



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

### New Testament Survey

## Lesson 21 – Paul’s Letter to the Galatians – the Charter of Christian Liberty

### The Background

At the first church convention in Jerusalem in 49 A.D. they considered the question: Is it necessary that Gentile Christians be circumcised and keep the Jewish laws to be saved? The Judaizers said: Yes. But the convention said: No. The letter that was drawn up said of the Judaizers: **“Some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’ – to whom we gave no such commandment”** (Acts 15:24). By the grace of God all the leaders of the church agreed: Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James, the brother of Jesus and head elder of the congregation at Jerusalem.

But by this time the Judaizers had already spread their false teaching to the congregations founded by Paul and Barnabas in Galatia: the congregations in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Since the false teaching of the Judaizers is the chief topic of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, it is most likely that Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians right before the Jerusalem convention, as he does not mention the decision of the convention which dealt with this matter. We cannot know for sure when or where Paul wrote this letter, but the following order of events is likely:

1. Paul (Saul) persecuted the Christians after Stephen’s death in 32 AD.
2. Paul became a Christian on the road to Damascus (32 AD).
3. Paul preached at Damascus and went to Arabia (32-35 AD).
4. Paul was in Jerusalem for 15 days, saw Peter and James (Jesus’ brother), and preached boldly but very briefly in Jerusalem (35 AD).
5. Paul was at home in Tarsus of Cilicia (35-43 AD).
6. Paul and Barnabas were pastors in Antioch of Syria (43-46 AD).
7. [Meanwhile Herod Agrippa I killed James (the brother of John) and imprisoned Peter (44 AD).]
8. Paul and Barnabas came from Antioch to Jerusalem with help for the poor. At this time Paul had a private conference with James, Peter, and John. Titus, Paul’s Greek companion, was not compelled to be circumcised (46 AD).
9. Paul and Barnabas went on their first mission journey (Lesson 20) to Cyprus and Galatia (46-47 AD).

10. After Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch in Syria, Peter made a visit to Antioch and ate with the Gentile Christians (48 AD).
11. Judaizers from Jerusalem and Judea came to Antioch in Syria and also to Galatia, insisting on the circumcision of Gentile Christians (48 AD).
12. Peter and then also Barnabas and others stopped eating with the Gentile Christians because of the Judaizers, and Paul rebuked Peter publicly (48 AD).
13. Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians to counteract the influence of the Judaizers (48 AD).
14. Paul and Barnabas and delegates from Antioch in Syria attended the convention in Jerusalem (Lesson 20) to discuss this same question (49 AD).

Note: It is also possible, but not likely, that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians later, but the above order of events seems to fit the evidence the best. It is not necessary, however, to agree on matters of this kind (that is, when exactly this letter was written).

### **The Judaizers in Galatia**

These are some of the things that were taught by the Judaizers in Galatia:

1. Paul was only a second-rate apostle and was trying to make the Gospel too easy in order to gain more converts.
2. Jesus did not free men from the Jewish law; circumcision and the keeping of the laws are necessary for salvation; faith in Christ is not enough.
3. Paul's message of freedom from the Jewish law would mean moral chaos.

Because of these false views Paul found it necessary to write this letter to the Galatians.

1. He proved that he was a true apostle and a reliable teacher (Chapters 1 & 2).
2. He defended the true Gospel: that we are saved alone by the grace of God and by faith in Christ, not by doing the works of the Law (Chapters 3 & 4).
3. He showed that true faith in Christ shows itself in a life of love and good works (Chapters 5 & 6).

The message of Galatians can be summarized in this one verse: **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”** (Galatians 5:1). Because Martin Luther was involved in a similar struggle with the Roman Catholic Church, this letter was his favorite letter.

Read all the book of Galatians (chapters 1-6) along with the notes below. If you have any questions, ask them.

*Paul proves that he is a true apostle and a reliable teacher* (Chapters 1 & 2).

Introduction: Paul; to the Galatians; grace and peace from God (1:1-5).

Paul rebukes the Galatians for accepting the false teaching of the Judaizers (1:6-7).

**“You are turning away so soon ... to a different gospel, which is not another”** (vv. 6-7).

Paul curses the false teachers for preaching a false Gospel (1:7-10).

**“If anyone preaches any other gospel to you ... , let him be accursed”** (v. 9).

Paul says he received the Gospel directly from God, not from other men (1:11-24).

**“It came through the revelation of Jesus Christ”** (v. 12).

Paul says that on a trip to Jerusalem he was accepted as an apostle by the leaders (2:1-10).

**“They gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship”** (v. 9).

Paul recounts the time when he had to rebuke Peter publicly (2:11-21).

Paul: **“Why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”** (v. 14).

Paul: **“A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ”** (v. 16).

Paul defends the true Gospel of God’s free grace (Chapters 3 & 4).

You Galatians received the Spirit and witnessed miracles by faith, not by works of law (3:1-5).

Abraham was justified by faith; all believers in Christ are Abraham’s children (3:6-9).

**“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness”** (v. 6).

**“Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham”** (v. 7).

The law curses us, but Christ saves us by becoming a curse in our place (3:10-14).

**“Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them”** (v. 10).

**“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us”** (v. 13).

God’s promise of Christ to Abraham came 430 years before the giving of the law on Sinai; this law did not change God’s promise to Abraham (3:15-18).

**“The law ... cannot annul the covenant”** (v. 17).

The law of God served a temporary purpose until the coming of Christ (3:19-24).

The coming of Christ breaks down all barriers between Jews and Gentiles (3:25-29).

**“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”** (v. 26).

**“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”** (v. 28).

All believers in Christ are now free adopted sons and daughters of God, neither underage minors (as the Jews were) nor slaves of law (as all unbelievers are) (4:1-31).

**“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (vv. 4-5).**

Paul shows that true faith in Christ produces good fruit (Chapters 5 & 6).

The believer in Christ will not submit to circumcision as something he must do to be saved (5:1-12).

**“If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing ... You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (v. 2, 4).**

The believer in Christ will love his neighbor and fight against his flesh (5:13-26).

**“Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (v. 13).**

**“The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (v. 17).**

The believer in Christ will try to help his neighbor and do good to all people (6:1-10).

**“Let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (v. 10).**

Conclusion in Paul’s own handwriting (6:11-18).

**“God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14).**

## **Questions**

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1. What was the false teaching of the Judaizers?
2. How had this teaching been proved false at the Jerusalem convention?
3. Why did Paul find it necessary to find fault with Peter?
4. What is the only way sinners can escape the curse of the law?
5. What does it mean that Jesus became a curse for us?
6. Which came first: the Law or the Gospel?
7. Quote a passage that teaches that non-Jews can also be children of Abraham.
8. Under what circumstances should a person refuse to be circumcised?
9. What will the Christian want to do out of love for the Lord?