

A STUDY ON GALATIANS
Week 1
Galatians 1:1-2:10

Stay Focused on Christ Alone
From the Womb to the End

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THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

The Reason for this Letter

This Letter is reaching out to believers who are stuck in a legalistic religion. Paul longs to help us to see that obeying the law alone will always fall short in getting us to God. We can never reach God through our own might. Our wall of sin is simply stacked up too high. We need Christ! It is only because of Jesus Who carried God's punishment for sin, and thus becoming cursed on our behalf on a cross, that this wall between us and God can be demolished, forever.

It is faith in Jesus that brings freedom of punishment, and freedom to truly live in God's will, all the time, till we walk with our Father into eternity.

A Few Important Details

Paul wrote this letter around AD 55 to believers in the Northern Galatia area of Asia Minor, primarily around the modern Ankara (ancient Ancyra, the capital of Galatia) in Turkey.



Important passages would include Paul sharing his life story from Galatians 1:11-2:14; the punishment of the law that Christ bore on our behalf - Galatians 3:1-20; the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Galatians 5:16-26, and the importance of caring for one another in chapter 6:1-10.

Most Pauline letters start with warm thanks and praise for the church (e.g., Romans, Corinthians, Philippians). Galatians jumps straight into rebuke ("I am astonished..." in 1:6). This abrupt, strong tone is unique and reflects how seriously upset Paul was about their drift toward legalism.

In 1:17, Paul mentions going to "Arabia" (likely the Nabataean kingdom, modern Jordan area) right after Damascus, before heading to Jerusalem. This mysterious three-year detour (possibly for reflection or early ministry) isn't detailed in Acts—it's a quirky autobiographical nugget unique to Galatians.

Galatians 5:22–23 gives the famous nine-fold "fruit of the Spirit" (love, joy, peace, etc.)—the longest and most comprehensive such description anywhere in Scripture. For its short length (only 6 chapters), the book packs a punch on Spirit-led living.

Unlike most of his letters (dictated to a scribe), Paul took the pen himself for the closing of Galatians (6:11), emphasizing it with big, bold handwriting. Scholars think this was partly due to poor eyesight (hinted in 4:15) or just to drive home his passion—like yelling in ALL CAPS in a heated email.

Some other Interesting Facts

Galatians has exactly 149 verses across 6 chapters, making it one of the shorter Pauline epistles. For comparison: It's longer than Philemon (25 verses) or 2 Thessalonians (47), but shorter than Ephesians (155 verses) or Philippians (104). Interestingly, in the New Testament canon, Paul's epistles to churches are roughly ordered by descending length, but Galatians comes before the slightly longer Ephesians.

The Greek word for "law" (*nomos*) appears 32 times in Galatians—more densely than anywhere else in the New Testament. (Romans has the most overall at 74, but over twice the length.) This averages "law" in nearly every 5th verse from chapters 2–6, underscoring the Book's intense debate over legalism vs. grace.

"Faith" (*pistis*) shows up over 20 times, one of the highest concentrations in Paul's writings. Key phrases like "faith in/of Christ" (*pistis Christou*) appear multiple times (e.g., 2:16 twice, 2:20, 3:22). This ties directly to Galatians' core Message of justification by faith.

Among its distinct Greek words, about 30 appear only here in the entire New Testament (e.g., certain terms tied to Paul's autobiographical details or anti-legalism arguments). The word "Judaism" (*Ioudaismos*) is used twice (1:13–14)—the only occurrences in the whole New Testament!

For its size, Galatians quotes or alludes to the OT more densely than most Pauline letters—especially Abraham stories (Genesis) and Hagar/Sarah allegory (unique extended use in 4:21–31).

Galatians 1:1-5, Your Calling

After greeting the believers, Paul introduces himself and remind the believers in Galatia that he had been appointed by Jesus and God the Father, Who had risen Christ from the dead, to be an apostle (vv. 1-2). It is important for him that *believers should acknowledge his divine calling*.

Paul continues to share that the *grace and peace* that believers can experience is possible only *because Christ had sacrificed His life for us* (vv. 3-4)! God's plan of salvation literally saved us from the claws of sin (v. 4). It pulled us out of this kingdom into His Kingdom. This clear division that Paul presents between "the present evil age" and the unmentioned, "coming Messianic age", was familiar to both Jew and Christian.

Paul uses the "will of our God and Father" to confirm that this loving and costly Rescue in Christ is *deeply rooted in the Plan of God*, and not merely in our subjective responses.

Rescued by our God we can now live completely to His glory! For this divine love Act we cannot do anything else but *glorify His Name forever* (v. 5). This is how we *express and confess our eternal and infinite indebtedness to Christ our Lord!*

As we serve God, in whatever capacity, it truly helps to remember that *your true "appointment" came from God*, not from any committee, board, or person. This will be very helpful in times where your service or leadership is being challenged.

Take a moment to praise God that He...*called you...to serve!*

- ❖ How would you describe your divine calling?
- ❖ Re-read this passage. How does it help you to embrace your calling more and truly live into it?

Galatians 1:6-10, The One and Only True Gospel

Paul is concerned about how easily some believers can exchange the one and only true Gospel for another message (v. 6). Some teachers came and had started spreading a false message amongst the believers, *confusing* many of them (v. 7). Paul is not questioning their *sincerity* or their *passion*, but their *theology*! Remember, *if it is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ it is “really no gospel at all”* (v. 7a)!

For this, these teachers will *join the devil and his following of fallen angels in hell* (v. 8)! Paul is extremely serious about this.

There is *no other message than the Truth* as Paul had shared it, and spreading another “gospel” will end in an eternal disaster (v. 9)!

Paul also clarifies that he is not trying to impress anyone or become “popular”—he is simply a *faithful “servant of Christ”* (v. 10). How can he try to impress people anyhow with something that is not even his...?!

It cannot be emphasized enough: We cannot simply allow false teachers to continue destroying the true Gospel Message. If you know about false teachings it is your responsibility to step up and make the Church leaders aware of this. It needs to be addressed with great seriousness. Leading people astray, rather than leading them to Christ, or deeper into a relationship with Him is a serious offense against the Lord Who had died for this Message of hope and salvation. Do you know about such false teachers? Pray about this and then decide what your next step should be.

- ❖ Has the Message of Jesus Christ become confusing to you? Where do you think did this confusion start?
- ❖ How do we get ourselves and / or loved ones back to the “One and Only True Gospel”?

Galatians 1:11-24, Paul's Life in a Nutshell...since his time in the womb!

*This Gospel that Paul was bringing to people was not something that he came up with—it comes straight from Jesus Christ (vv. 11-12)! Before Paul knew Christ he was a *rigorous Jew* and even persecuted the Christian Church (v. 13). In his ideal world all Christians should have been wiped from the face of the earth! Soon Paul became a model Pharisee, a religious fanatic of all Jewish traditions (v. 14).*

*Yet, even since Paul was in the womb, God had already bestowed grace upon Paul...as an *unborn child* (v. 15a)! Even before Paul had ever existed God had already grabbed a hold of him and called him into full time ministry (v. 15b). Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, told Paul about this calling—an *encounter that had changed his entire life* and ignited a deep passion in his life to share the Good News about Christ especially with people not belonging to Israel (v. 16a). At first Paul had to ask advice from other Christians about what to say (v. 16b). Rather than going to the apostles in Jerusalem though, he went straight to Arabia and later to Damascus (v. 17). Only three years later did he go to Jerusalem, where he stayed with Peter for fifteen days and also saw James (vv. 18-20). Paul then started preaching in the regions of Syria and Cilicia (v. 21). At this stage the Churches in Judea only knew Paul as the persecutor who tried to erase the Christian faith, but was now preaching it to others (v. 23)! They were so excited about how Paul was now being used by God to His glory (v. 24)!*

Even though you might have messed up at some point in your life, can you imagine how huge the grace of God is that He had called you to be in a relationship with Him and be used by Him, even before your birth! You are indeed so special to God. Do not let the devil win by convincing you that what you had done wrong is too big to be forgiven, or so bad that it should prevent you from any kind of ministry to our Father—that is a lie from the father of lies! Soak for a moment in how precious God's plan of salvation is...and that this includes...you. Savor this: *Since the womb God has been at work in you, has called you, has a plan for your life.*

- ❖ What have you learned from Paul's life story?
- ❖ Take a moment to reflect on your life and write the highlights down below.
- ❖ What have you learned from your own life story?

Galatians 2:1-10, Keep the Focus on Christ Alone

Fourteen years later Paul went back to Jerusalem along with Barnabas and Titus (v. 1). God had called him to return and *share the Gospel now also with believers in the city of Jerusalem* (v. 2a). Paul also met privately with the Church leaders to make sure that they were all on the same page about the Message of the Good News (v. 2b). He didn't care about who they were, or what they had done in the past, because who better to know than Paul that *God only cared about what was going on in their hearts* (v. 6a)! It was about what came from *there* that they had to talk about and agree upon.

Titus, a Greek, was *not circumcised* (v. 3a). Some believers understood that this was not necessary anymore, but other Jews were upset about it (vv. 3b-4). Paul was serious about how wrong it would be to focus on rules and laws erasing the freedom that Christ had brought to us (v. 4). Such *actions* would *enslave* us again to *religious rules and laws*... This has to be prevented at all cost (v. 5)!

The leaders in Jerusalem agreed that Paul's Message was correct (v. 6b). *Nothing had to be added or taken away from it*. It was just right and no wonder...all of them received the *Message from the same God*, right (v. 8)?! *The same God who had appointed Peter as apostle to the circumcised is also the God who appointed Paul as apostle to the uncircumcised* (v. 7). James, Peter and John were all glad about this divine appointment to Paul (v. 9a). A handshake from these "pillars" of the Church in Jerusalem meant a lot to Paul, illustrating to him that they were *all part of the same family of believers with only one goal: Spreading the Good News to all!* They agreed that Paul and Barnabas would continue working amongst the non-Jews and that the Church leaders in Jerusalem would focus on the work amongst Israel (v. 9b). These leaders did encourage Paul *not to forget the poor believers in Jerusalem*, for whom he had already started raising funds anyhow (v. 10).

It is not always easy for us to look at the new, changed creation in Christ, rather than who people were or how they might look like on the outside. However, the challenge remains: Pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to look at changed hearts, enabling people to start fresh and serve God in amazing new ways. This is often so difficult, especially with people that we really know well...especially when they start serving in the Church...or when they even start filling leadership positions! If you are struggling with someone with a terrible past, who had experienced a God-encounter, and had been changed by Christ's grace, it is time to *look at the heart*...at what truly matters...and *work together as one family in Christ to God's glory*. What would a next step for you look like?

It is so important that we don't get ourselves entangled in all kinds of laws and rules, enslaving ourselves to religion, rather than living in a real and true relationship with our Father.

- ❖ Take a moment to think carefully about your walk with God. What about your spiritual life is simply rules and laws, and what is effectively building into a living relationship with God?

- ❖ What can you do to keep your focus on what is truly important in your relationship with our Father?
- ❖ Spend some time in prayer for the next lesson, and read ahead a little.