

By Grace

The book of Galatians



Bible studies 2020

28There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

Note: the 2020 preaching series covers chapters 2-6. If you would like to following the preaching pattern more closely, begin at study 2. Alternatively, start one week early, or finish one week late!

Galatians

A summary and introduction

Paul's letter to the Galatians speak with an incredibly important message – that salvation is by faith alone. Salvation is not gained by following laws, or by living out a moral code, or by doing good. Christianity is not some set of religious observances. It is not a “human achievement” based faith. It is about what Christ has done for us, not about what we have done for him. We cannot “improve” upon what God has done in Christ. Galatians points to the work of the cross as the only means to salvation.

Paul appeals to Abraham as an example of faith – a faith that came BEFORE the law. His salvation was by faith, not by dependence upon the law (which did not yet exist) God's way has always been based on PROMISE and FAITH. He achieved this through Christ becoming a curse for us (3:13)

The theme of freedom is also important. Compared to the slavery of the law and sin, the freedom we have in Christ is a freedom to eternal life. The Christian life is not to be one that is slave to a “system” of religion, but one that is slave to Christ who achieved our salvation on the cross. The Paul and Barnabas situation is a good example of this danger of falling into a religious “system”.

Galatians overview:

- 1 Salutation (1:1–5)
- 2 No other gospel (1:6–10)
- 3 Autobiographical sketch: Paul's independent gospel (1:11–2:14)
 - 3.1 Defence of the gospel in Jerusalem (2:1-10)
 - 3.2 Defence of the gospel in Antioch (2:11-21)
- 4 Faith receives the promise (2:15–5:1)
 - 4.1 Righteousness by faith (3:1-18)
 - 4.2 adoption as sons (3:19-4:7)
 - 4.3 rejecting slavery (4:8-31)
- 5 Christian freedom (5:2–12)
- 6 Flesh and Spirit (5:13–26)
- 7 Mutual help and service (6:1–10)
- 8 Concluding comments and final greeting (6:11–18)

Study One – Galatians chapter 1

Opening discussion:

What have you heard people say about “how to get to heaven”?

Introduction

Paul outlines his defence as an apostle along with the doctrine of grace. It is in the cross alone that salvation is found – the **works** of the law must be rejected.

There is no “thanksgiving” in this introduction, thus setting the tone for the letter.

Paul rebukes the Galatians in that they have turned to another gospel – rather than the gospel of Jesus which he received himself by divine revelation and passed on to them.

Read Verses 1 - 5

1. The introduction of a letter often introduces the background for issues that may have been present in the church of those addressed.
What does this introduction tell us about Paul’s reasons for writing? Think about what it tells us about the author and the recipients.

Read verses 6-10

2. What are the explicit issues Paul is outlining in the church in Galatia?
3. What do these verse tell you about Paul’s integrity as a preacher and minister of the gospel?
4. Do you think we are in similar dangers today from hearing “different gospels”?
Examples?

Study Two – Galatians chapter 2

Opening discussion:

What are the themes of Galatians so far?

Introduction

Paul wants to show that he was called by God. He did “not confer with flesh and blood” (1:15-16) He received the gospel by Jesus’ revelation (1:11-12) and was acknowledged by the other apostles in his commission (2:9). He was charged with only having the teaching of the apostles, yet he conducted his ministry for 3 years before he met with the apostles.

14 years after his Jerusalem visit in 1:18, he went to Jerusalem for the famine relief visit. Hence, 17 years after his conversion he went to speak to the apostles about the gospel he was preaching to the Gentiles. And they added nothing to his message (2:6)

Peter’s withdrawal from Gentile table fellowship was from fear of “*the circumcision party*” (who insisted Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law). This led others to do the same (Barnabas). Paul opposed Peter to his face. By withdrawing, Peter was causing division by validating the food laws. Were the Gentiles to follow the Jewish Law, or not?!

Justification cannot come through effort, but only through reliance on the person and work of Jesus. Salvation is for the Gentile and Jew on the same basis.

Paul goes to Jerusalem

1. Read Galatians 2:1-10

a. Why did Paul go to Jerusalem?

b. What was the result of his journey to Jerusalem?

i. Peter:

ii. Paul:

The Problem

2. Read Galatians 2:11-14

- a. This event is summarised also in Acts 15:1. Why did Peter separate himself from the Gentiles at meals? (You could also refer to Acts 10 and 11)

- b. Why did Paul oppose him to his face?

- c. What does this mean for us?

Paul's Proposition

3. Read Galatians 2:15-21

- a. How are we justified? Compare 2 Corinthians 6:14 and Job 25:4

- b. How are we justified through Christ?
 - i. Verse 16a
 - ii. Verse 16b
 - iii. Verse 16c

- c. What is the issue in verse 17-21?

Study Three – Galatians chapter 3

Opening discussion:

When you were young, and your parents had to leave you alone in the house, who was in charge? How did you feel about that?

Introduction

Having begun the Christian life with the Spirit, will we complete it with the flesh? Legalism is identified with a return to the law. Righteousness is not a “property”, but a “righteous status”, imparted as a gift.

For the Jews, the purpose of the law was to make people accountable to God. A superintendent. Custodian. Supervising the conduct of children. Through Christ (verse 4-5), Jews were able to be adopted as sons. Gentiles (verse 8) were also released from slavery to false gods to become sons and heirs. Being able to call God “Abba, Father” is proof of this new adopted status. (A term not used by Jews in the past to address God).

Read Galatians 3:1-14

1. What have the Galatians done, which leads Paul to complain of their senselessness and to ask if they have been bewitched?
2. Read verse 3:1b
How does this work out today? To what extent do your Christian witness and evangelism do this?
3. Read verses 2-5
How does Paul’s appeal to their suffering (v4), their experience (2-5) and Christ’s death (2:21) expose the futility and foolishness of human effort? Explain Paul’s argument.
4. How does the example of Abraham (6-9) support Paul’s argument?
How is our faith in Christ a fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham?

5. Read v 10-13 – Paul expands the two alternatives of 2:16.
 - a. How does each OT quote expose the problem of trying to be right with God by trusting in one’s ability to keep the law?

 - b. How does Jesus solve this problem for us? (v13-14)

6. What Christian rules seem to be important in our “circle”?

Read Galatians 3:15-24

7. In verses 15-18.
 - a. What is the parallel Paul wants to make between the types of covenants (wills) people make, and the covenant promise (3:8) God made to Abraham?

8. In verses 19-25
 - a. Since the law was not to take the place of the promise, how do verses 19 and 23 explain what the law’s purpose actually is (see Rom 3:20)?

 - b. How is relating to God by the law like being kept in prison, or scolded by a harsh disciplinarian?

 - c. How does Christ change all this?

9. How would you use this passage with someone who thought that keeping the Golden Rule or the 10 commandments is enough to get right with God?

Study Four – Galatians chapter 4

Opening discussion:

In what ways do we sometimes see Christians “return” to their old life before Christ?

Introduction

The Galatians had turned from false gods. Will they now turn back and become slaves again?

Isaac and Ishmael represent two types of descendants: **flesh** and **promise**.

Sarah and Hagar (Gen 16-21) represent the two covenants: Mt Sinai (**slavery**) and the new covenant (**freedom**). And two **Jerusalems** – the present Jerusalem and the Jerusalem above. (verses 25-26)

Ishmael was expelled. God will reject this side. Why then would the Galatians want to return to that side?!

Read Galatians 4:21-31

1. These two “branches” represent 2 religions.

Which religions? What does each religion represent?

2. What did it mean to the Jews to have Abraham as their Father?

3. READ Matthew 3:9

What is John the Baptist saying here?

4. READ John 8:31-44

What is Jesus saying about this?

Abraham's sons:

A. Slave Woman	B. Free Woman
Born in ordinary way	Born as a result of promise
Mount Sinai (Arabia) covenant	Mount Sinai(?) Covenant
Hagar and Ishmael	Sarah
Present Jerusalem	Above Jerusalem
In slavery with her children	Free

5. Consider Isaac and Ishmael

Consider the differences in their birth:

- a. Which one was a "natural" way?

- b. As humans, what are we "naturally"?

- c. What was Superman's birth story?!

6. Who are we born under?

- a. What does that mean?

- b. Verse 29 – what should we expect?

- c. What happened to Ishmael (of the Arabians) and his mother? Why?

7. Ishmael: a religion of?

Isaac: a religion of?

Study Five – Galatians chapter 5

Opening discussion:

What do you have to **do** to be a Christian?

Introduction

Using freedom as an opportunity for the flesh is dangerous. Again, it is a submission to a return to slavery. **Legalism** is a return to the flesh. But when justification is an excuse for **self-indulgence**, this is also a return to **flesh** slavery. (Compare Romans 6) **Love** is the imperative. Living by the SPIRIT is the alternative to living under the LAW

Read Galatians 5:1-6

1. What is Paul's argument?

a. What is the specific issue?

b. What are the consequences of verse 3?

2. "Have faith and live as you please"

What do you think of this as a summary of what Paul is saying?

Read Galatians 5:7-12

3. What are the marks of false teaching?

4. What does Paul think of the false teachers?

5. What is your reaction to false teachers today?

Read Galatians 5:13-15

6. What does Paul mean by “indulge the sinful nature?”
In what ways might we misuse our Christian freedom in this way?

Read Galatians 5:16-25

7. We are in constant conflict between the **flesh** and the **Spirit**.
a. What do these two words mean?

8. Your Christian friend gets drunk one night.
The next morning they read verse 21 and conclude that they have lost their salvation. How would you help your friend?

9. Christian victory = “crucifying the flesh” and “walking by the Spirit”.
What do these two phrases mean in practice?

Study Six – Galatians chapter 6

Opening discussion:

In what ways are the issues around circumcision in the Galatian church similar to the issues around Baptism in the Christian church today?

Introduction

Paul's conclusion is key to the letter. Usually, a letter writer would summarise the main points of the letter, which Paul does here. Paul takes the pen to write with his own large letters. He concludes by warning of the Judaisers:

- they want to make a good showing in the flesh, focussing on the approval of Jews, rather than the approval of God.
- they want to avoid persecution because of preaching the cross of Christ. By preaching justification by faith and not by works, they would open themselves up to the same persecution as Paul was facing. (5:11)
- they are hypocrites who do not even keep the law themselves. They want to boast in the Gentile's circumcision.

Paul's actions and motives are different.

Read Galatians 5:26-6:5

1. What leads Christians to treat each other in the wrong way?
2. "We shouldn't rely on each other. OR "We should rely on each other"
Which do you think?
3. Compare 6:2 and 6:5
Is this a contradiction?
4. How can we apply Paul's examples of "bearing burdens" today?

Read Galatians 6:6-10

5. “We reap what we sow”
How is 6:6 relevant for you ?

6. What does it mean to sow in the flesh?
How can we sow in the Spirit?

7. Have you ever “grown weary of doing good”?

Read Galatians 6:11-18

8. Paul opposes those who concentrate on an outward show at the expense of what really matters. (6:15)
Can you think of examples today when this happens?

9. Is the essence of Christian religion human or divine?
What does Paul see as our motive in religious matters?

10. What is the biggest idea you take away from the letter to the Galatians?