

Galatians

Summary

The book of Galatians is a letter sent by the apostle Paul to a group of churches in the southern part of the region called Galatia (modern-day Turkey). In his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-14:28), Paul ministered in southern Galatia cities such as Antioch in Pisidia, Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe, sharing the gospel message and starting new communities of believers. This letter is written to the believers in these churches and is largely a loving rebuke of some of the ideas they have let affect their communities. Paul is mainly criticizing a group of Jewish Christians, or "Judaizers," that have come into the church and attempted to enforce Old Testament law on new believers. He is worried that the people of these churches will fall back into the work-based, ritualistic religion of their past, instead of realizing that Christ has set them free and that it is their faith that justifies them.

Author

The opening verse of Galatians identifies the author of Galatians as the apostle Paul.

Date

The date given by most scholars for the letter to the Galatians is between A.D. 51-57. Galatians is one of Paul's earliest letters for which we have a record.

Primary Characters

Paul (Galatians 1-6)

Peter (Galatians 2)

Abraham (Galatians 4)

Historical Moments

Paul Writes His Letter to the Galatians (Galatians 1-6)

Paul Speaks of His Conversion (Galatians 1)

Paul Goes to Jerusalem (Galatians 1)

Paul Confronts Peter on the Issue of Circumcision (Galatians 2)

Major Theological Themes

There Is No Other Gospel - Paul is very emphatic that anyone who preaches a different gospel than Jesus Christ will be punished and is not within the will of God. Some of the Christians who were formerly followers of Judaism began to teach that Christians must still follow the dietary and social laws that applied to them in their former faith. This viewpoint separated them from the Gentile Christians, making them feel like second-class citizens in the church. Paul felt very strongly that he must address anyone who tried to add restrictions or qualifications outside of faith through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Justified By Faith, Not Works - The only way we can be fully redeemed is through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* The message of the gospel is that it is only through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ and belief in Him that one can be saved. There is no list of laws or works that one must fulfill; it is only by the grace given to us.

Christ Has Set Us Free - Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we have been released from Jewish ceremonial laws and customs that inhibited them. This was a struggle for the early Jewish converts to grasp, as formerly they had a set of rules and regulations that validated their relationship with God. Paul is preaching exactly what Christ had taught, that through Christ's sacrifice, He opened up a relationship that was justified by belief and not primarily action.

Lessons Learned from Galatians

Beware of False Teaching - In our culture, we can see people changing their theological views due to custom or personal viewpoint. One of Paul's strengths in his teaching is his ability to take a step back and analyze whether something is a compromise to the gospel. We must always be immersed in Scripture and prayer so that we have the knowledge and discernment to know what is in line with the message of Christ and what is false. Thankfully, in the twenty-first century, we have easy access to Scripture, but we need to make sure we are taking the time to commit ourselves to read it.

You Can't Work for Salvation or the Love of God - As Paul so frequently points out in his writings, there is nothing we can do to justify ourselves to God. It is only through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ that we can be redeemed and seen as whole by God. There is no amount of rituals, sacrifices, or acts of service that can bring us into closer communion with our Creator. It is only through faith that we are saved. If you are struggling with the idea that you must do something to make God love you, read Galatians and be encouraged that Jesus died for you so that you can live a life of faith, not one of guilt.

True Faith Produces Fruit - Although works do not justify us, Paul says that if we truly have faith in God, it will be visible in our lives. He encourages Christians to pursue the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Those who have these things in their lives are actually fulfilling the law in the way that Christ defined it. Remember that not all of these things will be present at all times in our lives, but this list is what we should aspire to as Christians, and we can accomplish it by walking in the Spirit.