

Galatians

Earliest Book of the New Testament	Galatians is the earliest book of the NT. Paul wrote it in 48/49 AD, soon after evangelizing the region of Galatia (modern day Turkey) on his 1 st missionary journey. This is 15/16 years after Christ and almost 40 years before Revelation (the Apocalypse of John) was written around 90 AD.
A Cyclical Letter	Unlike Romans, and 1 and 2 Corinthians, which are specific letters to specific churches, Galatians is a cyclical letter. It was written by Paul to be disseminated to all of the churches in the region of Galatia. That's important information because all of the churches in Galatia were dealing with a specific problem: the theological influence of the Judaizers.
The Problem of the Judaizers	The Judaizers were a militant band of Jewish theologians who were going behind Paul and teaching the churches in the region of Galatia that grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone was not sufficient for salvation or sufficient for following Jesus. Instead, in order to be in New Covenant relationship with Jesus, one had to come by way of the Old Covenant first (thus the reason for the name Judaizers). For example, the Judaizers taught that any male not Jewish had to be circumcised (the sign of the Old Covenant) before being baptized (the sign of the New Covenant).
The Most Severe Rebuke in the NT	Most NT letters follow a simple format in the introduction: (a) authorship and addressee and (b) thanksgiving by the author to the addressee. In Galatians, Paul doesn't do that. Instead, he introduces himself, defends his apostolic authority and then tears right into them: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different Gospel" (1:6). The issues Paul raises in Galatians are serious and the introduction sets the tone for the rest of the book.
The Corinthian Contrast	In 1-2 Corinthians, the issue Paul addressed was license, essentially saying you belong to Christ and living any way you please. In Galatians, the issue is legalism. Our flesh patterns typically fall in one area or the other. But what's important to understand is that both attitudes merited strong rebuke from Paul.
Theme of Galatians	By grace through faith alone
Key Verses	<i>¹⁰ For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." ¹¹ Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." (Gal 3:10-11).</i>

The Galatian Problem (1:6-10)

The Judaizers had influenced the churches in Galatia to the point that the Gospel Paul preached to them was no longer the Gospel the Galatians believed. They turned to a different "gospel," the Gospel of Legalism.

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! ¹⁰ Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Paul Defends His Apostolic Authority (1:11-2:21)

Before correcting what had gone wrong with the theology of the Galatians, Paul gives a defense of his apostolic authority. Included with it is a word about his rebuke of Peter, who had a problem with being associated with gentiles. Paul has to do this because the Judaizers had bedeviled them into believing Paul was way off base and he had gotten the Gospel wrong. As a result, he has to correct their view of him before he corrects their view of the Gospel.

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. (1:11-16)

¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? (2:14)

Correction One: Abraham Was Justified by Faith Alone, Not By Doing the Works of the Covenant

The best way for Paul to correct the Galatians is to point to the example of Abraham, who the Judaizers also believed was an example. Abraham relied on faith and that faith saved him.

⁷ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.⁸ Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”^[d] ⁹ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ¹⁰ For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”^[e] ¹¹ Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.”^[f] ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.”^[g] ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”^[h] ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (3:7-14)

Correction Two: What The Law Was Designed to Do Versus What It Was Not Designed to Do

The law was never designed to save. It was only given as a guardian until Christ came.

²¹ Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ²² But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. ²³ Before the coming of this faith,^[i] we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. (3:21-25)

Correction Three: The Sons of Hagar (Ishmael) and Sarah (Isaac) Contain Truths About the Promise vs the Flesh

Isaac was a child of the promise, Ishmael the child of the flesh. Ishmael persecuted the promise. That’s what the flesh does: it persecutes the promise, just like the Judaizers are doing to the Gospel.

²¹ Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³ His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise...²⁸ Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. (3:21-23; 28-29).

The “Therefore” Chapters (chs 5-6)

In chs 5-6, Paul applies the argument he’s set forth in the preceding chapters. If the law can’t save – only faith – this, Galatians, is how you must live.

- 1. Standing firm against Legalism:** It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. ² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law (5:1-3).
- 2. Live by the Spirit:** ¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever^[j] you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (5:16-24)
- 3. Sow to Please the Spirit (Live According to the Promise, Don’t Persecute It Like Ishmael and the Judaizers:** ⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (6:7-10).

