

Galatians

Authorship: “Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – and all the brothers with me” (Galatians 1:1).

Date: Probably about AD 47 (or shortly before the Jerusalem Council?)

Destination: “To the churches of Galatia” (Galatians 1:2). Galatia is the name of the Roman province of north-central Asia Minor, now modern Turkey.

Key Verse: “After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Galatians 3:3)

Theme: Only faith can save us from slavery to the law. We are to live our Christian lives by following God’s Spirit in freedom, not the law in bondage.

Unique Features: Galatians is a stern, severe, and solemn message (Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1-5). It’s objective is not to correct conduct, as the Corinthian letters do, but it is corrective – the Galatian believers were in grave peril. Because the foundations were being attacked, everything was threatened. Galatians contains no word of commendation, praise, or thanksgiving. There is no request for prayer, and there is no mention of their standing in Christ. No one with Paul is mentioned by name (Galatians 1:2). Compared to the other Pauline epistles this stands as a unique difference. The heart of the apostle Paul is laid bare, there is a deep emotion and strong feeling. This is his fighting epistle – he has on his war paint. He has no toleration for legalism. Someone has said that Romans comes from the head of Paul while Galatians comes from the heart of Paul. “Galatians takes up controversially what Romans puts systematically.” Furthermore, Galatians has become known as the “declaration of emancipation” from legalism of any type. This was Martin Luther’s favorite epistle, and it was on the masthead of the Reformation. It has been called the “Magna Charta” of the early church, the manifesto of Christian liberty, the pregnable citadel, and a veritable Gibraltar against any attack on the heart of the Gospel. “Immortal victory is set upon its brow.” It is the strongest declaration and defense of the doctrine of justification by faith in or out of Scripture. It is God’s polemic on behalf of the most vital truth of the Christian faith against any attack. Not only is the sinner saved by grace, but the saved sinner lives by grace. Grace is a way to life and a way of life.

Purpose: Stated by Paul, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel – not that there is a another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert [corrupt] the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:6-7). This letter was probably written from the general controversy over keeping the law. I.e., should the Gentiles be forced to keep Jewish laws and customs when they became converts? Paul apparently thought this was not necessary. Paul was the champion of freedom (from the law) who saw that neither Jew nor Gentile could be delivered from their sins by self-effort in keeping a set of ethical principles. The technical biblical term for this issue is called, “Justification by Faith.”

Theology: Sometimes referred to as “Luther’s book,” because Martin Luther relied strongly on this letter in his arguments against abusive theology of his day. It had been said that the rediscovery of the basic message of Galatians brought about the Reformation.

1. The primal address that Paul argues is that humankind is justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul is emphatic that, “Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “*The righteous live by faith*” (Galatians 3:11).
2. Life in the Spirit excludes a sinful nature. Paul defines a sinful nature as: “*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 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*” (Galatians 5:19-21).
3. Paul sums up the entire law by repeating Christ’s famous command: “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Galatians 5:14).
4. “*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ*” (Galatians 6:2).
5. “*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers*” (Galatians 6:10).

Outline:	I.	Introduction (1:1-10)
	II.	Paul and the Nature of His Apostleship (1:11-2:21)
	III.	Treatise: The Efficacy of Grace over Law (3:1-4:7)
	IV.	An Appeal to the Galatians (4:8-31)
	V.	Freedom in Christ (5:1-6:10)
	VI.	Conclusion with Personal Appeal (6:11-18)

Sources:

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