

*Paul's Letter to the*

# Galatians



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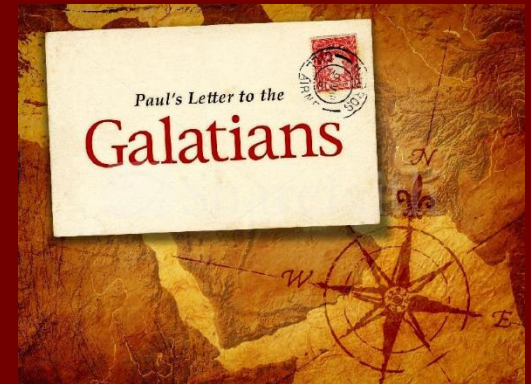
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# Background

## ■ Author, Date & Location

- The author identifies himself, as the Apostle Paul (1:1).
- Galatians 1:2 indicates that this letter was intended to be read to multiple churches in Galatia, an area in Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey.
- Its date of composition is difficult to determine, though it was likely written some time after 49 – 52 CE / AD.





# Background



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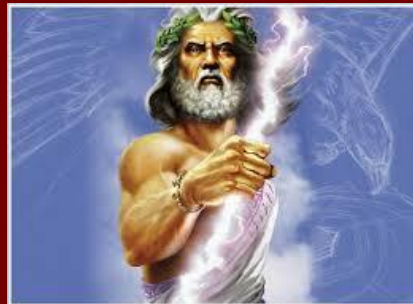
- **Noteworthy Facts**
  - The church membership was undoubtedly composed mainly of Gentiles, and the males were physically uncircumcised (the debate troubling the churches).
  - False teachers were troubling these predominantly Gentile churches with teaching contrary to the conference of Acts 15, primarily saying the Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved.



# Background

## ■ Noteworthy Facts

- In Lystra, God healed a crippled man through Paul (Acts 14:8-18). The people of the area were so astonished at this miracle that they supposed Barnabas and Paul, whom they called Zeus and Hermes (verse 12), to be pagan gods. They wanted to sacrifice to them, and would have, if the apostles had not stopped them (verses 13-18). This shows that the people in Galatia were generally superstitious and worshipped pagan gods.



# Background

## ■ Noteworthy Facts

- A major theme of the Galatian epistle is to put the people "back on the track" because someone had been teaching "a different gospel," a perversion of the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-7).
- Evidence indicates that the false teachers were teaching a blend of Judaism and Gnosticism. The philosophy of Gnosticism taught that everything physical was evil and that people could attain a higher spiritual understanding through effort.

# Background

## ■ Noteworthy Facts

- Gnosticism was the type of philosophy that its adherents thought could be used to enhance or improve anyone's religion. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, we read of this same philosophy having an influence on the church there. It was characterized by strict legalism, a "taste not, touch not" attitude, neglect of the body, worship of angels and a false humility (Colossians 2:18-23).



# Background

## ■ Noteworthy Facts

- **Contrary to Gnosticism, Paul tells the Galatians that they should not listen to even an angel from heaven who taught a false gospel (Galatians 1:8). Also, even though the Gnostics taught a strict discipline of the body, it could sometimes lead to a licentious lifestyle. The idea that the physical, evil body was separate from the spirit often led to the attitude that what one did with the body made no difference.**





# Background

## ■ Noteworthy Facts

- Paul is concerned, after having sampled the freedom they have found in their new faith, that they are so willing to go back into a type of spiritual slavery.
- The spiritual slavery of the false teachers is the viewpoint held by Rabbinical Judaism; the Law of God is inclusive of the Mishna, Talmud and Gemara; placing the oral in primacy to the written law.



# Background

## ■ Noteworthy Facts

- Paul makes a number of often misunderstood complex arguments about what he calls “the truth of the gospel”. We must remain contextual from a historical and textual view, in our study of Galatians to understand the message to these troubled past churches and to us, today.
- II Peter 3:14-18



# Outline of Content

## PAUL EXPLAINS WHAT CHRISTIAN FREEDOM MEANS

- An appeal not to be enslaved to weak and beggarly things again ([4:1-11](#))
- Paul's concern for Christians in Galatia ([4:12-20](#))
- A symbolic drama used to explain Christian freedom ([4:21-31](#))



# Galatians 4

## ■ Chapter 4

- **Verses 1 – 2:** A child cannot accept his inheritance until he reaches maturity. “Tutors” and “governors” (as in KJV) are put in charge of the children. Here, Paul uses different words than the one translated “schoolmaster” in 4:24 (paidagogos). The “tutor” was more of an administrator, while the “governors” were managers of the household.
- **Verses 4 – 5:** At the right time, Jesus came and bought us out of slavery (“redeemed”) us and gives us our full rights as God’s children. Adoption confers full rights of sonship, including the right to inheritance.
- **Verses 6 – 7:** If we are to be heirs along with Christ – if we are to receive a right to a full inheritance – it is not just eternal life. It’s “all things” (Hebrew 2: 6 – 8).



# Galatians 4

## ■ Chapter 4

- **Verses 8 – 10:** “Ye” (KJV) is speaking to the primarily Gentile Galatian churches. The Jews knew God (John 4:22), but the Gentiles “knew not God”, and they were slaves (“did service”) to the elements of the world. Note that this phrase is a little different than the phrase he uses in verse 3 where he writes of “the elements of the world.” Here he calls them “weak and beggarly elements” (KJV). Other translations are as follows:
  - **Contemporary English Version:** “those weak and pitiful powers.”
  - **Common English Bible:** “weak and worthless world system.”
  - **Complete Jewish Bible:** “weak and miserable elemental spirits.”
  - **Expanded Bible:** “weak and useless [bankrupt; poor] rules [or spiritual forces; or elementary principles/powers]”

# Galatians 4

## ■ Chapter 4

- Remember that the Galatian church was primarily a Gentile church. They had come out of a pagan culture where those weak and miserable elemental spirits ruled, and they were apparently going back to them. That heathen background is important to understand when we read verse 10: “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.” They were turning back to their former pagan ways of worship. Paul here is not talking about days God set aside (Leviticus 23), but the Galatians turning back to their own pagan days.
- Whether the Galatians were reverting to previous pagan days or were misunderstanding the purpose of the Feasts of the Lord, they were returning to an unbiblical, superstitious mindset.

# Galatians 4

## ■ Chapter 4

- **Verse 17 - 18:** False ministers might make you feel good, but their teachings can keep you out of the kingdom. Those people are merely after a following. The New International Version of verses 17 & 18:

*Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you.*

- Zeal is good, but only if for a worthy cause, and not just when Paul is around. The Galatians seemed to be easily swayed by any eloquent fraud who turned up on their doorstep. See 3:1

# Galatians 4

## ■ Chapter 4

- **Verses 21 – 31:** Isaac and Ishmael are used allegorically in order to make the point that one can either be a descendant of freedom or a descendant of bondage. This is a bit of a mixed metaphor. Paul relates the metaphor of the two brothers with the metaphor of Sinai and the Jerusalem from above. Sinai represents the law as the center of one covenant and the Jerusalem from above represents freedom from the law's demands (i.e., the law demands death for its violation). This puts grace at the center of the new covenant.



# Group Discussion



# Outline of Content

## PAUL EXPLAINS WHAT CHRISTIAN FREEDOM MEANS

- Insisting on circumcision does not bring freedom ([5:1-12](#))
- The ongoing conflict between flesh and spirit ([5:13-26](#))



# Galatians 5

## ■ Chapter 5

- **Verses 1 – 4:** Paul goes back to his main point, that circumcision is not a requirement for salvation. There is no need for Jesus Christ if you can make yourself righteous. By the grace of God we are saved, not by our physical rituals. If one tries to “buy” one’s salvation through works, one is denying the fullness of God’s grace. Paul is concerned that the point of contention over circumcision will lead to even more loss of freedom (verse 9). Verse 3 implies something similar, that to be justified by the law (works), you must keep the law perfectly. In verse 1 Paul uses the term “yoke of bondage”, very similar to what Paul calls circumcision in Acts 15:10-11.

# Galatians 5

## ■ Chapter 5

- **Verses 13 – 14:** Although we are free from the schoolmaster, we must not confuse that liberty as an excuse for license. With freedom comes greater responsibility. Use this freedom to “obey the truth” (verse 7). We still need to understand and fulfill the intent of God’s instructions to us (Torah = instruction), which is expressed in loving and serving one another (Leviticus 19:18, Romans 13:10, Matthew 22: 36-40). By doing this we will discern that the Ten Commandments, which are the heart and soul of the law, have not been done away. They are still expected of God’s people.



# Galatians 5

## ■ Chapter 5

- **Verses 17 - 18:** They were relying on the flesh for their salvation, and that was leading to a loss of the Holy Spirit. The flesh pulls in one direction, while the Spirit pulls them in the other. Paul, in the following verses in this chapter (verses 18 – 26) tells the Galatians where their current track would lead them. The flesh in fact can drive out the Holy Spirit, and that would leave them with an inability to be the type of people they know they need to be, thus placing them once again under the curse of the law.

# Group Discussion



# Outline of Content

## PAUL EXPLAINS WHAT CHRISTIAN FREEDOM MEANS & CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Fulfilling the law of the Christ by carrying the burdens of one another ([6:1-6](#))
- Each one will reap what he sows ([6:7-10](#))
- Paul is writing with his own hand ([6:11](#))
- Circumcision is of no value, but a new creation is ([6:12-16](#))
- Paul, a true slave of Jesus, wishes that the Galatians show the right spirit ([6:17, 18](#))



# Galatians 6

## ■ Chapter 6

- **Verses 1 – 6:** Paul shifts his tone. He is now telling them what they need to start doing as opposed to what they shouldn't be doing. This is a logical extension of his remarks about the fruit of the Spirit (5:14, 22-25). In verse 2 he speaks of fulfilling "the law of Christ". John 13:14 illustrates what is embodied in the law of Christ as do the specifics Paul mentions in these 6 verses.
- **Verses 7 – 8:** Paul goes back to his earlier statements in chapter 5 that contrast the works of the flesh with the fruit of the spirit. The earlier verses in chapter 6 (verse 1 – 6) can also be thought of in this context. He reminds his readers in verse 8 that the law cannot give us eternal life. It is the Holy Spirit that is the down payment, the guarantee, of our inheritance (Ephesians 1: 13 – 15 NIV).

# Galatians 6

## ■ Chapter 6

- **Verses 9 – 10:** Sometimes well doing can be tedious and underappreciated. That's no reason to give it up.
- **Verses 14 – 16:** Signs on your flesh will have no bearing whatsoever on your salvation or your spiritual welfare.
- **Verses 17 – 18:** Paul says that the scars on his body from frequent floggings and abuse for being faithful to his calling are a greater sign of his commitment than having his foreskin removed. One can sense Paul's frustration with the Galatian churches in these closing verses. The conclusion of his letter to the Galatians contains no personal greetings which are common in the concluding verses of so many of Paul's other epistles.

# Group Discussion

