

## Paul and the Galatians: Background and Story

We have thirteen epistles from the Apostle Paul, but none of them are quite as strong as his letter to the Galatians. What had happened that led to Paul penning such a heartfelt message to them? In Galatians Paul defends his own ministry and the gospel itself. This will be a letter that challenges us, encourages us, motivates us, and hopefully helps us as preachers of the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century!

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### I. Background of Galatians

A. Author

B. Date

C. Recipients

D. Occasion

1. Acts 11:27-30
2. Acts 13-14
3. Galatians
4. Acts 15

## II. The Letter Frame

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—<sup>2</sup> and all the brothers who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

### **Observations:**

### **III. A Christian Letter (by Conrad Gempf, *How to Like Paul Again*, in chapter 4)**

#### **The Epistle of “Those People” to the Galatians**

1:1 “Those People”, entrusted by the pillars of the faith, Jesus’ own disciples, with the good news;

1:2 To the believers in Galatia, called to turn from idolatry to the one true God;

1:3 Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:4 We thank God whenever we think of you, being confident that the Lord will keep you walking in the ways he prepared.

#### **Don’t Believe Paul**

1:5 We beseech you, brothers and sisters, not to be fooled by those who come talking of the gospel but spreading lies. Jesus has not come to destroy the law but to complete it, 1:6 and those, such as Paul, who preach anything else are doing so without the approval of the apostles who sent us, or Jesus who sent them, or God who sent him.

1:7 These teachers are not unknown to us, and they are unstable in all their ways. 1:8 When with Jews, they act as Jews and follow the traditions of the fathers, 1:9 but when with Gentiles, they act as Gentiles and follow the customs of the pagans. 1:10 Such men will do whatever is easiest and whatever gains your approval. But do not be deceived; there are those who seek human approval, they already have all the approval they will ever get. 1:11 Instead, brothers and sisters, seek God’s approval by following his will, and God, who sees all things, will reward all things.

#### **The God Who Sent Jesus is Jewish**

2:1 For God is a jealous God who sent his son to die for us. He did this, not in order that we may continue in his son but as strangers to himself, but to reconcile us to himself, that we might sit at his table. The Lord Jesus Christ who called you in the Jewish messiah, 2:2 he is God’s own answer to Jewish questions and promises. 2:3 But although it is we Jews who are natural heirs to this good news, the bountiful mercy of God is such that he has flung the doors wide open 2:4 that you too can be adopted into the people of God, the Jewish family.

2:5 But this God, whom you now serve in Christ, was not born yesterday. He did not hide himself or his wishes until such time as Jesus appeared. 2:6 No, he spent millennia preparing a people for himself, hinting at his glory and teaching of his character and laws. 2:7 We are not meant to discard all these things as if God has changed his nature overnight. On the contrary, 2:8 the truths that God has revealed in the Scriptures remain as true and valid as ever, though we now see them even more brightly and clearly in the Christ who kept and completed the writings in which he was foretold. 2:9 Has one God withered and another sprouted up? 2:10 No way, Jose! 2:11 Our God had Jesus always in mind; to those whom he gave the law through Moses he told to expect another prophet like Moses. 2:12 Will the new Moses destroy the work of the first Moses? Will they not both sing from the same song-tablet?

## **Saying No to the Law is Saying No to God**

2:13 And what will God say to us if we say “no” to him? It is not possible to say “yes” to Jesus and “no” to the one who sent him. 2:14 When he gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, they were not multiple choice. We cannot say, “I love you Lord, and I love your ways” and then say “no” when he bids us “Do not steal.” 2:15 Did Jesus keep the commandments or break them? Did Jesus keep kosher or fry bacon? Was Jesus not circumcised? 2:16 If you refuse to follow him in his life, how can you claim to pick up your cross and follow him in his death that you might be raised with him in glory?

2:17 Come out of Egypt and follow the true God! 2:18 If you do not respond in obedience to the Lord, in the commands he gave to his servant Moses, you will have no part in his blessings. 2:19 Embrace the King’s commands that you may truly become his subjects and he truly your King.

3:1 Furthermore, brothers and sisters, if you abandon the Law, as some like Paul would have you do, 3:2 you would be constantly sinning and doing what is displeasing to God. For there are only two ways: God’s way and sin; there is no neutral ground. 3:3 If God has gone to so much trouble to tell you his way, to make a covenant with people, if God has gone to the trouble of spelling out his holy guidelines for behavior, 3:4 is it really too much to ask for us to learn God’s guidelines and keep them and obey his will? 3:5 Come and be part of the covenant with God and help each other not to sin by together keeping the Law!

## **God’s Law and God’s Gospel Work Together**

3:6 For the Law was not given for its own sake. No, it was always meant to lead to God’s ultimate gift to us in his Son. 3:7 If the Law were given for its own sake and Jesus for his own sake, then the one could replace the other, 3:8 but if God is constant and sure from the beginning until now, then they work together. 3:9 The Law leads us to the Christ that it foreshadows 3:10 and it keeps us on the path with him – keeps us from sin. 3:11 Therefore hear the call of Christ in your hearts and respond with heart and body that you may learn the statutes of God, write them in your body and hearts and obey. 3:12 For the God who created the heavens and the earth loves an obedience with the whole heart but also with all your body, all your soul, and spirit. 3:13 Submit to him and he will be all in all with you forever.

3:14 Greet all God’s people in Christ Jesus; may you know the peace of the Lord as you grow closer and closer inside the clearly declared covenant people of God.

## ***Suggested Readings:***

Conrad Gempf, *How to Like Paul Again* (Authentic, 2013)

\*\*Richard Longenecker, *Word Bible Commentary: Galatians* (Thomas Nelson, 1990)

Peter Mead, *Galatians: The Life I Now Live* (10Publishing: 2015)

\*\*Douglas Moo, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians* (Baker, 2013)

Thomas Schreiner, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians* (Zondervan, 2010)

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