

Galatians

Listed Scriptures

Galatians

Lesson Aim

- 1) To encourage students to truly understand what they believe in (i.e. what does it mean for us that Christ has died for us? Why do we live for Christ?).
- 2) To help students be thankful for God's gift of grace.
- 3) To teach students how to live as a Christian.

Memory Verse

"...a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ..." (Gal 2:16)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Gal 1-6

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D

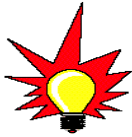


Galatia, a Roman province, is located north of the Mediterranean Sea in the south central area of Asia Minor. Places such as Antioch at Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, etc.—where Paul had preached and set up many churches—are all within this province of Galatia. On Paul's first missionary trip to this region, many gentiles accepted the truth and warmly provided for the needs of Paul and his coworkers. However, after Paul had left, certain men advocating Judaism came to lead them astray, telling the believers of Galatia that they needed to keep the Jewish law and perform circumcision. Moreover, these men slandered Paul, saying he was a false apostle.

To secure the faith of the believers, Paul wrote a letter to reprove the

Galatians, encouraging them to understand the truth of the gospel: that we are justified by faith. Paul emphasizes in his letter that since Christians are already saved by faith, they should not become slaves of the law again.

W A R M U P



At a certain point in our lives, it is important that we understand what we believe in. Perhaps we were baptized when we were babies and grew up in the church. Perhaps we came to believe on our own; but no matter what category we fall under, we are all in the church because we have experienced the grace of God. Yet, if we do not seek to fully understand our faith and be firmly rooted in the truth, we will be easily led astray when we are challenged.

This is what happened to the churches of Galatia. When they first heard the gospel, they received the Holy Spirit because they believed. Nonetheless, they were not firmly rooted in their beliefs and abandoned it when they were confronted with a twisted version of the truth. In response to this failure to keep their faith, Paul wrote this epistle to remind them of their beliefs. Using biblical examples, Paul explained to the Galatians in detail central truths of the Christian faith. Additionally, Paul also gave instructions in how they should continue to live a Christian life.



Part 1

An Overview

In Galatians, Paul begins by addressing the uncertainties the Galatian believers had when the Judaism-advocates came to pollute their minds. Then Paul goes on to teach the Galatians the doctrine of justification by faith and how they can live a life of faith. It is divided as follows:

- a. Foreword (1:1-5)
- b. Defending the one unchanging gospel (1:6-10)
- c. Proof of Paul's apostleship (1:11–2:21)
 - i. Origin of Paul's apostleship (1:11-17)
 - ii. Paul's relationship with the other apostles (1:18–2:21)

- d. Justification by Faith (3:1–4:31)
 - i. No one can be justified by keeping the law (3:1-10)
 - ii. The just shall live by faith (3:11-29)
 - iii. Law and grace (4:1-31)
- e. Living a life of faith (5:1–6:18)
 - i. Freedom in Christ (5:1-15)
 - ii. Victory over flesh through the Holy Spirit (5:16-26)
 - iii. Sharing one another's burdens (6:1-10)
 - iv. Boasting in the cross (6:11-18)



Part 2

Bible Study of Galatians



A. Defending the One Unchanging Gospel (1:6-10)

The Galatians did not hold fast to the gospel of Christ after having received it. When they were bothered by advocates of Judaism, they quickly left to follow another gospel. Thus, Paul tells them sternly that if anyone preaches to them a gospel different from the one they first received, that person ought to be cursed. Such an attitude of “wanting to please God in all circumstances” and an insistence on the truth reflected by Paul in this section are worthy of our emulation. (Ref. Jude 3, Acts 4:19-20)



B. Proof of Paul's Apostleship (1:11-2:21)

When the Jews—that is, believers of Judaism—slandered Paul in saying he was not an apostle and did not have authority in what he preached, the Galatians became deluded. Paul, having always valued this position that was given to him, gives a rebuttal in this passage to the Jews' slander using facts, proving that the gospel he preaches is indeed from God.

a. Origin of Paul's apostleship (1:11-17)

Paul emphasizes the fact that his apostleship did not come from men. Rather, through the will of Jesus Christ and the heavenly Father, he had been separated when he was still in his mother's womb. Even though he was fervent in Judaism in the past and had greatly persecuted the church, God still called him and revealed the salvation of Christ in his heart. Hence, he is called to preach this gospel to the

gentiles. (Ref. Acts 9:1-16, 22:3-21; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 5:4; John 15:16; Num 16:3; Mark 10:40)

b. Paul's relationship with the other apostles (1:18—2:21)

- i. When Paul had been called by God, he went to Arabia first and then returned to Damascus for about three years. Only after this did he go to see Peter in Jerusalem (where he stayed for 15 days) and meet James. From the order of these events we can see that not only was Paul's apostleship not given by men, he also did not learn from men the word that he preached.
- ii. Fourteen years later, Paul went again to Jerusalem by revelation. This time, he went to discuss the matter of gentiles believing in the Lord. Paul witnessed to the elders and other apostles the process of how he preached to the gentiles. Upon hearing this, the apostles gave Paul the right hand of fellowship, accepting him as one of them. They recognized that just as they had been apostles to the Jews, Paul was an apostle to the gentiles (2:9; Acts 15).
- iii. Later, when Peter went to Antioch, he would eat with the gentile believers. Yet, when the men who insisted on circumcision came, Peter drew back and separated himself from the gentiles. Seeing this, the Jews who came with Peter to Antioch also followed him in his pretense. At that time, Paul saw that what they were doing was not in accordance with the truth of the gospel. Therefore, Paul rebuked Peter on the spot, pointing out their mistakes. We see from Paul's enthusiasm in upholding the truth that his apostleship is not any less than the other apostles' (2:11-14).



C. Justification by Faith (3:1—4:31)

a. No one can be justified by keeping the law (3:1-10)

In 3:2, Paul questions the Galatians, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" The answer is obviously the latter. For God called Abraham righteous because he believed; that had happened before the law and circumcision. Accordingly, those who live by the law are under a curse. This is because no one who is of flesh can be justified by the law. Instead, the purpose of the law is to let people understand the nature of sin and its frightening consequences; hence, leading people to hope and search for the path to salvation.


b. The just shall live by faith (3:11-29)

From 3:11-29, Paul explains that God desires the gentiles to be justified by faith. Paul then quotes Genesis 15:6: "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to

him for righteousness." Therefore, those who live by faith will be blessed along with Abraham. According to God's promise to Abraham, nations shall be blessed by the Seed of Abraham. This Seed is Jesus Christ. Through the cross, Christ has been cursed for us and redeemed us from the curse of the law. It is through Christ Jesus that the blessing of Abraham has fallen on the gentiles. Under the law, all people are bound in sin. Nevertheless, by believing in Jesus Christ, the promised blessing will come upon those who believe. Henceforth, when we put our faith in Lord Jesus and are baptized into Christ, we have become Abraham's seeds and are heavenly heirs entitled to receive eternal life.

c. Law and grace (4:1-31)

- i. Continuing from the last passage, Paul explains that to live under the law in Old Testament times is like being an heir who is still a child. Like a child is under guardians and stewards, those under the law have to keep the rituals and regulations of the law. When they do not, they are punished. Moreover, despite having to read the book of the law and keeping its regulations, they do not understand its meaning. On the contrary, the believers in the New Testament have received the status of sons through the redemption of Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit enters into their hearts, calling "Abba, Father," becoming a deposit of eternal life for these descendants. For this reason, the believers in the New Testament have received great blessings and power and continue to grow by the grace of God. (4:1-7). (Ref. 2 Cor 3:13-14; Rom 8:17)
- ii. Then, Paul recounts the story of Hagar and Sarah to teach about grace. The sons of Hagar and Sarah foreshadow two covenants (4:21-31). On one hand, Hagar was a bondwoman and her son Ishmael was born of human will and desire. Her son was of the flesh and to be cast out, to have no part in the inheritance (Gen 16:3-4, 15, 21:9-12). Sarah, on the other hand, was a free woman and her son Isaac was born of a promise. Her son was to receive all the inheritance (Gen 17:19; 21:1-3; 25:5). The believers of the true church are the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Like Isaac, the believers are born through the promised Holy Spirit and have it as a guarantee to receive an inheritance in heaven (Eph 1:14).



D. Living a Life of Faith (5:1—6:18)

a. Freedom in Christ (5:1-15)

Since Christ has already given us freedom, we ought to stand firm in His grace. We need not be slaves of the law anymore and held hostage by the yoke of

bondage (5:1). Hence, to stand for circumcision and attempt to be justified by keeping the law is to throw away the grace of God and be separated from Christ. To those who do such a thing, the salvation of the cross bears no meaning. Paul writes: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." Of course, although we are called to freedom, we cannot use this as an opportunity to gratify our desires and allow sin to rule over us.

b. Victory over the flesh through the Holy Spirit (5:16-26)

In this passage, Paul points out that the flesh and the Holy Spirit work against each other. It is important that we submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for the works of the flesh (adultery, fornication, uncleanness, etc.) are of the devil. The people who do such things cannot enter God's kingdom. Moreover, since we have already received life through the Holy Spirit, we need to also walk in the Holy Spirit and bear the fruit (love, joy, peace, etc.). In doing so, we will be able to enter God's kingdom with an abundance of the fruit of the Spirit.

c. Sharing one another's burdens (6:1-10)

On the matter of sharing burdens, Paul continues in saying that if someone has been overcome by sin, we need to use a gentle heart to bring the person back. While doing so, we need to be careful, for we might also be tempted. Nevertheless, Paul points out that we need to be active by showing love and understanding to our fellow brothers' and sisters' weaknesses and shortcomings. We need to support one another and share in our burdens. Furthermore, we need to do our best in supplying the needs of the ministers and workers of the church. This is so they will not be tied down by the matters of the world and will be free to focus on serving the Lord. Paul commends us to not grow weary in doing all this good, "for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."

d. Boasting in the cross (6:11-18)

In this final section, Paul points out the crooked motives and hypocrisies of those false teachers who had led the Galatians astray. These people wanted to look good and boasted in their flesh. They compelled others to be circumcised when they do not keep the law themselves. However, we see that Paul is different. He does what is right in front of God and only boasts in the cross of Christ. He is willing to forsake all in the world for the salvation of the cross.

E. Conclusion

In Galatians 6:15, Paul concludes the epistle by writing: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." Throughout the epistle, Paul stressed that the outward observance of the law and regulations is unimportant. What is important is whether we are renewing the life within us. Just as it is recorded in Titus 3:5: "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1

Why did Paul write this epistle to the churches in the province of Galatia?

2

What is the purpose of the law? (If salvation only comes through Christ, then why did God give the Israelites the law?)

3

Why do we need to "walk in the Spirit" and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh?

4

Please write out the "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Holy Spirit."

5

Please write out the verses from the epistle that you have enjoyed or found important, and explain.

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Part A: Fruit Picking

Galatians 5:22-23 records the fruit of the spirit. As Christians, we constantly pursue bearing fruit. Often, we see the fruit in our brothers and sisters and long to have them too. During a Youth Theological Training Course (YTTC) Graduate Class graduation one summer, nine youths decided among themselves to pick a fruit of the spirit for one another. This fruit

was either something each youth had, or needed to pursue. Each youth had a fruit and decided that after a year's time, they would get together again to see how they had come along with their fruit and would choose another one to pursue.

You can do the same too! In the following list, write down the name of the person in the class who most exhibits a particular fruit in his or her life next to that fruit. For example, you might put Joe's name next to "peace" because he rarely causes division in the group, or next to "joy" because he is always very happy.

When you have completed writing the names on the list, share with the class whose name you wrote beside each fruit. When everyone is through, ask each person which fruit he feels he lacks in his life and why. Go around the group until everyone has the chance to do this.

Love	_____
Joy	_____
Peace	_____
Patience	_____
Kindness	_____
Goodness	_____
Faithfulness	_____
Gentleness	_____
Self-control	_____

Part B: Give Thanks!

We have learned in this lesson to be appreciative and thankful for God's grace. Here are the lyrics to the song, "Give Thanks."

*Give thanks with a grateful heart
Give thanks unto the Holy One
Give thanks because He's given
Jesus Christ, His Son.
And now let the weak say, "I am strong"
Let the poor say, "I am rich
Because of what the Lord
Has done for us."*

1. When do you feel most grateful to the Lord? Why?

2. How do we learn to be thankful to the Lord all the time?

It is not easy to feel thankful or joyful, especially when we are undergoing trials, but as the above hymn suggests, we need to give thanks to the Lord with a grateful heart because He has given us Jesus Christ. Sing this hymn together and ask the students for their thoughts.

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Sing hymn 356: Faith Is the Victory.

This hymn tells us that as long as we have faith in Christ, we shall be victorious over the world. That means that if we rely on and walk according to the Holy Spirit, we are able to overcome our fleshly desires and pursue a life of faith and holiness. Let us continue to strive for a deep-rooted faith in Christ so that we will be confident of a victorious life that will bear fruit for His glory. Let us continue to give thanks to His wondrous name!