

Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church

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Bible Study, Wednesday, October 14, 2015

Survey of the Bible

Lesson 50: Galatians

The Book of Galatians

The book of Galatians is a letter written to a recently evangelized group of churches in region of Asia Minor known as Galatia. Galatia is northwest of Palestine and Judea, a region which is in modern day central Turkey. The letter is written as a warning for the churches against certain people (known as *Judaisers*) who have come into the region that wish to require that Gentile (non-Jewish) converts to Christ follow the Jewish laws of the Old Testament, such as circumcision and dietary requirements. The writer wishes to emphasize that faith in Christ frees a person from legalism, but without giving them a license to sin.

Author

There is little dispute that the author of this epistle is the Apostle Paul. In fact, the letter indicates that Paul actually wrote it with his own hand rather than dictating it, which was his ordinary practice (Gal. 6:11).

The Times and context of Galatians

The term *Galatia* was used in both in a cultural sense and also a political sense. There is an historic Galatia, which refers to a central part of Asia Minor where in ancient times certain Celtic tribes (the original Galatians) settled. However Galatia came under Roman domination in 189 BC, and in 25 BC the Emperor Caesar Augustus created a *province* called Galatia, which included territories to the south, closer to the Mediterranean sea, that were not originally part of Galatia. Some of these added territories included cities that Paul visited during his first missionary journey (Acts 13 & 14).

There are two theories regarding the time Galatians was written. These theories are related to the question of *which Galatia Paul was writing to*.

1. *The North Galatian Theory*. This suggests that Paul was writing to the *original* Galatians in the north. According to his travel itinerary, he would have traveled through there during his *second* missionary journey with Silas, after picking up Timothy, on his way to Troas (see Acts 16:1-8). On his third missionary journey, Paul revisited the Galatian churches he had established (Acts 18:23). He probably would have written this letter either in Ephesus 53-56 AD or in Macedonia (56 AD).
2. *The South Galatian Theory*. This theory suggests that Paul was writing to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia. This means that the churches he had in mind included those that Paul evangelized during his *first* missionary journey like Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13 & 14). This was just prior to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). This theory says that Paul wrote the letter *prior* to the council from Syrian Antioch in 49 AD.

Although there are arguments for both theories, it seems more likely that Judaisers would have gone first after the churches in the *south* (where his first churches were established) to discredit his theology, since any churches in the north would have been far more remote and less influential.

Overview

The letter to the Galatians might be referred to as “The Emancipation Proclamation of the gospel.” In it, as well as in Romans, Paul emphasizes justification (gaining right standing with God) by faith (as opposed to by deeds). Paul directs his letter to people who are being influenced to give up their Christian freedom to adopt a more legalistic, oppressive attachment to Jewish laws as a way of living a righteous life. The proponents of legalism (the Judaizers) are saying that Paul is not a “true apostle,” because he was disciplined by the Jewish core-group of Christians in Jerusalem. Because he is not a “true apostle,” he has no authority to bring declare freedom from the law for the Gentiles. Paul emphasizes that he received his message directly from The Lord Himself (and therefore IS a “true apostle”), and that any “other gospel” is not really a gospel at all.

Paul writes this forceful letter to do away with the false gospel of works, which is the notion that there are rules and regulations that people have to follow in order to work their way into God’s favor and be saved. He wants to show that those who are in Christ live under grace (the idea that God’s favor is *granted* as a gift not a wage). The letter however also emphasizes that living under that grace requires that one die to their sinful nature, and then follow of the Spirit of God, received when a person believes the gospel. Thus, freedom from the law does not constitute a license to sin, but rather requires obedience to The Spirit. To further legitimize his claim, Paul concludes the letter by comparing *his* motives (which include a willingness to suffer) with those of his critics (who bear the outward sign of circumcision but are inwardly corrupt).

Outline

- I. Paul’s Apostleship Defended (1:1-2:21)**
 - A. Introduction (1:1-1:10)
 1. Salutation: The Revelation and Grounds of Grace (1:1-1:5)
 2. Situation: The Departure from Grace (1:6-1:9)
 3. Transition: This is not to win friends (1:10)
 - B. Paul is A True Apostle (1:11-2:21)
 1. This Gospel came directly from God (1:11-1:24)
 2. Gospel of Grace approved by the Apostles (2:1-2:10)
 3. The Rebuke of Peter as further proof (2:11-2:14)
 4. Justification by FAITH alone (2:15-2:21)

- II. The Gospel of Grace Explained (3:1-4:31)**
 - A. The Holy Spirit is given by faith, not works (3:1-5)
 - B. Abrahams Seed Justified by Faith (3:6-4:7)
 1. Abraham justification extended to those who believe (3:6-3:9)
 2. Freedom from the curse of the law and Abraham’s blessing (3:10-3:15)
 3. Promises to Abraham’s SEED (3:16-3:20)
 4. The Law was given to lead us to Christ (3:21-3:25)
 5. Children of God as heirs in due time. (3:26-4:7)
 - C. Paul’s Appeal: Believers are free in Christ (4:8-4:31)
 1. Why enslave yourselves again (4:8-4:16)
 2. Those who enslave you are driven by wrong motives (4:17-4:20)
 3. An Allegory: Children of The Free Woman = Children of The Promise (4:21-4:31)

- III. The Gospel of Grace Applied (5:1-6:18)**
 - A. Position of Liberty: Stand Fast! (5:1-5:12)
 - B. Life in The Spirit (5:13-5:26)

1. The Practice of Liberty: Love (5:13-5:15)
2. Liberty is not license, but follow-ship (5:16-5:26)
 - a) Walk in The Spirit (5:16-5:18)
 - b) The works of the flesh (5:19-21)
 - c) The fruit of The Spirit (5:22-26)
- C. The Outworking of The Spirit: Compassion (6:1-6:10)
 1. Bearing one another's burdens (6:1-6:5)
 2. Sowing to please the Spirit (6:6-6:10)
- D. The marks of the true gospel (6:11-6:18)

Some Keys to understanding The Book of Galatians

- Paul was under constant criticism from those who wanted to keep Christianity “controllable” and “respectable.” A religion that did not rely on rules to control people’s behavior represented the possibility of being a threat to the Roman order and was immediately under suspicion.
- Paul teaches the Galatians that Christ has freed the believer from bondage to the law (legalism). It has been said that Judaism was the cradle of Christianity, but also that it was very nearly its grave as well. Paul has been referred to as the “Moses” of the Christian church to deliver them from the bondage of obedience to a written code. Following the law one could always find a “violation” somewhere that would cause a person to be condemned.
- Galatians also teaches them that Christ sets captives free from sin (license) because following and focusing on the Spirit and on love will enable a person to overcome their appetite for sin.
- Romans and Galatians, which emphasize grace through faith, are often compared with James, which emphasizes faith’s demonstration through works. Both sides working together provide an important counterbalance that helps to prevent excess on either side.
- Trusting in obedience to the law for salvation is an ALL OR NOTHING proposition. A person is evaluated on a scale that requires absolute perfection.

Some Lessons from Galatians

- There are “other gospels” out there that are often backed up by self-interest, profit motives, or desires for power and/or popularity. We should avoid them at all costs.
- Sometimes rules are established by people who simply want to control other people and they simply end up being restrictive. This was how the Pharisees system was experienced. We have to be careful in the church how we impose rules. There is a difference between guidelines established to keep people safe and restrictions established to keep people in their place.
- There are times when we, like Paul with Peter, will be required to “call out” inconsistencies and hypocrisy even by those who we respect. However, as was the case with Paul, the intent is never to embarrass or injure but rather to help people to be their best.
- A winning walk with Christ requires that “self” be crucified. This does not mean LOSING our identity, but rather finding it in Christ. Finding identity in Christ means that every motive is to glorify Christ, not to protect, exalt, or promote oneself.
- Sinful behaviors CAN be overcome by immersing oneself in following THE HOLY SPIRIT, for whom LOVE is the only motive that counts. Overcoming the flesh requires feeding the spirit.
- The Spirit is not one that condemns, but rather one that seeks to RESTORE and empower those who have fallen.
- Those willing to SACRIFICE and “go through” are marked by Jesus – they share in his sufferings. They shall also reign with him.
- The fruit of the Spirit is the BEST evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Gifts can be manipulated, but character cannot.