

Galatians Bible Study: Lesson 1

Galatians 1:1-10

Lesson Outline

Welcome/Prayer

Objectives of Lesson

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

- Explain what the message of Paul's letter to the Galatians meant to the original readers.
- Describe the person of Paul.

Scripture Study (20 min.)

The Person of Paul (15 min.)

Reflection – What is Freedom? (15 min.)

Closing Prayer

Scripture Study

Among the writings of Paul, none is more important or more difficult than the letter to the Galatians. This letter presents important features of Paul's life and announces significant doctrines. As to the religious and social make-up of the Galatian churches, most, if not all, of the members were Gentiles, as the issue of circumcision, crucial to the letter, would hardly be a question for Jewish converts. When Paul implies that his Gentile readers had not known God, he probably refers to their previous life in paganism. As in other Pauline churches, members of the congregation were probably urbanites, drawn from a variety of social and economic classes. The purpose of Galatians is to counter the claims of Jewish Christians who had invaded the churches in Galatia. They believed the people of God needed an identity that was marked by Jewish rights and practices. The purpose of Galatians is to counter the claims of these troublemakers (Harper Collins Bible Commentary – pp. 1105-1106).

See map of the Region of Galatia (below) Bible Hub

(Retrieved from <http://bibleatlas.org/regional/galatia.htm>)

Read Gal. 1: 1-5

Questions:

- 1. Paul begins the letter by presenting his credentials. Why do you believe he needs to do this?**

“The letter opening is more expensive than in any other Pauline letter except Romans and announces things that Paul will develop in the rest of the letter. In identifying himself as an apostle, Paul insists that he is not commissioned by human beings but by Jesus Christ and God, forestalling any objection to his credentials as an apostle. In wishing the Galatians grace and peace, Paul identifies Christ as the one who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present age of evil. This already suggests that Christ effects salvation apart from the law” (New Interpreter's Study Bible, Note 1:1-5, p. 2081).

2. What is the context of this letter?

“Paul and Barnabas had just completed their first missionary journey (Acts 13:2; 14:28). They had visited Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, cities in the Roman province of Galatea (present day Turkey). Upon returning to Antioch, Paul was accused by some Jewish Christians of diluting Christianity to make it more appealing to Gentiles. These Jewish Christians disagreed with Paul’s statements that the Gentiles did not have to follow many of the religious laws that the Jews had obeyed for centuries. Some of Paul’s accusers had even followed him to those Galatian cities and had told the Gentile converts they had to be circumcised and follow all the Jewish laws and customs in order to be saved. According to these people, Gentiles had to first become Jews in order to become Christians. In response to this threat, Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians churches. In it, he explains that following the Old Testament laws, or the Jewish laws, will not bring salvation. A person is saved by grace through faith. Paul wrote this letter about a A.D. 49, shortly before the meeting of the Jerusalem Council, which settled the law-versus-grace controversy (Acts 15)” (Tyndale, Galatians and Ephesians, Note 1:1, p. 6).

Read Gal. 1:6-10

3. What is Paul’s essential message in these verses?

4. What is the simple gospel Paul advocates? (See 1 Cor. 15:1-4)

5. Who was perverting Paul’s gospel?

“Those who have confused the Galatian believers and perverted the good news were zealous Jewish Christians who believed that the Old Testament practices, such as circumcision and dietary restrictions, were required of all believers. Because these teachers wanted to turn the Gentile Christians into Jews, they were called “Judaizers” (Tyndale, Note 1:7, p. 1)

”Most of the Galatian Christians were Greeks who were unfamiliar with Jewish laws and customs. The Judaizers were an extreme faction of Jewish Christians. Both groups believed in Christ, but their life-styles differed considerably. We do not know why the Judaizers may have traveled no small distance to teach their mistaken notion’s to the new Gentile converts. They may have been motivated by (1) a sincere wish to integrate Judaism with the new Christian faith, (2) a sincere love for their Jewish heritage, or (3) a jealous desire to destroy Paul’s authority. Whether or not these Judaizers were sincere, their teaching threatened these new churches and had to be countered” (Tyndale, Note 1:7, p. 1).

Paul’s adamant opposition to the Judaizers can be seen in vv. 8-10.

The Person of Paul

Brainstorming Activity: When you think of the Apostle Paul, what comes to mind?

Read Paul's profile (Acts 9)

Reader 1: Acts 9:1-9

Reader 2: Acts 9:10-19

Reader 3: Acts 9:20-31

Evaluate the following statement: "It could reasonably be argued that no other human, apart from Jesus himself, has had a greater impact on the world than Paul of Tarsus. ... Yet Paul is not without his critics" (Adam Hamilton, *The Call*, 2015, p. 16).

How do you imagine the location and circumstances of Paul's early life influenced the man he became?

Reflection: What is freedom?

"The book of Galatians is the Emancipation Proclamation for the church. Written by one who had known slavery, it declares and defines Christian liberty. Paul wrote it to refute the devilish idea that salvation is based on adherence to a religious code.

"Many of the early Christians were Jewish Christians who were accustomed to following the law. Though they have accepted the gift of grace offered by Christ on the cross, some were falling away – substituting human effort for God's gift. Paul recognized this for what it was – legalism.

"Everywhere the Gospel has been preached, there have been those who contend that it is too good to be true. Faith isn't enough, argues the legalist. We must earn God's approval. Some teach that we can earn God's favor by what we know (intellectualism). Others insist we are saved by what we do (moralism). Still others claim that salvation is determined by what we feel (emotionalism).

"However you package it, Paul contests legalism is heresy. Salvation comes only through the cross – no additions, no alterations.

"We are free in Christ. 'We have freedom now because Christ made us free. So stand strong. Do not change and go back into the slavery of the law' (5:1 NCV). Galatians is a document of freedom. As you read, note the confidence of the writer. His hand doesn't shake; his conviction doesn't waver.

"Neither should ours" (Max Lucado, *Galatians*, Introduction to the Book of Galatians, p. vii).

Discussion Question: People talk a lot about freedom, but when can freedom be frightening?

Closing Prayer

