

Galatians Introduction and Chapter 1

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For what it's worth, God laid it on me a while ago to teach Galatians next. I'm not sure why God made that clear, but if I had to guess now that I've studied Chapter 1 "to death" it's due to the constant danger any Christian (including myself) regularly faces of regularly thinking to please God we must do this or that! Yes, I believe I'm saved by faith alone and I believe God calls us to live as a witness for Him and not try to earn our salvation. The danger is thinking, God must be proud of me right now because what I'm doing right now! None of us are more saved after a moment when we first commit our lives to Him even though He has perfect knowledge and knew we're saved before the world began. My point is that we can't be "more saved" by doing any of a thousand things we think make us more "holy". The reason I believe God wanted me to teach this is as a reminder that all the works we do are simply because God wants to use our lives to glorify Him versus trying to earn it by our efforts.

Let me pause for a moment to consider one of my favorite facts in Galatians. There's a half-verse from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. It's from Chapter 2, Verse 4 and is usually translated, "The just shall live by faith". By the way the Protestant reformation keys on that verse and as many of us know it changed the course of western civilization when Martin Luther started the reformation roughly a 1,000 years ago. My point is that half-verse is quoted three times in the New Testament.

It is here in Galatians 3:11, with an emphasis on the just shall live by faith? It asks how shall we live? It is also at Romans 1:17 with an emphasis on the Just shall live by faith. It asks who are the just? It is also at Hebrews 10:28 with an emphasis on the just shall live by faith. It asks who are faithful?

I wanted to open with that because when you get confused as the purpose for this book, remember it is a guide on how God expects us to live, which is in faith that Jesus did it all for us! I like to think of the Gospel message as not just Jesus is God, He died for every sin we ever have or ever will commit, but it is the fact we're now sinless because Jesus paid for all of our sins! The classic question is why do most people reject that message? In short, they want to prove their worth to God by their efforts or simple a denial that all of this is real! To me the history of the bible manuscripts, bible archeology, prophesy, and statistical evidence of the bible both through internal study and external evidence all support the fact of the bible came from outside of time and space as we know it.

Well, it won't be an opening chapter without a who, what, when and where discussion. Galatia today is part of the nation of Turkey. It's a region and not a city. It refers to a nation called Gaul. It's confusing as that area (that Galatia was named after) was the northern parts of what the Romans called Galatia. It is important to remember when Paul wrote this, Galatia was a part of the Roman Empire. The Romans referred to the southern part of Galatia as such. Paul did his first of three missionary journeys there and started churches there. My point is this letter most likely refers to a larger area than "original Galatia".

Most likely this letter was written shortly after Paul finished that missionary journey. Most likely it got written either right before or right after a big "pow wow" in Jerusalem, over the issue of whether or not non-Jewish Christians were required to be circumcised! The answer is no! When Paul wrote this letter 6-chapter letter (Chapter numbers were added at the time of the printing press). Paul wrote it as Jewish Christians traveled to Galatia to preach non-Jewish Christians must be circumcised. I suspect a big fear among Jewish Christians is that if non-Jewish Christians didn't have to be Jewish, what'll happen to the Jewish nation! By the way Paul answers that in Romans 11 to state God's promises to the Jewish nation

are unconditional, meaning in the "post-church era" God will focus on Israel again. If Jesus is going to rule the world from Israel, then Israel must exist when Jesus does that!

Anyway, back to the who, what when and where. Most date this letter about 49AD. It is considered to be Paul's first letter in terms of a time date. I always wondered who picked the order of the books in the New Testament and Paul's letters are roughly organized from "biggest to smallest", with Romans being first as it covers doctrine the most. I suspect he wrote it either from Jerusalem or Paul's home church of Antioch (in Syria today). One of the reasons Paul wrote it was to prove he was an apostle and called by God. In fact, the first two chapters is an emphasis on why Paul is an apostle and why his version of the Gospel (saved by grace alone) is key to understanding the first two chapters. Galatians could ask, who is Paul anyway? He's not one of the 12 so how do we know he's God sent? (Acts wasn't written when this book was!) That's why the first two chapters has a heavy emphasis on who is Paul as what exactly is the true Gospel message (saved by faith alone).

OK then time to breakdown and actually talk about Chapter 1. It's not very long, so I can get through it fairly quickly! Paul opens to explain who he is. He is writing to churches he founded, but I'm sure lots of people there didn't know him personally. For those of us who already believe Paul was sent by God think of these opening chapters as a reminder that we're saved by faith alone and if that is good enough for Paul it should be good enough for us! Paul emphasizes the fact he was not saved because someone told him about Jesus, he was saved because Jesus Himself spoke to him. Paul also said he wrote it with all the brothers who are with him. Not sure who that refers to, but the emphasis is on the fact he wasn't alone but had other believers to back up his story.

He then states the letter is to the churches in Galatia (and obviously for all people to study). Paul goes into the Gospel message in Verses 3-5 just to make it clear what the Gospel message is! By Verse 6, it gets into the heart of the problem. Believers in that church were turning from a message of "just saved by faith alone"! Remember Jewish Christians were preaching this message I suspect out of fear that if a non-Jewish person could only be saved by faith, what will happen to the nation of Israel, and His plans for that nation? My point is it's easy to sell having to work one's way to pleasing God! That appeals to our ego that we work hard to please God! The problem of course is that message of "works" as well as faith is not the Gospel Message. That's Paul's key point all through this book!

By Verse 10 Paul emphasizes the fact He was called by God to do this and not man! If he was trying to please people he'd probably encourage working hard to earn salvation. Paul believed as we should that we are servants of Jesus to do what is His will, not ours!

From Verses 11 to 24 we get a Paul "history lesson". How he was raised a religious Jew and before he got saved, he not only was against Christians but literally put some to death for that belief. It makes me wonder how forgiving those Christians were where Paul killed believers! As most of you know, he got saved as he was traveling to from Israel to Damascus (Syria) to arrest more Christians and Jesus said in effect to Paul, "Time to join the winning team!" When he first got saved, he did not immediately return to Israel (and Jerusalem in particular) for a new "pow wow". Instead, he went by himself to the desert (in Saudi Arabia) where I suspect Jesus taught him more as well as he contemplated all that he did!

In Verse 18 Paul talks about going to Jerusalem. The only disciple he met was Peter and one of Jesus' half-brothers (James) who got saved after the resurrection and became a church leader! Bottom line is those in Jerusalem didn't trust Paul because of his history of persecuting the church. It took Peter and James to convince the Christians there that Paul was now ok and one of them!

So why give all of this history? Yes the book of Acts that tells much of this story wasn't written yet. I suspect the main reason it's here for us believers is to understand and accept that Paul was sent to us as an apostle by Jesus. Fine most of us believe that, now what? My short answer is to examine our lives and ask, what am I trying to do to convince God I deserve to go to heaven more than just believe we're saved by faith alone? It's a constant danger each of us face and that's why it's good to review Galatians every now and then to remind us of that fact.