

## Galatians

- 1. Who wrote this letter? Who were the original recipients? What previous connection did they have?** The apostle Paul wrote this letter as evidenced by the first verse. Paul establishes that he was an apostle, directly chosen by Jesus Christ Himself. (We will discuss this issue further under question 5.) This letter was written to the *churches of Galatia*. Notice that this is different than most of Paul's letters which are addressed to a singular church. However, Galatia wasn't a city that would have had only one church, but was a province which would have had multiple congregations. Some familiar regions from Paul's missionary journeys as recorded in the book of Acts that were a part of the Galatian province included Lycaonia, as well as sections of Phrygia and Pisidia. Lycaonia included the cities of Lystra and Derbe, Phrygia included the town of Iconium, and Pisidia included Antioch (not of Syria, but of Pisidia). It is obvious from the Galatian letter that Paul had previously had some intimate time with the people of Galatia. Galatians 4:12-16 tells us that a bodily illness of Paul had provided the opportunity for him to first preach the gospel to them. He also mentioned that their initial attitude was such that, if possible, they would have plucked out their eyes and given them to him. (My opinion is that Paul is speaking of the events of Acts chapters 13 and 14. He preached at Pisidian Antioch, next Iconium, and then he went on to Lystra. At Lystra, Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. The next day he went on to Derbe, and then returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. My guess is that Paul had some serious troubles with his eyes from the stoning at Lystra, and that the new converts of Galatia were willing to help him in any way they could.) However, when Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians, that friendly attitude of the Galatians had disappeared, which left Paul perplexed, with him asking, "Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth?"
- 2. What is the overall theme?** The overall theme of the letter of Galatians is that Christianity is a system of faith, not of law. Paul's reprimand of Peter includes a great summary statement of the theme of Galatians in 2:16, "nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified." Within this theme are some major points including:
  - The Law has a two-fold purpose – 1) to pin people under sin (3:22), 2) as a tutor to lead us to Christ (3:24)
  - The Law can't produce a life of righteousness – 2:16, 2:21, 3:10-11, 3:21, 5:4
  - Faith does produce righteousness – 2:16, 2:20, 3:11, 3:24, 3:26, 5:5
  - God's plan always was a system of faith – 3:6, 3:8, 3:14, 3:17-18, 3:23, 4:4-5
  - The system of faith is synonymous with the ministry of the Spirit – 3:2, 3:5, 3:14, 3:22
  - The Law and faith don't coexist – 3:2, 3:5, 12, 5:18

- Immersion is connected with faith, not with works of the Law – 3:26-27

**3. What is the "rule" of the New Testament?** The "rule" is mentioned in Galatians 6:16 and is stated in Galatians 6:15 which says, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." This is a powerful rule – external things are irrelevant, the inside is what counts. Laws such as circumcision make no difference, but circumcision of the heart makes all the difference. There are a few pertinent questions here: 1) How does a person become a new creation? 2) Am I really a new creation? 3) Do I remember who I am? 4) Do I walk by this rule?

**4. How is the "new creation" defined in this letter?** There are two parallel statements in the book of Galatians found in 5:6 and 6:15. Galatians 6:15 says, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." Galatians 5:6 says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." An awesome, working definition of a new creation is "faith working through love." Faith recognizes and believes that we are whom God has made us to be. The heart of the new creation is filled with love – love for God and love for others. Love, then, is the motivation that puts our faith picture into motion. A new creation walks by faith and is controlled by love. Through this process, we keep the commandments of God – see 1 Corinthians 7:19, and we fulfill the Law – see Galatians 5:14.

**5. Why would the author recite the history given in 1:11 – 2:21?** One of the challenges faced by the apostle Paul was to establish his true apostleship. Each of the other apostles was chosen directly by Jesus while He was living on earth. Paul was chosen directly by Jesus, but it was after His ascension to glory – see Acts 26:16-18, 1 Corinthians 15:8-10. In Galatians chapter 1, Paul first makes the point that he was actually set apart while still in his mother's womb – 1:15-16. He then goes on to communicate that there was no way possible for him to have received his knowledge apart from direct revelation from Christ. Other than a brief stay with Peter three years after his conversion, Paul didn't even have interaction with the other apostles until the conference at Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. This Acts 15 conference is the setting for the first half of Galatians 2. Paul makes a few major points through this history:

- Paul didn't get his message from anyone other than Christ – 2:2, 2:6
- His gospel was exactly the same as that given to the other apostles – 2:7,9
- Paul was particularly commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles – 2:7-9

**6. What does this letter say about those who preach a distorted gospel?** Many people teach a different gospel than that preached by Jesus' apostles. Typically it is a clever shift; there is much similarity, but it is stretched in some places and/or shrunk in others. In chapter 1, verses 8-9, Paul is very clear about the consequences for those who would twist the gospel message that was given to the apostles. He says that anyone preaching

a distorted gospel is to be accursed. In other words, the fate of such a person is complete excommunication from God and eternal destruction. There is only one eternal gospel – let's get it right!

7. **Who is Abraham's seed?** In the third chapter of Galatians, Paul reminds his audience that the initial promise of Genesis was made to Abraham and to his seed (singular). He then goes on to establish that the “seed of Abraham” was Christ – Galatians 3:16. In other words, the promised Spirit would really be given to Christ. Of course this was fulfilled at Christ's ascension to the throne – see Acts 2:33. In like manner, the covenant made with Abraham was really an eternal covenant forged with Jesus – see Hebrews 13:20. Ultimately, the promise of the Holy Spirit and the inheritance of the covenant are available to all of the real descendants of Abraham, that is, Christians. Galatians 3:29 is clear, “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring [literally “seed”], heirs according to promise.”
8. **What is the point of the allegory in 4:21 – 31?** The main point of this allegory is that God's plan is in accordance with His promise, not with man's futile attempts to make things work by himself. We also see that there is a sharp contrast, even a war, between those of the flesh and those of the promise. When Abraham begot Ishmael through Sarah's maid, Hagar, that wasn't in accordance with the promise of God. The birth of Isaac years later through Abraham's wife Sarah was the fulfillment of God's promise. Just as Hagar had disdain for Sarah, so Ishmael mocked Isaac. The result was that God told Abraham to cast out the bondwoman and her son. In the allegory, Hagar matches up with the physical nation of Israel, and represents all those living under the Law. Sarah corresponds with the church, heavenly Jerusalem, and represents all those who truly live by faith. The lesson here is that law and faith cannot coexist. The Lord's true church is composed of real Christians living by the Spirit. Those not living by the Spirit are cast out and receive no inheritance. God's true people who live by faith cannot possibly have unity with those still attempting to be justified by law.
9. **What does this short letter say about the Holy Spirit?** This little book of six chapters has much to say about the Holy Spirit. Here are the specifics:
  - We receive the Spirit by hearing with faith – 3:2
  - We begin by the Spirit and are perfected by the Spirit – 3:3
  - God provides us with the Spirit by hearing with faith – 3:5
  - The Holy Spirit is *the promise* spoken of throughout the Scriptures – 3:14
  - God has sent forth the Spirit into hearts – 4:6
  - Those born of flesh persecute those born of the Spirit – 4:29
  - Through the Spirit, we wait for the hope of righteousness – 5:5
  - If we walk by the Spirit, we won't carry out the desire of the flesh – 5:16
  - If we are led by the Spirit, we are not under Law – 5:18
  - The Spirit bears particular fruit – 5:22-23

- If we get our life from the Spirit, then we should walk by the Spirit – 5:25
- The one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life – 6:8