

Through the Bible Book by Book

New Testament

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GALATIANS

Theme: The question as to whether the Gentiles were to keep the law of Moses had been settled at the council at Jerusalem. The decision was that the Gentiles were justified by faith without the works of the law. But this decision did not seem to satisfy the Judaizing party, who still insisted that though the Gentiles were saved by faith, their faith was perfected by the observance of the law of Moses. Preaching this message of the mingling of law and grace, they did their utmost to turn Paul's converts against him and against the message he preached. In this they succeeded to the extent of bringing under the bondage of the law the whole church of the Galatians - a Gentile church.

To restore this church to their former standing in grace, Paul wrote his Epistle to them, the theme of which is, Justification and sanctification are not by the works of the law, but by faith.

Occasion for Writing: Passing through Galatia on his second missionary journey, Paul was detained on account of sickness. Acts 16:6; Galatians 4:13. He was well received by the Galatians, and established a church there. Galatians 1:6; 4:14. While in Greece on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2), he received the news that the Galatians had taken upon themselves the yoke of the law. This led to the writing of his Epistle.

Why Written:

1. To oppose the influence of the Judaizing teachers who were attempting to undermine Paul's authority.
2. To refute the following errors that they taught:
 - (a) Obedience to the law mingled with faith is necessary to salvation.
 - (b) The believer is made perfect by the keeping of the law.
3. To restore the Galatians who had fallen from grace.

When Written: During Paul's third missionary journey.

Contents:

- I. The Apostle of Liberty.** Chaps. 1,2.
- II. The Doctrine of Liberty.** Chaps. 3,4.
- III. The Life of Liberty.** Chaps. 5, 6.

I. The Apostle of Liberty. Chaps. 1,2.

In the first two chapters, Paul defends himself against the following charges made against him on the part of the Judaizers.

1. They denied that he was a true apostle of Christ, for he had not, like the Twelve, received his commission personally from the Lord.
2. They claimed that he was only a teacher sent out by the apostles, therefore his teaching should be accepted only as it agreed with theirs.
3. They charged him with spreading teachings not approved by the council at Jerusalem.

Notice how Paul answered these charges:

1. In the very first verse of the Epistle, Paul emphasizes his divine commission as apostle. He then greets the believers (2-5). Notice there is an absence of the thanksgiving that characterizes his other Epistles, for he is writing to a church which has fallen from grace. He is amazed that they have so soon turned from the true Gospel to what he terms a different gospel (v. 6); yet this different gospel is not another gospel, for there is but one; but this message they have obeyed is a perversion of the gospel (v. 7). Upon those who would preach a different gospel he pronounces a curse (vv. 8, 9).

2. In verses 10-24 he refutes the charge that he received his teaching and commission from the apostles. He received them from the Lord Himself.

3. In chapter 2:1-10, Paul shows that his ministry and message were endorsed by the leaders of the church council at Jerusalem.

Fourteen years after his conversion, Paul went to Jerusalem to attend the council and there defended his preaching of the justification of the Gentiles by faith alone (2:1; compare Acts 15:1, 2).

4. Instead of the Twelve finding fault with Paul, as had been charged, Paul affirms that he found fault with one of their number (2:11-21). After his vision (Acts 10:11-16), and his experience at Cornelius' house Peter cast off his Jewish prejudices and mingled freely in social intercourse with the Gentiles. But when certain of the strict Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem, who evidently looked with a criticizing eye on his conduct, (and those Jews with him) he separated himself from the Gentiles (vv. 11-13).

This course of action Paul condemned as a cowardly compromise.

II. The Doctrine of Liberty. Chaps. 3,4.

Paul rebukes the Galatians for turning from the truth of justification by faith, and tells them that their spiritual experience had no connection with their observing the law (3:1-5). He then takes up the argument that justification is by faith, apart from the works of the law (3:6 to 4:7).

The following are its main points.

1. Even Abraham, the friend of God, was not justified by his works, but by his faith (v. 6).

So that instead of the observers of the law of Moses being the children of Abraham (Compare Matthew 3:9), it is those who are justified by faith who can claim that right (v. 7).

2. The covenant that God made with Abraham was a covenant of faith (vv. 8,9).

This has no connection with the Mosaic covenant which was a covenant of works (v. 10). The Abrahamic covenant was made first; but the law, with its curse was added, and so blocked the way for the blessing of Abraham to come to the world. But Christ by His death removed the curse of the law (v. 13), so that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles as well as the Jews (v. 14).

3. Paul then explains the relation between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants (3:15-18).

If the blessing of Abraham is to come by the works of the law, then reception of that blessing is conditional upon keeping the law; but the covenant made with Abraham is unconditional (v. 18).

The inference from the last verse is that if it is by the keeping of the law that the blessing of Abraham is to come upon the world, then that blessing will never come; for no one can be justified by the law.

4. Paul now explains the purpose of the law and its relation to the believer (3:19 to 4:7).

Paul's foregoing arguments call forth the question on the part of the Jew, If the law cannot save why then did God give it to man (v. 19)? The Abrahamic covenant promised salvation through faith without the works of the law. But how could God teach man that salvation was only by faith, and not by any effort on his part? Only by placing him under law and showing him that his sinful nature could not keep perfectly its precepts, thus shutting him up to faith as a means of salvation (v. 19). The law does not stand in opposition to the Abrahamic covenant, for it was never intended to save man (v. 21); it was given to educate man to his need of salvation by faith (vv. 22, 23). Paul pleads with them to return to the full liberty of the Gospel. 4:8-31.

III. The Life of Liberty. Chaps. 5,6.

This section may be summed up by the following exhortations:

1. Hold fast to the liberty of grace for the law cannot save you. 5:1-6.
2. Turn away from the false teachers who have perverted the Gospel and made you slaves to legalism. 5:7-12.
3. Though free from the Mosaic law, you are not free to sin. Walk in love and you will thereby fulfill the law. 5:13, 14.

4. You will be tempted though by the lower nature, but obey the promptings of the Spirit and you will be victorious. 5:16-26.
5. Bear one another's burdens, and be patient with the erring. 6:1-5.
6. Be mindful to support your ministers and you will thereby reap the Divine blessing. 6:6-10.
7. Conclusion (6:11-18). Beware of the Judaizers. I know quite well that they desire to win you simply in order to get a reputation for zeal. Glory only in the Cross in which alone there is real salvation.

~ end of Galatians ~

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