

The Epistle to the Galatians
Lesson #1 • Introduction
Galatians 1:1-5
• H A N D O U T •

► Of all of Paul's letters, none grapples with the issues of the Law and the true source of salvation in the way the Letter to the believers at Galatia does. In fact, many scholars believe this letter is responsible for shaping the history of the Western world.

That is a quite bold statement, is it not?
But, as we work our way through the pages of this letter,
I believe the truth of that statement will be verified.

► This letter truly is bold – but not just for the time in which it was written – it is bold for today's world as well. This letter maintains, without compromise, the truth of the Gospel: **It is not by a person's deeds, nor through adherence to the Law that grants them Salvation and Eternal Life. Rather, it is only acquired by trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus, God's Son, and through the grace of God the Father. Then and only then can a person escape the curse of sin and eternal death and live eternally with the Lord God Almighty.**

► If this letter was only about eternity future, it would be amazing, But this letter is about so much more. It is about living a victorious life. It is living without being in bondage to the Law. It is about giving the Believer genuine freedom of mind and spirit through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's bold message to the Galatians was delivered at a time when severe, heretical teaching had come into the Church. This letter lays the foundation for the Christian's everyday life and conduct.

Eventually, this letter became the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation. In Luther's loving hands, this letter became a mighty weapon in the Reformation arsenal. Through this letter and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Luther was able to restore the Church's understanding about salvation, grace, saving faith, and true spiritual freedom in Christ.

HISTORICAL SETTING





Q: Where was Galatia?

Q: Who were the people of Galatia?

Q: What were the religious practices of the Celtic and Gaelic people?

Q: When & where did Paul write this letter?

Q: The time placement of this letter was the mid-point between what two great events?

- 1.
- 2.

► At this point in time, the Church – the Ecclesia – the Body of Christ was still growing. As long as the Gospel message was being preached primarily to Jews by Jews, the development of the church seemed to progress smoothly. But, as the gospel began to take root in the Gentile communities, real dilemmas emerged. By the time Paul penned this letter, the Church had begun to drift into what would become a great doctrinal crisis.

There were **serious issues and questions** that needed to be addressed and answered. Questions like these:

1. Should the Jewish Followers of the Way – the newly named “Christians” – be an extension of Judaism?
2. Or, should this new sect of Jews who referred to themselves as the “Followers of the Way” be treated as something entirely new, separate from Judaism?
3. Should these Jewish Christians still be bound to the Law of Moses and therefore be duty-bound to satisfy the requirements of Judaism?
4. What about the new Gentile Christians – those “foreign” Followers of the Way?
Should they be required to convert to Judaism and participate in all the Jewish practices?
Specifically, did they need to be circumcised?
5. How should the social norms of Judaism affect the relationship between Jews and Gentiles?
Under the Law, Jews could not – ever – associate with or even eat with a Gentile.
Should this social practice change?
Should Gentiles have the same standing as Jews in the newly formed Christian Fellowship?

With this foundation to Paul's Letter to the churches in Galatia, let's begin ...

Galatians 1:1-2 Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia:

Q: What does Paul say about himself in this opening statement?

Q: What is an apostle in Judaism and how did it differ from the interpretation in the N.T.?

Q: How can Paul claim to be an apostle when he did not fulfill the N.T. prerequisites?

Q: What are two unique things about this opening statement?

- 1.
- 2.

► The following letters of Paul demonstrates Galatian's unique statement:

Romans 1:8 • First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

1 Corinthians 1:4-6 • I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way--in all your speaking and in all your knowledge--because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.

Philippians 1:3-5 • I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

Colossians 1:3-4 • To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints--

1 Thessalonians 1:1-4 • Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 • We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

Q: It was characteristic of Paul to join the names of the Father and Son together in his greetings. What is uncharacteristic about this greeting to Galatia?

Q: What is significant about this change in his greeting to Galatia?

Galatians 1:3-5 • Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Q: What did Paul mean when he wrote that Jesus *“rescued us from this present evil age?”*

Q: Grace and peace are standard greetings used in NT times, but just what is actually meant by those two words?

► Grace:

► Peace:

- Q: Following Paul's familiar greeting to the Christian churches in Galatia, Paul adds a brief Gospel statement. Since Paul is writing to Christians, why does he feel the need to do this?
- Q: Though the problems with the Galatian churches have not as yet been fully disclosed, what fundamental truths does Paul underscore in this greeting?
- Q: By looking at what Paul was underscoring in his greeting, what does this reveal about the problems in general?
- Q: It was unusual for Paul to include a doxology at the beginning of a letter, as he does here. Why is this important?

Paul begins the next verse with a very blunt tone.
He states that the churches in Galatia had perverted the truth!
This is where we will pick up our study next time...



Next Time • Lesson #2

~~ Paul's Attitude Becomes Intense ~~

Galatians 1:6-12

