

# God's Message to Us in Galatians

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## **Introduction**

This afternoon, as we make our way through every book of the Bible, we come to Paul's epistle to the Galatians.

- You will remember that an epistle is another name for a letter.
- Most of the books of the New Testament are letters written to churches or individuals.
  - They are written by apostles or prophets who were carried along by the Holy Spirit so that what they wrote is infallible and inerrant—it is the word of God.
  - In this way, the Holy Spirit has given to us in Holy Scripture all that we need in order to know about God and His salvation.

There is a great deal of variety in the epistles.

- Romans is a summary of the Christian doctrines of salvation in Christ by the gospel.
- 1 Corinthians was written in an effort to redirect a church that was influenced by pagan wisdom and practice back to God's way.
- 2 Corinthians was written to refute those who were opposing Paul and his teaching, after he corrected the Corinthians. These preachers to promote a "prosperity gospel."
  - It shows us that suffering is very much a part of the Christian life, and that God uses it to help us grow and gain a sense of eternity.

➤ Those are the epistles we have covered so far.

Today we come to the epistle to the Galatians.

- It was written to confront the false teaching of legalism that seems to find its way into the church again and again.
- It is very sad the way this happens with God's people in all ages.
  - We initially come to God as sinners—we enter into our discipleship by baptism which testifies to the fact that we are defiled by sin and need to be washed.
    - In the Old Testament it was circumcision which likewise testified that we are defiled at the very fountain of life—so that we who were made to reproduce the image of God only bring forth corrupt and sinful children.
  - So we come to God as sinners for mercy, but then as the generations go by, it has often been that we become proud.
    - As those who are restored to God, we have His grace working in us and we grow over the generations into a people that are godly.
    - But then, it would seem, we become proud and start to think that it is by our own works rather than by God's grace that we are saved.
      - We actually start to believe the very opposite of what God teaches us.
        - He teaches us that we are sinners who must have blood shed for us—even the blood of Christ—to atone for our sin...
        - He teaches us that we are His people because of His mercy to us in Christ—but we come to believe that we are His people because we are better than others—because we keep His law—both His ordinances and His moral commandments.

Paul and Barnabas had planted the churches of Galatia and taught them about the wonderful grace of God...

- That we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of righteousness that we have done.
  - And they had received this teaching.
- But now Paul is distressed because Judaizers who believe that we are saved by works have come among them...
  - These Judaizers were okay with talking about Christ, but the thing they rested in was not Christ crucified, but keeping the Old Testament rituals.
  - They saw those rituals as a way of righteousness when in fact those rituals were designed to show them their need of Christ who had now come.
    - The people of the old covenant were to yearn for Christ and when He came, they were to receive Him in faith.
- If you talk to the average church goer today, they make a similar mistake.
  - They believe that because they are following God, trying to be good people, and because they have been baptised and go to church, they are accepted by God.
    - Instead of relying on the Old Testament rituals, they rely on the fact that they engage in the rituals of the New Testament—and I might add that like the Jews who did that, they often add rituals to those that God has given them.
    - They suppose that all is well between them and God because they prayed to Mary or because they gave to the poor... whatever...
  - But the rituals of the New Testament are meant to point us to Christ who has come, just as the Old Testament rituals pointed to Christ who was coming.
    - Baptism itself shows us that we are defiled by sin and need to be washed by Christ—and the Lord's Supper points to His blood as the blood of the New Covenant shed for the remission of our sins.
    - Nothing tells us that we are accepted with God on the basis of what we do—our works—but only by trusting in Christ and His saving work for us.

Today I want to show you how Galatians teaches us this.

- The teaching of Galatians is very useful to keep us from going wrong as Christians... from being those who begin to trust in our works instead of in Christ.
- Let's take a look.

## **I. Paul asserts that what he has taught them is from God.**

A. This is just as important for us to know today as it was when Paul wrote it.

1. Our link to the truth of God—to knowing His will and His way of salvation—is the teaching of the prophets and the apostles in Scripture.
  - If what they taught is not indeed the word of God, then we are left to our own wisdom.
  - We are left to pick and choose what we want to believe.
    - That is a very dangerous place for sinners to be left.
    - We will go wrong every time if we move away from the scriptures and the teaching of the apostles and prophets of the Lord.
  - We must know that Paul is a true apostle.

2. Francis Schaeffer was right when he described our acceptance of the Bible as the word of God as a watershed issue.
    - The water on one side of a ridge ends up on one side of the mountain and the water on the other side of the ridge ends up on the opposite side.
    - As soon as we move away from the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God, we are going to end up in the wrong place—in error.
  3. Even though the Judaizers that Paul was opposing accepted the word of the Old Testament prophets, they did not receive the word of the New Testament prophets and apostles.
    - So Paul defends himself as a true apostle of the LORD.
      - Not because he is proud and wants people to admire him, but because he has been appointed by God to speak His Word and he knows that if his teaching is not accepted, it will lead people away from Christ...
        - as it had the Galatians.
- B. Paul begins his letter to the Galatians with intense concern.
1. Ordinarily, after his salutation and greeting, he includes in his letters an expression of thanksgiving for the church and how they came to Christ and how they are growing in Him...
    - He even did that with the church at Corinth when he was writing to address a whole array of problems in their midst...
  2. But in his letter to the Galatians, we do not find that.
    - Instead he expresses shock that they are already turning away from the gospel that he had brought them.
    - Look at 1:6-10: **I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, <sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. <sup>10</sup> For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.**
  3. He is incensed because he knows the consequences.
    - When a church starts to reject the gospel of Christ that Paul and the other apostles preached, it will lead to their destruction.
      - It is true that those who are truly in Christ will continue in the faith, but it is also true that the next generation will not know the faith...
      - And it is also true that many who profess faith at first later show that they did not really believe to salvation when they made their profession.
    - All the way through Galatians, Paul speaks of it as a real possibility that those who embrace this false gospel were never truly in the faith.
      - The danger is real, and Paul is angry with those who are teaching false gospels or bending their conduct to accommodate those who do so.

- C. From here, Paul defends himself as a true apostle who has brought them the true gospel.
1. In 1:11, he says that the gospel he preached was not according to man.
    - a. He goes on to explain that he did not learn it from other men, but directly from Christ.
      - That is how it is with a true apostle.
      - His calling is to deliver what he received from the Lord to us so that we can know the truth.
        - We might rather that God spoke to each one of us directly, but He has chosen to reveal His truth to certain prophets and apostles and then have them give us the Holy Scriptures.
    - b. Paul reminds them that he was in opposition to Christ until Christ called him,
      - and in verse 16-17 he explains that he did not confer with flesh and blood or go up to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles.
      - He was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles and he went to Arabia for three years where he received revelation from the Lord.
      - He did eventually go to Jerusalem and met with Peter for fifteen days, and also saw James—but he got his doctrine directly from the Lord.
        - That is his point—what he preaches and writes is the word of God.
        - It will have little impact on you if you do not receive it as such.
    - c. Notice how he distinguishes the gospel for the Gentiles that he had been given as somehow different than the gospel for the Jews.
      - In chapter 2, he says that he went up to Jerusalem to reveal this gospel to the leaders of the church...
        - In Gal 2:2, he says: **And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.**
      - He says that to Peter was committed the gospel to the Jews—the twelve apostles were witnesses in particular to the twelve tribes...
        - But Paul was given revelation that was specific to the Gentiles—not a different Gospel in the essentials of course—but different in that it was for those who were brought in to the people of God by it...
          - The Jews were already in the church, and were to embrace Christ as the fulfillment of the promises that had been made to them...
          - But the Gentiles were brought into the church directly by the gospel... they did not have to first become Jews.
  2. The way this is expressed is that the Gentiles do not need to be circumcised...what they would do to become Jews.
    - a. Understand that this was not just circumcision...
      - Those who required them to be circumcised wanted them to keep all the rituals of the Old Testament too.
        - The dietary laws regarding clean and unclean foods.
        - The holy days that were appointed in the Old Testament.
        - The ceremonies and sacrifices at the temple.

- Of course there was a transition period for the Jews during which they continued to observe the Old Testament rituals.
  - God gave them time to make the change.
  - It was a big adjustment for them to eat with Gentiles who were ritually unclean because of the foods they ate... but once the Gentiles were added to the church without first being circumcised, the Jews were to accept them and to eat with them as brothers.
- b. We know that Peter agreed with this because God showed him this with Cornelius, the Roman centurion, who was baptised with the Holy Spirit without being circumcised.
  - Peter was also shown a vision in connection with this in which the Lord declared to him all foods were now clean.
    - Peter and the other apostles were shown this and taught this.
    - They defended the inclusion of the Gentiles without circumcision at the Council of Jerusalem.
  - But they were not always consistent in their practice when they got pressure from other Jews.
    - Paul, who had been given much revelation about the gospel for the Gentiles, was a staunch defender of this truth.
    - And he says that the other apostles gave him the right hand of fellowship—they recognised him as God’s apostle to the Gentiles.
  - Look at 2:7-9 where it shows that they accepted Paul as a true apostle.
    - **Gal 2:7-9: But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised was to Peter <sup>8</sup> (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), <sup>9</sup> and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.**
- c. Paul explains that in defense of this teaching, he even had to rebuke Peter when Peter would not eat with Gentiles because of pressure from fellow Jews.
  - In 2:11-12, he says: **Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; <sup>12</sup> for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.**
- 3. Paul saw this as much more than a matter of table fellowship...
  - Those who were pushing for the Gentiles to be circumcised were those who believed in salvation by works instead of by faith.
    - In verse 16, Paul says: **knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”**
    - In verse 21 he says: **I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.**

TRANS> So Paul is not teaching his own doctrine about this.

- Gentiles do not need to become Jews to be accepted of Christ.
  - Those who insist on this are putting forth salvation by works rather than by grace.
  - The very gospel is at stake.

## II. In Galatians 3 & 4, Paul shows that salvation has never been by the works of the law but always by faith in the promise of God.

A. He begins his defence by asking the Gentiles just how they were brought to God.

- He calls them foolish Galatians for forgetting how they came to God...
  1. Did they come to God by getting circumcised and becoming Jews as they were now being asked to do?
    - In 3:2-3, he says: **This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?**
  2. No—the Spirit opened their hearts to see that they were sinners—and to see that Christ is the only Saviour...
    - They came to God by faith in Jesus—by hearing with faith.
      - That is how they were cleansed from their sins and that is how they began their new life in Jesus Christ.

B. He shows how their experience is the same as that of Abraham.

1. Look at how he lays this out in 3:5-6: **Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? — <sup>6</sup> just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”**
  - He stresses that they came to God the very same way that Abraham did.
2. He therefore calls those who believe the sons of Abraham...
  - Look at 3:7: **Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.**
  - He does this even more strongly at the end of chapter 3... in 3:26-29: **For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.**
    - Believers are, in fact, the true sons of Abraham.
    - Those who trust in doing the law instead of in the promise are only Abraham’s sons according to the flesh. They are not saved.
3. In 3:10-25, Paul explains that the law was never intended to save anyone.
  - a. It shows us what is required for us to be reconciled to God—it shows that we must have a priest with a sacrifice to take away our sins.
    - And unless we can meet all that the law demands (which we can’t) it shows us that we are cursed.
      - Look at 3:10: **For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”**

- You have to do all that is required, including atoning for sin, or you are cursed.
    - And that is what Christ did—He was cursed for us—He met the demands that the law shows us that God requires.
      - Verse 13-14 says: **Christ has 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”),<sup>14</sup> that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.**
- b. Do you see? The law tells us what is required of us and the promise was that Christ would provide what was required for Abraham and all who believe.
- The law is not contrary to the promises of God...
    - God did not go back on His promise (even men don’t do that when they make a covenant) and decide that we didn’t have to meet the demands of the law after all—something which we could never do.
    - He gave the law to His people to keep them looking for the promise so that when Christ came, they could believe and be justified by faith in Him.
      - Look at 3:24-25: **Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.<sup>25</sup> But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.**
      - Now that Christ has come, the law of Moses has done its work and is no longer needed.
- C. In chapter 4, Paul compares those in bondage to the law with those who are free sons through faith in Christ.
1. Before Christ came, those who believed the promise were to obey the law right along with those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous by keeping the law.
    - The children did those rituals and things in view of the coming promise...
    - But the slaves did those rituals supposing that these rituals made them righteous.
  2. After Jesus came, the slaves and the sons were divided.
    - The sons rejoiced that Christ their Saviour had come to redeem them from the curse that they might receive the full adoption of grown sons (4:4-5).
      - Jesus was made under the law and He met all of its demands for us all.
    - But the slaves held on to the law because for them, keeping the law was the way of justification.
      - Those who accepted Jesus at all (most of them did not) accepted Him as the one who would deliver them from bondage to their enemies and death, but they did not look to Him to justify them.
  3. Paul expresses his fears for those among the Galatians who are listening to the Judaizers, getting circumcised, and observing holy days and food laws...
    - In 4:11, he says, **“I am afraid for you lest I have labored in vain.”**
      - If they are buying into the narrative that this is the way of righteousness, they are cut off from Christ!
      - In 5:3-6, he sums up saying: **And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.<sup>4</sup> You have become**

estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to be justified by law*; you have fallen from grace. <sup>5</sup> For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

TRANS> And this is a transition into the last part of Paul's letter.

### **III. In the last two chapters (5 & 6), Paul shows that although true salvation is not by works, neither is it ever without works.**

A. That is what 5:6 is talking about: **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.**

1. A person is not justified by circumcision and keeping the law—
  - It is by faith alone—in Christ alone; but not faith that is alone.
  - True faith always works by love...it is a faith that goes with a change of heart.
    - When our hearts are transformed by the Spirit of God so that we come to Christ to be saved—that transformation radically changes us.
  - As God promises in the new covenant, not only are our sins forgiven, but His law is written in our hearts—
    - not the ritual law of Moses of course,
      - but the moral law that is summarised in the Ten Commandments—
        - the moral law that tells us to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves.
2. Paul makes it clear that the liberty in Christ that he has been talking about is never a liberty that lets us live immoral or ungodly lives—just the opposite!
  - Look at Gal 5:13-15: **For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.** <sup>14</sup> **For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** <sup>15</sup> **But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!**
3. The Holy Spirit transforms us so that we no longer follow the desires of the flesh, but rather live for God.
  - a. Paul speaks of how the Spirit is at war with the lust of flesh (with our own selfish desires).
    - Look at 5:16-18: **I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.** <sup>17</sup> **For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.** <sup>18</sup> **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**
  - b. And then he goes into a huge list of the works of the flesh and concludes that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!
    - Look at verses 19-21: **Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,** <sup>20</sup> **idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,** <sup>21</sup> **envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**



- So has Paul gone back to salvation by works? What does he mean that they who practice such things will not inherit God's kingdom?
    - He means just that—they won't go to heaven.
    - But it is not justification by works—a person does not obtain favour with God by avoiding these works of the flesh...
      - It is rather that when we are trusting in Christ for salvation, the Holy Spirit changes us so that we no longer live after the flesh.
      - Those who are truly saved by faith have a new heart and a new spirit that obeys... it has always been that way.
        - The whole point of salvation is to reconcile us to God.
  - c. He describes the fruit of the Spirit... that which grows in the life of a believer—in 5:22-23: **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.**
    - And then he says: **And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**
    - When you come to Christ, you die with Him and then you walk in newness of life by the Spirit—not to earn salvation—but because you are reconciled to God and you start living for God...
      - The Spirit changes you...
      - Not to perfection yet—there is a struggle of the Spirit against the flesh—as we saw in verse 17...
        - but everything is made new for you in Christ.
- B. In chapter 6 he gives us some further instructions about living out our lives as those who have faith in Christ... not by doing rituals—but by caring for each other.
1. In 6:1-5, he tells us to be diligent to restore anyone who is trapped in sin—to go and restore them in a spirit of humility.
    - We should be humble because we know that we are only saved and kept by grace. There is no place for pride.
  2. And then in 6:6-10 he tells us to share our material things with others...
    - As those who are taught, to provide for those who teach.
      - In doing that, you are investing in the kingdom of God so that there will always adequate pastors and teachers...
        - It would be wonderful if in the days to come we could bring in an intern or even an associate minister as we branch out to Truro.
        - If people here and people there truly tithe, then it will be possible.
          - If not, we will not have sufficient and it will hinder the ministry.
    - If you sow to the flesh, you will reap corruption, but if to the Spirit, you will reap everlasting life.
      - He also says that we should do good to all who are in need—especially to the household of faith.
  3. In 6:11-15 Paul tells us something that very much relates to this whole epistle.
    - He tells us that however much God has changed our lives, there is only one thing to boast in—and it is not circumcision and keeping the law!

- In 6:14, he says: **But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.**
- You can only attribute your walk with God to Jesus Christ crucified.
  - It is by Him that you are reconciled to God and it is by Him that you have died so that you could live for God.
  - Paul concludes by pronouncing a blessing, but only on those who believe this:
    - **Gal 6:16: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”**