

GALATIANS

GALATIANS — INTRODUCTION

The Acts of the Apostles records that Paul visited the province of Galatia in Asia Minor twice, on his second and third journeys, but no mention was made of any particular city or town at which he stopped on either occasion. ^{<410>}Acts 16:6, 18:23. It was on the third journey, and probably during his long stay at Ephesus, though some would say at Corinth, that this epistle was written. The occasion for writing it carries us back to the fifteenth chapter of Acts and the story of the first church council held at that time. The Judaizing teachers there referred to tracked Paul's footsteps everywhere, seeking to circumvent the preaching of a free Gospel and teaching the need of circumcision and other observances of the Mosaic law in order to salvation. They had good soil to work on in Galatia, for the people seem to have been of a demonstrative and fickle mind. (1:6, 4:9, 4:15-16, 5:15.) That this was the condition of things in the church, and that many had already fallen into the snare of seeking to supplement faith by works is further evident from 1:6-9; 3:3; 4:9-11; 5:3; etc. The object of the epistle, therefore, is to restore these people to the faith, and in the working out of that object the epistle becomes an inspired classic on that fundamental doctrine of Christianity, justification by faith.

It would seem that the false teachers in order to undermine the confidence of the people in the Gospel itself, must first accomplish the same purpose with reference to the apostolic authority of Paul. They must first destroy his authority as an inspired apostle before they could weaken the foundations of the Gospel he preached. This they sought to do using Peter as a sort of comparison and contrast. The last-named preached no different Gospel from Paul, but being the apostle to the circumcision, i.e., the Jews (^{<410>}Galatians 2:6-9), presented it from the Jewish standpoint, while Paul as the apostle to the uncircumcision did the same from the Gentile standpoint. We can see how there may have been some differences in the mode of presentation which gave opportunity to these unsanctified Jewish Christians to denounce Paul as unorthodox. They had an advantage also in that Paul was not one of the original twelve.

The plan of the Epistle lends itself to a three-fold division. Chapters 1-2 are of a personal character in which Paul defends his apostolic authority; chapters 3-4 are doctrinal, in which he defends the Gospel of justification by faith; while chapters 5-6 are practical and contain the application of the doctrine to the daily life of the individual Christian.

QUESTIONS

1. How often did Paul visit Galatia?
2. What two cities have been named as the abode of Paul at the time of writing this epistle?
3. Tell the story of ~~<415>~~ Acts 15.
4. Describe the Galatian people.
5. What was the object of this epistle?
6. What was the method of the false teachers?
7. Name the three divisions of this epistle.

GALATIANS 1-2 — PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS AUTHORITY

Paul defends his authority in five ways. On the grounds of:

1. His Divine call (1:1)
2. His Divine revelation of the Gospel (1:11-12)
3. His independence of the other apostles (1:15-24)
4. His endorsement by the church, (2:1-10)
5. His rebuke of Peter (2:11-14)

Speaking of his Divine call, some would say that his reference to man-made apostles has an application to the choice of Matthias in Act 1, though there may be a question about this. In like manner, his reference to the way in which he received the revelation of the Gospel recalls the circumstances of his conversion in ~~<415>~~ Acts 9, as well as the experience referred to in verses 17-18 of this chapter. In the section treating of his endorsement by the church there is an allusion (2:1-2), to the journey and its results spoken of in ~~<415>~~ Acts 15 at the time of the first general council of the church to settle the question of justification. Particular attention should be called to

his bold and consistent attitude with reference to the circumcision of Titus (vv. 3-5), an allusion to which was made in our study of the Acts. It is noticeable, too, that Paul makes as much of his final endorsement by the church as of his independence of the leaders of the church prior thereto. He would give his adversaries no advantage over him, as if they should say he were too independent and could not be acknowledged by them until he had received the acknowledgment of the accepted authorities. His rebuke of Peter shows him to have been naturally the stronger character of the two, and in consideration of the fact that Peter was doubtless being quoted by his opponents, proves a convincing argument for his own authority.

In verse 2:17, the *Scofield Bible* has this illuminating footnote:

If we Jews, in seeking to be justified by faith in Christ, take our places as mere sinners like the Gentiles, is it therefore Christ who makes us sinners? By no means. It is by putting ourselves again under law after seeking justification through Christ, that we act as if we were still unjustified sinners, seeking to become righteous through law-works.

QUESTIONS

1. Give the five arguments of Paul in defense of his apostolic authority.
2. Recall the circumstances of His call to the Apostleship.
3. Recall the circumstance of his endorsement by the church.
4. What shows his tact in offsetting any advantage against him?
5. Explain verse 2:17.

GALATIANS 3-4 — JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Having established his authority as an apostle, and his right to expound the Gospel he had received, Paul now enters upon the elucidation of the latter, or rather proceeds to the defense of its cardinal teaching. This is the doctrine that man is justified only by faith in Jesus Christ without the works of the law. The same doctrine was enlarged upon in Romans, only there he was expressing the Divine side of its truth while here he is showing the human side. There he taught that God justified man by giving him a righteous or righteousness that satisfied His justice, here he teaches that man receives this blessing simply by believing on Jesus Christ. The false

teachers had denied this and had led some of the Galatians back to the law of Moses both as (in part at least), the ground of their justification and the means of their perfection in holiness. Paul shows the untruthfulness and futility of this in the following way:

1. By their own experience of the effects of faith in the Gospel (3:1-5)
2. By the history of Abraham the founder of the Jewish Nation (3:6-9)
3. By the teachings of Old Testament Scriptures (3:10-12)
4. By the nature of the work of Christ (3:13-14)

The first might be called the *argumentum ad hominem*. It was evident to these Galatian Christians that they had received the Holy Spirit. But how had they come to receive Him, through observing the Mosaic law or the preaching of the Gospel? The answer, of course, was foreseen. It was as the result of Paul's preaching and not the observance of circumcision or anything else. Why then did they need to supplement the work of the Spirit by that of the flesh?

The second argument is well adapted to refute the Judaizing teachers, since Abraham was the founder of their faith. And yet Abraham clearly was justified by believing on God and before he was circumcised.

The argument from the teachings of Scripture requires no explanation, since the passages quoted plainly state that if one elects to be saved by the law and not by grace, he can only be saved by keeping the whole of it. Circumcision nor ceremonialism of any kind were not enough.

The work of Christ did away with all these things which only foreshadowed Him. He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, why then dishonor His work and put ourselves voluntarily under that curse a second time? The whole argument is clear and convincing.

At this point the apostle supplements his argument by a brief disquisition on the promise of Abraham.

RELATION OF THE LAW TO THE PROMISE

He anticipates a possible objection to his argument. It were as though some one should say: Granted that God saved Abraham or accounted him righteous on the ground of his belief in His promise; is it not true that 430 years after that promise to Abraham He gave the law to Moses? And was

not this law to take the place of that promise as a ground of human righteousness? Paul answers, No (3:15-18). His imaginary interlocutor then inquires, Why was the law given? What purpose does it serve? Paul's reply discloses two points.

First, the law was given because of transgressions, etc. (3:19). As the transgressions of men multiplied and became aggravated, God was obliged to come to His people in an entirely new way, in a more distant revelation than existed in the time of the patriarchs. The law was given, not so much in order to prevent transgressions, as to bring men under a more strict accountability for them, and a more plainly expressed curse.

Second, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (v. 24). The Greek word for schoolmaster here means a faithful slave entrusted with the care of a boy from his tender years till puberty to keep him from physical and moral evil, and accompany him to his studies and amusements. He approached his charge with commands and prohibitions, and in a sense with limitations of his freedom. All this as a means to an end, viz: that the boy might be trained for mature age, and the assumption of that higher grade of life for which he was destined. Thus the law leads men to Christ. It restrains and rebukes us, it shows us our sin and danger, it condemns us, and thus makes us feel the need of a Redeemer and prepares us to receive Him when presented to our faith. Compare ~~510~~ Romans 10:4.

Paul continues this general subject throughout chapter four, climaxing the whole in the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, (4:21-31). This is not to say that the story of Sarah and Hagar was not historical in Genesis, but only that the apostle uses the fact in an accommodated or allegorical sense for illustration. The design seems to be to show the effect of being under bondage of the Jewish law as compared with the liberty of the Gospel. Hagar and her son were treated with severity, cast out and persecuted, and became a fit representation of Jerusalem as it was in the time of Paul. Sarah and Isaac enjoyed freedom and sonship, and became correspondingly a fit representation of the New Jerusalem or the true kingdom of God. Which would these Galatian Christians choose, to remain under the freedom of the Gospel, or voluntarily put themselves into the bondage and under the yoke of Judaism?

The allegory is addressed to justified but immature believers, who, under the influence of legalistic teachers, "desire to be under the law," and has therefore no application to a sinner seeking justification. It raises and

answers for the fifth time in this epistle, the question: Is the believer under the law?

QUESTIONS

1. What has the writer entered upon in this part of the epistle?
2. What is the difference between Galatians and Romans as to the teaching about justification?
3. Name the four direct arguments for justification by faith in Chapter 3?
4. Amplify the first argument.
5. What is the title of the supplemental argument?
6. For what two-fold purpose was the law given after the promise?
7. How would you state the teaching of the allegory?

GALATIANS 5-6 — PRACTICAL APPLICATION

In applying the doctrine Paul urges his readers to stand fast in the liberty of Christ (5:1-12), but in doing so not to abuse that liberty (5:13-6:10). He mentions four ways in which it may be abused:

1. Uncharitableness (5:13-15)
2. Uncleaness (5:16-25)
3. Pride (5:26-6:5)
4. Selfishness (6:6-10)

The first-mentioned warning or exhortation speaks for itself. They were to cease contending on this matter and everything else, and live in peace.

The second is important as showing that sins of the mind (v. 20), as well as of the body (vv. 19, 21), are classified as of the flesh; that the practice of such sins eternally disinherits (v. 21), and that the Holy Spirit is given to believers for the purpose of overcoming them (v. 17). Read this last verse in the Revised Version and see the different construction put upon the word "may" instead of "can" in the last phrase.

The "pride" referred to in the third instance is spiritual pride; in which connection note the contrast between verses 2 and 5 of chapter 5. The

Greek word for "burden" is not the same in both cases and the statements are not contradictory. In the first instance Paul tells them to bear with others' "burdens" of infirmity in sympathy; and in the second, that self-examination will make them feel they have enough to do with their own "load" of sin without comparing themselves boastfully with their neighbors.

What in the fourth place is called selfishness, might be equally described as parsimony. Verse 6 seems to refer to the care they should evince for their spiritual teachers in their temporal concerns; and the reference to "sowing and reaping" in the following verses primarily alludes to the same thing.

In closing the lesson note verse 11 for its bearing on ~~2~~ 2 Thessalonians 3:17. "How large a letter," really means "with what large letters." The apostle, as was stated in the treatment of 2 Corinthians, had a serious affliction of the eyes, a common disease in the East, which caused him to usually dictate his letters. He seems to have had no amanuensis at hand just now, but the urgency of the situation at Galatia made it necessary to write to them with his "own hand," even though with pain and difficulty.

QUESTIONS

1. From the positive side, what application does Paul make of this whole epistle?
2. From the negative side, what obligations does he lay upon his readers?
3. What three great facts about sin are taught in verses 5:16-25?
4. Explain the twofold use of "burden" in chapter 6.
5. To what particular sin does 6:7-8 refer?
6. How would you explain ~~Gal~~ Galatians 6:11?