

An Attempt To Listen To God

A Survey of Galatians

By

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Introduction

As with all the scriptures, Galatians is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago. Paul was deeply burdened about the situation in the area of Galatia, and felt it was of such importance that it could not wait for a scribe and wrote it himself. It makes an individual go round their spiritual foundation and ask:

- a) What is a Christian? Many would answer correctly by saying that is an individual who is wholly depending on the finished work of Christ for salvation. Yet, there are those who teach otherwise, leaving folks wondering if they believed in the right way, if their faith was strong enough, or that they need to have some laws by which to govern life.
- b) On this point, there is a sharp division, for to many being a “good” or a “real” Christian means using the right Bible, the right hymnbook, wearing the right clothes, conforming to the accepted traditions of the church or praying and speaking of God the right way. That which is meant by the “right” way is doing that which we say and doing things the way we do! In other words, a new legalism is Judaism modernized. It is the problem the Galatians faced.

The argument was that one cannot be a real Christian unless they conform to outward ritualisms.

The arguments of the legalists could be summarized as:

- a) If there was no need for works, law abiding, and circumcision, why would God legislate them? (Ex. 20: 1-17; Gen. 17:11). Paul answers: “The law was given to be our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ” (Gal. 2:24); to show man his sins (Rom. 7:7-13); because of transgressions (Gal. 3:19); and to put a restraint on man’s natural sinfulness (Gal. 3:23).
- b) If works are cast aside and there are no boundaries, then men will do as they want (Rom. 6:1). This Paul answers by presenting the truth that salvation is not just an intellectual outward matter, but the very life of Christ being outlived within a person (Gal. 2:20).
- c) God Himself made a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. On what grounds can this distinction by God be nullified? This Paul answers by showing that since all are saved on the one foundation, all partakers of the same Holy Spirit, the ceremonial cannot nullify the spiritual. Thus, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond or free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Abraham is mentioned in four epistles:

- a) Twice he is mentioned in Gentile epistles: Romans and Galatians. The reference is Gen. 15:6
- b) Twice he is mentioned in Jewish epistles: Hebrews and James. The reference is Gen. 22:9, 12.

The Author

Galatians was clearly written by Paul who does not speak of himself in a chronological manner, rather it is that of spiritual importance. He is an apostle (Gal. 1:1) by the authority of God and Christ. His message was not from men, neither was it persuaded to him by men, endorsed by man (Gal. 1:12, 17), but by God.

The love He had for them was evident in that even though he was ill he preached the gospel to them (ch. 4:13). He was received as an “angel of God” (ch. 4:14), and then in return lavished love upon him (ch. 4:15).

Old Testament In Galatians

As a book dealing with the law and establishing grace, one would think that Galatians would have a great number of Old Testament quotations or allusions, yet there are comparatively few.

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Expression	Galatians	Old Testament
“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”	ch. 3:6	Gen. 15:6
“In thee shall all nations be blessed.”	ch. 3:8	Gen. 12:3
“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”	ch. 3:10	Deut. 27:26 Jer. 11:3
“The just shall live by faith.”	ch. 3:11	Hab. 2:4
“The man that doeth them shall live in them.”	ch. 3:12	Lev. 18:5
“Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.”	ch. 3:13	Deut. 21:23
“And to thy seed”	ch. 3:16	Gen. 13:15
“Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.”	ch. 4:27	Isa. 54:1
“Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.”	ch. 4:30	Gen. 21:10
“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”	ch. 5:14	Lev. 19:18

Words And Clauses Peculiar To Galatians

Word / Clauses	Reference	Word / Clauses	Reference
Jews religion	ch. 1:13, 14	Added thereto	ch. 3:15
Equals	ch. 1:14	Confirmed before	ch. 3:17
Fathers	ch. 1:14	Time appointed	ch. 4:2
Conferred (conference)	ch. 1:16; 2:6	Be formed	ch. 4:19
To see	ch. 1:18	Persuasion	ch. 5:8
Unawares brought in	ch. 2:4	Agar	ch. 4:24, 25
Spy out	ch. 2:4	Allegory	ch. 4:24
Gave place	ch. 2:5	Answereth	ch. 4:25
Dissembled likewise with him	ch. 2:13	Bite	ch. 5:15
Walked not uprightly	ch. 2:14	Vain glory	ch. 5:26
Livest after the manner of the Gentiles	ch. 2:14	Provoking	ch. 5:26
Bewitched	ch. 3:1	Deceiveth	ch. 6:3

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Word / Clauses	Reference	Word / Clauses	Reference
Gospel	ch. 3:8	Mocked	ch. 6:7

Key Words In Galatians

Word	No. of verses found in	Word	No. of verses found in
Liberty	4	Spirit	15
Law	25	Cross / Tree	3 / 1
Faith	20	Justified	5
Bondage	6 Douleuo - 4 verses Katadouloo - 1 verse Douloo - 1 verse	Promise	8
Crucified	4	Gospel	11

The Time Sequence

Of this there is a major difference of opinion, and it depends largely as to what churches were in Galatia. Some say it only indicates the southern churches and others the northern. The best one can do is look at the internal evidences and the background to the letter being written. Having reviewed the various viewpoints, and without being dogmatic, the following is the most satisfactory to me.

Date	Events
A.D. 35	The conversion of Paul (Acts 9:4-6). Some have suggested this was two years after the death of our Lord. I cannot agree with this since our Lord was born in 4-5 B C it would make Him at least 37 years of age when He was crucified.
A.D. 38	Paul goes to Jerusalem and meets Peter. (Gal. 1:18; Acts 9:26)
A.D. 51-52	After 14 years Paul goes again to Jerusalem for the council meeting. (Acts 15:2; Gal. 2:1)
A.D. 53	Paul's 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:40) at which time the decrees agreed upon at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:22-29) were delivered (Acts 16:4).
A.D. 58	Paul writes Galatians

The Recipients

The letter is addressed to "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2). Therefore, it was not written to a specific church but was addressing a problem rampant among these churches. This area included Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra Pisidia. If Paul was writing to the churches in Northern Galatia, it is interesting that he mentions none of the cities in that area, i.e. Tavium, Ancyra?

The Judaizers

To get today's application from Galatians we need to know something about the Judaizers. The following is a brief summary of them.

- a) Their two pronged object:
 - i) To substitute works for faith in Christ, a message directed principally to the Gentiles. Galatians counteracts this teaching.
 - ii) To devalue the blood of Christ, thus the need to come back to the law. This was directed principally against the Jews, and Hebrews counteracts this teaching.

- b) Their character:
 - i) It was these people Paul spoke of in Phil. 3:2-6 in non-flattering terms.
 - ii) "*Dogs*" they were to be viewed as outcasts from the society of believers, that was the place to be given to them.
 - iii) *Evil workers*, emphasizes their working contrary to the gospel, this was their attitude. What a difference it would make if we saw each one who stands at a pulpit and preaches salvation by works.
 - iv) *Concision*, they were mutilators of the gospel. This indicates their object.
 - v) Do not worship by the spirit, emphasizing their ungodliness.
 - vi) Have confidence, having come to a settled belief in the merit of human attainment indicative of their defiance.

The Situation Which Made Necessary The Letter

With the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles a series of new problems arose.

- a) The first was, since Gentiles had accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour should it be a necessity for them to keep the law?
- b) The second problem was when Judaizer preachers started to go among the churches and teach Paul was not qualified, he was not an apostle and was preaching an erroneous message, and that circumcision and law works must be observed.

These saints were in danger of being swayed and indeed, some already had been set on the wrong track and therefore needed correction in divine truth. The gospel of God's grace was superior to the law as the Lord Himself presented in (Matt. 5-7). They had been released from legalism by the grace of Christ, but their understanding was distorted in thinking that for spiritual growth, to be really saved they had to add works to grace.

It had been an internal struggle for Peter to go to the house of Cornelius and when he came to report the tidings to the Jewish believers at Jerusalem, it was not until he said: "The Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us . . . what was I, that I could withstand God?" It was when they heard these things: "they held their peace, and glorified God" (Acts 11:15-18). This did not settle the matter for later certain men came to Antioch and taught: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). This automatically became a stumbling block to new believers. They had been delivered from all aspects of legalism and ceremonialism thinking they were saved, and now these men told them they were not saved! To add to their spiritual concerns, the Judaizers taught that they had to be circumcised for the law demanded it, and the law was a sign of God's covenant (Ex. 12:48) and it must be adhered to. Furthermore, the rite of circumcision predated the law, for God gave it to Abraham as a sign that the covenant had been established (Gen. 17:9-14). What were they to do? The church at Antioch sent men to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. Therefore, Paul, Barnabas, and others went to Jerusalem. This was a major gathering where epic decisions were to be made.

It "began" with a speech from Peter, possibly because of his experience of the gospel going to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11), in which he made several formidable points:

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- a) It was the will of God for the Gentiles to hear the gospel (Acts 15:7). Indeed, the very reason God chose Israel was that the Gentiles would be saved without the works of the law.
- b) That they had been given the Holy Spirit, as the Jews also had so there was no difference, and without further additives of the law (Acts. 15:8). Thus, not only was going to the Gentiles endorsed by the Holy Spirit, but they were put on the same relationship as the believer who was a Jew, and it was all of faith. (Acts 15:9)
- c) He pointed out that the ceremonial law was an unbearable yoke for the Jews themselves. (Acts 15:10)
- d) That salvation by grace was for the Gentiles as well as the Jew. (Acts 15:11)

Then Paul and Barnabas gave a report of how the Lord had worked through them among the Gentiles, and emphasized that “signs and wonders” had been effected (Acts 15:12). The argument was that God had endorsed the message of salvation by grace without works or the law.

The final message was given by James, who was a very strict observer of the law (Gal. 2:12). His presentation was that God had intended to save those Gentiles who sought after Him. His suggestion was that the Gentiles were not required to keep the law, but to observe certain practices which would be very offensive to their Jewish brethren. These were:

- a) To abstain from idolatry. (Acts 15:20)
- b) To abstain from fornication. (Acts 15:20)
- c) To abstain from meat from strangled animals. (Acts 15:20)

The decision was reached by the whole congregation and it was agreed to send Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to tell of that which happened and was decided upon (Acts 15:22-23). This was not just a verbal communication which could be modified, but it was written and contained:

- a) The renunciation and rejection of the Judaizers who had caused the disturbance in the first place. (Acts 15:24)
- b) The endorsing of Paul and Barnabas. (Acts 15:25)
- c) Judas and Silas were to be delegates. (Acts 15:27)
- d) The insistence of the Holy Spirit in the things forbidden. (Acts 15:20, 29)

However, problems still arose for the Judaizers were zealous to keep people under their domination and the glory in them. Two letters were then written to various groups, the epistle of James and that of Galatians. They were written from differing viewpoints:

- a) James was written by a strict brother in that there was the avoiding of any looseness regarding the law, in living by the law of liberty. (Jam. 1:25)
- b) Paul wrote from the perspective of one who lived in the fulness of divine liberty, who taught that it was irrelevant if one was a Jew or a Gentile:
 - i) They could not be delivered from the power of sin by the law.
 - ii) That the law had no relevance to the promise by grace.
 - iii) By going back to the law, the individual was putting themselves under the curse. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law . . . that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Gal. 3:13-14)

Characteristics of Paul’s Argument In Galatians

The Lord had several marvelous ways of teaching, and one of them was by questioning. Questions pull people up and make them stop and think. Paul uses the questioning method constantly in Romans and Galatians. The questions in Galatians are:

- a) Did you receive the Spirit by the law or the hearing of faith? (Gal. 3:2)
- b) “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3)
- c) “Have ye suffered so many things in vain?” (Gal. 3:3) (If you try to finish salvation by works then there was no salvation to begin with, and your salvation is in vain)
- d) “He therefore that ministereth to you . . . and worketh miracles . . . doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Gal. 3:5)
- e) “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. (Gal. 3:7)

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Having been forced to face up to such questions, Paul declares the inability to keep the law and gain salvation. He will teach that to put oneself under law is foolishness for:

- a) No one can keep it, and therefore puts themselves under a curse. (Gal. 3:10)
- b) They are going contrary to the scriptures for even the Old Testament teaches: "The just shall live by faith". (Hab. 2:4; Gal. 3:11), and justification was by faith (Rom. 4:3).
- c) If all are under the curse of a broken law, how can the promises to Abraham be fulfilled?
- d) How can an individual be made righteous before God if not by the law?

The Outline Of The Book

Again I repeat, Judaizing teachers were infiltrating the gathering of the saints by subtlety, and then teaching to be saved the law had to be kept. Paul was zealous for the glory of God and that zeal allowed zero tolerance for error. His writing is sharp, passionate, and to the point.

It is a book which can be broadly outlined as follows:

Reference	Themes 1	Themes 2	Themes 3	Themes 4
Ch. 1:1-2:21	Explanation	Biographical	Defense of the gospel	<u>Historical</u> The apostles commission The will of God
Ch. 3:1-4:31	Expository	Didactical	Declaration of the gospel	<u>Doctrinal</u> The believers justification The work of Christ
Ch. 5:1-6:18	Exhortation	Practical	Demands of the gospel	<u>Practical</u> The Christians conduct The way of the Spirit

Theme	Developments	Reference
Declaration	The authorization of Paul's apostleship because of the false teachers who accused him of not being an apostle. Paul was an apostle according to the will of God. The first section ch. 1:1-2:21 is mainly historical and biographical.	ch. 1:1-3
Deliverance	From this present evil world.	ch. 1:4-5
Denunciation	1) On the believers because of their departing from the truth of the gospel. 2) On the unbelievers for their perverting the truth of the gospel.	ch. 1:6 ch. 1:7-9
Declaration	1) Paul's motivational integrity in preaching the gospel - not as a man pleaser. 2) Paul's message, integrity in preaching the gospel: a) It did not originate with man but God. b) In its void of endorsement by man.	ch. 1:10 ch. 1:11-16 ch. 1:17-2:1

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Theme	Developments	Reference
Deliverance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In being circumspect because of the Judaizers. 2) In being contrary to Judaism. 3) In being in communion with the apostles. 4) In being consistent by rebuking James when he behaved contrary to the gospel. 	ch. 2:2-5 ch. 2:6 ch. 2:7-10 ch. 2:11-15
Declaration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Justification by faith. The gospel is not a gospel of works in which justification is a reward. 2) Justification by faith, and works is a contradiction making Christ the Minister of sin 3) The Gospel brings: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Internalization, the life of Christ within. 	ch. 2:16 ch. 2:17-18 ch. 2:19-21
Denunciation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Of their foolishness: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) By turning aside from that which they had experienced and seen. b) In turning from the footsteps of Abraham. His was a case history in how a man without circumcision was made righteous. c) Because of the results of putting themselves under law. d) In rejecting the principle by which man can live. e) Because of the results of putting themselves under law, they are rejecting the principle by which man can live, in failing to see: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) The finality of the promise. ii) Singularity of the word “seed”. iii) The true purpose of the law. iv) The unification of them experientially with Christ. v) The unification of them experientially with Abraham vi) What it means to be under law. vii) The fulness of the liberation in Christ: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Their recognition as the sons of God. 2. The inclination of the sons of God. 3. The position of the sons of God. viii) The inconsistency of law and grace. ix) Their reception of Paul. x) The case history through the two sons. 	ch. 3:1-5 ch. 3:6-9 ch. 3:10-11 ch. 3:12-14 ch. 3:15 ch. 3:16-18 ch. 3:19-25 ch. 3:26-28 ch. 3:29 ch. 4:1-3 ch. 4:4-5 ch. 4:6 ch. 4:7 ch. 4:8-10 ch. 4:11-20 ch. 4:21-31
Declaration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Shun the error of doctrine. 2) Shun the error of Illustration - how? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Live according to the Spirit, despite the war within. b) Practical characteristics. c) The writing of the letter and final comments. 	ch. 5:1-15 ch. 5:16-26 ch. 6:1-10 ch. 6:11-18

Lessons

- a) The work of an evangelist does not end with the preaching of the gospel for the Lord said: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). The evangelist ought to have a perpetual care for the saints who God has graciously given. Paul saw the preaching of the gospel as a spiritual birth in which there was travail, and when an individual was saved he longed for their spiritual growth. At Galatia their spiritual development was being hindered, and seeing this as a work of God, he did not just pray but travailed again for their growth (Gal. 4:19).

- b) Many a man will seek to get the acclamation of men but not that of God, and to do so will modify the gospel so that instead of being a delight to the heart of God, it boosts the pride of man. This is not always the speakers fault, for men put them on a pedestal as if the gift they have was of their own making, instead of recognizing that the ability anyone has comes from God.
- c) Instead of a declaration of salvation by faith from eternal condemnation, there is the imagined good in the flesh and man's own ability to work out his own salvation.
- d) The message of salvation by faith and Divine liberation is not an intellectual message alone. It is not a clinical message dealing only with the external. Rather, it is the inner life brought into living union with Christ. It is more than an application of life, it is an impartation of life and it is this point Paul makes when he writes: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). It is not conformity to external regulations and ceremonies, but: "Godliness is God . . . manifest in flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). This life is true liberty but never license to do as one wants.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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