

EXPERIENCING GOD'S GRACE

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

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WHY GALATIANS?



Galatians will help you understand that legalism has no place in the church. It will encourage you to know that God loves you because of who he is, not because of what you do.

Galatians will give you a different, and far better vision of spiritual freedom. Rather than being a *freedom from*, it is a *freedom for*....to live for Jesus knowing that his love for you could never be greater than it is now, and knowing that he will

never leave you or forsake you.

It is the freedom to experience the love of God that enables us to cry to him "Abba, Father," the freedom of confidence, knowing that you are an heir to all of God's promises, the freedom in the power of the Spirit to serve one another in love.

WARM-UP QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about the following statements?

"Christians must always attend every church service or activity."

"Christians must not have tattoos."

"Christians must always dress formally for church."

"Christians must never go to movies or play cards."

"Christian women must never wear make-up, jewelry, or cut their hair."

"Christians must read only the King James Version of the Bible."

2. How can the above statements affect a Christian's view of salvation?

BACKGROUND

Author: Apostle Paul

Galatians has always been among those Pauline epistles least challenged on the issue of authorship. Paul most likely wrote to the Galatians after having a hand in starting them on his first missionary journey to Asia Minor.

Recipients: The spiritually young churches (mostly Gentiles) in Galatia

Paul's letter is addressed "to the churches of Galatia," but the location of these churches is a matter of debate. Most scholars agree that it is a geographical



reference to the Roman province in central Asia Minor, which had been settled by immigrant Celts in the 270s BC and retained Gaulish features of culture and language in Paul's day.

Acts of the Apostles records Paul traveling to the "region of Galatia and Phrygia", which lies immediately west of Galatia. Some scholars have argued that the "Galatia" is an ethnic reference to a Celtic people living in northern Asia Minor.

The New Testament indicates that Paul spent time personally in the cities of Galatia (Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) during his missionary journeys. They seem to have been composed mainly of Gentile converts. After Paul's departure, the churches were led astray from Paul's trust/faith-centered teachings by individuals proposing "another gospel" (which centered on salvation through the Mosaic law, so-called legalism), whom Paul saw as preaching a "different gospel" from what Paul had taught. The Galatians appear to have been receptive to the teaching of these newcomers, and the epistle is Paul's response to what he sees as their willingness to turn from his teaching.

The identity of these "opponents" is disputed. However, most modern scholars view them as Jewish Christians, who taught that in order for converts to belong to the People of God, they must be subject to some or all of the Jewish Law, (i.e., Judaizers).

The letter indicates controversy concerning circumcision, Sabbath observance, and the Mosaic Covenant. It would appear, from Paul's clear response, that they cited the example of Abraham, who was circumcised as a mark of receiving the covenant blessings. They certainly appear to have questioned Paul's authority as an apostle, perhaps appealing to the greater authority of the Jerusalem church governed by James (half-brother of Jesus).¹

Date: Uncertain but most likely just before the Jerusalem Council, A.D. 48-49

Upon arriving back in Antioch from his first missionary journey after eighteen months on the road, Paul received a report that the churches he had started in Galatia had fallen into hard times—specifically, they had fallen into error.²

A group of Judaizers—those who sought to make living under the Mosaic Law a requirement of the Christian faith—had gained an influence in the Galatian churches.

Paul probably wrote his letter to the Galatians a few months before his attendance at the Jerusalem Council in AD 48/49, a meeting where the apostles would take up this very topic (Acts 15:1–30).

¹ Wikipedia, Epistle to the Galatians <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_the_Galatians>.

² (Swindoll)

Why Paul wrote this letter

First, to reprimand the Galatians believers for buying into a perverted gospel of salvation = faith + works. This perversion, being taught by Judaizers, was that Christians must live under the Mosaic Law and follow its practices, especially the practice of circumcision.

Paul is agitated as he writes forcefully but passionately making pleas with the Galatians not to buy into the teachings of these Jewish Christian "missionaries."³

The majority of modern scholars view these Judaizers as Jewish Christians, who taught that converts must be subject to some or all of the Jewish Law.



Paul presents his primary arguments that the observance of the Jewish law has come to an end because of the cross of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:15-21; 3:2).⁴

Second, to validate his apostleship which was being discredited by Judaizers. Paul's apostleship was also being attacked by the Judaizers

They questioned Paul's authority as an apostle, perhaps appealing to the greater authority of the Jerusalem church governed by James; the Jewish half-brother of Jesus.

Judaizers

Judaizers taught that, in order for a Christian to truly be right with God, he must conform to the Mosaic Law. Circumcision, especially, was promoted as necessary for salvation. Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes *first*, and *then* they could come to Christ. The doctrine of the Judaizers was a mixture of grace (through Christ) and works (through the keeping of the Law). This false doctrine was dealt with in Acts 15 and strongly condemned in the book of Galatians.



When this type of Jew saw Paul bringing the gospel to the despised Gentiles, he was appalled and infuriated.

³ (Fee and Stuart 341)

⁴ Paul never says it's wrong for Jews to keep the law; what he says is that it has nothing to do with salvation (Leadership Ministries Worldwide 14).

Judaizers' "gospel" → salvation is attained through law-keeping (works)

Paul's gospel → salvation is attained by faith alone, in God's grace alone.

That, for Paul, was the opposite of all that Christianity meant. It meant that a man's salvation was dependent on his ability to keep the law and could be won by his own unaided efforts, whereas, to Paul salvation was entirely a thing of grace. He believed that no man could ever earn the favor of God. All he could do was to accept the love of God offered to him by making an act of faith and flinging himself on his mercy.

For Paul the essential thing was, not what man can do for God, but what God had done for him.⁵

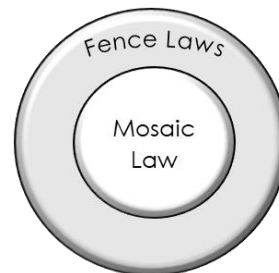
The Law



When "the law" is mentioned in the Bible, it refers back to the days of the Old Testament. There are hundreds of commands given to the Israelites, but the phrase "the law" refers specifically to the compilation of decrees found in the first five books (Torah) of the Bible.

Galatians is a book that was written specifically to counter law-keeping (legalism) as a means to salvation and addresses the centrality of grace in the church.

When Paul speaks of the "law" in Galatians he is referring to more than the written Mosaic Law. The term "law" in Galatians, sometimes called "traditions" (Galatians 1:14; 2:14), included the oral laws which were man-made. They are also called "fence laws" which put these Galatians into a state of confusion. Is salvation based on grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ, or is it based on faith plus law-keeping (works)?



Judaizers had come to Galatia and were telling people that Paul was not really an apostle and that they did not have to accept as he says. They based this on the fact that Paul was not one of the original twelve, that he was the most savage of all persecutors of the church. They further pointed out that Paul had no official appointment from the Jerusalem church leaders.

Paul had no doubts about his apostleship since Jesus commissioned him personally as he was on the road to Damascus in pursuit of those who followed Jesus.

⁵ (Barclay, 1976, pp. 4-5)

Legalism

The word "legalism" does not occur in the Bible. It is a term Christians use to describe a doctrinal position emphasizing a system of rules and regulations for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth.

- Legalism is the belief that to achieve salvation and a right standing before God, one must perform in a certain way.
- Legalism is opposed to a belief in salvation through the grace of God, given to the individual through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Legalism is adding human rules to divine laws and treating them as being divine.
- Legalism is focusing on God's laws more than a relationship with God.
- Legalism is keeping God's moral laws without a truly submitted heart.

Key Terms

Flesh: a sinful and sensual power tending toward sin and opposing the Spirit's working (Rom. 7.25; Gal. 5.17).

Freedom: a state of being free, liberty, the opposite of slavery, bondage; a life rescued from spiritual and moral wrongdoing (2 Cor 3.17); a way of life no longer dominated by legal constraint (Gal. 2.4).

Gospel: The word gospel reflects the Greek word for "good news" or "momentous news." The good news is what God has done in Jesus Christ, supremely in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Judaism: The belief that the Levitical laws of the Old Testament are still binding on all Christians.⁶

Justified/justification: to declare a person righteous by the imputing of Jesus Christ's righteousness in the believer (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What was the purpose of the Mosaic Law? (Hint: see <https://www.gotquestions.org/Mosaic-Law.html>).



⁶ (Wikipedia) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaizers>

2. In what ways might legalism be practiced in churches today?

3. Why does legalism sometimes appeal to Christians today?

4. If Christians are under God's grace, not under the law, is it acceptable for them to live any way they want? Why or why not? (Hint: see 1 Corinthians 10:23 and Romans 6:1).

5. Optional group leader's question(s)