

Lesson 18 – Galatians – Back from COVID

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Author and Recipients

The authorship of the apostle Paul is undisputed (Galatians 1:1-2; 5:2). Galatians derives its title from the region in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) where the recipient churches were located (Galatians 1:2; 3:1). Southern Galatia, where Paul ministered during his first missionary journey is most likely this region.

Date of Writing

Acts 13-14 records Paul’s ministry in Galatia during his first missionary journey (AD 48-49) where he ministered in Cyprus, Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe.

In Galatians 2, Paul described his visit to the Jerusalem Council, so Galatians was most likely written shortly after the Council in AD 49-50. Here is an estimated timeline.

Date	Event
33/34	Saul encounters Jesus on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-21)
33/34	Saul spent “several days” in Damascus “confounding the Jews” (Acts 9:19-22)
33/34	Saul went away to Arabia to be with the Lord (Gal 1:17)
36/37	Back in Damascus preaching Jesus (Acts 9:22-35; Gal 1:17))
36/37	Escape from Damascus (Acts 9:23-25; 2 Cor 11:32-33)
36/37	Saul to Jerusalem to become acquainted with the Apostles (Acts 9:26-29; Gal 1:18)
37	Saul Goes to Caesarea, then Tarsus ministering in the “regions of Syria and Cilicia” (Acts 9:30; Gal 1:21)
~41-43	Barnabas and Saul minister in Antioch for one year (Acts 11:19-26)
47	Barnabas and Saul take the contribution for the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:30)
47	Barnabas and Saul return to Antioch with John Mark (Acts 12:24-25)
48-49	First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-14:28)
48	Barnabas and Saul set apart by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3)
48	Ministry in Cyprus; Saul referred to as Paul (Acts 13:4-12)
49	Paul’s ministry in Galatia: Perga (John Mark leaves), Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lycaonia, Lystra (perhaps Timothy converted), and Derbe (perhaps Titus converted) (Acts 13:13-14:20)
49	Paul returns to Antioch (Acts 14:21-28)
49/50	Paul took Titus to Jerusalem (Gal 2:3)
49-50	Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29)
49/50	Paul returns to Antioch (Acts 15:30-34)
49/50	<i>Galatians written from Antioch</i>
50-52	Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)
50	⁴ Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. ⁵ So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily. (Acts 16:4-5)



Paul's First Missionary Journey (from classic.net.bible.org)

Context

The church was born in Jerusalem and spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the known world. The first converts and most of the early leaders were Jews who accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah. Traditional Jews taught a lifestyle of obligatory works which they equated with being a follower of the one true God. This thinking moved into the early church when some Jews who had believed were teaching a gospel of Christ plus works.

They obviously struggled with their dual identity: traditional Jewish teaching driving them to strictly obey the law versus newfound Christian faith inviting them to celebrate freedom from the law. Also, what about the Gentiles? How could they possibly become a part of the kingdom when they did not know God's Messiah in a Jewish way?

Keeping this controversy alive were the Judaizers, a group of Jewish false teachers in the church who were determined to undermine the doctrine of justification by faith. They taught that Gentiles had to submit to Jewish laws and traditions in addition to believing in Jesus to be true Christians. To the Judaizers, it was Christ plus something else.

This controversy was addressed in Judea and Syria with the First Jerusalem Council. But north of Syria around the Mediterranean in Galatia, the controversy lived on. So, Paul wrote a letter to address the issue following the Jerusalem Council. Shortly after writing the letter, Paul will set out on the second missionary journey. Part of that effort was to follow-up his letter with a personal visit. Thankfully, Paul's efforts resulted in strengthened churches.

What shocked Paul most was that the Galatians bought into this heresy. Many of them left sound doctrine to follow these teachings. Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians to refute this teaching and call believers, both Jew and Gentile, back to the pure gospel – justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)
- II. Paul's Defense of His Slavery to Christ (1:10-2:21)
- III. Paul's Defense of Justification by Faith (3:1-4:31)
- IV. Practical Application of Justification (5:1-6:10)
- V. Conclusion (6:11-18)

I. Introduction (1:1-9)

Greeting (1:1-5)

¹Paul, an apostle (not *sent* from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), ²and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom *be* the glory forevermore. Amen.

Paul is writing to the Galatian churches who are in danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Like most of Paul's letters, he begins with a greeting.

Paul had ministered in Galatia for a year. On the way home he revisited the churches and appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:21-23). The point is that many of the Galatians (at least the church leaders) know Paul. He does not need to provide an introduction more than his name, but he does. This is a reminder for those that know him and a rebuke for those that oppose the true gospel.

His apostleship has nothing to do with man (either in sending or authority); it is all about God. His apostolic authority is being questioned in Galatia, so he wants to make it clear to the recipients of the letter that he is an apostle by the will of God.

Paul goes on to give a summary of the gospel: from eternity past God the Father chose those whom He would save from sin. At His perfect time, He sent Jesus into the world who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from the penalty, power, and one day the very presence of sin. This is all to the Triune God's glory!

❖ Am I continually reminding myself of all that God has done for me through Christ?

Reason for writing (1:6-9)

⁶I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Paul normally commends his readers before launching into the main subject of his letter, but the letter to the churches of Galatia has no commendation. That obvious omission stressed the seriousness of his readers' error and reflects how urgently Paul felt about confronting their defection and defending the essential doctrine of justification.

All Scripture are from the NASB '95 Update unless noted.

Most word studies are from preceptaustin.org, blueletterbible.org, and biblehub.com

False “gospels” are those messages that corrupt/distort any part of salvation from sin by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Unfortunately, in our culture, the gospel has become muddled and confused among and by heretics and many professing Christians alike. The message has been softened to make it palatable to not offend.

Paul was “amazed” that they had defected from the gospel of grace and were accepting the false teaching of the Judaizers. This different gospel was a distorted gospel of Christ; a radical departure from the “grace of Christ”. It was a non-gospel of works in which there is no “good news”. If anyone perverts the gospel of the grace of Christ, they are to be accursed: “anathema” meaning “devoted to destruction”. Paul is speaking in strong terms to show the Galatians the folly of their actions.

❖ **Do you view the gospel as precious and protect it?**

II. Paul’s Defense of His Slavery to Christ (1:10-2:21)

Source of Paul’s message (1:10-12)

¹⁰For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. ¹¹For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.

¹²For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul presents the authentication of the Gospel through the source (God). Paul did not learn the gospel from other people nor Scripture-invalidating tradition nor did he invent it. He received it directly from the Lord Jesus. Because he is a slave of Christ, when the gospel is threatened, he must speak. We must speak too!

❖ **Are you careful to not speak a distorted “gospel”?**

Paul’s encounter with the living Christ (1:13-17)

¹³For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. ¹⁵But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

Paul presents his testimony to show that only the gospel has the power to change lives. Only God could change a persecutor and murderer into a preacher and a slave to sin to slave of Christ thus demonstrating that the gospel that Paul preached is the true gospel. That change is true for the follower of Christ today. Paul also shows that he was taught directly from the Lord in Arabia, the same as the other apostles.

❖ **How has God through the gospel changed your life?**

Paul's connection to the other apostles (1:18-24)

¹⁸Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; ²³but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they were glorifying God because of me.

Paul demonstrated his connection to the other apostles showing they all preach the same gospel. The saving and sanctifying work of God is ultimately for the purpose of glorifying God.

❖ Is the gospel you speak the same as the apostles?

Paul's authority approved (2:1-10)

¹Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. ²It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *I did so* in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. ³But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. ⁴But *it was* because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. ⁵But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you. ⁶But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. ⁷But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter *had been* to the circumcised ⁸(for He who effectually worked for Peter in *his* apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), ⁹and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰*They only asked* us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.

Paul was welcomed by the other apostles as an apostle. Paul did not get the gospel from them, but since they both got the gospel from God, it was the same gospel.

❖ Do you extend the right hand of fellowship to the brethren?

Paul's authority demonstrated (2:11-14)

¹¹But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹²For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. ¹³The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Peter's hypocrisy demonstrates a powerless non-gospel instead of the powerful gospel of grace. Paul's confrontation of Peter demonstrated his equality with the other apostles. It also demonstrated that the Judaizers were enemies of the gospel.

❖ **Do you confront heresy, or do you confront opinion?**

Paul's authoritative message – justification by faith (2:15-21)

¹⁵“We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; ¹⁶nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. ¹⁷But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! ¹⁸For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. ²¹I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

Paul now lays out the means of justification – NOT by works but by **grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!!!** The great doctrinal truth of justification leaves no room or law/works because works treats grace disdainfully; works views Christ sacrifice as needless.

❖ **Is Christ consistently living through you (2:20)?**

III. Paul's Defense of Justification by Faith (3:1-4:31)

Chapter three begins the main doctrinal section of the letter, looking at the defense of justification by faith.

The regeneration argument (3:1-5)

¹You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed *as* crucified? ²This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Paul began by asking five questions of the Galatians which drove home the point that they did not receive spiritual baptism through works of the law, but by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. These questions were meant to stir the thoughtless Galatians (and us) to think seriously about the gospel. True salvation only occurs through the Spirit and true salvation results in Spirit indwelling. The Galatians' experience demonstrated justification by grace through faith alone in Christ alone and not law.

❖ **Do you see the Spirit's work of sanctification in your life?**

The example of Abraham's salvation (3:6-9)

⁶Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. ⁷Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "All the nations will be blessed in you." ⁹So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Paul demonstrates biblically that salvation in the OT was the same as salvation in the NT – through faith. The OT clearly teaches that justification is by faith alone. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness prior to receiving circumcision and before the law existed. Those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

❖ In what specific ways are you blessed with Abraham the believer?

The curse of the law (3:10-14)

¹⁰For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." ¹¹Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith." ¹²However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them." ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"— ¹⁴in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Paul continued his biblical argument showing from the OT that those who rely on the law for justification are under a curse. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

❖ How does Christ becoming a curse for you move you to gratitude?

The priority of promise over law (3:15-18)

¹⁵Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is *only* a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. ¹⁶Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. ¹⁷What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. ¹⁸For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Paul's arguments have been ironclad; irrefutable because they are clear scriptural teaching. So, here he anticipates the Judaizer's response. Abraham was saved by faith they will agree (since the Torah says so), but when the law was given to Moses, the means of salvation changed from faith to law (or faith plus law). Abraham was saved from his sin through faith prior to the coming of the law. The means of salvation did not change from faith to law (or faith plus law). The superiority of promise over works of the law did not change. Promise has priority over law; promise is superior to law; law did not invalidate promise.

❖ In ways are you tempted to elevate law (in salvation or sanctification) over promise?

The purpose of the law (3:19-25)

¹⁹Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. ²⁰Now a mediator is not for one *party only*; whereas God is *only* one. ²¹Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. ²²But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. ²⁴Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

If promise is superior to law, then what is the purpose of the law? Law cannot save but was given to take us by the hand and lead us to Christ. The law shows us our need for a savior.

❖ When you take in the Bible, are you desiring to be shown your sin?

The power of justification to make family (3:26-4:7)

²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

¹Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, ²but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. ³So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. ⁴But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Paul has explored the things that the law cannot do: give the Holy Spirit (3:1-5), give righteousness (3:6-9), justify (3:10-12), and change grace through faith (3:15-18). And he has shown why the law was given, to lead us to Christ. These are authenticating evidence of the superiority of the gospel of grace over law. Here he shows the power of justification by faith to eliminate distinctions, to unify people who are different in the body of Christ. There are no real cultural, ethnic, racial, past religious, financial, or social distinctions within the body of Christ. Neither should there be in practice.

Paul also shows that justification by faith makes the elect Abraham's spiritual descendants, heirs of every spiritual blessings according to promise.

❖ How do you actively practice your oneness in Christ within the local body?

Fear of reverting to enslavement (4:8-11)

⁸However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. ⁹But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? ¹⁰You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

Paul is concerned that the Galatians will revert to law or grace plus law; reverting to slavery, to a mindset and practice of working their way to heaven by keeping man-made rules and ideas even if they are derived from Scripture. Remembering our pre-saved condition is powerful in keeping us from deserting the true gospel.

❖ **Are you still living as if enslaved? Do you live a perplexing life, vacillating between grace and law, freedom and slavery?**

Paul's love for the Galatians (4:12-20)

¹²I beg of you, brethren, become as I *am*, for I also *have become* as you *are*. You have done me no wrong; ¹³but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; ¹⁴and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus *Himself*. ¹⁵Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? ¹⁷They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. ¹⁸But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. ¹⁹My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— ²⁰but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Paul literally says, “continue becoming as I, for I also as you”. Paul and the Galatians have been born again, but Paul never vacillated on that. Paul appeals to them to stop vacillating. Paul appeals to the Galatians to see his point of view and remember their relationship and the difference between his real concern for the Galatians and the Judaizers not commendable concern for the Galatians. Paul is “in labor again until Christ is formed in them”. This seems best to understand “Christ formed in you” as a full-conviction-reception of the word of God and the demonstration of the subjective evidences of salvation.

❖ **How is your devotion to the brethren demonstrated? What subjective evidence of salvation do you see in your life?**

Main Point of Galatians – Salvation is NOT by Good works, moral living, religious ritual or observance, heredity, or organizational membership, but by **grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!!!** All attempts to insert works as the means of salvation or sanctification are a perversion of the true gospel.

Next week we continue by finishing Paul's defense of justification by faith by looking at the biblical allegory of slavery and freedom (4:21-31). Then we will look at the practical applications of justification.