

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

FEBRUARY 24TH–25TH, 2024 // GALATIANS

## THE LETTER OF (PAUL TO THE GALATIANS) WHO WROTE GALATIANS?

Galatians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the churches of Galatia (vs. 2).

- The apostle Paul was one of the most influential leaders in the early church.
- Before Paul met Jesus, he was a Pharisee and a notorious persecutor of Christians.
- After his dramatic conversion to Christ, Paul devoted His life to preaching the gospel.
- Paul planted more than a dozen churches and authored 13 books of the Bible.
- Paul had planted these churches in Galatia during his first missionary journey (AD 47–48).
- Most likely, Paul wrote this letter from his home church in Antioch in Syria, sometime between his first and second missionary journeys (AD 49–51).

## WHO WERE THE GALATIANS?

Galatia was a region of the Roman empire in modern Turkey—the name “Galatia” means “land of the Gauls” (group of Celtic people).

- The Galatian church was a mix of both Jew and Gentile converts.
- The name Galatia first appears in Acts 16:6 as a region where Paul had preached the gospel.

## BACKGROUND & HISTORICAL SETTING OF GALATIANS

After Paul had founded this church during his first missionary journey, a group called the “Judaizers” showed up and began to preach that Gentile believers had to become Jewish first (through circumcision and keeping the law of Moses) before they could come to Christ.

- The Judaizers preached a mixture of grace and works that was a false doctrine.

## WHAT IS GALATIANS ABOUT?

Galatians is Paul's letter of correction and instruction to the early church regarding salvation and the freedom we have in Christ.

- We are saved by grace and must live by grace, not by the law, for no one can truly keep the law.
- To add anything to the work Christ did for salvation is to negate God's grace—we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

## WHY STUDY GALATIANS?

We need to understand fully that we are made right with God through faith in Christ.

- If we don't, we'll cheapen and pervert the gospel by teaching a blend of faith/works.
- Legalism is a threat that continually reemerges in the church in different forms.
- Legalism is working in our own power: Jesus + whatever we bring to the table.
- Legalism is working according to our own rules: adding rules beyond what God has already defined as the basis for His relationship with us.
- Legalism is working to earn God's favor: believing in a performance-based faith that works to earn God's love and approval.
- Freedom comes from understanding and believing that salvation comes by faith alone through God's grace to those who have believed in Christ alone.

## GREETINGS (GALATIANS 1:1–5)

One way to discredit the truthfulness of a message is to attack the credibility and deny the authority of the messenger.

- The Galatian church had received the true message of the gospel from Paul, but apparently false teachers had convinced some of the church that Paul was a self-appointed apostle with no divine commission and no real authority.

In the opening of this letter, Paul greets the church giving his authority (vs. 1–2), his message (vs. 3–4), and his motive (vs. 5).

- Paul introduces himself as an apostle (one who is sent with a commission) who had been commissioned by Jesus Christ and God the Father (vs. 1).
- Paul's credentials came from God!

In the early church, the apostles were given special authority by God to build and lead the church.

- To be an apostle, you had to have been with Jesus during his earthly ministry and have witnessed the resurrected Jesus.
- Paul was not one of the original 12, but he had an undeniable encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, Who had appointed him as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).

## PAUL'S MESSAGE (VS. 3–4)

The gospel (“good news”) is the message of God's grace and peace extended to humanity through Jesus Christ.

- Jesus, in accordance with God's will and perfect plan, gave Himself for our sins to rescue us out of destruction and death.
- We have to push past all the legalism and man-made traditions to get back to the “good news.”

## PAUL'S MOTIVE (VS. 5)

Paul's motive for preaching, proclaiming, and fighting for this gospel wasn't for personal gain, power, or fame—it was simply for the glory of God.

- God gets all the glory when we get the gospel right: when we understand it's all about Him and His work through Jesus, it stops being all about us, our glory, and our performance.

## ANOTHER GOSPEL? (GALATIANS 1:6–10)

Imagine you're a church planter in the rural American south in the 1960's...

- You would be saddened, concerned, and quite frustrated to hear the report of them turning away!
- Paul's amazement and frustration is that this church turned away (quickly) to a “different gospel” that wasn't “another gospel,” just a distortion of the true gospel of grace (vs. 6–7).

This distortion of the gospel was brought in by “some who are troubling you”—false teachers.

- This message of a works-based salvation from false teachers was troubling the church and distorting the gospel of Christ.
- No matter how sincere or charismatic a person may seem to be (even if they're an angel

from heaven), if they bring a false gospel, they are to be rejected (vs. 8).

Whether it's works-based legalism, permissive liberalism, or cultic perversion, any teaching that adds or takes away from God's revealed truth is a dangerous distortion of the gospel and warps the nature and work of Christ.

- It doesn't matter how nice, sincere, or religious the person bringing that message may seem to be, Paul pronounces a curse on anyone preaching contrary to the gospel of grace (vs. 9).

Paul uses very passionate, strong, and heated language to express his concern and frustration!

- Paul's aim was not to get everybody to like him by shaping his message in a way that pleased and persuaded people—Paul only wanted to please God (vs. 10).
- If Paul simply wanted to please people, he'd still be a Pharisee caught up in legalistic, dead religion, and he wouldn't be a servant of Christ.

## THERE'S A WAY IN WHICH THE GOSPEL OF GRACE IS EXTREMELY OFFENSIVE TO OUR OWN SENSE OF LEGALISM.

It offends our pride—it tells us we're sinful and broken, we can't fix ourselves, and we need a Savior who does that work for us.

- It offends our desire to appear wise and intelligent—it tells us to be saved, we must humble ourselves and believe that God became a man and died a humiliating, painful death in our place.

## THE SOURCE OF THE GOSPEL (GALATIANS 1:11–12)

The message that Paul preached was different from the false gospel brought by other teachers: Paul's message was not of human origin (vs. 11).

- The gospel message that Paul taught came to him by a revelation of Jesus Christ (vs. 12).
- Paul wasn't some false prophet who spelled out his private dreams and unverifiable secret revelations.

Paul had been commissioned directly by God to preach the truth of the gospel through a dramatic experience with the resurrected Jesus.

- The good news concerning how we're made right with God through Christ isn't something that human beings created—it's something God has revealed.
- If you were going to make up a religion, it wouldn't be Christianity.

Every other religion in the world teaches us we can earn our way to God through a system of rules (laws or pillars) to appease God and gain enlightenment, salvation, or blessing.

- This appeals to human pride and our sense of personal achievement—if we can succeed, it helps us feel morally superior or more “spiritual” than those who can't (sometimes it even can justify our hatred of the “unrighteous”).

Christianity is the only religion that teaches God came for us (Rom. 5:8) and Jesus died for us before we could ever do a thing for Him!

- God didn't wait for us to clean up our act and do good things before He sent Jesus to die for us. In fact, God sent Jesus because He knew we could never get things right apart from Jesus.
- We can't appease God or earn His forgiveness—it's a gift we receive through faith.

## A TESTIMONY (GALATIANS 1:13–24)

Why should the Galatian church believe Paul's message came from God and not man?

- Because of Paul's dramatic, undeniable testimony of how Jesus had completely changed him.
- There is incredible value in sharing with others how Jesus has changed us through His grace.
- You may not have a dramatic conversion story, but you should know how to share how God has changed you if you've truly believed.

## WHO PAUL WAS BEFORE HE MET JESUS (VS. 13–14)

Before Paul met Jesus, he was an advanced scholar of Judaism, and he was zealous in opposing and destroying anything that threatened the purity of the Jewish religion.

- Paul had religion (a lot of it, too); he wasn't looking for some new revelation or truth to make a name for himself because he already had one.
- You can have religion without knowing God.

## HOW PAUL MET JESUS (VS. 15–16)

Paul came to Jesus not because a man decided he should (it was “when God...was pleased” to), or because of anything Paul did to earn Jesus being revealed to him (he was set apart when in his mother's womb).

- Paul was set apart, called by God's grace, and Jesus the Son was revealed to him so he would live out God's purposes for his life.

## WHO PAUL WAS AFTER HE MET JESUS (VS. 17–24)

After Paul's conversion, he didn't consult with others to find out the right words or content of the gospel.

- He didn't need to because Jesus revealed the gospel to him directly.
- For three years (in Arabia and Damascus), Paul went to seminary with God as his professor (vs. 17–18).
- Then Paul went up to Jerusalem, but not to learn the gospel from Peter (Cephas) or James or receive an apostolic commission, but simply to fellowship with them as fellow believers.
- After Paul's conversion, he “remained personally unknown” to the Judean churches, but they kept hearing his testimony and glorified God because of how he'd been changed.

## ANOTHER GOSPEL?

- Legalism isn't the “good news” (gospel). It never works because it can't change the heart, and it causes us to worship something other than Christ (mainly ourselves and our own efforts).
- Libertinism isn't the “good news” (gospel). It never works because it says we don't have to change, which proves we either have never received God's grace or we're not walking in freedom.

## BACK TO THE BASICS.

- The great invitation of the gospel is to take our eyes off ourselves and place them on Jesus.
- We're called to put faith in the work Jesus did for us first, and if we do, God will change us, then works will follow out of loving obedience.
- We're called to receive God's promise of grace and trust in His power at work in our lives even as we follow Him in trusting faith.