

Galatians

Background

Galatians is a book written by the Apostle Paul to refute legalism and to teach the importance of God's grace in the life of a Christian. The letter is most likely written to a young church that was founded by the Apostle Paul during one of his missionary journeys.

This letter addresses issues with a group called the "Judaizers". The Judaizers were Jewish converts to Christianity who wanted to make Christianity an extension of their traditional legalistic religion. They were causing a lot of confusion in the churches and they were distorting the gospel message. They were teaching that Gentile converts must be circumcised before they could become Christians. They also taught that Christians were righteous before God only by keeping the Mosaic laws and regulations.

In this letter Paul shares two central messages 1. (Chapters 3-4) is that Christ salvation sets us free from both bondage and the Jewish law. 2. (Chapters 5-6) is that sanctification frees us to live out lives of faithfulness, free of sin and bondage.

In Paul's day, the word Galatia had two distinct meanings. In a strict ethnic sense, Galatia was the region of central Asia Minor inhabited by the Galatians. They were a Celtic people who had migrated to that region from Gaul (modern France) in the third century B.C. The Romans conquered the Galatians in 189 B.C. but allowed them to have some measure of independence until 25 B.C. when Galatia became a Roman province, incorporating some regions not inhabited by ethnic Galatians (e.g., parts of Lycaonia, Phrygia, and Pisidia). In a political sense, Galatia came to describe the entire Roman province, not merely the region inhabited by the ethnic Galatians.

Paul founded churches in the southern Galatian cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14–14:23). These cities, although within the Roman province of Galatia, were not in the ethnic Galatian region. There is no record of Paul's founding churches in that northern, less populated region.

Paul wrote Galatians to counter judaizing false teachers who were undermining the central NT doctrine of justification by faith. Ignoring the express decree of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:23–29), they spread their dangerous teaching that Gentiles must first become Jewish proselytes and submit to all the Mosaic law before they could become Christians (see 1:7; 4:17, 21; 5:2–12; 6:12, 13). Shocked by the Galatians' openness to that damning heresy (cf. 1:6), Paul wrote this letter to defend justification by faith, and warn these churches of the dire consequences of abandoning that essential doctrine.

Galatians is the only epistle Paul wrote that does not contain a commendation for its readers—that obvious omission reflects how urgently he felt about confronting the defection and defending the essential doctrine of justification.



Outline

I. Personal: The Preacher of Justification (1:1–2:21)

- A. Apostolic Chastening (1:1–9)
- B. Apostolic Credentials (1:10–2:10)
- C. Apostolic Confidence (2:11–21)

II. Doctrinal: The Principles of Justification (3:1–4:31)

- A. The Experience of the Galatians (3:1–5)
- B. The Blessing of Abraham (3:6–9)
- C. The Curse of the Law (3:10–14)
- D. The Promise of the Covenant (3:15–18)
- E. The Purpose of the Law (3:19–29)
- F. The Sonship of Believers (4:1–7)
- G. The Futility of Ritualism (4:8–20)
- H. The Illustration from Scripture (4:21–31)

III. Practical: The Privileges of Justification (5:1–6:18)

- A. Freedom from Ritual (5:1–6)
- B. Freedom from Legalists (5:7–12)
- C. Freedom in the Spirit (5:13–26)
- D. Freedom from Spiritual Bondage (6:1–10)
- E. Conclusion (6:11–18)

