

Galatians – Summary

1.1 Greeting

1. The letter is from Paul who is an apostle, uniquely commissioned directly by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Christ.
2. His authority as an apostle owes nothing to any human act or agency.
3. The letter is for the churches of Galatia. Paul and his friends greet them.
4. The greeting is “Grace “ and “peace” – a greeting we see in many of Paul’s letters. However, unlike other letters of Paul, this greeting has an added rider, it makes clear that Jesus, according to the Father’s express will, gave himself up for our sins to rescue us out of the evil age in which we live.
5. The theme of the letter is struck as celebrating the costly act of grace done for us is made the basis of our liberty from underlying spiritual powers of the universe at work everywhere.

1.6-10 There is only one gospel message.

1. To the apostle’s astonishment, the Galatians are looking as if they are about to turn away from the God who called them so graciously. They are giving consideration to a ‘different’ gospel, a distortion of the message concerning Christ.
2. Those through whom this unsettling distortion has come to the Galatians are worthy of being cursed – banned!
3. The strength of Paul’s reaction here makes clear he is not currying favour with men. If he did that he would not be a faithful servant of Christ.

1.11-24 The total ‘about face’ of Paul’s call was without any connection with Jerusalem.

1. The gospel Paul had preached to the Galatians had come to him through a direct encounter with the risen Jesus, who spoke from heaven. As to its content, it was a revelation of Christ as Lord, as God.
2. So the origin of his gospel was free from other humans, he was not taught it by men, nor did he adopt something he heard from others.
3. The Galatians are aware of Paul’s life before his conversion. As a practising Jew he excelled his contemporaries and was so zealous for the traditions of Judaism. He actively persecuted the church of God.
4. Yet, as soon as he was aware of his destiny, his call and that God wanted to reveal his Son in Paul’s person so that he might preach Him among the Gentiles, he did not consult anyone at all, but went off to Arabia and returned subsequently to Damascus.
5. He did see in Jerusalem James, spent two weeks with Peter. Then he left for regions of Syria and Cilicia. The Judean churches had never seen him, although they heard about his being turned around by God and they thanked God for that.

2. 1-10 Paul rehearses his dealings with the apostles of Jerusalem and Paul

1. Fourteen years went by, and then Paul, with Barnabas, because of a revelation, went up to Jerusalem.
2. Privately, to the main apostles, the gospel he laid out what he was preaching among the Gentiles.
3. Circumcision came up through some sham Christians, who had sneaked in to spy out the deep freedom they all exercised. However, Titus, Paul’s Greek companion, was not compelled to be circumcised. Paul did not yield to such ideas these false Christians brought – for the sake of the Gentiles he preached to, including the Galatians themselves.
4. While Paul, who was impartial in such matters, did notice that the people of reputation in the Church in Jerusalem added nothing to his gospel.
5. What they all accepted was that as Peter preached among the Jewish people, Paul was similarly engaged with the Gentile people – they saw these respective spheres of work as a trust of God for them both.
6. James Peter and John accepted Barnabas and Paul as partners. The agreement was that they would concentrate on the Jews, while acknowledging that Paul was engaged with the Gentiles.
7. They all agreed to remember the poor – which Paul was already doing.

2.11-21 Paul’s altercation with Peter at Antioch the occasion for the main issue he wants to raise for the Galatians.

1. At Antioch of Syria, on the Orontes River, Peter expressed himself by full ‘table fellowship’ with the Gentile brothers there. He did this until some brothers from James came from Jerusalem, then he withdrew, fearing the Jews.

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2. Others present, also followed Peter's example, even Barnabas. Paul saw this as a failure to hold to gospel principles. He challenged Peter with the words, "If you, a Jew born and bred, live like a Gentile, and not like a Jew, how can you insist that Gentiles must live like Jews?"

3. Paul began to recapitulate to Peter – but really for his readers, the Galatians - their own journey.

[a] As Jews by birth, they were not Gentile 'sinners'.

[b] But now, they had come to know that no one is justified before God by doing what the law requires, but is acceptable to God through faith in Christ Jesus.

[c] Both he and Peter had put their faith in Jesus Christ so that they might be justified that way, and not through actions required by law. No human being can be justified by keeping the Law.

[d] But this meant that they had become sinners – just like the Gentiles. Now Christ had not promoted sin for them through trusting Him. It is the other way about; he saw that Peter's action was to start building up the law again as the basis for acceptance.

[e] Paul explains that":

[i] it was through the law that he died to the law so that he could live for God

[ii] He has been crucified with Christ

[iii] the life he now lived was not his life, but the life of Christ living within him

[iv] his present life then, was live by faith, faith in the Son of God who loved him and had given himself for him.

4. For Paul, to build up the law again is to nullify the grace of God. If righteousness came through law then Christ died for nothing.

3. 1-5 The Galatian experience: they received the Holy Spirit through faith in the preached gospel.

1. The Galatians have an experience of the Spirit. He now appeals to that experience.

2. Did they receive that Spirit by law keeping or by believing the gospel message? This is Paul's question for them.

3. This beginning for them was in the Spirit; are they now going back to the flesh, to material matters, to finish what they had begun spiritually?

4. When God works miracles among them – and He does, they know – is it because they keep the law or because they have faith in the gospel message?

3.6-14 They have the same blessing as Abraham, and by the same means as he did.

1. Abraham put his faith in God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

2. So, those who have faith are Abraham's sons – for they copy him as their father.

3. And these 'future' sons of Abraham, were foreseen when the Scripture said that in Abraham all nations would find a blessing.

4. It is the reverse for those who rely on the law; they are not blessed but are under a curse; that is what is written in the law. No one is ever justified by law; rather the Scripture says it is 'by faith'.

5. The law does not operate by faith, but strictly by performance of deeds.

6. Christ, in taking up the proper end of all the cursed ones, showed that He came under a curse by being hanged on a 'tree' – his cross. He did for us – and so has redeemed us from the curse of the law.

7. The purpose of this was so that the blessing might be extended to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

3.15-18 Law, being later, cannot nullify a promise covenanted earlier.

1. It is a human argument, but true, that no one changes a man's will after its been executed.

2. The promises given by God to Abraham were for his "issue" [seed]; by which is meant one issue – that is, Christ.

3. The law, coming 430 years after the promises to Abraham, cannot change the promise; and it certainly cannot invalidate it! These are mutually exclusive ways of operating – if the inheritance is by legal right, then it is not by promise.

4. But it is by promise that God bestowed on Abraham as free gift.

3.19-25 The law held us under sin till Christ came. Now its charge over us is finished.

1. What then, was the function of the law? Why was it given?

2. It was added to make wrongdoing a legal offence. It was an interim measure pending the arrival of the "issue" to whom the promise was made.

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3. Its inferiority is seen in that it was indirectly revealed, using mediators – angels and Moses. But the ‘issue’ is God’s son, to see Him is to see God, for God is One.
4. The law, while performing a different function, operating on different principles, and at a later time, doesn’t contradict the promises. But if there had been a law that conveyed life, then righteousness would have been through law.
5. But the scripture shows that all persons are subject to the power, sin. And this to show that faith in Jesus Christ is the only option for life to be had.
6. The Law was a custodian, keeping us in its charge until the revelation of faith. For, when Christ came, justification is by faith; so, now that faith has come, the law’s charge – its custody of us - is at an end.

3.26 – 4.7 We are sons, through union with Christ. We have entered into maturity.

1. Through faith we are all in union with Christ. In being baptised we have put on Christ as a person puts on a garment.
2. And we are not taking our orientation from whether we are Jews or Greeks, or slave or free, or men or women, but we are starting from the point of our unity together in Christ.
3. So, if we belong to Christ then we are ‘issue’ of Abraham, and heirs by virtue of promise.
4. A little child is an heir of all of his father’s estate. But while young, his father puts him under guardians and tutors, who regulate his life carefully, until the father says it is over.
5. Being no different from a slave in this time of his minority, we, likewise, were slaves of the elemental spirits of the universe.
6. But at the appointed time, God sent His Son, through birth by a woman, and subject to law, to buy the freedom of us all who were under law.
7. And he did this that we might come into our maturity; we have been redeemed to a mature freedom.
8. This is declared by the giving of the Spirit who makes our hearts open and accessible to God as our dear Father.
9. So, we are no longer a slave [to sin under law’s custody] but a son [the ‘issue’ of Abraham and that by promise] and if a son then an heir by God’s action.

4.8-11 Do the Galatians want to return to their slavery to such beggarly masters?

1. Before the gospel had come to them, the Galatians were slaves to gods that were not gods at all.
2. It is inconceivable to Paul that, now that God has acknowledged them as His own –called them by grace – that they would return to such feeble and empty elemental spirits.
3. In that they would keep special days, festivals, months, seasons and years the Galatians are intimating that they would be returning to serve these old masters again.
4. Paul wonders if his hard work is going to become wasted on them.

4.12-20 An appeal to their own friendship

1. Paul re-capitulates how he and the Galatians first met. He was not well, and this led to him bringing them the gospel.
2. Their welcome to him at that time was warm, generous and accepting. Further they treated him as a messenger of God to them, as they might have welcomed Jesus Himself. What has happened to that original warmth? Has he become their enemy now, simply because he would speak the truth frankly to them?
3. The disturbers who have come among them are insincere; they want to isolate the Galatians so that they will attend to them.
4. And while it is good to be the object of attention, the Galatians should understand that they have a fatherly relationship with Paul, and he wants them, as his children to have Christ formed in themselves.
5. He admits his tone is strong, but he is subject to extreme feelings right now as he is worried about them.

4.21-31 The two streams in Abraham’s family cannot be mixed

1. If the Galatians want to return to the law they should listen to what it says about Abraham’s two sons. Ishmael was the first son. He was by a slave woman, Hagar, and was born in the ordinary course of nature. Isaac, the second son, was of a free woman, Sarah, and came to be born as an express fulfilment of God’s promise.
2. Allegorically speaking, these two women stand for two covenants. Hagar for the covenant at Mt Sinai, the fruit of that covenant were children born into slavery. This is the people of the earthly city of Jerusalem people of today – she and her children are in slavery [to law].

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3. The heavenly Jerusalem is the free woman – she is our mother. She is rejoicing because, being barren like Sarah, she now has more children than the one who has a husband.

4. The Galatians, like all Christians, are children of God's promise. [In that they have come to liberty of the heavenly Jerusalem by faith in the promise of God to Abraham, realised in his 'issue', Christ].

5. The call to the Galatians is found mirrored in the way that, long ago, Hagar and Ishmael were cast out of the family. The Galatians should kick out the people – the Judaisers - who want to take their liberty [as children of promise] and mix it with the slavery they are bringing to the Galatians in the guise of circumcision being required. There is no sharing in the inheritance of the promise for these slaves; the Galatians should refuse to go back to such subjection.

5.1-12 Dangers of losing their life in Christ by accepting the Judaiser's ideas .

1. If the Galatians, already in possession of the freedom of the Spirit, get circumcised in response to the urgings of the Judaisers, they will cut themselves off from Christ.

2. It would be to fall from living under grace because it would be a returning to a commitment to keeping the whole law. These are two mutually exclusive ways of life.

3. The Galatians are currently living by the Spirit; and through faith have a hope of righteousness for which they wait. Anyone living this way understands that the externals of circumcision or un-circumcision are irrelevant to life – they simply make no difference.

4. What does matter is that faith expresses itself - works itself out - in love.

5. Paul interprets the Judaisers' arrival among them as really a hindrance to their life within the truth. The ideas the Judaisers are raising among them do not come from God. They are a defiling yeast that threatens to work through the whole fellowship.

6. The Lord makes Paul confident the Galatians won't accept this persuasion and that He will judge the Judaisers.

7. Paul hints that the underlying reason his enemies persecute him is to be found in the cross of Christ – it is an offence to them. They cannot swallow the idea of a publicly executed Messiah.

8. He reckons that these agitators should castrate themselves – go the whole way!

5.13-26 Freedom of the Spirit is the freedom to live 'out of ourselves' to serve others.

1. The Galatians, in being called to freedom, should not interpret that freedom as a licence for their flesh – their unspiritual nature.

2. Rather, they should serve one another in love – this fulfils the whole law as summed up in the statement "love your neighbour as yourself".

3. To be guided by the Spirit they won't fulfil the desires of the flesh, He is opposed to the flesh, that unspiritual nature within us. The Spirit maintains a consistent conflict with the flesh so that we won't carry out what we want. This way of being led internally by the Spirit is certainly not living under law.

4. The unspiritual nature, which is the flesh, has its product in the sort of life that is found in folks who never inherits the kingdom of God. Such deeds as fornication, debauchery, indecency, idolatry and witchcraft, quarrels, contentious behaviour, envy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, party intrigues, jealousies, drinking bouts, orgies and such.

5. The Spirit in our life has his own harvest. His fruit are really the life of Christ being formed in us; love, joy and peace; patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control. No law ever condemns these.

6. Those who are Christ's people have crucified the flesh. They have put this old unspiritual nature on a cross to die slowly with its passions and the things it wants.

7. Let us not be jealous rivals of one another!

6.1-10 Restoration, shared burdens, realistic views of ourselves. Keep doing good.

1. If anyone is caught doing wrong, those who are mature in the faith must gently restore him, fully aware that they are open to temptation themselves.

2. Christ's way is to carry each other's burdens.

3. Have a realistic view of yourselves. Look at your own conduct; see what you do and be satisfied with that and not with what someone else does. Everyone has his own burden to carry.

4. Share good things you have with those who teach you in the faith.

5. Do not mock God, He is not to be fooled, what you sow you will reap. Thinking of your flesh as a field such as a farmer has, if you sow into this field you will reap corruption and decay. If you sow in the Spirit you will reap eternal life.

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6. Keep at it – don't grow weary in doing good; do it to all men and women, but especially to the brothers and sisters in Christ.

6.11-18 Paul's signature and what he considers the nub of the matter.

1. Paul makes his own authenticating signature and last note.
2. The Judaiser's are making an outward show, wanting the Galatians to submit to them.
3. But the real underlying reason for their actions is their inability to come to terms with the persecution that comes to those who embrace the cross of Christ as a glory.
4. The Judaiser's wanted to boast in the fact that the Galatians accept the outward rite of circumcision.
5. Paul wants to boast in nothing except the cross of Christ. He knows it as the great separator of himself to the world and the world to him.
6. He thinks circumcision is really irrelevant and counts as nothing – what does count is the new creation that God has brought through Christ.
7. For everyone who lives this way in the new life of God let their peace and mercy upon them – they are the Israel of God.
8. Paul has had cost in following Christ; people should not worry him!
9. He ends with a benediction of the grace of Christ to be with their spirit.