

"THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS"

Introduction

AUTHOR: The apostle Paul (1:1; 5:2). This was the unanimous view of the early church, and even those modern critics who challenge the authorship of many of the New Testament books concede that Galatians is truly Pauline.

BACKGROUND OF THE EPISTLE: During his first missionary journey (46-48 A.D.), Paul together with Barnabas had the opportunity to establish several churches in the Roman province of Galatia (Ac 13:14-14:23). On his second trip (49-52 A.D.), Paul and Silas visited them again (Ac 16:1-5).

It wasn't long, however, before some Jewish Christians came in and began teaching that Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (similar to what happened at Antioch of Syria, cf. Ac 15:1). In an effort to persuade the Galatians, it appears the tactic was to discredit Paul as an apostle, challenge his concept of the gospel of Christ, and charge his doctrine with leading to loose living.

TIME AND PLACE OF WRITING: Dating Galatians is affected by one's view of whether the churches of Galatia were located in the north central part of Asia Minor (ethnic Galatia), or in the south central part (the Roman province of Galatia). The "North Galatia Theory" maintains that the churches were in the north, and that Paul had not been there until the beginning of his third missionary journey (54-55 A.D.; cf. Ac 18:23). This would require that Paul wrote his epistle sometime toward the end of that journey, or afterward (i.e., around 57-58 A.D. or later).

I subscribe to the "South Galatia Theory", which identifies the churches of Galatia as those established on Paul's first journey (cf. Ac 13:14-14:23). I also believe that the meeting described in Ga 2:1-10 took place during the "Jerusalem Conference" related in Ac 15:1-29. This view opens several possibilities for the place and time of writing:

- 1) Corinth, in the period of Ac 18:1-17
- 2) Antioch, in the period of Ac 18:22
- 3) Ephesus, in the period covered by Ac 19:1-41
- 4) Macedonia or Achaia in the period of Ac 20:1-3

With such uncertainty one cannot be dogmatic, but in view of Paul's lengthy stay in Ephesus, that would seem a likely possibility, and the date would be approximately A.D. 55.

PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE: The churches in Galatia were being influenced by those who would "pervert the gospel of Christ" (1:6-7; cf. 3:1). Known as "Judaizing teachers", these individuals taught that Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (cf. Ac 15:1). Paul recognized that this doctrine would jeopardize the salvation of those souls who accepted it (cf. 5:4). Because the enemies of the true gospel were trying to support their case by undermining Paul's authority as an apostle of Christ, it was necessary to verify that he was truly an apostle "not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (1:1). Therefore, Paul writes:

TO VERIFY HIS APOSTLESHIP AND THE GOSPEL OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN CHRIST

Because of his outstanding defense of the gospel of Christ in which we have freedom from sin and the Law, this epistle has frequently been called "The Magna Carta Of Christian Liberty."

KEY VERSE: Galatians 5:1

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."

OUTLINE:

INTRODUCTION (1:1-10)

1. Salutation (1-5)
2. Reason for the letter (6-10)

I. PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS APOSTLESHIP (1:11-2:21)

A. THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF HIS GOSPEL (1:11-17)

1. Thesis: His gospel received directly from God (1:11-12)
2. His pre-Christian years, and conversion (1:13-17)

B. HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE OTHER APOSTLES (1:18-2:21)

1. His first visit with Peter, and early years as a Christian (1:18-24)
2. The council at Jerusalem (2:1-5)
3. His sanction by James, Cephas, and John (2:6-10)
4. His rebuke of Peter at Antioch (2:11-21)
 - a. Peter's hypocrisy (2:11-13)

- b. His speech to Peter, how we are justified by faith in Christ (2:14-21)

II. PAUL'S DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (3:1-4:31)

A. THE PERSONAL ARGUMENT (3:1-5)

1. How they received the Spirit (3:1-4)
2. From whom they received the Spirit (3:5)

B. THE SCRIPTURAL ARGUMENT (3:6-25)

1. The example of Abraham (3:6-9)
2. The curse of the Law (3:10-14)
3. The priority of the Promise over the Law (3:15-18)
4. The purpose of the Law (3:19-25)

C. THE PRACTICAL ARGUMENT (3:26-4:7)

1. In Christ they are one, as children of God, Abraham's seed, and heirs of the promise (3:26-29)
2. Redeemed from the law, and adopted as sons, they are no longer slaves, but heirs (4:1-7)

D. THE SENTIMENTAL ARGUMENT (4:8-20)

1. His fears over their returning to bondage (4:8-11)
2. Their past and present relationships to him (4:12-20)

E. THE ALLEGORICAL ARGUMENT (4:21-31)

1. An allegory for those who desire to be under the Law (4:21-24a)
2. Symbolic of the two covenants; one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, and the other from the Jerusalem above which makes free (24b-31)

III. THE CALL TO STAND FAST IN THE LIBERTY OF THE GOSPEL (5:1-6:10)

A. A LIBERTY THAT EXCLUDES THE NECESSITY OF CIRCUMCISION (5:1-6)

1. Do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (5:1)
2. Circumcision means nothing; requiring it results in falling from grace (5:2-4)
3. We should wait for the hope of righteousness with faith working through love (5:5-6)

B. A LIBERTY THAT FULFILLS THE LAW (5:7-15)

1. Beware of those who would bind the Law (5:7-12)
2. Use your liberty as an opportunity to serve one another with love, and you will fulfill the Law (5:13-14)
3. But beware that you do not use it as an opportunity for the flesh in which you consume one another (5:13b,15)

C. A LIBERTY IN WHICH ONE IS TO BE LED BY THE SPIRIT (5:16-26)

1. Liberty is not an excuse for license (5:16-18)
2. The works of the flesh contrasted with the fruits of the Spirit (5:19-23)
3. Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh and are walking in the Spirit (5:24-26)

D. A LIBERTY WITH A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY (6:1-10)

1. For helping those with burdens (6:1-5)
2. For doing good to all, thus sowing to the Spirit (6:6-10)

CONCLUSION (6:11-18)

1. A final rebuke to those who would bind circumcision (6:11-13)
2. Paul's confidence in the cross of Christ (6:14-17)
3. Benediction (6:18)

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE INTRODUCTION

- 1) According to the "South Galatia Theory", on which journey did Paul establish the churches in Galatia?
- 2) Where does one read about the establishment of these churches?
- 3) What are some of the cities in which these churches were located? (14:20-23)
- 4) Among the many possibilities for the place of writing and time of this epistle, which one seems likely because of Paul's extended stay at that place?
- 5) What two things were being required of the Gentile Christians that jeopardized their salvation? (cf. Ac 15:1; Ga 5:2-4)
- 6) What three tactics appear to have been used by "Judaizing teachers"?

7) What is Paul's purpose in writing this epistle?

8) What has The Epistle To The Galatians been frequently called?

9) Which verse in the book stands out as the "key" verse?

"THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS"

Chapter One

OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To understand the divine origin of Paul's apostleship
- 2) To appreciate the danger of twisting the gospel of Christ

SUMMARY

Paul begins his letter to the churches of Galatia immediately addressing a key issue of the epistle: that he is an apostle "not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ..." (1). Joined by unnamed brethren, he sends grace and peace from God and Christ, making reference to the deliverance made possible by Jesus' death for our sins in keeping with God's will (2-4). This in turns leads to a short doxology (5).

Without any thanksgiving or prayer for his recipients as found in other epistles, Paul expresses his amazement that they are so soon turning to a different gospel being offered by those who wish to

pervert the gospel of Christ (6-7). This is followed by a condemnation repeated for emphasis of anyone, even an apostle or angel, who would preach a different gospel than they had already received (8-9). Strong words, yes, but as a servant of Christ Paul is seeking to please God, not man (10).

The gospel preached by Paul was being twisted by those who challenged his authority as an apostle. Therefore Paul proceeds to defend both the gospel and his apostleship by stressing that his gospel was by revelation, and not from man (11-12). As evidence, Paul relates his conduct prior to his conversion, and how by the grace of God he was called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (13-14). That his gospel was not from man is supported by the scarcity of opportunities he had to be around Peter or the other apostles (15-20). In the early years after his conversion, most of his time was spent in Syria and Cilicia, with the churches of Judea knowing Paul only by what they heard. And what they heard led them to glorify God (21-24)!

OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION (1-10)

A. SALUTATION (1-5)

1. From Paul, an apostle, and those with him, to the churches of Galatia (1-2)
2. With a desire for them to have grace and peace from God and Jesus (3)
3. With mention of Christ's sacrifice for our sins, designed to deliver us from this evil age, in keeping with God's will, to Whom be glory forever (4-5)

B. REASON FOR THE LETTER (6-10)

1. He is amazed that they are turning from the One who called them in the grace of Christ, to a different and perverted gospel (6-7)
2. A repeated condemnation against anyone (man, apostle, or angel) who would preach a different gospel than what they had already received (8-9)
3. Strong words, yes, but coming from one who seeks to serve Christ, not man (10)

II. PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS APOSTLESHIP (11-24)

A. THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF HIS GOSPEL (11-17)

1. His gospel was not according to man, or from man, but directly from Jesus Christ (11-12)
2. A review of his conduct in Judaism prior to conversion (13-14)
3. Upon his conversion, an act of Divine revelation itself, he did not confer with man, especially the apostles in Jerusalem (15-17a)
4. But went to Arabia, and then returned to Damascus (17b)

B. HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER APOSTLES (18-24)

1. After three years he went to Jerusalem to see Peter, and only then for fifteen days (18)
 - a. He saw none of the other apostles, except James, the Lord's brother (19)
 - b. With a solemn declaration he affirms these things to be true (20)
2. Then he went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia (21)
 - a. Remaining unknown by face to the churches of Judea (22)
 - b. They heard only of his preaching brought about by his

conversion, and they glorified God in him (23-24)

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

- 1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- 2) In identifying himself as an apostle, what point does Paul stress?
(1)

- 3) To whom is this epistle written? (2)

- 4) Why did Jesus give Himself for our sins? (4)

- 5) Why did Paul marvel? (6)

- 6) What were those who were troubling them actually doing? (7)

- 7) What does Paul say of those who would preach a different gospel? (8-9)

- 8) Who was Paul seeking to please? Why? (10)

9) What does Paul stress about the gospel he preached? (11-12)

10) What did Paul remind them concerning his former conduct in Judaism?
(13-14)

11) Why did God call Paul and reveal His Son in him? (15-16)

12) Where did Paul NOT go after his conversion? (17)

13) How long was it before Paul saw any of the apostles in Jerusalem?
Which ones did he see? (18-19)

14) Where did he go then? (21)

15) What three things are said about Paul's connection with the churches of Judea? (22-24)