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What You Need to Know About Galatians

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GALATIANS

Here it is – the Apostle Paul’s **first** N. T. book and Martin Luther’s **favorite** N. T. book.

This book is Scripture’s greatest defense on the subject of justification by faith, written to counteract the grievous heresy of the Jewish legalizers who were trusting in salvation by works. Paul argues his case from personal experience, the life of Abraham, and from the Law itself.

BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

THE IMPERATIVE: WARNING! DO NOT MIX, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, THESE INGREDIENTS, THE LAW OF GOD AND THE GRACE OF GOD!

FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

1. Who? **Paul**. He was also known as Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:11). This relentless enemy of Christians (Acts 8:3; 22:5, 19; 26:11; Gal. 1:13) would, following his conversion (Acts 9:3-9), become the greatest missionary, church planter, soul winner, and theologian in church history, authoring nearly half of the New Testament books!
2. What? The books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.
3. When and where?
4. Why and to whom?
 - **Galatians**: to defend the subject of justification by faith. Written to the churches in southern Galatia

KEY EVENTS

1. Paul’s grief over the legalism of the Galatians; his pre- and post-conversion activities
2. Remembering his second trip to Jerusalem and his rebuke of Peter at Antioch
3. Five arguments demonstrating the sufficiency of justification by faith alone
4. Paul’s illustration of Hagar and Sarah; his personal appeal, begging the Church to turn from its legalism
5. Contrasting the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit
6. The law of sowing and reaping

KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Paul**, author of Galatians and at least 12 other New Testament books, church planter, evangelist, missionary, and perhaps the greatest of all the apostles
2. **James, the half brother of Jesus**, who served as pastor of the Jerusalem Church, who authored the book of James, and welcomed Paul during the Apostle's first visit to Jerusalem following his conversion
3. **Titus**, associate minister of Paul who accompanied the Apostle during his second trip to Jerusalem following his conversion and to whom the book of Titus was written
4. **Peter**, most vocal of the apostles, who was soundly rebuked by Paul for temporarily falling back into legalism
5. **Abraham**, referred to by Paul to illustrate the fact that sinners are saved by faith alone
6. **Sarah and Hagar**, referred to by Paul contrasting the bondage of the Law with the glorious liberty of Grace

KEY PLACES

1. **Churches of Galatia**: a province in Asia Minor in which area was located the churches Paul founded during his first missionary journey including Antioch in Pisidia, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, etc.
2. **Jerusalem**: capital city of Israel, where Paul met up with Peter and James, the half brother of Christ, some three years following the Apostle's conversion
3. **Mt. Sinai**: place where the Ten Commandments were given (Exod. 20), used by Paul to contrast the Law of Moses from the Grace of God

UNIQUE FEATURES

1. The book of Galatians is the Magna Charta of the early Church. It is Scripture's strongest declaration and defense of the doctrine of justification by faith.
2. It has been said that Judaism was the cradle of Christianity and very nearly its grave. But God raised up Paul as the Moses of the Christian Church to deliver believers from bondage.
3. This was Martin Luther's favorite epistle and it was the masthead of the Reformation. Note Luther's words: "The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I was as it were, in wedlock. It is my Katherine."
4. Galatians was Paul's first epistle. The book of Second Timothy would be his last.
5. It is, next to Second Corinthians, the most autobiographical of Paul's letters and the only epistle by Paul addressed to a group of local churches.
6. The key word is *liberty*, used 11 times in the letter. This is more than all his other epistles combined.

7. Galatians may have been the only book written personally by the Apostle without the aid of a stenographer (see 6:11).
8. Paul reveals more about his early Christian life activities in this book than in any other of his writings (1:13-2:14). Among these events is the account when he confronted Peter concerning Simon's sinful legalism.
9. Galatians is the first chronological New Testament book to quote Habakkuk 2:4: "*The just shall live by faith*" (Gal. 3:11). The other two instances are Rom. 1:17 and Heb. 10:38.
10. The book contains the greatest contrast between the fruit of the flesh and that of the Spirit in all the Bible (see 5:19-23).
11. For its size Galatians has more to say regarding the Law than any other biblical book. The word "law" occurs 29 times. During these instances Paul:
 - Compares the Law as a schoolmaster (3:24, 25)
 - Explains the purpose of the Law (3:19-4:7)
 - Contrasts the Law with Grace (4:21-31)
 - Warns against attempting to keep the Law (5:1-6)
12. Galatians records the second of two references regarding the role angels had in the giving of the Law (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19).
13. It is the only New Testament reference to Hagar, Abraham's second wife (4:24, 25).
14. Some believe Paul's statement in 6:11 may have indicated his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7) was related to a serious eye affliction.
"Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand" (Gal. 6:11).
15. One of the problems in dating the book concerns its destination. Was the letter written to the churches in northern Galatia (where Paul visited during his second and third missionary trips) or to the churches in southern Galatia (where he reached during his first trip)?
16. The Galatians themselves were an emotional and intense Celtic people. Caesar said: "They are fickle in their resolves, fond of change, and not to be trusted." This is demonstrated during Paul's first visit to them. In the morning they attempted to worship him, and in the afternoon to murder him (Acts 14). They were a branch of Gauls, originally from north of the Baltic Sea, who had split off from a main migration westward to France and had settled in Asia Minor during the third century B.C. Paul's work in Galatia had been highly successful. Great multitudes of people, mostly Gentiles, had accepted Christ. But after he left, the Judaizers from Jerusalem (a group of legalistic gospel-perverting Jews) had come to Galatia, teaching that Gentiles must put themselves back under the bondage of the Law to be saved. The Galatians had thus received their message with the same zeal that they had accepted Paul's. There was then a general epidemic of circumcision among them. The Judaizers had not only attacked the message of Paul, but also his apostleship.
17. J. Vernon McGee aptly summarizes Galatians: "It is a stern, severe and solemn message" (Gal. 1:6-9; 3:1-5). It does not correct conduct, as the Corinthian letters do,

but it is corrective—the Galatian believers were in grave peril. Because the foundations were being attacked, everything was threatened. The epistle contains no word of commendation, praise, or thanksgiving. There is no request for prayer, and there is no mention of their standing in Christ. No one with him is mentioned by name (1:2). Compare this with the other epistles of Paul. The heart of Paul the Apostle is laid bare; there is deep emotion and strong feeling. This is his fighting epistle; he has on his war paint. He has no toleration for legalism. Someone has said that Romans comes from the head of Paul while Galatians comes from the heart of Paul. ‘Galatians takes up controversially what Romans puts systematically.’ It is the declaration of emancipation from legalism of any type.

It is the strongest declaration and defense of the doctrine of justification by faith in or out of the Scripture. It is God’s polemic on behalf of the most vital truth of the Christian faith against any attack. Not only is a sinner saved by grace through faith, but the saved sinner lives by grace. Grace is a way to life and a way of life” (*Through the Bible*, p. 108).

18. Hymn writer Philip P. Bliss may well have had the book of Galatians in mind when he wrote his song entitled, *Once For All* :

*Free from the Law; O happy condition!
Jesus hath bled, And there is remission;
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall.
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.*

Chorus: *Once for all—O sinner, receive it!
Once for all—O brother, believe it!
Cling to the Cross, the burden will fall
Christ had redeemed us once for all!*

*Now are we free—there’s no condemnation!
Jesus provides a perfect salvation,
“Come unto Me”; O hear His sweet call!
Come; and He saves us once for all.*

*Children of God; O glorious calling!
Surely His grace will keep us from falling;
Passing from death to life at His call,
Blessed salvation—once for all.*

COMPAIRSON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

1. **Romans:**

- Galatians has been called a shorthand version of Romans, which Paul wrote nearly ten years later; Galatians discusses controversially what Romans discusses systematically.
- The word *Law* is found 86 times in these two books, more times than in the rest of Paul's writings combined.
- Galatians finishes what Paul will begin in Second Corinthians (concerning his apostleship), and begins what Paul will finish in Romans (concerning justification by faith).
- There is a striking parallel between Galatians and Romans. At least 19 passages may be favorably compared. Galatians is a rough sketch of which Romans is the finished picture.

2. **2 Corinthians:**

- Paul's defense of his apostleship (1-2) is somewhat parallel to the entire book of Second Corinthians.

3. **Hebrews:**

- Both Hebrews and Galatians talk about the New Covenant's superiority to the Old.

TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

1. Jesus Christ (1:1)
2. Lord Jesus Christ (1:3)
3. Christ (1:10)
4. God's Son (1:16)
5. Christ Jesus (2:4)
6. Son of God (2:20)
7. Redeemer of the Law's Curse (3:13)