

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

1. Historically, the Galatians as a people had come into the central highlands of what is now Turkey around the Third Century B.C. as part of an ongoing great Celtic migration out of central Europe. This migration extended also across western Europe and into what is now known as the British Isles and their language is still spoken in portions thereof. Historical records show an overlap of the terms Celtic and Gallic. Their region was once called Gallo Graecia and was made a Roman province (Galatia) around 25 B.C. John Gill notes that some affirm that the Grecians called them Galatians from *gala*, which signifies *milk*, because of their milky color.
2. Little is said in scripture about the forming of the churches of Galatia. **ACT 16:6; 18:23.**
 - A. They had been idolaters in spiritual bondage to works and ceremony. **GAL 4:8-10.**
 - B. Paul certainly takes credit for founding them. **GAL 4:13-15, 19.**
 - C. Paul gave them orders. **1CO 16:1.**
3. Their churches were in considerable doctrinal and practical disorder, yet Paul affirms them as *churches* (**GAL 1:2**). Their candlestick was still in place.
 - A. Paul called them *brethren* and *children of promise* like himself. **GAL 4:28.**
 - B. He called them, "My little children..." (**GAL 4:19**), not disowning them.
 - C. That they were in considerable disorder and still churches is not an excuse for disorder but it does show that true churches may have serious flaws.
 - (1) Five of the seven churches of Asia (**REV 2-3**) had disorder. Mind that they were warned about the loss of their candlestick unless they repented and came to order.
 - (2) The preservation of Christ's church in this world is a fact (**MAT 16:18**) but not dependent upon absolute purity.
 - (3) The fate, though, of a persistently disorderly church, is the forfeiting of its blessing and identity in favor of another. **ROM 11:18-23.**
 - D. Their rapid and pervasive disorder provoked a censorious epistle from Paul.
 - (1) He marvelled at their rapid departure from the truth. **GAL 1:6.**
 - (2) He chided them for being turncoats to his ministry. **GAL 4:14-16.**
 - (3) He called them *foolish* (**GAL 3:1**), strong language in view of **MAT 5:22**.
 - (4) He closed the epistle, "From henceforth let no man trouble me..." (**GAL 6:17**). He had had enough.
 - (5) Other Pauline epistles to churches generally included prayer for them but this one has only his usual introduction and benediction of grace. **GAL 1:3; 6:18.**
 - a. God told Jeremiah, "...Pray not for this people for their good" (**JER 14:11**).
 - b. This is not to say that Paul had completely ceased praying for them, but a church should be comforted by having its minister tell them that he is praying for them when he writes them. They were denied such comfort.
4. Paul found it necessary to defend both his ministry and gospel as being from God. **GAL 1:11, 15-16; 2:8-9.**
 - A. False teachers of "the circumcision" had come unto the Galatians after Paul and cast doubts on his gospel and ministry. **GAL 6:13.**
 - B. They had evidently slandered Paul as being duplicitous: teaching circumcision for justification to Jews but not to the Gentiles who might be offended at circumcision, implying that he ordered his ministry for personal benefit. **GAL 1:10; 5:11.**
 - C. The irony of the slander was that the slanderers were preaching the necessity of

circumcision for their own benefit. **GAL 6:12.**

- (1) The overall message was, “You can be Christian while cleaving to the old ways of your peers and this will reduce persecution.”
- (2) The Galatians had suffered persecution (**GAL 3:4**) so this message had an appeal.
- (3) Such a gospel is certainly not of Paul. **2CO 6:16-17; 2TI 3:12.**
- D. Paul's main antagonists and rivals were self-pleasing Jews, even Christian Jews. **2CO 11:13, 22-23; TIT 1:10-11.**

5. The Galatians had “...fallen from grace” (**GAL 5:4**).

- A. They had not *fallen from grace* in the sense of losing their status as God's children. **GAL 3:26; 4:6-7.**
- B. They had fallen from the doctrine of grace that had converted them by Paul.
- C. When one abandons or degrades from a known superior position, he *falls* from that position. c/w **REV 2:4-5.**
 - (1) Apostasy is called a *falling away* (Gr. *apostasia*). **2TH 2:3.**
 - (2) “For the law was given by Moses, but GRACE and truth came by Jesus Christ” (**JOH 1:17**).
 - (3) The Galatians had initially trusted in Jesus Christ and His grace but had opted for hybridizing that with the inferior and abolished O.T. Mosaic code of “do and live” righteousness (**ROM 10:5**). This was how they had *fallen from grace*.
 - (4) Where the Spirit of Christ is, there is *liberty* (**2CO 3:17; GAL 5:1, 13**) but where the “spirit” of Moses is (the O.T.), there is *bondage*. **GAL 2:4; 4:3.**
 - (5) This epistle makes clear that relying on sinners' righteousnesses or on ceremony for justification is bondage *whether it be pagan or Mosaic*. **GAL 4:9-10; 5:1.**
- D. The corruption of the doctrine of salvation from grace to works was also affecting their conduct as brethren.
 - (1) Grace levels the playing field: all are unworthy incapable sinners by nature and no one has any more earned or natural claim on God than another. **ROM 3:9 c/w EPH 2:1-3.**
 - (2) The introduction of works (like circumcision) to be added for justification automatically introduced vainglorious, prideful superiority: “Oh, you aren't circumcised? Well, you know you can't be saved unless you're circumcised like me.” **GAL 5:26 c/w 6:15-16.**
 - (3) Contention had set in (**GAL 5:15**) and “Only by pride cometh contention...” (**PRO 13:10**).
 - (4) They had drifted from true “...faith which worketh by love” (**GAL 5:6**) to a corrupted faith which worked by pride, vanity and glorying.
 - (5) Never trivialize the importance of sound doctrine, especially the doctrine of Who God is and how He relates to His creation. The corruption of doctrine leads to the corruption of conduct. **ROM 1:21-25.**

6. Faith is a major theme in this epistle, and is contrasted with works-righteousness and quasi-faith.

- A. This epistle sets forth the *flawless* faith of Jesus Christ which justified sinners and made them righteous. **GAL 2:16; 3:21-22.**
- B. It also sets forth the faith of the saint after the manner of the faith of Abraham which *evidences* justification and righteousness. **GAL 3:5-7.**

7. This epistle is an excellent partner to Romans and likewise exposes and condemns many heresies.