

GALATIANS: CHARTER OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (study 1)

GOOD NEWS TO THE GENTILES

God's glorious Gospel of grace

Then when [Barnabas] had come and witnessed the GRACE of GOD, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to cleave to the Lord ... Many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who ... were urging them to continue in the GRACE of GOD ... they spent a long time there speaking boldly in [for] the Lord, who confirmed the WORD of HIS GRACE ... they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the GRACE of GOD for the work they had accomplished. ACTS 11:22,23; 13:43; 14:3,26

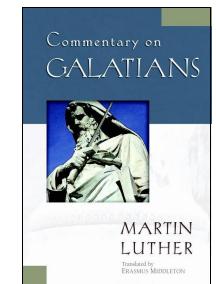
OCCASION & SETTING: SCHOLARS DIVIDED & UNITED

Though the commentators are divided as to the time Galatians was written (before or after the Jerusalem council?), they are united on its background: the Apostle Paul needed to defend his apostolic authority against those who would undermine both his office and his gospel – the gospel of grace (plus nothing!). The Galatians were in danger ...

The Celtic character of the Galatian people

Still with all this foreign admixture, it was the Celtic blood which gave its distinctive colour to the Galatian character and separated them by so broad a line even from their near neighbours ... The tough vitality of the Celtic character maintained itself in Asia comparatively unimpaired among Phrygians and Greeks, as it has done in our own islands [Britain and Ireland, *editor*] among Saxons and Danes and Normans, retaining its individuality of type after the lapse of ages and under conditions the most adverse ... This instability of character was the great difficulty against which Caesar had to contend in his dealings with the Gaul. He complains that they all with scarcely an exception are impelled by the desire of change ... The colours in which contemporary writers have painted the religion of the primitive Gauls are dark and terrible enough. A gross superstition, appealing to the senses and the passions rather than to the heart and mind, enforcing rites of unexampled cruelty and demanding a slavish obedience to priestly authority, such is the picture with which we are familiar. [Lightfoot 12,15,16]

[1] Few books ... have had a more profound influence on the history of mankind than has this small tract, for such it could be called. Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect, and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely pagan had it never been written. Galatians embodies the germinal teaching on Christian freedom which separated Christianity from Judaism, and which launched it upon a career of missionary conquest. It was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation, because its teaching of salvation by grace alone became the dominant theme of the preaching of the Reformers. Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* was the reasoned manifesto of the revolt against the Roman ritual and hierarchy, which, more than any other single document, revived the knowledge of Biblical truth in the minds of the people. It has been called "the Magna Charta of spiritual emancipation," ... [Tenney 15]



[2] The question of the North or South Galatian destination of our epistle is not one in which it is proper to take up partisan attitudes or indulge in dogmatic assertions; and it ill becomes champions of either view to disparage the rival view or those who maintain it. The fact that so many competent scholars can be cited in support of either position suggests that the evidence for neither is absolutely conclusive. But the weight of the evidence, it seems to me, favours the South Galatian view. [Bruce 18]

[3] When Luther commenced his attack on the corruptions of the mediaeval Church, he chose this epistle as his most efficient engine in overthrowing the mass of error which time had piled on the simple foundations of the Gospel. His commentary on the Galatians was written and rewritten. It cost him more labour, and was more highly esteemed by him, than any of his works ... it still remains and ever will remain a speaking monument of the mind of the reformer and the principles of the reformation. [Lightfoot 68]

[4] ... there is not a single letter that is so generally regarded as authentic as is Paul's letter to the Galatians. [Ridderbos 36]

[5] ... he was not appointed by a group of men, such as the Twelve or the church at Jerusalem or the church at Antioch, as, for instance, the Jewish Sanhedrin appointed apostles, official delegates commissioned to travel and teach in their name. Paul ... had been one of these, as is plain from Acts 9:1,2 ... His apostolic commission was human neither directly nor indirectly; it was wholly divine. [Stott 14]

[6] [v.1] When Paul says "from men," I take this to refer to those who call and intrude themselves, when neither God nor man calls or sends them, but who run

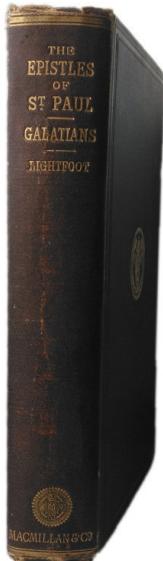
Counseling children: If reason fails, try rebuke!

The sustained severity of this epistle is an equally characteristic feature with its unity of purpose. The Galatians are not addressed as the 'saints in Christ,' 'the faithful brethren.' The Apostle has no congratulations, no word of praise, for this apostate Church. Even on the Corinthians, in spite of all their shortcomings, he could lavish expressions of commendation and love ... For this once only the pervading type of his epistles is abandoned in the omission of the opening thanksgiving. The argument is interrupted every now and then by an outburst of indignant remonstrance. He is dealing with a thoughtless half-barbarous people. They have erred like children, and must be chastised like children. Rebuke may prevail where reason will be powerless. [Lightfoot 64]

and speak on their own. Today the sectarians do this. Either they lurk in corners, look for some place to spew forth their venom, and do not come into public churches; or they go where the Gospel has already been planted. [Luther 17]

Let us beware of 'innovative' preaching: Is God really ever bringing the 'new thing'?

[7] The rare and fitful glimpses which we obtain of the Celtic peoples in the early twilight of history reveal the same restless, fickle temperament, so familiar to us in St Paul's epistle. They appear in a ferment of busy turmoil and ceaseless migration ... the energy of the Apostle's preaching took their hearts by storm. But the old leaven still remained. The pure and spiritual teaching of Christianity soon ceased to satisfy them. Their religious temperament ... prompted them to seek a system more external and ritualistic ... At a later period ... we find the Galatians still hankering after new forms of Christianity in the same spirit of ceaseless innovation, still looking for some 'other gospel' which might better satisfy their cravings after a more passionate worship. [Lightfoot 4,17]



"Sectarians ... do not come into public churches; or they go where the Gospel has already been planted."

THE THEME: ON THIS SCHOLARS ARE UNITED

The Gospel of grace was effectively undermined by the Judaizers' insistence upon Gospel PLUS law

[8] [v.6] The instigators of this rebellion against St Paul's authority and teaching seem not to have been Galatian residents. His leading antagonists were most probably emissaries from the mother Church of Jerusalem, either abusing a commission actually received from the Apostles of the Circumcision, or assuming an authority which had never been conferred upon them. [Lightfoot 29]

[9] The message of Galatians is the message of liberation ... We have all kinds of talk about liberation movements. Western man talks continuously about "freedom." He speaks about a new morality, about a new ethic. He prides himself on free speech, free right to dissent, free love, and freedom from authority. But none of it is genuine freedom. It is all slavery. [MacArthur 6]

[10] Paul was fighting against the doctrine that a man can earn a part, at least, of his salvation by his own obedience to God's law ... against the doctrine that a man is justified not by faith alone, but by faith and works. [Machen 9]

[11] [v.4] 'Deliver' strikes the keynote of the epistle. The Gospel is a rescue, an emancipation from a state of bondage ... 'by the will of God' and not by our own merits. St Paul is still insisting on the dispensation of grace impugned by the false teachers. [Lightfoot 73,74]

[12] [v.3] Because the world does not understand this doctrine, it neither can nor will tolerate it. It brags about free will, about our powers, about our works – all these

as means by which to earn and attain grace and peace, that is, the forgiveness of sins and a joyful conscience ... your bones and mine will know no rest until we hear the Word of grace and cling to it firmly and faithfully. [Luther 27]

INTRODUCTION: WHEN SEVERITY IS NECESSARY

Unusually for Paul, there is no sugar to help the medicine go down. Even the Corinthians got that consideration!

[13] As usual, the first few verses bear the stamp of the whole, and show what the Holy Ghost was about to bring out in every part. We have, of course, the choicest collection of words, and the avoiding of irrelevant topics, so as to reveal in short compass the mind of God as to the state of things among the churches in Galatia. This accounts for the comparative coldness of the tone of the epistle – the reserve, we may say, with which the apostle speaks to them. I think it is unexampled in any other part of the New Testament. And the reason was this: the bad state into which the Galatians had fallen did not so much arise from ignorance, as it was unfaithfulness. And there is a great difference. God is most patient towards mere want of light; but He is intolerant of His saints' trifling with the light He has given them. [Kelly 2]

**"your bones
and mine will
know no rest
until ..."**

The CHOICE: Either ALL is of grace, or we take some credit for our salvation

[14] [v.6] The partial apostasies of genuine Christians are fearful demonstrations of the power of natural depravity, – clear evidences that, but for the constant operation of the good Spirit, every good man would soon become a bad man; and everything like right religious thinking, and feeling, and acting, would be banished from the earth. [Brown 37]



[15] [v.4] *According to the will of our God and Father.* Paul chooses and arranges his every word here in such a way that each of them does battle against the perverters of the doctrine of justification. Christ, he says, has delivered us from this wicked kingdom of the devil and the world, and has done so according to the will, good pleasure, and command of the Father. Therefore we have not been delivered by our own will or exertion (Rom.9:16) or by our own wisdom or decision; we have been delivered because God has had mercy on us and has loved us. As it is written in another passage (John 1:13): "Who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." It is by grace, then, and not by our merit that we have been delivered from this present evil world. Paul is so prolix and ardent in his praise of grace that he sharpens and aims every word against the false apostles. [Luther 42]

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