in him so he might proclaim Christ to Gentiles. It was a decisive moment in the unfolding of God's cosmic plan for spreading the gospel.

In vs. 18-24 Paul does some damage control.

He cannot deny he spent time in Jerusalem but it was a brief stay.

He spent two weeks with Cephas and saw none of the other apostles except James.

Paul shared nothing about the content of his conversations with Peter.

Rival missionaries must have claimed that Paul had been taught and commissioned in Jerusalem.

Paul denied the report.

After the two-week visit Paul traveled to the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

He mentioned this to stress how he kept his distance from Jerusalem.

It established (once more) the independence of his apostolic mission from their authority.

He did report that the Judean churches enthusiastically approved of his preaching.

It was important because it proved that all the recent trouble was not caused by Paul.

It was caused by the pressure put upon the Galatians to be circumcised.

Faith was the substantive content of Christian preaching.

Galatians 2:1-10

Paul described a trip he made to Jerusalem three years after Jesus met him in Damascus.

Here he describes a second trip to Jerusalem (fourteen years later).

His mission work caused controversy among Jewish Christians so he went to the Holy City.

Story is crafted to create the impression that Paul was a freelance apostle.

According to Acts, Barnabas was sent as an emissary to Antioch.

He was a Jew of impeccable credentials with strong personal ties to the Jerusalem church.

Titus (on the other hand) was an uncircumcised Greek and a convert of Paul.

Presence of an uncircumcised person would give the Jerusalem leaders a test case.

Paul made this trip in response to a revelation.

Upon his arrival in Jerusalem Paul proclaimed the gospel he set forth before the Gentiles.

He did not submit this gospel message to seek their approval.

Paul had no doubts about the truth and origin of his message.

Paul presented his case only to the eminent leaders in the Jerusalem church.

In the end the church leaders accepted his Gentile mission in receiving uncircumcised converts.

Decision was reached in spite of heavy pressure from the *false brothers*.

Paul portrays them as spies who have infiltrated their ranks to enslave them.

For the first time Paul introduces the paired themes of *freedom* and *slavery*.

They will become major topics in the rest of the letter.

Freedom refers to the unqualified relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Enslavement refers to the attempted imposition of circumcision on Gentile believers.

At the time he was not thinking specifically about the Galatians.

Galatian churches were not even founded at the time of the meeting in Jerusalem.

His stand was necessary to preserve the gospel for the Gentiles as a whole.

Paul then focuses on the responses of James, Cephas, and John.
He was not awed by these reputed pillars of the church.
He wanted the Galatians to know that they added nothing to his articulation of the gospel.
In Acts 15 the conference reached a formal decision.
Gentile converts were not required to be circumcised but they were to abstain from idols.
Peter and Paul were called to work in different cultural worlds.
Each recognized the grace of God at work in the ministry of the other.
Peter and Paul were complementary instruments of the one gospel.
Both missions were the work of the Holy Spirit.
It reflected their common recognition of a power bigger than any of the humans involved.
At the time of the meeting the only stipulation added was that they remember the poor.

When Paul wrote to the Galatians he was confident that he had kept his end of the bargain.
He was already collecting money for the poor in Jerusalem.

*I have been crucified with
Christ
It is no longer I who live, but
Christ who lives in me
I live by faith in the Son of God
who loved me and gave Himself for me
Galatians 2:20*

Galatians 2:11-14

Arrival of Cephas to Antioch marked a major complication in the story.
Antioch became a major base of operations for the mission to the Gentiles.
Jerusalem agreement acknowledged a separate-but-equal Gentile mission.
It did not address the problem of social relations and table fellowship.
Christians at Antioch made a practice of eating together.
Some Jewish Christians from Jerusalem found this practice objectionable.
Law of Moses contained no prohibitions from eating with Gentiles.

When confronted by the messengers from Jerusalem Peter retreated from his actions.
He accommodated to the well-established Jewish belief that they should keep themselves apart.
Paul charged Peter with separating himself because he feared the circumcision faction.
For Paul the verdict of God already condemned Peter.
Actions of Peter were a betrayal of the gospel and it turned into a disaster.
Before the church in Antioch was unified but now it was split into two ethnic communities.
For Paul they caved in to external pressure and carried out someone else's agenda.
Fact that Barnabas joined in this hypocrisy must have galled Paul.
Paul was left to stand alone as an advocate for God's new creation of a community.
Paul did not hesitate to take an uncompromising stand because truth of the gospel was at stake.

Neither circumcision nor observance of dietary laws should divide the church.
Paul opens fire with an argument charging Peter with bad faith and gross inconsistency.
Peter was in effect requiring the converts to adopt a higher standard of Torah observance.

Galatians 2:15-21

Still addressing Peter, Paul affirmed his own participation in Jewish tradition.
He pointed to a shared confessional tradition as a foundation to defend the freedom of converts.
Torah observance was not necessary for Gentiles in the new state that God brought them into.
Vs. 16 becomes the heart of the message of Galatians.
To be justified is to be declared in a right relationship with God.
In many Old Testament contexts it means *to vindicate*.
It points to God's ultimate action of powerfully setting right all that has gone wrong.
It is God alone who has the power to set things right.

Justification is the eschatological act of God.
Luther interpreted *works of the law* as a metaphor for all human striving for God's approval.
Judaism never taught that individuals must earn God's favor by performing good works.
Obedience to the Law was not a condition for getting into the kingdom of God.
It was a means of staying in the covenant community.
Paul's critique was targeted against ethnic exclusivity.
In his view Peter was not seeking to earn salvation through good deeds.
He was seeking to maintain a boundary between the Jewish Christians and the Gentiles.

When he alludes to Psalm 143 Paul underscores his claim that the gospel is consistent.
We are set in a right relationship with God only through God's own act of grace.
Ground of our hope is the righteousness of God.

Paul goes on to explain why it is a mistake for Jewish Christians to separate themselves.
Torah should not be used as a wall that separates Israel from the Gentiles.
Jesus Christ tore down that wall.
Old frame of reference no longer applies.
It was abolished by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.
Paul has passed through this death leaving the Law behind so that he might live to God.
Paul lives in the mysterious power of the risen Christ.
Hallmarks of this new identity are love and self-giving (not circumcision and the Law).
Those who insist on Law observance as a necessary condition declare the death of Christ null.
Foundational truth is that Jesus Christ died to set us free from the present evil age.
Law was powerless to achieve that end.

Paul began with the confession that Christ died for us.
He then worked out the implications of that confession to diagnose the human plight.
He also determined the role of the Law.
God has chosen to set things right in the world through the cross.
God brings into being a new people in which old barriers are broken down.