

A LIFE OF GRACE AND FAITH

Galatians Review

Introduction:

Well, here we are, a few days into the year 2014. How is your year going so far? Every year as we begin a new year, I tend to look back at the past year, reviewing some of the major events of the year. I also cannot help but wonder what the year ahead has in store for me and my family, for us as a church and for you, as individuals and families in our church. There will no doubt be exciting times—new grandchildren, weddings, graduations. But there may also be difficult times—sickness, personal struggles, death and loss. Then again, perhaps this will be the year the Lord returns to take his children home to glory.

Well as we leave behind the Christmas season and move into a new year, we need to move forward in our study of God's Word as well. Last fall we began a study from the book of Galatians. It has been quite a few weeks since we left off in the middle of chapter 3, but I want to get back into it again now. Since it has been so long, I think a bit of review is in order. In fact, what I want to do this morning is simply to review for you the part of the book we have already covered. Then next week we will carry on with the next section.

We will begin with some background to the letter itself—who it was written to, when it was written, and why:

The churches: Galatia was a Roman province in the south-central part of what is today Turkey. It is probably to the churches in this region that Paul wrote this letter. So these would most likely be the churches that were founded by Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, in the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

The timing: The letter appears to have been written within a year after Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch in Syria – about AD 48.

The Purpose: Paul was alarmed by the news he was hearing about the error that was coming into the churches of that region. It seemed that men from Jerusalem, claiming to represent the apostles there, were

telling these new Gentile believers that they needed to be circumcised and follow the rules and requirements of the Law if they were to really be accepted by God. This letter was Paul's attack on this false teaching and his attempt to shake up these believers to see how they were being led astray.

The letter of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians is a letter of liberation. It is a call to all who have been set free in Christ to live in that freedom, to fight for that freedom and to defend that freedom. Galatians is a forceful pronouncement of freedom based on grace. It is a letter celebrating the freedom we find only in Jesus Christ—not freedom to do whatever we please, but freedom from sin and freedom to obey and serve our Savior.

The letter to the Galatians was a favorite of the German reformer, Martin Luther. In fact he is credited with writing these words: "The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am, as it were, in wedlock." Some have described its contents as "the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation" and the Magna Charta of spiritual emancipation." Chuck Swindoll describes it as "...an inspired chamber that continually re-sounds with three monosyllabic words: 'You are free...you are free...you are free.'"

We obviously don't have time to go through all of the arguments Paul presented in the first 2½ chapters of this epistle, but in the next few minutes I would like to try to summarize a few of the things we looked at back in the fall.

The letter begins with a very bold statement by the apostle Paul regarding his authority to speak on God's behalf – read v. 1. Paul's argument throughout this letter stands or falls on the authority of his apostleship and he is very quick to point out the truth of his calling by God.

In vv. 3-5 he lays out the fundamental truth of the gospel message which is critical to understand. It can be summarized as: grace to you and glory to God, because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Read vv. 3-5. Verses 1 and 2 claim authority for his message; verses 3–5 give a summary of that message. So the greeting of the letter itself is a pre-

view of the whole letter. Paul takes these two things (the authority and content of his message) and unfolds them in that order (cf. 1:6–2:10; 2:11–6:18).

1:6-10 – Paul addresses the danger of turning to another gospel. In fact, he points out that any other gospel is really no gospel at all. There is only one true gospel – the good news of salvation by grace alone through repentance and faith. To turn away from the truth of the gospel to another way is not only astonishing, but anyone trying to proclaim any other message is subject to God’s judgment and curse.

1:11-2:10 – We spent two weeks looking at this section which is Paul’s defense of his gospel message. There are two key parts to his argument. First, in 1:11-24 he makes it clear that he is not a “second-hander.” In other words, his message was not a second-hand message. His message did not come from other men, but through a direct revelation from Jesus Christ. He gives us, his readers, some clear information regarding the timeline of his life following his conversion to show that the gospel he proclaim had not been taught to him by other men.

In 2:1-10 he defends his message, addressing another apparent accusation. It seems that these Judaizers, the false teachers from Jerusalem were accusing him of preaching something different from the apostles in Jerusalem. So, he points out that the gospel he preaches is indeed the same message proclaimed by the Jerusalem apostles. When he went up to Jerusalem 14 years after his conversion, the foremost apostles there, James, Peter and John, not only welcomed him but also commissioned him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. There was and is complete unity in the gospel message, and it does not include keeping the Law in order to be saved, as these false teachers were insisting.

2:11-21 – Not only is it important to have the true gospel but it is important to live our lives in step or in sync with the gospel. In these verses, Paul points out the hypocrisy that led Peter and the other Jews to get out of step with the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. (*Discuss briefly the events surrounding this hypocrisy.*) It is so easy to get caught up with legalistic rules which minimize the grace of God and add our own efforts to the Christian life. He concludes this part of his epistle by placing his stake in the ground... read 2:21.

3:1-9 – After defending the authority of his apostleship and his message, Paul turns to address the Galatian believers directly about the way they have been led astray into thinking that the salvation they acquired by faith must now be maintained and lived out by their own efforts. He asks a series of questions all designed to make them see how foolish it is to think that they can somehow complete the work God began by their own efforts. (*Briefly go through the questions in vv. 2-6.*) He makes it very clear that it is faith from beginning to end.

3:10-14 – Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law. In vv. 10-12 Paul points out the curse of the Law and how we are all under that curse. In vv. 13-14 he shows us Christ’s solution to the curse. He redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us. He took the curse on himself, so that we could know the blessing of Abraham—the blessing of being declared righteous by faith.

Conclusion:

So what? How does this affect us today? I cannot say too strongly how important it is to understand the truth of the message of Galatians. I believe that one of the most important verses in this entire letter is found in chapter 2, verse 16 – read it.

There is an old hymn that says it so well:

*Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe,
Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.*

I would like to summarize all of this with some thoughts borrowed from the Living Insights Study Bible, by Chuck Swindoll.

Regardless of what you may have been taught or how you may feel at this moment, this is the truth of the matter: Jesus' sacrificial death wiped away the stain of sin. There is nothing you or I can do that can save our guilty souls. We cannot “earn” God's love by following the rules. The gospel of grace says, “Believe in His sufficient, ‘once-for-all’ death on the cross, God says that’s enough. Now we must agree with heart and mind that it is enough.” True freedom comes when we joyfully accept God's gift of grace and by faith alone live out our new life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Have you come to trust in Jesus alone for salvation?