

Week of June 4 - 10

Book of Galatians

Paul wrote the book of Galatians at the end of his first missionary journey about 48-49 AD or at the end of his third journey about 53-57 AD. So, we are uncertain and can't be dogmatic about the date. But because he had a lengthy stay in Ephesus, it is a likely possibility it was written about 55 AD.

During the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas established several churches in the Roman province of Galatia, and on Paul's second trip, he and Silas revisited them. But it wasn't long before some Jewish Christians began teaching they needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. The Jews tried to discredit Paul as an apostle and challenge his teachings.

The Judaizers taught that faith in Christ was not enough, but that obedience to parts of Old Testament Law was also necessary. They tried to force the Law on gentile Christians. Paul says in his letter that they are invalidating the Gospel. He explains that salvation is by grace, through faith, in Christ alone. No works or Law is required.

Chapters 1-2 is Paul's defense of his teaching and his status as an apostle. Chapters 3-4 explain how Christians are free from the Law. Chapters 5-6 encourage the Galatians to live out their freedom in Christ.

Salutation and Reason for His Letter (Galatians 1:1-10)

Paul starts by getting right to the issue, that he wasn't called to be an apostle by any group, but by Jesus Christ himself. He sends grace and peace from God and Christ, noting that Christ's death delivered us from our sins, just as God the Father planned. Without any thanks or prayer for the church, as he often includes in other letters, he says he is amazed that they are already turning to different Gospel. Then he condemns any person, or even an apostle or an angel, who preaches a different gospel than the one he gave them. These are strong words, but Paul isn't trying to please man, but God.

Paul's Authority Comes from God (Galatians 1:11-24)

The Gospel Paul preached was being twisted by those who challenged his authority as an apostle. Therefore, Paul defends both the Gospel and his apostleship by stressing that his Gospel came directly from Jesus Christ and not from man. Paul explains his conduct before his conversion, and how, by the grace of God, he was called to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. That his Gospel was not from man is supported by the lack of opportunities he had to be around Peter or the other apostles. In the early years after his conversion, most of his time was spent in Syria and Cilicia, which was near Syria, with the churches of Judea knowing Paul only by what they had heard about him. And what they heard led them to give God glory.

Paul Accepted by the Church (Galatians 2:1-10)

As Paul continues to defend his apostleship, he describes a meeting in Jerusalem fourteen years later. A revelation from God prompted it, and Barnabas and Titus went with him to meet those who were considered to be leaders. The meeting with them was private, but some false Christians were secretly brought in to demand that Titus, a Gentile, be circumcised. Paul refused, realizing it as an effort to bring them back into bondage with the Law from which Christ set them free.

The result of the meeting was that the church leaders added nothing to Paul's presentation of the Gospel. Once they saw that the Gospel to the Gentiles had been given to him just as the Gospel to the Jews had been given to Peter, and once James, Cephas, and John recognized the grace that had been given to Paul, he was extended the right hand of fellowship. They only asked that Paul be mindful of the poor, something he was very eager to do.

Paul's Opposition to Peter (Galatians 2:11-24)

The rest of the chapter describes a confrontation in Antioch between Peter and Paul. Peter, who was visiting, at first, was willing to eat with the Gentile Christians, but when some Jewish friends of James came, out of fear, he wouldn't eat with the Gentile Christians. Through his actions, the rest of the Jews, including Barnabas, followed his example. This prompted Paul to take on Peter "to his face" and rebuke him in everyone's presence. Paul stressed that we are justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law. Otherwise, Christ died in vain.

Faith or Observance of the Law (Galatians 3:1-14)

Now that the defense of his apostleship is behind him, Paul spends the next two chapters defending the Gospel he received by revelation. It is a gospel that proclaims justification by faith in Christ, not by keeping the works of the Law. As support, Paul asks the Galatians to remember how they had received the Spirit, and from Whom. It did not come by the works of the Law but through hearing about Christ and trusting in him to save them. It should be evident to them how their faith came to them. How can they just throw it away and make their salvation dependent on following the Laws?

Paul then refers to the Old Testament, telling them that Abraham's faith was accounted to him as righteousness and that in Abraham, all the nations would be blessed. Therefore, those who are of faith are sons of Abraham and blessed along with him. As for the Law itself, the Scriptures reveal that those who are of the works of the Law are under a curse, while the just shall live by faith. Christ, however, has redeemed us from the curse of the Law and made it possible for Abraham's blessing to come to the Gentiles, especially that the promise of the Spirit would be received through faith.

The Law and the Promise (Galatians 3:15-25)

Paul reminds them that the covenant nature of the promise made to Abraham means it cannot be broken. The promise to Abraham and His "seed" (Christ) remained firm, even when the Law came along 430 years later. What was the purpose of the Law then? Paul answers that it was added because of sin until the Seed (Christ) comes. It was not against the promises of God, but because it could not provide life itself, it showed men how guilty they are of breaking God's Laws. Until Christ came, we were guarded by the Law, kept in protective custody, so to speak, until we could believe in the coming savior. To put it another way, it was like a teacher leading them to Christ, where they could be justified by faith. Once faith had arrived, the teacher was no longer over them.)

Sons of God (Galatians 3:26-29)

Paul then proceeds with a practical argument to prove we are justified by faith in Christ. Through faith, they have become sons of God in Christ, for by being baptized into Christ, they had put on Christ. Being in Christ, they are now one in Him, with all racial, social, and sexual distinctions removed as it relates to salvation. Being in Christ also makes them Abraham's seed and thereby heirs according to the promise God made to him.

Appeal not to Return to Bondage to the Law (Galatians 4:1-7)

Paul continues and ends his defense of the Gospel of justification by faith in Christ, in contrast to seeking justification by the works of the Law. He had just finished his argument about how, by faith, they had become the sons of God, the true seed of Abraham and heirs of the promise, when they put on Christ in baptism.

Paul describes the condition of those under the Law before coming of Christ. They were "children" and no different than slaves. But when Christ came, He redeemed those under the Law and made it possible for them to receive the adoption as "sons." A special blessing of this sonship was to receive the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and now they are no longer a slave but a son and an heir of God through Christ.

Paul's Concern for the Galatians (Galatians 4:8-20)

After having come to know the true God and being recognized by Him, their observance of holy days is indicative of a desire to return to bondage. That greatly concerned Paul, who would have them be like him. He reminds them of their reception of him in the past, and he hopes that by telling them the truth, he has not become their enemy. Paul adds that he wishes he could be there with them right then and not have to reason with them like this, because at this distance, He frankly didn't know what to do.

Life Threatened by Legalism (Galatians 5:1-15)

Chapter 5, verse one, is the climax and overall theme of his letter to the Galatians. "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." He warns about the consequences of seeking to be circumcised and justified by the Law and reminds them that the hope of righteousness is for those who, through the Spirit eagerly wait for it with faith working through love.

The next verses continue with warnings about allowing others to slow their progress. Paul doesn't want anyone to think that liberty in Christ means license, and encourages them to use their freedom to love and serve one another. The two-fold benefit is that one fulfills the Law, and at the same time, does not allow the flesh to cause them always to be critical and devouring one another.

Life in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26)

Paul then stresses the need for the Christian to walk in the Spirit so as not to fulfill the lust of the flesh. He describes the enmity between the flesh and the Spirit, explaining why we must bear the fruit of the Spirit instead of practicing the works of the flesh. Not only is there no inheritance in the kingdom of God for those engaging in the works of the flesh, but those in Christ have crucified the flesh with all its passions and desires. Having been made alive in the Spirit, they ought to walk in the Spirit so as not to be conceited, not provoking nor envying one another.