

Called To Freedom In Christ

**Textual Studies From
Paul's Letter To The
Churches In Galatia**

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Called To Freedom In Christ

— Textual Studies From Galatians —

Lesson 1 – General Introduction

Overview

“Freedom.” This may very well be the most basic of unalienable rights... the right to be free. There may not be a more intense yearning within the human heart.

- Collective peoples have fought and died in wars to liberate themselves and chart their own national course.
- Individuals have endured great struggles to obtain their personal freedom.

Our culture even has tangible symbols of “freedom.” National monuments serve as “beacons” for all those who desire to live free. While all these statements certainly describe political and social pursuits, they also could be applied to the most important “freedom” of all...freedom from sin and freedom in Christ. Possibly no other N.T. book summarizes this idea of “freedom in Christ” more than Paul’s epistle to the churches of ancient Galatia.



Galatia was a Roman province in Asia Minor. Its name seems to be derived from the Gauls (ancestors of modern-day inhabitants in Germany and France). Included were the territories Cappadocia, Phrygia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia, as well as cities Antioch Pisidia, Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium. One recognizes these as locations where Paul & Barnabas established churches on their initial missionary journey (**Acts 13-14**). Paul also made stops in these Galatian cities on his subsequent missionary trips (**Acts 15-16, 18**).

As was the case with most of Paul’s travels, his Galatian ministry was subjected to attack from Judaizing false teachers. Their intent was to subvert his preaching by enslaving Gentiles to a perverted version of the Mosaic Law (**2:4**). One will remember the trouble the early church faced on this issue...namely, circumcision (**Acts 15:1-2**). What resulted from the “Jerusalem Conference” was that Gentiles were not required to keep the Law in any way. The letter that was written and distributed was to have solved this troublesome issue (**Acts 15:30; 16:4-5**). It is almost universally agreed that Paul wrote this epistle after the “Jerusalem Conference,” for he makes mention of it in **Gal. 2:1-10**.

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However, Judaizing false teachers were not easily deterred. They continued to trouble Gentiles in local churches. In further efforts to undermine Paul's work, they also sought to attack him personally. This led to Paul having to defend his apostleship **(1:10 – 2:21)**.

The theme of this letter undoubtedly is "freedom in Christ" for all saints.

- Gentile brethren had been freed from the vices & immorality of paganism. Yet, they were not without moral restraint. They were encouraged to "...walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh" **(5:13, 16)**.
- Jewish brethren had been freed from the bondage of Judaism and a law system that could not save **(3:2, 5, 10-14)**. They were exhorted to "stand fast...and do not be enslaved again with a yoke of bondage" **(5:1)**.

Those who are disciples of Christ are indeed "free"...free *in* Christ, and free *from* sin **(4:1; Jn. 8:31-32, 34)**.

Reason For Writing

Somehow, Paul learned of the inclination of the Galatian saints towards drifting away from the truth he had taught them **(1:6)**. As an initial observation, notice how he does not begin the letter with a statement of personal thanksgiving...a standard "mark" in most of his epistles **(Rom. 1:8; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:3)**. Even though Corinth had several problems, he still expressed his gratitude for those brethren **(1 Cor. 1:4)**. Not extending such thankfulness to the Christians in Galatia might indicate the seriousness with which Paul wrote this letter. Perhaps he thought he must get right to the issue about which he was writing.

Neither does Paul address the false teachers in Galatia...for them, he had little sympathy **(2:6; 4:17; 5:12)**. Paul wrote to warn the saints who were entertaining the error taught by the false teachers **(3:1-3; 5:2-3; 6:12-13)**.

Also, notice Paul wrote the letter himself...there was no "scribe" **(6:11; Rom. 16:22)**.

Time & Place Of Writing

Of all of Paul's 13 N.T. epistles, Galatians is the one having the least amount of direct information.

- It was written *after* the "Jerusalem Conference" **(2:1-10)**.
- It was written *before* the decision was made to collect funds for the needy saints in Judea.
 - No mention is made; compare to 3rd journey epistles that mention the collection **(1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9; Rom. 15:25-28)**.

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What must be determined as best we can is how Paul came to know about the bad conditions in the Galatian churches. In the absence of clear statements from the Scripture, we cannot dogmatically press one view. However, we believe there are basically two options to consider:

- [1] Paul observed the Galatians' departure from the gospel of Christ himself as he passed through the region...after all, he did include Galatia in his journeys. Then, sometime later, he writes the epistle about what he witnessed. While this is certainly plausible, we do not believe it to be the most likely. For Paul to observe something wrong or dangerous and delay in addressing it does not match the Paul we read about in the N.T. (**Acts 17:16-17**).
- [2] Someone got word to Paul about the Galatians' apostasy. For this to be correct, we would also have to have some idea about when he wrote the letter. After all, where would someone know where to find Paul to tell him about the problems in Galatia? Consider the following:
 - Since this epistle was written after **Acts 15**, we know it was not connected with the 1st journey.
 - We believe the only letters written on the 2nd journey were his first ones... the two epistles to Thessalonica he wrote from Corinth (**Acts 18:11**). Looking at Paul's "travel log," he didn't stay anywhere else long enough to have both received a report about Galatia and send a letter. Therefore, we believe **Galatians** is a 3rd journey letter.
 - The only information anyone could have known re: Paul's whereabouts was his previous promise at the end of the 2nd journey to return to Ephesus (**Acts 18:19-21**). The news about the trouble in Galatia could have easily come to him during his 3-year stay there (**Acts 19:10; 20:31**). This would have given ample time for Paul both to receive a report and send his letter to Galatia.

Therefore, we believe Paul wrote **Galatians** from Ephesus on his 3rd journey. It can be inserted into Luke's record at **Acts 19:10**.

Outline

The letter can be outlined into 3 main sections, each containing 2 chapters. Throughout the letter, Paul sets forth "propositions" (statements of fact he intends to prove by his letter). It was his intention to show the Galatian brethren reasons why they should reject the false Judaizing teachers and hold fast to what he had taught them.

We will use the outline on the following page.

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[A] Paul defends his apostleship (1:6 – 2:21)

- He was “amazed” the Galatians had already begun turning away (1:6-10)
- No one (not even apostles nor angels) can change the gospel message
- He offers “proof” that what he taught was not from him, but from God
 - His lifestyle before his conversion (1:11-16)
 - He was not “instructed” by the other apostles (1:17-20)
 - His early efforts in Damascus & Arabia (1:21-24)
 - His efforts at the “Jerusalem Conference” (2:1-10)
 - His rebuke of Peter (2:11-21)

[B] Spiritual blessings are based on God’s promises, not works of law (3:1 – 4:31)

- Man is “justified” before God by his faith, not works of a law system (3:1-14)
 - The *kind* of faith Abraham possessed
- God’s promises to save man actually pre-date the Law of Moses (3:15-29)
 - Promises made to Abraham (cp. Gen. 12)
 - Law added because of transgressions...made sin apparent (v. 19)
 - Law was our “schoolmaster” or “tutor” to lead to Christ (vv. 23-25)
 - One is a child of God through faith in the promises (vv. 26-29)
- These promises free man from bondage...make him a full “son” (4:1-11)
- Paul is perplexed why they would change, accept false teaching (4:12-20)
- An allegory to illustrate what they should do with false teaching (4:21-31)

[C] Exhortations on how those who are “free in Christ” should live (5:1 – 6:18)

- Those “set free” by the Spirit should not return to bondage (5:1-12)
 - Submitting to circumcision obligates one to keep the whole law
 - “Christ profits you nothing” if one returns to the Law
 - A strong statement for the false teachers (v. 12)
- Those “set free” by the Spirit should live for the Spirit, not the flesh (5:13-26)
 - “Works of the flesh” vs. “Fruit of the Spirit”
- Those “set free” by the Spirit have responsibilities to one another (6:1-10)
 - Restore fallen away brethren
 - Bear each others burdens
 - Share the things of this life...especially with those who teach you
 - Be careful about what you “sow”...that shall you also “reap”
 - Do good to all men...especially to brethren
- A final reminder about the false teachers who were troubling them (6:11-18)
 - They don’t keep the Law themselves...they don’t even care for you
 - Paul wanted only to boast in the cross of Christ

Addendum To The Outline

While we will generally follow the outline on page 4, we also believe it is helpful to understand this epistle from the perspective of its 3 “propositions” (*affirmations, assertions*). Viewing the letter in this way allows us to capture Paul’s flow of thought...after all, it is a letter.

A “proposition” is a statement that demands proving...it is *not* proof in & of itself. Paul makes these “affirmations” in the hopes of convincing the Galatian Christians to reject the false Judaizing teachers, and to return to Christ and the gospel he had taught them when he was with them.

Suppose we hear of friends who have made a dangerous decision we believe will lead to serious consequences. In writing them a letter or e-mail, we might include in our writing some “propositions” we want them to think about. In making such statements, we would need to prove what we are saying is true. That is what Paul does in **Galatians**.

Below are the 3 main “propositions.” We will emphasize them in our classes, and look for the proof the apostle gives following each one.



Paul’s message came from God...it did not come from man. (1:11-12)



Justification comes on the basis of faith...not on the basis of works of law. (2:16)



Claiming to live by (in) the Spirit means saints must also walk by (in) the Spirit. (5:1)

- Our manner of live indicates we are Spirit-led
- *THE APPLICATION SECTION OF THE LETTER*