

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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LESSON NINE

GALATIANS

Our reading of the Acts showed that Paul visited the province of Galatia in Asia Minor twice, on his second and third journeys, but no mention was made of any particular city or town at which he stopped on either occasion (Acts 16:6; 18:23).

It was on the third journey, and probably during his long stay at Ephesus, that this Epistle was written, the evidence for which supposition is found in Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of Paul*, and in the introduction to any good commentary on the book.

The occasion for writing it carries us back in our thought to the fifteenth chapter of Acts, and the story of the first church council held at that time. The Judaizing teachers there referred to tracked Paul's footsteps everywhere, seeking to circumvent the preaching of a free Gospel and teaching the need of circumcision and other observances of the Mosaic law in order to salvation.

They had good soil to work on in Galatia, for the people seem to have been of a demonstrative and fickle mind (1:6; 4:9; 4:15, 16; 5:15).

That this was the condition of things in the church, and that many had already fallen into the snare of seeking to supplement faith by works is further evident from 1:6-9; 3:3; 4:9-11; 5:3, etc., to which passages you are asked to give particular attention. The object of the Epistle, therefore, is to restore these people to the faith, and in the workings out of that object the Epistle becomes an inspired classic on that fundamental doctrine of Christianity, justification by faith.

It would seem that the false teachers referred to, in order to undermine the confidence of the people in the Gospel itself, must first accomplish the same purpose, with reference to the apostolic authority of Paul. They must first destroy his authority with the people as an inspired apostle before they could weaken the foundations of the Gospel as preached. This they sought diligently to do using Peter as a sort of comparison and contrast. The last named preached no different Gospel from Paul, but being the apostle to the circumcision, i. e., the Jews, (Galatians 2:6-9), presented it from the Jewish standpoint, while Paul as the apostle to the uncircumcision did the same from the Gentile standpoint. We can readily see how there may have been some difference in the mode of presentation which gave an opportunity to these unsanctified Jewish Christians to denounce Paul as unorthodox. They had an advantage also in the fact that Paul was not one of the original twelve.

The plan of the Epistle lends itself to a three-fold division.

- chapters 1 and 2 are of a *personal* character in which Paul defends his apostolic authority;
- chapters 3 and 4 are *doctrinal*, in which he defends the Gospel or the doctrine of justification by faith; while
- chapters 5 and 6 are *practical* in their nature and contain the application of the doctrine to the daily life of the individual Christian.

I. Paul Defends His Apostolic Authority, Chapters 1, 2

He does this on the ground of

- His divine call (1:1).
- His divine revelation of the Gospel (1:11, 12).
- His independence of the other apostles (1:15-24).
- His endorsement by the church (2:1-10).
- His rebuke of Peter (2:11-14).

Speaking of his divine call, there are those who would say that his reference to man-made apostles has an application to the choice of Matthias by Peter and the others, alluded to in Acts 1.

In like manner, his reference to the way in which he received the revelation of the Gospel recalls the circumstances of his conversion in Acts 9, as well as the experience referred to in verses 17 and 18 of this chapter.

In the section treating of his endorsement by the church there is an allusion (2:1, 2), to the journey and its results spoken of in Acts 15 at the time of the first general council of the church to settle the question of justification. Particular attention should be called to his bold and consistent attitude with reference to the circumcision of Titus (vv. 3-5), an earlier allusion to which was made in our study of the Acts.

It is noticeable, too, that Paul makes as much of his final endorsement by the church as of his independence of the leaders of the church prior thereto. He would give his adversaries no

advantage over him, as if they should say he were too independent and could not be acknowledged by them until he had received the acknowledgment of the accepted authorities.

His rebuke of Peter shows him to have been naturally the stronger character of the two, and in consideration of the fact that Peter was doubtless being quoted by his opponents, proves a convincing argument for his own authority.

II. Paul Defends the Gospel, Chapters 3, 4

Having established his authority as an apostle, the way is now clear to defend the Gospel he preached, and this he does on the following grounds:

Their own experience of its effects (3:1-5).

The history of Abraham (3:6-9).

The teachings of Scripture (3:10-12).

The work of CHRIST (3:13,14).

The first might be called the "*argumentum ad hominem*." It was evident to these Galatian Christians that they had received the HOLY SPIRIT into their lives as the fruit thereof was seen and known. But how had they come to receive Him, through observing the Mosaic ceremonials or through the simple preaching of the Gospel? The answer, of course, was foreseen. It was as the result of Paul's preaching among them, and not the observance of circumcision or anything else. Why then did they need to supplement the work of the Spirit by that of the flesh?

The second argument is well adapted to refute the Judaizing teachers, since Abraham was the founder of their faith. And yet Abraham clearly was justified by believing on GOD and before he was circumcised.

The argument from the teachings of Scripture requires no explanation, since the passages quoted plainly state that if one elects to be saved by the law and not by grace, he can only be so saved by keeping the whole of it. Circumcision or ceremonialism of any kind was not enough.

The work of CHRIST did away with all these things which only foreshadowed Him. He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, why then dishonor His work and put ourselves voluntarily under that curse a second time? The whole argument is very clear and convincing, and furnishes us with a sermon outline on the doctrine of justification by faith.

But at this point the apostle supplements his argument by a brief disquisition on the relation of the law to the promise.

He anticipates a possible objection to his argument. It were as though some one should say: Granted that GOD saved Abraham or accounted him righteous on the ground of his belief in His promise; but is it not true that 430 years after that promise to Abraham He gave the law to Moses? And was not this law thus given to Moses intended to take the place of that promise as a ground of human righteousness? Paul answers, No, (vv. 15-18).

His imaginary interlocutor then inquires, Why was the law given? What purpose does it serve?

Paul's reply to this question discloses two points:

(1) *the law was given because of transgressions, etc.*, (v. 19).

As the transgressions of men multiplied and became aggravated, GOD was obliged to come to His people in an entirely new way, in a more distant relation than existed in the time of the patriarchs. "The law was given, not so much in order to prevent transgressions, as to bring men under a more strict accountability for them, and a more plainly expressed curse."

This brings us to the second point

(2) *the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to CHRIST* (v. 24).

The Greek word for schoolmaster here means a faithful slave entrusted with the care of a boy from his tender years till puberty, to keep him from physical and moral evil, and accompany him to his studies and amusements. He approached his charge with commands and prohibitions, and in a sense with limitations of his freedom. All this as a means to an end, viz: that the boy might be trained for mature age and the assumption of that higher grade of life for which he was destined. (Lange's Commentary). Thus the law leads men to CHRIST. It restrains and rebukes them, it shows us our sin and danger, it condemns them, and thus makes them feel the need of a Redeemer and prepares them to receive Him when presented to their faith. Compare Romans 10:4.

Paul continues this general subject amplifying and enlarging upon it throughout chapter four, climaxing the whole matter at last in the use of the allegory of Sarah and Hagar (4:21-23). This is not to say that the story of Sarah and Hagar was not a historical fact as given in Genesis, but only that the apostle here uses the fact in an accommodated or allegorical sense for purposes of illustration. The design seems to be to show the effect of being under the bondage of the Jewish law as compared with the liberty of the Gospel. Hagar and her son were treated with severity, cast out and persecuted, and became a fit representation of Jerusalem as it was in the time of Paul. Sarah and Isaac enjoyed freedom and sonship, and became correspondingly a fit representation of the New Jerusalem or the true kingdom of GOD. Which would these Galatian Christians choose, to remain under the freedom of the Gospel, or voluntarily put themselves into the bondage and under the yoke of Judaism?

III. Paul Applies the Doctrine, Chapters 5, 6

In applying the doctrine Paul simply urges them to stand fast in the liberty of CHRIST (5:1-12), but in doing so to be careful not to abuse that liberty (5:13-6:10).

He mentions at least four ways in which their Christian liberty may thus be abused:

Uncharitableness (5:13-15).

Uncleanness (5:16-25).

Pride (5:26-6:5).

Selfishness (6:6-10).

The first-mentioned warning or exhortation speaks for itself.

They were to give over contending on this matter and everything else, and seek to live in peace.

The second is very important as showing that sins of the mind (5:20), as well as of the body (5:19,21), are to be classed as of the flesh; that the practice of such sins eternally disinherits (5:21), and that the HOLY SPIRIT is given to believers for the very purpose of overcoming them (5:17).

The "pride" referred to in the third instance will be found to be spiritual pride; in which connection it will be profitable to note the implied contrast between verses 2 and 5 of chapter 6. The Greek word for "burden" is not the same in both cases and the statements are not contradictory. A commentary will tell you that in the first instance Paul tells them to bear with others "burdens" of infirmity in sympathy; and in the second, that self-examination will make them feel they have enough to do with their own "load" of sin without comparing themselves boastfully with their neighbors.

What in the fourth place I have called selfishness, might be equally well described as parsimony. Verse 6 seems to refer to the care they should evince for their spiritual teachers in their temporal concerns; and the reference to "*sowing and reaping*" in the following verses primarily alludes to the same thing.

In closing the lesson let me call your attention to verse 11 for its bearing on what we are taught in II Thessalonians 3:17.

~ end of Lesson 9 ~
