

Unlocking Freedom: “Introduction to Galatians”

Sermon preached by Chris Lofquist
January 3, 2019

Introduction

The year was AD 30, and a young man by the name of **John** was proclaiming the coming of the Messiah and baptizing men and women in the name of the Lord. Scripture tells us that one day, while John was ministering by the Jordan river, Jesus approached, and when John saw Him coming to him he said, “*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” It was from this point on that Jesus’ ministry began. He would perform many miracles, preach many sermons, and teach many things about the kingdom of God – yet I’m not sure very many people put much thought into the title John gave Jesus (The Lamb of God). Well, time began to do what time does and move along, and now we find ourselves in the year AD 33 - Jesus knew His time was drawing near, and as day had turned to night the time with the Disciples became even more important. They were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and as they sought to share one last **Passover meal** together, Jesus took bread, broke it, and spoke words that would be forever remembered. “*This is My body, which is for you, do this in remembrance of Me.*” Those words seemed profound at the time, but I’m sure, just like John’s words in reference to whom Jesus was, they simply were misunderstood. Supper continued on and He then, after supper, took the cup and said, “*This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.*” The Disciples knew something was happening at that time, these words must have great significance - but what did He mean when He spoke of a new covenant in His blood? The words would later be remembered, but it wasn’t until the events of the next 24 hours unfolded that they would begin to put the pieces together. God had made many covenants with humanity before, but this was different, this was one paid for by the blood of His Son. This new covenant changed everything – and it became the very motivation for the Apostles, as they sought to share the Gospel with everyone. This new covenant is the basis of the Gospel and it is the very thing that Paul wrote about when he wrote to the Churches in Galatia.

Over the next several months we will be working our way through this letter and seeking to open our hearts to its inspired message. But like every new sermon series here at New Hope Bible Church, we will spend a Sunday introducing you to this book of the Bible. It is a letter that continues to change hearts and history and our prayer is that it would be used of God to change us even more into the image of His Son.

Open in Prayer.

Martin Luther is quoted as saying, “*The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am, as it were, in wedlock. Galatians is my Katherine (his wife).*” And Merrill C. Tenney a great professor of years past, wrote, “*Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect, and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely pagan had it (this book) never been written.*”

In John MacArthur's commentary he writes that *Galatians has been conferred with such titles as the Magna Carta of spiritual liberty, the battle cry of the Reformation, and the Christian's declaration of independence.* This tiny letter penned by an Apostle of Jesus Christ to a budding group of believers has become some of the most important words every written.

So, now that I have wet your appetite, let me begin by introducing you to the Author, inspired by the Holy Spirit to pen such a timely book as this.

Open your Bibles to **Galatians 1**, read with me **verses 1-5**.

1. The Author and Recipients

a. The Author: "*Paul, an apostle*" (v. 1) This is another letter that Paul wrote, and he qualifies his authority in writing such a letter by pointing out that he is an 'apostle' – the word means 'one who was sent out, an ambassador'. However the word 'apostle' has both a specific and general meaning to it. In general, an apostle was a representative sent out by a church on a mission. In **Phil. 2:25** Paul calls Epaphroditus '*your apostle and minister for my need.*' He had been sent out by the Philippian Church on a mission to give Paul their gifts. And likewise in **2 Cor. 8:23** the men who were appointed by the churches of Macedonia to help Paul take money to the poor in Jerusalem are called '*apostles of the churches*'. They were representing the Churches sent out on this specific mission. But in this verse, Paul explicitly denies that he is an apostle merely in this general sense.

"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)." He was not simply a self-appointed apostle who had no authority to teach and to lead the churches, as perhaps some were accusing him of. He was not sent by men and not appointed by any human hands. He was called forth by the risen Christ Himself, through God the Father. This surely got everyone's attention. And we can conclude that because of Paul's apostleship and relationship to Jesus Christ, his words are on behalf of the One who sent him.

Side Note: If we would only realize that words of this book are in fact truly the words of God Almighty, we would no longer seek only the counsel of others, but we would first and foremost go to very Words of God and seek His truth for life altering counsel. So, Paul is speaking on behalf of Christ to the early believers in the Church. And he isn't alone, "*and all the brethren who are with me.*" Listen up Church, what I have to say is important – I speak on behalf of Christ – and my brothers fully endorse my message, because it is what binds us together.

b. The Recipients: "*To the churches in Galatia.*" (v. 2b)

The churches in Galatia are the believers living in central Asia Minor – this is not in the middle of China somewhere – but these are the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (modern day Turkey) where Paul had previously ministered during his first and second missionary journeys (found in **Acts 13, 14, and 16**). In fact, it was in this general region (if you remember) where Paul was preaching Christ and nearly lost his life by a group of antagonistic Jewish leaders who followed him from Antioch and Iconium to

Lystra, stoning him and leaving him for dead. So, these are the group of believers whom Paul risked his life for the sake of the Gospel and whom he loves dearly.

Let us now move on to the setting, as we seek to understand the climate in which Paul wrote this letter to Galatia.

2. The Setting

When we discuss the setting let us begin with the date. Most Biblical and Historical scholars say that this was Paul's first letter written somewhere between 49-55 AD. That would put it within 20-25 years of Christ's death and resurrection. The Church has spread beyond the walls of Jerusalem through the evangelical efforts of the Apostles and other believers. Christ has already confronted Saul on the road to Damascus and in a very dramatic way brought him to salvation putting him on course to become the greatest missionary this world has ever known. And God had a special place for Paul in His plan of proclaiming salvation to everyone. **Galatians 2:7** spells out for us that Paul was called to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. And so in understanding his unique calling, Paul set out on multiple missionary journeys leading him all around the known world at that time. One of his missionary journeys led him to southern Galatia, where he preached the Gospel and discipled believers along the way. And its interesting to note that Paul left a piece of his heart in each of these locations. These new believers were beloved by Paul and like a spiritual father he sought to continue to offer guidance. And so it is with this heart that we find Paul writing his first letter to the churches he loved in Galatia.

Like noted before, Galatia is northwest of Israel, along the Mediterranean sea, in the region known at that time as Asia Minor, and it was a Roman province. And like every Church, they were experiencing problems. These new believers were allowing their past influences and religious traditions to turn them away from preaching the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. We see that in **verse 6** as Paul writes – *“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel.”* Judaizers had influenced these believers in Galatia and had caused them to turn away from truth. Salvation is by grace through faith alone and nothing else. Yet, these Judaizers were questioning that very Gospel and bringing doubt leading to a turning away from the truth.

Judaizers were those men and women who claimed Christianity but taught it necessary to adopt Jewish customs and traditions in order to truly be saved. It made sense. In a society, much like today, where you were rewarded for hard work it only seemed logical that you had to do something to receive God's gift of salvation. And so with a marriage between the Old Covenant (i.e. The Law of Moses) and the New Covenant (i.e. The Gospel of Christ) salvation became through belief in Jesus Christ and the keeping of the Law. This was the greatest struggle within the early Church. Jewish believers were having trouble abandoning their past tradition and not elevating it to the place of salvation – what they thought would save them once was meant to only highlight their sinfulness and need for a Savior – the Law was to point humanity to the Messiah – and now that He came lived and died for us, we no longer are bound to the law – we are now living in an age of Grace. And this was very hard for Jewish believers to wrap their mind around. Especially when Gentiles began to trust Christ as Savior. So the problem the

churches in Galatia were having were two-fold. First, they were being influenced by a wrong Gospel which was leading them down a path of error. Second, they were starting to teach Gentiles that they had to become Jewish in order to be saved. Their entire perspective of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) was changing – and like a grieving Father, Paul was writing to urge them to reconsider the path they were walking down and return to Christ.

This is the setting in which Paul was writing his letter to the Galatian Churches – which leads us perfectly to the theme and purpose of this letter.

3. The Theme and Purpose

We have titled this sermon series, “Unlocking Freedom” because the greatest theme and purpose of Paul’s writing this letter was to highlight and remind us of our freedoms in Christ. This letter answers the question, “How can I be truly free?” Free from guilt, free from fear, free from doubt, free from sin, free from always trying and never quite making it. *“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Gal. 5:1.*

As Paul reminds us of our freedoms in Christ we will see many doctrinal truths and encouraging applications in each chapter. So let me just give you a flyby of a few of these:

Galatians 1:3 – *“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.”* Paul reminds us that, even as we look around and see the evil world around us, we have been rescued from this wickedness and the bondage of sin which allows us to have peace with God to the glory of God.

Galatians 2:20 – *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”* When you believe in Christ you are spiritually participating with the Lord in His death and resurrection – the believers old self (his old mindset, his old attitudes, his old perspective, his old habits) have died with Christ and now, through the power of Christ in us, we are free from sin.

Galatians 3:13 – *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’”* Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the Law, by taking on our guilty sentence upon Himself, becoming a curse for us – and by His death and resurrection, purchasing us.

Galatians 4:4-7 – *“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.”* By grace alone, in

His perfect timing, God sent His Son, our Savior, in order to bring us, through faith, in to a renewed relationship with the Father. Once a slave, now a son and heir of the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:16 – *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”* We have been given this new life, we have this new relationship with God, offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have been given this gift of Grace, now walk by the Spirit.

Galatians 6:7 – *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will reap.”* This is where we get the idea of Karma. It is not some mystical philosophy out there established in the stars – it is a biblical concept. *“Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.” (v. 8)*

Each chapter packed with truth and application! This book can be dangerous. Martin Luther read it and a spiritual transformation happened in his heart that led to the Protestant Reformation. John Wesley heard a sermon based on Luther’s commentary on Galatians and was profoundly converted and used to do amazing things for the Lord. From Luther to Calvin to Wesley to the Puritans to Spurgeon to Billy Graham, there is a direct line from this ancient epistle to who we are and what we believe today. In a world that has lost touch with truth and is offended by beliefs, we need the truths found in this book. And so I am excited to bring that to you in the weeks and months to come as we seek to unlock freedom together. **Conclusion** – Let us pray that God uses it to grow us to be more like His Son.

Let’s pray.