

GALATIANS, PART 1

The Apostle Peter, under the inspiration of God, wrote of the Apostle Paul, “our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the scriptures” (2 Peter 4:15-16). These sentiments may be no more applicable to any of the writings of Paul than to the epistle to the Galatians. It is a book that raises questions about God’s law which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction.

At the same time, the book of Galatians is one of the most inspiring books, reassuring us of the promises of God that are ours by faith apart from works. God wants us to know that we are not inheritors of His promises by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. We see clearly that the children of God are known not by their outward physical works, but by their inward beliefs in the cross of Jesus Christ, in the grace of God and its manifestation in their practice of love. In addition, Galatians makes clear the source of righteousness is no longer through the law, but rather the righteousness which is by faith.

The central issue Paul is addressing throughout the book is the demand that false teachers are placing on Gentiles who have accepted Jesus Christ to be circumcised in order to become complete Christians. In fact, the act of physical circumcision represented the entering into a life of Judaism, which carried with it a number of physical, outward manifestations as prescribed in the law and through the traditions of the Judaic fathers (e.g., various washings, wearing tassels, hair and beard grooming, etc.). Paul shows how it is not physical circumcision that makes one a convert, a new creation, but inward circumcision of the heart. Paul warns us to beware of those who demand physical, religious practices of the outer man. He makes clear that physical signs of religion, such as circumcision, do not perfect you, but rather growth in faith, belief and love as believers in Christ, who walk according to the Spirit and not the flesh.

That said, we should look to the word of God to tell us how to live our life. If you decide to implement a set of practices in response to your faith in God and your desire to please him, then by all means you should feel free to do so. Where Christians have difficulty is when we decide to judge others or compel others to keep a set of practices in addition to the righteous requirements of the law, believing that they will make us more converted or righteous in the eyes of God.

The following study will explore the major concepts and teachings of the book of Galatians so that we all may be educated, stable believers who understand what the Apostle Paul says so we don’t twist it for our destruction, but rather gain comprehension of the edifying truth revealed within. As you go through the Bible Study, we encourage you to read each of the verses from your own Bible and even write them down, if you like.

BACKGROUND

Most scholars place the writing of Galatians around 49-56 A.D.

Unlike Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse and Corinth, “Galatia” was a region with multiple churches. (See 1 Corinthians 16:1, Galatians 1:2)

Paul visited Galatia at least twice during his missionary journeys. (See Acts 16:6, Acts 18:23)

GALATIANS 1:1-5

1. How did Paul become an apostle? (See Acts 9:1-19)
2. Where are the churches of Galatia?
3. What does it mean that “He might deliver us from this present evil age?” (See Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 2:1-6, 1 Peter 4:1-3)
4. *Point to Ponder:* How has God delivered you from this present evil age?

GALATIANS 1:6-10

In verse 8, Paul warns the brethren of Galatia to hold fast to the gospel that he and others have preached, and to not follow a different gospel. For us today, this “gospel that was preached” is the Word of God, which we must use to test what others say about the Lord.

5. Notice how the attitude of the Bereans relates to this passage. (See Acts 17:10-12)
6. Paul also speaks about a different gospel in 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15.
7. *Points to Ponder:* How diligently are you reading God’s Word so that you can recognize when someone is preaching a “different gospel?” How often do you find yourself being a “man pleaser” in your life rather than being a “God pleaser?”

GALATIANS 1:11-24

Paul establishes his apostleship through direct revelation of Jesus Christ. This placed Paul on equal footing with the other apostles who spent time with Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry.

8. Paul references his life in Judaism. What conclusions about Judaism can be drawn from this passage? How does Philippians 3:3-11 relate to Paul's life and credentials before conversion?
9. *Point to Ponder:* Read Galatians 1:21-24 and Acts 9:20-30. Why did Paul feel it was necessary to describe his calling and background?

GALATIANS 2:1-10

Paul is describing the meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem, where the apostles appeared to be supportive of the gospel being preached to the Gentiles.

10. Why did Paul talk to some people "privately?" Why would Paul have thought he might run, or had run, in vain? (Galatians 2:2)
11. Who was it that did not compel Titus to be circumcised? (Galatians 2:3)
12. *Points to Ponder:* It is interesting to note that it was Peter who God used to convert the first Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:18). In what ways do you seek counsel from other godly men and women to make sure you are not running in vain?

GALATIANS 2:11-21

13. Paul says in verse 14, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?" What does Paul mean by the phrases "live in the manner of Gentiles" and "live as Jews"?

Paul says very clearly in verse 16 that "...a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ..." Amen! The word "justified" can also be rendered "declared righteous." We are innocent before God because of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not because of how well we observed the law. This is in stark contrast to what Moses told the children of Israel, when he said, "Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us" (Deuteronomy 6:25).

14. What does it mean to have "died to the law?" (Galatians 2:19)

In Galatians 2:21, Paul declares that righteousness no longer comes through the law. Paul puts a sharper point on this truth in Philippians 3:8-9, where he directly rejects the righteousness which is from the law, and embraces the righteousness which is through faith in Christ.

SUMMARY

Consider the great difference between the old (first) covenant and the new covenant. The first was based on our righteousness; the new is based on God's righteousness. The first was based on our works; the new is based on His works.