

Bible Study Notes and Questions on the letter of Paul to the Galatians

Overview: Paul had visited Galatia, a Roman province which included the region of Lycaonia and Pisidia (part of Turkey today) where Paul had had a successful first missionary journey preaching the gospel to the Galatians in cities such as Antioch (**Acts 13:14-52**), Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (**Acts 14:1-23**). Paul revisited the Galatians in his second and third missionary journeys (**Acts 16:1-6; 18:23**). The dating of this letter is uncertain. A possible date is **48 AD** before the Council of Jerusalem (**Acts 15:1ff**) in about **49 AD**, whilst other people believe the letter could have been written from **50-53 AD**.

It would appear that the Galatians were visited by Judaistic teachers (Judaizers) not long after Paul's first visit to the Galatians. They undermined Paul's teaching by their own teaching of a new type of legalism to these young Gentile (non-Jewish) believers. They recognised belief in Jesus Christ as Saviour but they taught that non-Jewish believers were not true Christians until they were circumcised by a Jewish practice in the Old Testament (**Genesis 17:10-27**) and keeping the Law of Moses. They did not accept the teaching of the apostles (**Acts 15:1-31**). These Judaizers convinced many of the new Galatian converts to reject Paul's teaching because they were spiritually immature and not yet grounded in the word of God. The Galatian Christians had listened to Paul with much enthusiasm but then many of them gave the same enthusiastic response to the Judaizers.

It is for this reason Paul had to address the problem in this letter to the Galatians to show them that circumcision had nothing whatsoever to do with salvation. The Judaizers were presenting another gospel by saying receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and then be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved (**Acts 15:1-5**).

If this Judaistic teaching was allowed to continue without being exposed, the death of Christ on the cross would be increasingly seen by many Galatians as being for nothing (**2:21**). Paul had taught that believing in Christ and his work on the cross to save us from our sins was sufficient to have a right relationship with God. There was no way the Galatians could be justified by the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. Mixing law and grace to be saved was unacceptable and not the gospel.

Paul had received the gospel by revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ (**1:11-12**). His gospel was confirmed to be the same as that of the leaders in Jerusalem (**2:1-10**). Paul had stressed justification by faith alone and no salvation can be achieved by the works of the law (**2:16-21**). The purpose of the law was to reveal what sin is and show people the need of a Saviour. Salvation in Jesus Christ was for Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) to become all one in Jesus Christ (**3:26-29**) and sons of God (**4:5-6**).

Paul has shown in **chapters 5&6** that life in the Spirit was possible and practical in knowing freedom in Jesus Christ (**5:1, 13, 26; 6:1-10**). Paul stressed the distinction between the works of the flesh (**5:19-21**) and the fruit of the Spirit (**5:22-23**). There is the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit where believers need to crucify the works of the flesh in order to live and walk in the Spirit (**5:16-18, 24**). Believers should seek to be led by the Spirit.

The fundamental message of this letter can be summed up in what J. W. R. Stott has written in his book on Galatians (p191): "We have Christ through His apostles to teach us, Christ through His cross to save us and Christ through His Spirit to sanctify us." Paul finished his letter, as he did in all his letters in his final greetings, mentioning the word "grace" – God's unmerited favour towards us to be with us.

Questions

Chapter One

- Q.1)** Read **1:1-5**. Show how Paul writes of **A) His ministry. B) His greetings to the brethren in Galatia. See also 6:18. C) The death of Jesus Christ.**
- Q.2)** What did Paul mean by another gospel in **1:6-10**? See also **2:3, 16; Acts 15:1-5; 2Corinthians 11:2-4**. What were the troublemakers doing to bring about another gospel?
- Q.3)** How did Paul come to understand the gospel? Read **1:10-24**. How did Paul defend the validity of his own ministry?
- Q.4)** What is known of Paul's life before he was converted to Jesus Christ? See **1:13-14, 23**. Read also **Acts 8:1; 9:1-2; 22:3-5; 26:4-5, 9-12; Philippians 3:4-6**.
- Q.5)** What is meant by the word "apostle" (**1:1**). How do we know Paul had apostolic authority? See **1:1, 10-17** and also **Romans 1:1; 1Corinthians 1:1; 2Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1Timothy 1:1; 2Timothy 1:1**. Are there apostles in today's church?
- Q.6)** What is your testimony as a Christian? Can you testify to your life being transformed as seen in Paul? Read again **1:10-24** and also **Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-10; 26:13-19**.

Chapter Two

- Q.1)** Why did Paul go up to Jerusalem? Show what must have been discussed and what was the outcome of Paul's visit? Read carefully **2:1-10**.
- Q.2)** Why was Paul justified in rebuking Peter publicly for his attitude towards the Gentiles? See **2:11-16**.
- Q.3)** Read again **2:11-16**. What can be the consequences if a leader has sinned in view of Peter an elder being withstood by Paul? See also **2Samuel chapters 11 & 12; Psalm 51:1-19**. How can a leader be helped to stand against temptation to fall into sin?
- Q.4)** Read **2:16-21**. Show why it is impossible to be justified by the works of the law using Paul's arguments in **2:16-21**. What is meant by the word "justification"?
- Q.5)** Read carefully **2:20**. Can you see four possible things about a believer in Jesus Christ from this verse alone?

Chapter Three

- Q.1)** Read carefully **3:1-18**. What are the arguments Paul gave to why he said in **2:16**: "*a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faith*"? There are at least four arguments seen in **3:1-5; 3:6-9; 3:10-14** and **3:15-18**.
- Q.2)** What do we know of Abraham's faith? See **3:6-11; Genesis 15:1-6; Romans 4:1-25**.
- Q.3)** Read **3:10-18**. Can you make the distinction between the law and promise and between works and faith as shown by God dealing with men? Show the two benefits that we receive because of the redeeming work of Christ.
- Q.4)** What was the purpose of the law? See **3:19-24**.
- Q.5)** What do we have as believers in Jesus Christ in **3:25-29**?

Chapter Four

- Q.1)** Read carefully **4:1-3**. What do these verses show of our condition before knowing Jesus Christ as Saviour?
- Q.2)** Show the relationship we have with God as believers in Jesus Christ in **4:4-7**. Read again **3:25-29**.
- Q.3)** What had happened to many of the Galatian believers after responding to false teaching? See **4:8-21**. How did the Galatian believers treat Paul before the false teachers came? Can you say what disability Paul had from **4:13-15**? Please note that Paul had other people to write down his letters that he dictated to them.

Chapter Four continued

- Q.4)** Read again carefully **4:8-21**. Show the qualities Paul had as a leader. Consider carefully the characteristics of true leadership. See also **1Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1Timothy 3:1-12; 2Timothy 2:14-26; Titus 1:5-9; 1Peter 5:1-4**. What is your attitude to faithful leadership?
- Q.5)** Distinguish between the two covenants one of the freewoman and the other of the bondwoman. What do they teach us? Read **4:22-31** and also **Genesis 16:1-16; 21:9-12; Isaiah 54:1**.

Chapter Five

- Q.1)** In what ways did Paul show that circumcision was unprofitable? Read **5:2-12 & 6:12-15**. There are at least four results that follow if the Galatians decided to be circumcised.
- Q.2)** How can we know the freedom in Christ? See **5.1, 5-6, 13-15**. Are we free to do what we like? See also **Romans 6:1-11**.
- Q.3)** Read **5:16-26**. **A)** What did Paul mean by these two words the “flesh” and the “Spirit”? **B)** What is the distinction between the way of the flesh and the way of the Spirit? How should Christians respond to these two ways?
- C)** How can we walk in the Spirit? See also **Colossians 3:1-25**.
- Q.4)** What can we learn from Paul’s outline of false teaching in **5:7-12**? How should we react to false teaching in the Church today? Consider Paul’s attitude to false teachers in **v12** and why he felt that way about them.

Chapter Six

- Q.1)** Read **6:1-10**. Show the responsibility of every believer in relation to other people. Explain the apparent contradiction when told “*bear ye one another’s burdens*” in (**v2**) and “*every man shall bear his own burden*” in (**v5**).
- Q.2)** What can we learn from sowing and reaping? Show the meaning of sowing to the flesh and sowing to the Spirit. How can we sow to the Spirit? Read **6:7-9**.
- Q.3)** Show what matters for a believer in **6:11, 14-17** which is essential in Christianity.
- Q.4)** Why did the Judaizers make an outward show of their religion? See **6:12-13**. Can you give examples today of people making an outward show of their religion?
- Q.5)** Compare the final greetings Paul made to the Galatians in **6:18** with the final greetings at the end of all the other letters Paul produced. Is there anything in common in these final greetings in all these letters?

Miscellaneous Questions

- Q.1)** Find out about the background of the letter by using a Bible dictionary and a concordance. Read also **Acts 14:1-23; 16:1-6; 18:23**.
- Q.2)** Write down a list of the key words in this letter e.g. Spirit, law...
- Q.3)** Show the teaching in this letter on **A)** God revealed as the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. **B)** The cross of Christ. **C)** The distinction between the flesh and the Spirit.
- Q.4)** Show the teaching Paul has used from the Old Testament in this letter. A cross reference Bible will be helpful to find the Old Testament scriptures.
- Q.5)** Is there evidence in this letter that the Judaizers had tried to discredit Paul’s teaching? See for example **1:10 & 2:4-5**.
- Q.6)** Show how Paul refuted the legalistic teaching of the Judaizers and defended his own teaching of the gospel. See **1:10-24; 2:15-21; 3:1-25; 4:21-31; 5:1-6; 6:12-13, 15**.
- Q.7)** Show the ways many of the Galatian Christians had rejected Paul’s teaching to receive the teaching of the Judaizers. Read **1:6-9; 2:11-21; 3:1-4; 4:9-21; 5:7-10**.
- Q.8)** Show the evidence of Paul’s suffering for stressing the Cross of Christ. See **5:11 & 6:17**.

Bibliography

The following resources have proved helpful to give insight into understanding the message from this letter. The author of this work does not necessarily agree with everything written in these resources.

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