

Read Your Bible with Understanding

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Instructions

In this first assignment, firstly read all six chapters of Galatians in one sitting. This should take you about 15-20 minutes depending upon how well you read. Once you have read the whole epistle, study the "Introduction to the Galatian Epistle" below and answer the questions which follow.

Introduction to the Galatian Epistle

The books of Galatians and Romans are the clearest expressions of the new covenant of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone! Galatians has been called "The Magna Carta of Christian Liberty."

This letter stirred the fires of the Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther said, "the little book of Galatians is my letter; I have betrothed myself to it; it is my wife."

John Wesley said he found lasting peace from a sermon on Galatians.

In his Study Guide Commentary, p. 11, Curtis Vaughan wrote, "few books have more profoundly influenced the minds of men, have so significantly shaped the course of human history, or continued to speak with such relevance to the deepest needs of modern life."

This doctrinally oriented letter, possibly Paul's first, was a precursor to Romans and its development of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith apart from Judaism's emphasis on a works righteousness by obedience to the Mosaic Law and traditions of the elders (i.e., Oral Traditions). Some of the key Christian doctrines found in the Book of Galatians include;

Salvation cannot be found in both human performance and grace.

Salvation must be found in either human performance or grace.

Christlikeness will follow a true conversion.

This radically free salvation, by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone is desperately needed in our day because of the recurrent, subtle pull of our self-oriented, works-oriented religious

consciousness. In every age the simple truth of God's initiating, self-giving, unconditional covenant love mediated through human repentance and humble faith is challenged! It is not that the false teachers were rejecting Christ's central place in redemption, but they were adding prerequisites to Him. It is not what we add, but that we add anything!

Author

Paul's authorship of this letter has never been seriously doubted, as it forms a significant pillar of the Pauline Corpus. Galatians is very autobiographical and personal. It is highly emotional yet clearly presented gospel truth.

Date & Recipients

Paul wrote to the churches in southern Galatia after having a hand in starting them on his first missionary journey to Asia Minor. The date of writing is unclear. Paul's close relationship to these churches helps to explain the extremely strong tone he took with them from the very beginning of the letter. Galatians exhibits Paul at his angriest, as he risked the good favour of the converts in those churches to make sure they were on the path of truth and not led off into deception. In fact, to emphasize the seriousness of his purpose, he took the pen from his scribe and wrote the end of the letter himself in large letters ([Galatians 6:11](#)).

Purpose of the letter

Paul addressed three distinct areas of concern about the message of the false teachers. These heretics have been labelled "Judaizers" (cf. [II Corinthians 3](#)) because they believed that one had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian (cf. 6:12). His concerns revolved around the charges of the Judaizers (learned from Paul's defensive statements):

Paul was not truly an Apostle like the Twelve (cf. [Acts 1:21-22](#)); therefore, he was dependent on their authority or at least the authority of the Mother Church in Jerusalem.

Paul's message was different from theirs, and thus, false. This seems directly related to the concept of "justification by faith apart from the Law." The Apostles in Jerusalem were still very Jewish in their personal lives.

An element of libertinism was connected in some way with these churches (cf. 5:18-6:8). Exactly how this is to be explained is debated. Some have even seen two target groups in Paul's letter: Judaizers and Gnostics (cf. 4:8-11). However, it seems best to relate these verses to pagan practices. The believing Jews were concerned about the lifestyle of believing Gentiles. How did Paul's radical free grace relate to pagan idolatry and excess?

Doctrinally, this letter is a precursor to Paul's letter to the Romans. These two books contain Paul's major doctrines repeated and developed in different settings and later summarized in Ephesians. Galatians focuses on the differences between the Old Covenant (OT) in Moses and the New Covenant (NT) in Christ. The first was understood by the rabbis (Paul does not react against the Mosaic covenant, but its misinterpretation and application by Jewish tradition) to base God's acceptance on human performance, but the second was based on a new heart and a new spirit (cf. [Jer. 31:31-34](#); [Ezek. 36:22-38](#)). Both were based on God's grace; both desire a righteous people. The difference between them is how that righteousness is accomplished. This is developed in detail in the NT books of Romans and Hebrews.

Brief Outline

Prologue, 1:1-10

 general introduction to the book

 the occasion for writing the book

Paul defends his Apostleship, 1:11-2:14

Paul defends the doctrinal truths of his gospel, 2:15-4:20

Paul defends the practical implications of his gospel, 5:1-6:10

Personal summary and closing, 6:11-18

Questions for you to answer on the Introduction to the Galatian Epistle

1. The books of Galatians and Romans are the of the covenant of salvation by alone, through alone in alone
2. Martin Luther compared the Epistle to the Galatians to
3. True conversion to Christ will result in
4. It is not that the false teachers were rejecting Christ's central place in redemption, but they were to Him
5. That Paul is the author of Galatians has been hotly debated and much doubt continues to this very day. True statement () False statement ()
6. Paul wrote this epistle to;

People in the Roman province of Galatia in the south of the region ()

People of Gallic descent occupying the northern region ()

Both the southern and northern regions ()
7. What were the heretical Judaizers teaching in the Galatian churches?
8. What two charges did the Judaizers bring against Paul that he had to deal with in this epistle?
9. Read Galatians 5:18-6:8. From the descriptions in this passage, what do think is meant by the term libertine?
10. Which of Pauls epistles is a summary of Galatians and Romans?