

Galatians

Declaration of Independence

Galatians 2:20-21

January 11, 2020

Today

Author: Paul

Audience: Churches of Galatia

Date: 49 AD – Scholars believe that ‘Galatians’ may be Paul’s earliest letter.

Purpose: The early church found itself in a fierce battle over the nature of salvation. The Galatians felt pressured to seek salvation through keeping the Law of Moses, even though they had already accepted the Grace of Christ.

According to a group of Jewish believers, known as **Judaizers**, faith in Jesus *alone*, as the basis of salvation, was not good enough for Gentiles. They must also be circumcised and obey the laws of Moses – In other words, Jew first than Christian. Additionally, this group of Jews argued that Paul was not really an Apostle, but an imposter who was guilty of misleading the new believers.

Paul recognized that this false gospel, as well as the false accusations made against him, threatened to undermine the work of Christ, so he wrote a letter. In the strongest words possible, he identified this false teaching for what it really was — legalism, pure and simple. He also tackled issues such as freedom, the role of the law in salvation, our condition in Christ, the nature of the Spirit-led life, and how sinful humans are made right {declared NOT GUILTY} before a holy and just God.

It was while reading Galatians that **Martin Luther** {1483-1546} was first touched with the glorious good news of **Righteousness by Faith** - the great truth that spawned the Protestant Reformation. What he read in this little book changed him and the world.

Definition: Justification/Righteousness by Faith = As sinners, we deserve death. Jesus took our guilt and died our death. As a result, God removes our guilt and the penalty of sin and declares us righteous {as though we have never sinned} – we receive and accept this through faith.

To all the believers in the churches of Galatia,

Grace and peace to you *{unlike his other letters, Paul does not give thanks for this group – he is deeply distressed}*.

I am amazed at how quickly you have deserted Christ in favor of a different Gospel!

If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one preached to you, let him be cursed!

Am I trying to please men or God? The test of a man’s ministry is not popularity, or miraculous signs and wonders, but his faithfulness to the Word of God. I want to be clear about this: the gospel I preached to you is not man made.

- **Galatians 1:12** - I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. {see Acts 9}

You know what my life was like before meeting Jesus. I was a zealous Jew. I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it! I was advancing in Judaism more quickly than anyone else my age and was extremely zealous for all the Jewish traditions.

But in the fullness of time, Christ saw fit to reveal Himself to me so that I might preach Him to the Gentiles *{the only explanation for the radical change in Paul’s life is Jesus}*.

After my conversion I went to Arabia instead of going to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles. 3 years later I went to Jerusalem and got to know Peter and James.

14 years after that I went back to Jerusalem and had a private meeting with the Apostles regarding circumcision {Titus – a Greek - was not compelled to be circumcised}. By that time, many spies had infiltrated the group, but we did not yield to them even for a second.

- **Galatians 2:6-8** - As for those who seemed to be important-- whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance-- those men added nothing to my message. ⁷ On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. ⁸ For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.

James, Peter and John gave me the hand of friendship and agreed that I should go to the Gentiles and they would go to the Jews.

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face. You see, he freely associated with Gentiles – he even ate with them – UNTIL some men sent by James arrived in the city. Because he was afraid of these Jews, Peter stopped interacting with the Gentiles. Other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy - even Barnabas was led astray! When I saw that they were acting contrary to the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in front of everyone:

- **Galatians 2:14-21** - "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? ¹⁵ "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' ¹⁶ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. ¹⁷ "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

You foolish Galatians!!! I just have one question – Did you receive the Holy Spirit by keeping the Law or by believing what you heard?

Are you so foolish as to think that after receiving the Holy Spirit through faith you can now become perfect through human effort?

Think about Abraham – He BELIEVED God and it was credited to him as RIGHTEOUSNESS {**Genesis 15:6**}

Therefore, anyone who has faith like Abraham is a true son of Abraham. Because the goal of the Gospel given to Abraham was the Justification of Gentiles by Faith - "**All nations will be blessed through you.**" {**Genesis 12:3**} You are the recipients of this promised blessing, just like Abraham who was justified BEFORE being circumcised. {**Genesis 17:1-11**}

Additionally, anyone who relies on keeping the Law for salvation is under a curse, because it is written, "**Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.**" {**Deut. 27:26**} Clearly then, no one is justified before God by keeping the Law because scripture says, "**The righteous will live by faith.**" {**Habakkuk 2:4**}

Christ redeemed us from that curse by becoming a curse, because scripture says, "**Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.**" {**Deut. 21:22-23**} He did this so that the blessing given to Abraham would come to you and that by faith you would receive the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the promised SEED of Abraham spoken of in Scripture {**Genesis 22:18**}.

What I'm trying to say is this; the Law, was given 430 years after the Covenant, but it doesn't do away with the Covenant between God and Abraham which includes the Promise of Christ.

If that's true, that the Covenant hasn't gone away, then what is the purpose of the Law and is it in conflict with the promises of God? NO WAY!!! If any law could give life, then it would be possible to become righteous by keeping the Law. What the Law does is show us what sin looks like and that we are all guilty before God for breaking it. It kept us in line {like a guardrail} until Christ {the promised SEED} came and our faith in Him became a reality. The Law was like a tutor/instructor/schoolteacher/trainer {**Gr. – pedagogues**} which pointed us to Christ so that we might be declared not guilty through our faith in Him.

Now that Christ has come and we have put our faith in Him, we don't need to be under the supervision of The Tutor.

- **Galatians 3:26-29** - You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Because you are no longer slaves, but sons, God has sent His Spirit into your hearts and made you heirs. Before you knew God, you were slaves. **Now that you know God and He knows you (you're in a relationship) why would you want to go back to being slaves??!!** You have been overtaken by the religious fog and I am afraid for you and wonder if I have wasted my time on you.

What happened to all your joy? I know that at one time you would have done just about anything for me, but now it seems like I've become your enemy for telling you the truth – the people you are following don't desire your best good. They only want to alienate you from us!!

My dear, dear children – I am again suffering the pains of labor until Jesus is completely formed in you.

Paul desires for them transformed hearts not a mere legalistic adherence to the law – this legalistic detour is making him crazy!!

Are you sons of the slave woman Hagar – like Ishmael, who was born in the ordinary way or are you sons of the free woman Sarah – like Isaac, who was born as the result of the Promise?

- Everyone who tries to be saved through keeping the Law is the child of Hagar = Bondage to the Law.
- Everyone who is saved through faith in Christ is the child of Sarah = Freedom in Christ.

It is impossible to be the child of both..... and you, my dear brothers, are children of Sarah and any religion that imparts fear or demands unquestioning loyalty and obedience **{turns you back into slaves}** is NOT of Christ.

- **Galatians 5:1** - It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Listen to me, if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you!!! You will be obligated to keep the whole law - **which is impossible** - and you will be abandoning your faith in the righteousness found only in Jesus.

Our hope is found in a transformed life, which only the Holy Spirit can bring. There is no value in the debate over circumcision. The only thing of value is that your faith is actively used to love other people.

You were running a great race. Why did you let someone cut you off and keep you from obeying the truth?

As for those who are intentionally leading you astray by insisting on circumcision? I wish they'd go all the way and just make themselves eunuchs!!

You were called to be free, but don't use your freedom to do whatever you want. Instead, use your freedom in the service of love. After all, love can be summed up in this single command: **"Love your neighbor as yourself"**.

Live by the Holy Spirit!

Your natural and sinful human desires are at odds with the Spirit of God – they are in conflict with each other. So, I'll repeat myself, live by the Holy Spirit!! Because if you live by the Holy Spirit, you are no longer a slave to the Law.

- **Galatians 5:19-23** - The acts of the **sinful nature** are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the **Fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

If one of you is caught in a sin, try to restore him – gently. Carry each other's burdens!! Be careful that a judgmental and overconfident spirit doesn't cause your own downfall. Examine your own actions before God and don't compare yourselves.

- **Galatians 6:7-8** - Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Don't become weary of doing what is good and at every opportunity do what is good for the benefit of all people, especially fellow believers.

Can't you see, that the only reason those people want you to be circumcised is to make a good outward show. They do this because they don't want to be persecuted for following Christ. Not even those who are circumcised keep the whole law, yet they want you to be circumcised so that they can boast that they have some sort of authority over you.

May my only boasting be in Cross of Christ!!

I will say it again... Being circumcised or not being circumcised is not what matters. What matters is a transformed life!

May the grace of Jesus be with you..... Amen.

Take Aways

The overarching theme of Galatians is the freedom we possess in Christ.

Only by faith in Christ {who He is and what He did} are people declared NOT GUILTY by God. The law was never intended to save us, but instead, to point us to the One who does save us - **the goal of the law is to lead us to Christ**. When this goal has been reached, the law is no longer necessary. However, the law does not cease to exist, instead, we have matured and our motivation for keeping the law has changed. We no longer keep the law because we "have to", but because we WANT to. Law-keeping becomes an inward reality.

When Paul speaks of salvation by faith, he is talking about the Holy Spirit being invited in to take possession of the heart and mind so that natural human desires will be transformed. A transformed person will begin to do what is right because he/she wants to and not for the sake of duty or reward.

- **John Ortberg {The Life You've Always Wanted}**: When morphing happens, I don't just do the things Jesus would have done; I find myself wanting to do them. They appeal to me. They make sense. I don't just go around trying to do the right things; I become the right sort of person.

The question Paul then raises is this – If you have been made free in Christ, why would you voluntarily go back to being a slave?

Good question!

Two Wolves

One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people.

He said, "My son, the battle is between 2 "wolves" that are inside us all.

One is Evil: It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego.

The other is Good: It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith"

The grandson thought about it for a minute, then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."