



## Overview of Galatians

### Introduction

Galatians has been called the Magna Carta of Christian liberty. It was Martin Luther's favorite book. It is the amplification of that pillar of doctrine, *the just shall live by faith* which occurs four times in the Bible (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38) and which led Luther to Christ.

Paul wrote Romans from his head. He wrote Galatians from his heart. Galatians is the treatise of which Romans is the full treatment.

The Galatian churches had been subverted by the deliberate perversion of Paul's true teaching, which had brought them to Christ out of heathen paganism. Malicious religious devotees, called "Judaizers," followed Paul as he travelled on his missionary journeys. They hounded him and harassed his converts for the rest of his life. The error they promulgated persists to the present day: the error that one can - indeed must - work one's way to heaven.

It appeals to human pride and vanity to think that there is something one can do to merit salvation. Many people accept the fact that Christ died for humanity as an example or even as a sacrifice. But to say that belief in that sacrifice is sufficient alone for salvation is too much for them. They discount such teaching. "Simple faith is too simple," they say. Actually, it is most difficult, even impossible, for the natural person unaided by the Holy Spirit to put his or her faith and trust in Jesus Christ (John 6:37).

At stake is nothing less than being justified in God's sight and therefore forgiven and cleansed of sin, assured of everlasting life, and saved eternally. Bible scholar, J.I. Packer, says of Galatians, "his letter is the most violent piece of polemical writing in the New Testament" (The Biblical Expositor, Volume III, Baker, 1983).

Do you believe that Christ's death is all sufficient to atone for your sins and the sins of the whole world, past, present and future? If you do, you agree with the apostle Paul. If you do not, you agree with those who subverted the Galatian believers and caused Paul to write this letter in heated response and out of deep emotion.

### Outline of Galatians

- I. Faith versus Works as the Way to Justification - Galatians 1-2
- II. Grace versus Law as the Means of Justification - Galatians 3-4
- III. Spirit versus Flesh in Attaining Justification - Galatians 5-6

#### I. Faith versus Works as the Way to Justification - Galatians 1-2

##### A. Faith Without Works

###### 1. The Biblical Standard for Righteousness

a. *Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him* (Hebrews 11:6).

b. *If you do not believe that I am He you will die in your sins* (John 8:24).

c. *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast* (Ephesians 2:8,9).

d. *The just shall live by faith* (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

e. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3).

###### 2. Works as Insufficient for Justification

Which good work would you offer to God for your salvation? Does church attendance, or service to others, or even martyrdom equal the suffering of the Son of God on the Cross? Or is it the accumulation of good works? Is there a scale in heaven which puts the death of Jesus Christ on one side and our good works on the other? How many good works would it take to earn salvation?

a. *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us* (Titus 3:5).

b. *By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight* (Romans 3:20).

c. *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law* (Romans 3:28).

## B. The Inability To Save Ourselves

### 1. Hopelessly Sinful

Paul tells the Galatians his own spiritual journey so they can see that he was saved by the same gospel that saved them. For there is only one gospel, that of Our Lord Jesus Christ, *who gave himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil age.* (Romans 3:28)

a. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23).

b. *There is none righteous, no not one, ...there is none who does good, no not one* (Psalm 14:1-3; Romans 3:10,12).

### 2. Helpless to Attain Righteousness

Apart from the grace of God we are all helpless and unable to attain righteousness.

a. *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6).

b. *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned* (1Corinthians 2:14).

## C. The Problem of Faith versus Works

The problem of faith versus works is that it offends our pride that God receives individuals on the basis of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ as the one and only sacrifice for sin and not on anything they have done (Hebrews 9:12-28).

"There was no other good enough to take away our sin; He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in"  
There is a Green Hill Far Away,  
by Cecil Alexander.

Paul seems to have recognized and understood the importance of this truth earlier and to a greater extent than anyone else. Hence he drew the fire both of human enemies and our arch enemy, Satan, in a

way which is difficult for us to grasp. People today do not grapple with doctrinal or philosophical issues as did earlier generations. (In our shallow, frothy culture with its paganism, materialistic values and self-centered priorities it is refreshing when people grapple intellectually with anything at all!) Therefore, Galatians is good for us as mental stimulation apart from the great doctrinal issue because we are able to trace Paul's thought and arguments.

Baxter says in his succinct way, "Read Romans to be grounded in Christian doctrine; read Corinthians to be guided in Christian practice; read Galatians to be guarded against deceptive error" (Explore the Book, by J. Sidlow Baxter, Zondervan, 1966, Volume 6).

Paul had experienced both the ineffectiveness of works and religion, even the right religion. Judaism was the true religion before Christ. Anyone who wanted God had to come through Israel as did Ruth, Tamar, Naaman, and others (2 Kings 5:1-3, 14-15). Paul had excelled his peers in his own religion but it did not save him, zealous though he was.

Paul asks in Romans, *What shall we say then, is the law sin* (Romans 7:7)? He answers, *Certainly not* (NIV). He would not have known his sin of covetousness except the law said, *You shall not covet. For apart from the law sin was dead* (Romans 7:8). But, he says, the knowing of the commandment made sin come alive and he died, for the law condemned him to death for his sin. *And the commandment which was to bring life, I found to bring death* (Romans 7:10).

Furthermore, Paul had experienced the power of the Gospel of the grace of God through Jesus Christ to save instantly those who believe His word and trust Him.

Therefore, when enemies of the Gospel reached Galatia and introduced circumcision and lawkeeping as works necessary for salvation, Paul "saw red". It wasn't that he had neglected to tell his converts about keeping the law of Moses, to the contrary, he had deliberately avoided telling them about it. Their faith in Christ had saved them and the Holy Spirit within them would keep them. Paul had been able to leave them because he was confident of God's work in them (Philippians 1:6). Yet he visited them on each of his three missionary journeys because of his love for them.

Paul closes the first two chapters with his great statement of identification with Jesus Christ. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer *I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me* (Galatians 2:20).

Are you trusting God's finished work in you, whereby He sees you as perfect in Christ (Ephesians 1:3,4 with Jude 24-25)?

Do you introduce others to Christ without demanding that they do more than believe on Him for eternal life confessing their need of a Savior? Or do you give them a list of do's and don'ts?

## II. Grace versus Law as the Means of Salvation - Galatians 3-4

### A. Bewitched by the Law - Galatians 3:1

What the Judiazers didn't say was that the law saved no one. Neither circumcision, nor the obedient and continual sacrificing of animals, nor the highest personal standards of life ever saved one single person (Hebrews 10:1-4). James says that the Law is a mirror to show us our shortcomings (James 1:23-24). A mirror can do nothing more than reflect an image. It cannot cleanse or make anyone presentable.

In spite of this obvious and well-known fact, legalism still attracts followers enamored of a path that leads nowhere.

### B. Bondage of the Law

Even though Peter was a devout Jew and scrupulous law keeper, he proclaimed openly the hopelessness of keeping the law (Acts 10:14, 15:10). He called it a yoke which neither his nor previous generations could keep.

James said that the law must be kept perfectly or it is not kept at all, *For whoever shall keep the whole law yet stumble in one point is guilty of all* (James 2:10).

Paul calls the law a schoolmaster for preparation to recognize and receive Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). Faith in Christ took the place of the Law.

This does not mean that there is no longer any Law, for the Law is God-given and therefore perfect (Psalm 19:7). It is God's standard for mankind. However, those who are "in Christ" are credited with keeping the Law (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:10,14).

Are you resting in Christ's work on the Cross for you? What can you possibly do to add to His sacrifice which God accepted by raising Him from the dead? Are you resisting outside influence or inner temptation to rely on a system of works for good standing with God?

## III. Flesh versus Spirit in Attaining Justification - Galatians 5-6

### A. Freed From the Bondage of the Flesh - Galatians 5

Even though we have been freed from the bondage of sin through faith in Christ and even though we are not under bondage to the Law, there is another bondage from which we need to be freed - the bondage of the flesh. Flesh, with the "h" removed and spelled backwards is "self" the root of self-centeredness. It is our "self" that demands gratification and recognition and is the seat of pride and lust. The deeds of the flesh are listed in Galatians 5:15-21.

The Spirit is the opposite of the flesh. *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh* (Galatians 5:16). The Holy Spirit makes believers fruitful. The fruit of the Spirit is listed in Galatians 5:22-26. Which would be more beneficial to obey, the demands of the flesh or the leading of the Spirit?

### B. Free to Bear Fruit - Galatians 6

Paul gives the effects of freedom in Chapter six. They are:

1. Freedom to bear the burdens of others as well as our own - Galatians 6:1-5
2. Freedom to not be deceived - Galatians 6:6-10
3. Freedom to bear the marks of the Lord Jesus - Galatians 6:11-18

Paul silences all opposition by referring to his own sufferings for Christ. *From now on let no one trouble me for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Galatians 6:18). Freedom to suffer for Christ without being in bondage to fear or pride is a high measure of freedom.

## Applications

1. How free are you from sin, deception, legalistic systems and the flesh's temper, self-indulgence, pride and lust?
2. Are you free to bear your own burdens and those of others? Are you free enough to willingly suffer inconvenience and more for Christ if need be?
3. Will you thank the Lord Jesus for dying for you and for living today to be Lord of your life?
4. Will you choose to live by faith in Christ with works as the fruit and not the root of your faith?