

## **What's the Point....of Galatians?**

**Mark Garner**

*In the book of Galatians, the apostle Paul describes at length the difference between salvation by law and salvation by God's grace. In so doing, Paul also discusses several other topics that are of significance in our relationship with God. As he proceeds, the apostle continually brings everything back to Jesus' crucifixion, showing that a good understanding and appreciation of the cross enables believers much better to understand many other important topics.*

### ***Background & Themes***

The Roman region of Galatia is now a region in central Turkey. The epistle was most likely written in AD 56 or 57, while Paul was in the middle of his 3rd Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-21:17). In large part, the epistle addresses a recurring problem of the time. Some Christians, who had previously been Jews, thought that all of the Mosaic laws should be added to Christianity. After the conference described in Acts 15 (Galatians 2:1-10 might well refer to this event), it still took a while to help everyone understand that it was no longer necessary to follow the old laws.

Throughout the epistle, Paul refers to the cross as a unifying theme that can also help us understand other aspects of Jesus' message. Galatians uses the words "cross" or "crucified" seven times, more than any other epistle. As the epistle discusses "the cross", this involves much more than the physical events, and the epistle explains several aspects of what it involves. The letter also implicitly asks us to consider whether we are trying to please God or to gain human favor.

### ***Crucified With Christ (Overview Of Galatians)***

The letter could be roughly divided into three sections: the source and the genuine authority of the good news of Jesus (Galatians 1:11-2:14); the spiritual and Scriptural foundations of the message of Jesus (Galatians 2:15-4:31); and some of the implications and applications of the gospel in our daily lives (Galatians 5:1-6:18).

Galatians begins more abruptly than most of the other epistles, as after a brief greeting, the apostle states directly why he is writing (Galatians 1). He emphasizes that there is only one genuine gospel, and that no human, nor even an angel, has the authority to alter, revise, or add to it; and then he elaborates on this. Next, Paul gives an example of how the message of Jesus can bring harmony among people of different personalities and backgrounds; then, he gives an example of how easy it can be to be led astray by human thinking (Galatians 2:1-14).

Next, the epistle examines some of the key aspects of the gospel, beginning with how Jesus' crucifixion justifies those who believe in him (2:15-21), and then discusses the reasons why following the law cannot justify any of us (Galatians 3:1-4:31). Then, the apostle explains how relying on God's grace produces more godly living, compared with trying to justify ourselves by our works (Galatians 5), followed by some practical guidance and exhortations (Galatians 6).

Galatians helps us better understand some aspects of Jesus' message that might seem illogical to earthly minds. It also helps us understand even better the difference between trusting in human abilities and human teachings, compared with putting our faith in God's words, the message of Jesus, and God's promises.

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### **Caleb Dillinger**

Galatians is the beginning of Paul's shorter letters in the New Testament. Believed to be one of his earlier letters, Paul is quite harsh in his address of those who push salvation by Judaism/the Law of Moses. He is also quite passionate in his conviction of unity and salvation in Christ. Galatians is, without a doubt, a reflection of passionate faith in the Lord Jesus.

First, it is important to note that this letter of Paul is addressed "to the churches" (1:2). This is not tailored to just one congregation, but many. The reality is that many churches then (and today!) face similar challenges. One such challenge is the departure from truth, listening to those who distort the real gospel of grace in Christ. Whether it is accepting the teaching that you need to follow Moses or you need to earn your way to heaven with righteous acts, the church has faced false teaching for 2,000 years. This is true for all churches. Paul vigorously proclaims salvation by grace through faith in Christ. As 1:10 says, if we try to please people, we would not be servants of Christ. We cannot make our message different from the truth: salvation in Jesus.

Second, Paul puts truth above people, including himself. The gospel is not "his" gospel or any person's gospel, but simply is "the gospel." He recounts how he shared this and faced opposition at his own conversion. But even after positive moments, like the Acts 15 council that accepted Gentiles as equals through Christ, Peter and Barnabas struggled with racism/ethnocentrism. They disassociated from the Gentiles and Paul rebuked them for that decision. This is important to read today when some cultures and countries and groups prioritize their understanding of God, their way of doing church as more important than the unity and welcoming of others who serve and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third, Galatians is helpful to read for its teachings on the Holy Spirit. A dozen times in this short letter, Paul talks about the Holy Spirit. While he waits until chapter 3 of 6 to begin including the Spirit in discussion, Paul points to the battle between our earthly body (flesh) and the Spirit regarding desires/temptations, as well as the necessity to walk according to the Spirit, which is tied to faith. As he says in 6:8, "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

What is the point of reading Galatians today? To read spiritual passion, to better understand grace, to embrace the true gospel, and to stop discrimination and fleshly living. That's why we should read Galatians in the 21st century.