

Freedom IN CHRIST – Galatians

Galatians has been called the:

“The Charter of Christian Liberty.”

This Letter is a powerful Christian treatise designed to declare the truth of salvation by grace alone; namely, a life of joyous freedom from sin’s tyranny, and an ever increasing enslavement to Christ on the other.

Around 15 years after Jesus’ resurrection, the gospel that Jesus is the risen Messiah and Lord had already spilled over the borders of Judea and Galilee, and into new Gentile (non-Jewish) lands.

By the time Paul became a missionary, there were as many non-Jews as there were Jewish people in the Jesus movement. A conflict of cultures sparked major debate that came to a head in the events recounted in Acts 15. There was a thriving multi-cultural church in the major city of Antioch, Syria. That church sent Paul and Barnabas out to spread the news about Jesus further to the west on what we call the first missionary journey. Their preaching found a field ripe for harvest among the Gentiles and they eventually brought the gospel into the region of Galatia. They made disciples and gathered churches in places like Antioch of Psidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13-14).

With some conflicts, Paul kept on preaching and welcoming Gentiles, because for Paul, this was a central gospel issue. If Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and the culmination of Israel’s story, that means the blessing of Abraham is now available for all nations. The Gospel means that Gentiles can join Abraham’s family, and inherit all of God’s promises as his sons and daughters.

In time, opposition grew dangerously, especially from Jews because Paul and Barnabas were preaching that Gentiles were fully welcome in the people of God in Christ without the Jewish laws. Jewish Christians piously advocated that for non-Jews to truly become a part of God’s covenant family, they needed to obey the laws as well. Some of these Jewish Christians began undermining the Gospel and the message preached by Paul, demanding the circumcision of all male Christians. Upon arriving back in Antioch from his first missionary journey after eighteen months on the road, Paul received a report that the churches he had started in Galatia had fallen into error, and were drifting.

When Paul found out, he was both heartbroken and angry. He wrote this letter in response, challenging the Galatians to Stand Firm, and gave a summary of the Gospel message about the crucified Messiah. Paul argued that this Gospel is what creates the new, multiethnic family of God, truly transforming people through the presence and power of Jesus’ Spirit. However Paul’s aggressive tone shows just how important it was to him that the people embrace unity as All One in Christ. For Paul, this was no minor issue, going as far to call the Galatians deserters of Christ,

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people turning from the truth toward a gospel contrary to the one they had received from Paul (Gal 1:6–9).

Today, we are no less susceptible to self importance, and legalism. We must walk a fine line—on one hand, we do not want to fall into the legalism that the Galatians struggled with, and we can't just live as if anything goes. The Christian's commitment to Christ is based on the free gift of grace through faith, and as Paul articulates in the Letter, results in a life of walking by the Spirit.

Too often we lose ourselves at the extremes either ending in a legalistic attempt to earn our salvation or a careless devil-may-care attitude about our sin.

A key lesson is that the false teaching that confronted the Galatians is something that sounds plausible...that to live by grace and in freedom results in a lawless and degenerate life. Paul made clear that justification—an act of grace through faith—need not result in a sinful lifestyle – rather Christians have been freed from the sinful nature, freed to walk in servant holiness.

Galatians encourages us to pursue a life of holiness, not in our own strength but in the knowledge of God's empowering grace in your life. The starting point for us is the fruit of the Spirit. We need to see that His fruit evident in our lives, or do we find ourselves living according to the flesh or “compulsions of selfishness” (Gal 5:16–26)?

WHEN WE GAZE AT JESUS, AND WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR US, IT WILL CONTINUE TO TRANSFORM US FROM HIS GLORY TO GLORY!

Galatians 1:1 clearly identifies the apostle Paul as the writer of the epistle to the Galatians. Galatians is one of the first New Testament books to be written, composed sometime soon after AD 49. Several well-known scriptures come from Galatians, these among many:

- Gal 2:16: “Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”
- Gal 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
- Gal 3:11: “Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”
- Gal 4:5-6: “to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”
- Gal 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”
- Gal 6:7: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A person reaps what they sow.”

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