

The Book of Galatians

Gospel Living

Introduction

Ancient Gaul was populated by warlike tribes which migrated across Europe into Asia Minor several centuries before the Christian era. They founded a nation called “Galatia” which means “the country of the Gauls.” About a quarter of a century before Christ was born, the Romans made Galatia a part of one of their larger provinces, and called the entire area “Galatia.” In other words, when you spoke about “Galatia” back in Paul’s day, you had to specify whether you meant the smaller nation of Galatia, or the larger Roman province.

Most Bible students today believe that Paul wrote to the churches of the province, ones he founded on his first journey. In other words, he was writing to Christians in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. If this is true, it means that Galatians was the first of Paul’s epistles, proving that the Gospel of the grace of God was just as clearly presented by Paul at the start of his ministry as at the close.

Paul was God’s apostle to the Gentiles, with a special ministry to the body, the church. However, there were Jews who would not receive the simple message of grace and who tried to mix it with the Law, blending improperly the kingdom message and the church message. We call these people “Judaizers,” since their aim was to draw Gentile believers into the Jewish system. They taught that a person was saved by faith and by keeping the Law, and that the believer was sanctified and enabled to live a holy life in the same manner. These teachers had visited the Gentile churches in Galatia and were upsetting the people. They wanted the believers to follow the Jewish laws and customs of religious holidays, circumcision, etc. This was the “other Gospel” that Paul condemned in Gal. 1:6–9. The only Gospel that God approves and blesses is the Gospel of the grace of God, justification by faith in Christ Jesus alone. We are not saved by making promises to God but by believing His promises.

Galatians is God’s strongest word against legalism. The flesh loves to do things religious (celebrate holy days, practice rituals, attempt to do good works for God). Many religious systems today mix law and grace and present a confused way of salvation that is actually a way of bondage. Keeping the Sabbath, dietary laws, an earthly priesthood, holy days, obeying rules, all of these are swept away in Galatians and replaced by the glorious liberty the believer has through faith in Christ.

Author and Setting

The letter to the Galatians was written by Paul the apostle. In fact, it is one of the most important sources of information about Paul's life just after his conversion. The date of the epistle is less certain. Galatians was probably written before the council at Jerusalem (about 48-49 A.D.). If it had been written after that meeting, Paul probably would have cited the council's decision on accepting Gentiles into the faith, as it agreed with his own argument in the letter. In the light of this timing, Galatians may be Paul's earliest surviving letter.

Key Verses in Galatians

"I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" Gal. 2:20

"The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" Gal. 3:24

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" Gal. 3:28

"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" Gal. 5:16

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" Gal. 5:22-23

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" Gal. 6:7

"Let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" Gal. 6:10