

Notes for Galatians Class 1.

Galatians has been called “the charter of Christian liberty,” “Paul’s charter of Christian freedom,” and “the emancipation proclamation of Christianity.” It has also been called “the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation.” Martin Luther loved it so much that he compared it to his wife: “The Epistle of the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine.” “He paid her the highest tribute when he called St. Paul’s epistle to the Galatians‘ my Katherine von Bora.”

The greatest value of this letter is not found in its denunciations but in its enunciations. The book of Galatians central teaching is a proclamation concerning liberty. It is a germinal form (the earliest state of development) of the Epistle to the Romans, which Paul wrote either years later, in A.D. 57.

First, the root of every Christian’s Christianity is God’s supply of His Holy Spirit to that person (3:5, 14). One receives new life by receiving the Holy Spirit by faith at conversion. To teach that one must be circumcised, or baptized, or anything else in order to receive eternal life is to proclaim the worst of heresies. New life comes by faith alone. What makes Christians different is the fact that God indwells them. Eternal life is the life of God.

The false teachers in Galatia upset Paul exceedingly because whenever we add anything to faith for salvation we inevitably neglect faith. If we make something besides faith supreme we establish a rite (e.g., baptism). When we establish a rite, practice of the rite becomes the message of the religion, and we are in danger of divorcing morality from religion. There is no power for righteous living. This is one difference between Christianity and all other religions.

Galatians is not only a proclamation of liberty but it is also a protest against legalism. Legalism is both a belief and a practice. As a belief legalism is the conviction that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by keeping rules. Often the rules in view are those imposed by people, in contrast to those required by God. However, misapplying biblical law is also a form of legalism. As a practice legalism is the keeping of rules with a view to gaining merit with God. In a larger sense legalism is the belief that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by our good works. Of course the ONLY THING that makes us acceptable to God is our trust in Christ’s good works. He satisfied God’s demands for us. We are saved by good works, but it is Christ’s good works, not ours.

I would summarize the message of the book as follows: Salvation is by God’s grace through faith plus nothing. “In a sentence, we may define God’s grace as His favor to the sinner, that favor being shown and proved by His gift.”

Paul is pre-eminently the apostle of grace. Out of the 155 New Testament references to it, 130 are his, directly or indirectly.

Paul consistently referred to the Galatian troublemakers in the third person, but he addressed his readers in the second person. This strongly suggest that the false teachers originated from outside the church rather than from within it. We must deduce who they were from what Paul wrote about them in this epistle.

Outline for Class 1 of Galatians:

From reading the letter: Todd reads the letter outloud.

Class question: What are some of the major thoughts and themes you heard in this letter to the Galatian churches?

Background:

-Author: Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul opens this letter: Gal.1:1: Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead). Galatians 1:11-12, 15-17

-Audience: Churches in Galatia: The term “Galatia” was used in a couple of different ways in the first century. In one use of the term Galatia described a geographic area in the northern part of Asia Minor, which was populated by certain ethnic tribes. (Acts 16:6)

The other use of the term was in a political sense, as there was a Roman province termed Galatia. This province contained territory that extended into the southern part of Asia Minor, an area where Paul visited on his first missionary journey. Thus, the “southern Galatian theory” says the epistle was written to churches in the southern part of Asia Minor, and includes cities visited in Paul’s first missionary journey (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe - Acts 13, 14).

-Two theories:

“Northern Galatian theory holds that the letter was written to churches possibly established (but never explicitly mentioned in Acts) during his second missionary journey. Acts 16:6 Passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region. This is the Traditional opinion.

“Southern Galatian theory says the epistle was written to churches in the southern part of Asia Minor, and includes cities visited in Paul’s first missionary journey (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13,14). The “southern Galatian theory” currently holds more weight among Bible Scholars.

-Date of the epistle: There is a debate to the date this letter was written. Some bible teachers believe the letter was written prior to A.D. 50 and the Jerusalem council from Acts 15. Other bible teachers believe the letter was written after A.D. 50 and the Jerusalem council based on Acts 16:6.

If the letter was intended to “northern Galatian churches founded during his second missionary journey the earliest this letter could have been written was around A.D. 50.

If the letter was intended to “southern Galatian churches, planted during his first missionary journey the letter could have been written around A.D. 48-49.

To determine the date the possible role of the Jerusalem council (A.D.50)(see Acts 15) in the controversies addressed in Galatians must also be considered. Paul most likely would have centered his argument on those decisions or at least made an unmistakable reference to them. Since he did not, Galatians probably dates around A.D.48-49.

-Purpose of letter: Paul’s purpose was to bring the Galatian believers back to the truth of grace of Christ because they were being taken away by the Judaizers to follow Jewish laws and customs. It was clear from the letter that the negative influence of some outsiders(Judaizers) upon the assemblies gave rise to Paul’s writing. “Judaizers” is a term that has been applied to that group of religious people who mingled among first century believers and promoted the practice of Jewish laws and customs, either as a means for being “saved” or for being “sanctified.” It has its modern counterpart in “legalists” or “legalism.” Paul was writing to combat the false teaching being thrust upon these churches. In conjunction with this, it seems he was also dealing with some accusations against his own status as an apostle of God commissioned with the truth.