

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Paul's City Epistles: Galatians

In this letter of the Apostle Paul to the Christian churches in Galatia (written in the power of the Holy Spirit about 55 AD) he warns them of the dangers of mixing the Old Testament Law of Moses with the teaching of the New Testament. In the time allowed in this broadcast, we will briefly explore:

1. How Paul received the Gospel as a revelation from the Lord Himself;
2. How he strongly resisted any attempt to change the Gospel to law-keeping;
3. How Christians received the Gospel of Christ by faith;
4. How Christians are greatly privileged as the children and sons of God; and
5. How Christians need God's grace to live lives of faith that are pleasing to Him.

1. How Paul received the Gospel as a revelation from the Lord Himself

In Galatians 1 we see that Paul starts by emphasising the authority of his apostleship declaring that he was appointed such by "*Jesus Christ, and God the Father*" (Galatians 1:1). He immediately reminds these straying Christians that "*the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for their sins in order to save them from this present evil world*" (Galatians 1:4).

He then tells them off for turning from the gospel of the grace of Christ to one corrupted by doctrine that belonged to a different age (Galatians 1:6-7). He admonishes them for believing teachers who perverted the Gospel of Christ and says that such teachers should be accursed (Galatians 1:7-9). This is strong language. It shows us two things about the apostle.

1. He held the truth as vitally important;
2. He really cared for the spiritual progress of the Galatian Christians.

In Galatians 1:10-12, this servant of Christ expresses His dependence upon God and then declares that the gospel which was preached by him was not after the teaching of men but teaching directly revealed from Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 the same Apostle wrote: "*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*" God revealed the truth. The apostles and prophets (as the oracles of God) passed it on in the very words taught by the Holy Spirit of God.

Paul then goes on to show how God had worked on him in grace in order to reveal His Son in him (see Galatians 1:16). He clearly expresses that His God-given commission was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:16). He also noted that in the early days of his preaching other Christians were surprised to see how he, who had previously persecuted the church, preached the faith which he had sought to destroy (Galatians 1:23). Paul's commitment to God was seen in his preaching.

2. How Paul strongly resisted any attempt to change the Gospel to law-keeping

In Galatians 2 Paul strongly resists the attempt by some to lead Christians (set free by grace) back into the bondage of trying to keep the Law of Moses. He speaks of false brethren who had come into the Christian company at Jerusalem (see Galatians 2:4). He stated that they had slipped in among them to spy out the freedom they had in Christ so that they might introduce teaching that would bring them back to slavery under the law (see Galatians 2:4). Paul said that he gave these false teachers short shrift so that the truth of God might be preserved (see Galatians 2:5). Later, he even withstood his fellow apostle Peter at Antioch for fearing the religious Jews and withdrawing himself from eating with Gentiles (see Galatians 2:11-16).

He then reveals that the Christians at Jerusalem accepted that the gospel to the heathen had been committed to him by the Lord (see Galatians 2:9). Similarly, the gospel to the Jew had been committed to Peter. James, Cephas, and John, who were named as "pillars" of the church appreciated Paul's character of ministry (see Galatians 2:9). They

believed Paul and Barnabas should go to the Gentiles and they, themselves, would concentrate on taking the gospel to the Jews.

3. How Christians received the Gospel of Christ by faith

The rest of the chapter (Galatians 2:17-21) shows that Christians are justified by faith alone and, by that same faith, live their lives for God. Paul wrote that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. He stresses that the works of the law were not able to make anybody right in the sight of God. He also reasoned that if he allowed the law to infiltrate Christian doctrine then he, himself, would be a violator of the gospel (Galatians 2:18). Additionally, He goes on to contrast his old self with his new self by stating: *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). He then makes the point that if he depended upon keeping the law for righteousness, then the death of Christ would have been pointless.

In Galatians 3 Paul challenges the Galatians with the question: *"Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"* (Galatians 3:2). The answer is that the Spirit of God is received through faith! In Ephesians 1:13 we find that when we trust in Christ having heard the gospel of our salvation then we are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise. This sealing shows that we belong to and are kept by God.

Paul then uses the example of Abraham (who lived before the Law of Moses) to show that it is through faith in the living God that makes a person righteous. He argues that those who have this faith are the true children of Abraham. This fulfils the promise of God to Abraham which said: *"In thee shall all nations be blessed"* (Galatians 3:8, see Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). He stated that it is evident that no man is justified in God's sight by the works of the law because it is written: *"The just shall live by faith"* (Galatians 3:11, see Habakkuk 2:4). He asserts that those still trying to keep the law for salvation are under its curse, namely, death. He then gives all such hope by declaring: *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"* (Galatians 3:13). Every law-breaker; every sinner can know that Christ has taken on Himself God's judgment for sin. This is GRACE - God's Redemption At Christ's Expense.

Next, Paul reveals that Christ is the promised seed of Abraham. He highlights the fact that God didn't say seeds, in the plural, but in the singular specifically referring to Christ. It is in Christ that the promises of God are "yea and amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

He goes on to say that the law did serve a purpose. He likens it to a schoolmaster or guardian leading seekers to Christ so that they might be *"justified by faith"* (see Galatians 3:24). After all, *"faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17). He added that it is through faith in Christ Jesus we are made the children of God. As such we are *"Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:29).

4. How Christians are greatly privileged as the children and sons of God

In Galatians 4, Paul illustrates the difference between a child who is the rightful heir of his father and those who are full-grown sons in the sight of God through the redemption accomplished in Christ. Galatians 4:1-2 may be paraphrased as: *"And I say, so long as the heir is a young child, he is no different from a slave even though he is lord of all; but he is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by his father."* So the young child only receives the rights of his heirship at a time appointed by his father. Then, he, as the son, will receive and manage the inheritance. However, while still a child, he does not have the skill or wisdom to run such an estate. The stewards do this on his behalf. They oversee the inheritance on his behalf. At the same time, the guardians care for the child. They look after his person. Therefore, the son is likened to a slave because he has to do what he is told. Until he reaches a mature age, he unquestionably takes orders and gives none. He is under subjection.

In a similar way, the Jew was enslaved by the Law. He was in desperate need because he was under the curse of God also. In the next verses (Galatians 4:4-5), God marvellously provides for the redemption of the Jews. It shows how slaves are changed into sons. *"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."*

Having been purchased by the blood of Christ, the believing Jew had now come under God's favour. But more than that, he is placed as a fully-grown son in God's family for we read: *"...that we might receive the adoption of sons."* (Galatians 4:5). Sonship brings with it the thoughts of both dignity and status. As a child of God, a Christian is dependent upon God. As a son, he shares the Father's will and work. Sonship also qualifies the Christian to be an heir of God through Christ. It is an heirship that includes eternal, God-given blessings.

Paul then reminds these Christians of the happy, even sacrificial manner in which they had received him initially. At the same time, he expresses disappointment in their sliding back into law-keeping which rendered his previous labour

worthless. He appeals to them by saying: *"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you"* (Galatians 4:19-20).

The Apostle then offers a challenge to the false teachers by presenting an allegory of the sons of Abraham. One son was born of a bondwoman and the other by a freewoman. This contrasts the slavery that comes from the law and the freedom that comes through the gracious promise of God. The first is likened to an earthly Jerusalem ruled by the flesh and the second to the heavenly Jerusalem ruled by the Spirit of God. Paul says: *"Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman"* (Galatians 4:30). In simple terms, the letter of the law is to be done away and the gospel of God's grace accepted. As Romans 10:4 states: *"... Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."*

5. How Christians need God's grace to live lives of faith that are pleasing to Him

In Galatians 5 Paul commands the Galatian Christians to *"stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free"* (Galatians 5:1). He warns them that adopting circumcision under the law is in fact displacing Christ and His work. By placing themselves under law, they were turning their backs on the grace of God. He emphasises that it is only through the Spirit that righteousness by faith is gained.

He commended the early faith of the Galatians by stating: *"Ye did run well"* (Galatians 5:7). He then admonishes them by asking who had hindered them from obeying the truth that came with the gospel (Galatians 5:7). He predicted that the person who hindered them would come under judgment (Galatians 5:10). He himself desired that such false teachers should be *"cut off"* (Galatians 5:12).

He then shows that there is no persecution for those who are under law, but there is for those under grace who suffer persecution through the offence that comes with the cross. The section ends with the words: *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another"* (Galatians 5:13-15). Yes, Christians have liberty in Christ, but they must never abuse it. For example, in Romans 6:1-2 we read: *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* Christ is the gauge for our liberty. Love is its fuel. Anything we do that could dishonour Him is to be avoided. We are not to continue sinning saying that God's grace is so great He will forgive us. The Christian has a new nature that hates sin; therefore, he seeks to live a pure life. He also has the Holy Spirit within Him. If he continues in sin then the Spirit is grieved because He expects holiness - a life lived to the glory of God.

Paul directs the Galatians to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). He outlines the warfare between the old nature (the flesh) and the new nature ruled by the Spirit of God. He lists the works of the flesh in this way: *"Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like"* (Galatians 5:19-21). He insists that those who do such things *"shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:21).

He then lists the fruit of the Spirit as *"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance"* (Galatians 5:22-23). Faithful Christians are recognised by these things.

In Galatians 6, Paul encourages the Galatians to live a sanctified life. He starts by describing how those who have fallen into sin ought to be corrected: *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* (Galatians 6:1). We are all capable of such failure. Those who are aware of this are spiritual. Hence, those who know their own weakness are those used to advise those who have failed.

He continues by encouraging them to *"bear one another's [crushing] burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2). It is only love that would do this. These burdens would refer to things like difficulties, sorrows, infirmities or failings.

Paul also promoted a truthful assessment of self where one is always testing his own work by the standards of godliness. Each saint had a responsibility to bear his own burden. This is a lighter burden than that mentioned previously and seems to indicate the work done for the Lord. Jesus said in Matthew 11:30 *"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Paul certainly expected those who were taught in the word to provide for the temporal needs of their teachers (Galatians 6:6). He warns them that *"God is not mocked: because whatever a man sows, he also reaps. He that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting"*

(Galatians 6:7-8). In following false teachers, the Galatians were sowing to the flesh and would reap the consequences. Those who purged themselves from such teachers would be blessed.

He then confirms that if they engaged themselves in well-doing towards men (and especially fellow believers) then blessing would result. Next, he points out that the epistle had been written by his own hand (Galatians 6:11).

Furthermore, Paul highlights the motives behind the thinking of the false teachers. They wanted to retain aspects of the law so they could please men and avoid persecution from the Jews. They knew that they, themselves, could not keep the law; but would receive the praise of men if they gained converts to their cause. The only boasting Paul would do was in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ because it was by that sacrifice the world was crucified to him, and he to the world (see Galatians 6:14).

He leads up to his conclusion by declaring that those in Christ who walk according to their new God-given nature would be granted peace and mercy (Galatians 5:16). He goes on to state: *"From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus"* (Galatians 6:17). The scars of the wounds inflicted upon Paul as he suffered persecution for his faith were clearly seen. He hoped that his example of suffering might touch the hearts of these straying souls. Finally, He addresses the Galatians as his brethren and leaves them in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:18).

Let's end this talk by transferring some of the main teachings of this epistle into a prayer:

*Blest God and Father, grant me faith to see
The wonder of Thy word of truth to me.
Let me be sure of its authority
And seek Thy Son who died upon the tree.*

*Keep me, O Father, from turning away
And to avoid all those who'd lead astray.
Let my poor soul hear Thy most tender call
And turn my eyes to grace - with Christ my all.*

*Father, remind me I'm a child of Thine;
This by a birth that's certainly divine.
Tell me I am adopted as a son
Through all the work that Christ, my Lord, has done.*

*Father, the faith of Abraham was strong;
Reckoned as righteous, joy was in his song.
I'm justified and live by faith alone;
I can approach Thee on Thy royal throne.*

*In Christ I find I have true liberty;
His precious blood has set my spirit free.
Lord, I would walk in love and purity;
And, by Thy Spirit, gladly worship Thee.*

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Amen.

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