

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 fleshly 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 candlesticks were 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. But they were each 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, not for Christ's or the Galatians' sakes, but 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." That was their slant on Christianity.
 - (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 may have been affecting their conduct as brethren.
 - (1) Grace levels the playing field: all are unworthy incapable sinners by nature and no one has any earned or natural claim on God that implies superiority over others. **ROM 3:9 c/w EPH 2:1-3.**
 - (2) The introduction of works (like circumcision) to be added for justification automatically introduced the potential for 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.

- A. Both epistles set forth salvation by the faith of Jesus Christ. **ROM 3:20-22; GAL 2:16.**
- B. Both epistles condemn adding works to grace for righteousness. **ROM 11:6; GAL 2:21.**
- C. Both epistles deny superiority by circumcision. **ROM 2:25-27; GAL 6:13.**
- D. Both epistles declare faith is superior to circumcision. **ROM 4:9-10; GAL 5:6.**
- E. Both epistles deny righteousness by law. **ROM 3:20-21; GAL 3:21.**
- F. Both epistles declare a true Israel v. a false Israel. **ROM 9:6; GAL 6:16.**
- F. Both epistles show God's promise unique to the seed. **ROM 9:7-8; GAL 3:16, 29.**
- G. Both epistles declare the children of promise as God's children. **ROM 9:8; GAL 4:28.**
- H. Both epistles deny salvation by race or class. **ROM 3:9-10; 10:12; GAL 3:28.**
- I. Both epistles declare believers to have claim on God's promise. **ROM 3:22; GAL 4:30-31.**
- J. Both epistles deny that the inheritance is of the law. **ROM 4:14; GAL 3:18.**
- K. Both epistles counter Pharisaism, Judaism, Dispensationalism and Arminianism.

8. At issue in this epistle is the true gospel versus a counterfeit gospel (**GAL 1:6-7**):

True gospel

Counterfeit gospel

Revelation from God	Invention of men
Approved by the apostles and elders	Denounced by the apostles and elders
Christ magnified	Moses magnified
God-glorifying	Man-glorifying
Blessing attached	Curse attached
Salvation by grace	Salvation by Law
Grace alone	Grace plus works
Glories in the cross	Changes the cross into a + sign
Glories in the offence of the cross	Shrinks from the offence of the cross
Faith of God and Christ	Faith of sinners
Sinner's faith counted for righteousness	Sinner's faith produces righteousness
Perfect salvation	Incomplete salvation
Christ's work saved	Christ's work saved none
Spiritual circumcision	Fleshly circumcision
Live and do	Do and live
Abrahamic covenant	Mosaic covenant
Inheritance by promise	Inheritance by obedience
Free salvation	Earned salvation
Man incapable	Man empowered
Heavenly Jerusalem	Earthly Jerusalem
Apostolic doctrine	Man's traditions
Consistent	Self-contradicting
Spread openly, plainly	Spread by subtility
Not calendrical	Calendrical
Mature religion	Childish religion
Spiritual religion	Fleshly religion
Forbids paganism	Incorporates and consecrates paganism
Persecution for the truth	Compromises to evade persecution
Law a schoolmaster	Law a taskmaster
Law a temporary expedient	Law still in effect
Liberty	Bondage

9. This epistle was written from Rome (see the postscript), where Paul for the gospel's sake would end up in bonds.
 - A. A number of Paul's epistles were written from Rome.
 - B. God's minister may be bound but not God's word. **2TI 2:9.**
 - (1) Even the death of God's witness cannot silence his message. **HEB 11:4.**
 - (2) One might as well try to bind the sweet influences of the seven stars. **JOB 38:31.**
 - C. Some of the most influential gospel declarations have come from the confines of a prison, as witness Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, or the Baptist preachers overheard by James Madison in 1774.

Chapter 1

vs. 1-5.

1. A major element in this epistle is Paul's defense of his ministry, that his apostleship and gospel were directly from Jesus Christ. **vs. 1, 11-12.**
 - A. He was an apostle by *the will of God* (**1CO 1:1**), not his own will or other men's wills who elected him such, as was Matthias. **ACT 1:23-26.**
 - B. He was an apostle in truth, unlike the false apostles that were troubling the churches with a false gospel. **2CO 11:13-15.**
 - C. Paul's legitimacy as an apostle could have been verified by others.
 - (1) Ananias of Damascus could have done so. **ACT 9:10-17.**
 - (2) The prophets and teachers of the Antioch church could have done so. **ACT 13:1-4.**
 - (3) The Jerusalem apostles certainly could have done so. **GAL 2:8-9.**
 - (4) Ephesus was praised for trying (testing, proving) false apostles and exposing them. **REV 2:2.**
 - a. The Galatians had rather condemned Paul on the basis of false accusation, not seeking to verify his claims nor giving him a chance to defend himself.
 - b. They had essentially not tried the false teachers and found them liars and concluded Paul was a liar without proof.
 - c. How important it is to prove all things (**1TH 5:21**) and follow the Biblical protocol for judging others!
 - d. Legitimate witness invites scrutiny and investigation of its claims, which fosters conversion in honorable folks. **ACT 17:11-12.**
 - e. Pharisaism by contrast works by duplicity and stealth, dishonesty which Paul had to *renounce* to be a minister of Christ. **2CO 4:1-2.**
 - [1] Pharasaism's tactics belie their progenitor. **JOH 8:44.**
 - [2] Shun any system which preaches righteousness through double-talk, contradictions and such like.
 - (5) That Paul had converted them to Christ was the seal of his apostleship (c/w **1CO 9:1-2**); he had not converted them to Moses as did those who came later.
 - D. Others had been called to be apostles by Christ on *earth* but Paul's call was from *heaven*, "...by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (v. 1). His was a very special call.
 - (1) Seeing the resurrected Christ was a qualification for apostleship. **ACT 1:21-23.**
 - (2) Paul saw the resurrected Christ. **1CO 9:1.**
 - (3) Barnabas confirmed this. **ACT 9:27.**

- (4) Paul affirmed, “And last of all he was seen of me also,...” (**1CO 15:8**).
 - a. He was the last qualified apostle. No other after that could meet the conditions of **ACT 1:21-23**.
 - b. Any presumed apostle after Paul would be constrained to only preach his gospel (v. 9), so what would be the point?
 - c. After the apostolic era, we are to expect no subsequent appearance of the resurrected Christ until the Second Coming when all shall see him. **1PE 1:8; MAT 24:30; REV 1:7**.
 - d. We are not to walk by sight but by faith (**2CO 5:7**) which comes by hearing the word of God (**ROM 10:17**) and the word of God has been completed so we can use it to measure any prophet or teacher (**1JO 4:6**) which would be impossible if God was continually sending apostles with novel doctrines.
- E. That Paul says, “...and God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (v. 1) does more than simply declare the resurrection.
 - (1) Christ died in full faith of God's *promise* of life. **ACT 2:27-28**.
 - (2) The promise of God is the substance of the true gospel which Paul preached. **GAL 3:16-18; 4:28**.
 - (3) Salvation for eternity is by God's promise, not the sinner's performance. **TIT 1:2; 1JO 2:25**.
 - (4) Paul's introduction was therefore very appropriate to these churches who had been converted to the gospel of promise, not the false gospel of law-works.