

The Letter to the Galatians

Lesson One

Synopsis:

Galatians is an exciting book.

In it, the Apostle Paul lays down a foundation which every Christian needs in their life to guard against the most subtle trap believers can fall into, the trap of legalism.

Introduction:

When legalism is mentioned, most Christians automatically think of the Ten Commandments or the Mosaic law.

But legalism involves much more than these two examples.

It's less evident, and therefore much more dangerous.

To the Jews of Paul's day, legalism was primarily an over-emphasis on the observance of Jewish law which blinded their eyes to the Gospel of salvation by grace.

To today's Christians, legalism is more of an attitude than an action, that makes it more difficult to detect and avoid.

A person may not even know or be aware that they are guilty of it.

Because it is so dangerously hidden to the eyes of most Christians, it's easy to unsuspectingly allow this attitude to creep into our everyday lives.

It can unknowingly affect every facet of our existence.

In this study, we will be defining legalism as we should know it today and examine its effect upon us as believers.

We will see how it has come to exert an influence upon everything in our church life from water baptism to personal witnessing.

We will consider this most subtle attack of the kingdom of darkness and point out ways to overcome the dangers of falling into this well camouflaged incarceration.

The book of Galatians is a declaration of faith, and faith alone.

Faith for salvation, and faith for spirituality.

Faith that is based not upon any effort or action or observance on our part.

A faith that is founded solely and entirely on the grace of God.

Before we begin our actual study of this powerful letter, let's conduct a condensed review for a moment.

Exactly who were the Galatians?

If you are familiar at all with New Testament history, you may know that Galatia was an area northwest of Israel which had been settled by the Gauls in the third century.

It became a Roman province in 25 BC.

This means that the Galatians were descendants of barbaric tribes which had infiltrated the Roman Empire.

These tribes were all branches of the Celts, which later settled in Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

So, Galatians were distant cousins to the modern-day Irish.

Isn't it amazing to get little glimpses of how in God's great economy, He is constantly working His wonders and His plans to spread the Gospel of the Good News all over the world?

In the opening of this letter, specifically in verse two, we see the uniqueness of Galatians compared to other letters authored by Paul.

In it he states, "***To the churches of Galatia.***"

Notice that the churches is plural.

Galatians is the only one of Paul's letters directed to more than one church.

This was because of the fact, that Galatia was a province, not a city.

There were four major cities in Galatia, Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra.

The city of Lystra may be familiar to you because this is where, on his first missionary journey, Paul was stoned to death.

However, God resurrected him from the dead to go back into the city to preach to the same people who had killed him the day before.

How's that for a second act?

We will cover this subject more in depth in **Acts 14** in our study of this great letter to the Galatians.

We will be considering several basic themes; the Abrahamic Covenant, the blessing of Abraham, redemption from the curse of the law, the fruit of the Spirit versus works of the flesh, and several others.

As we progress, we will be referring to the Old Testament to visit with Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, and Ishmael.

From there we will move to the New Testament to follow Paul's missionary journey to Galatia.

We will see how Paul's message was focused on faith for salvation, faith for spirituality.

We will see how, because of this message, everywhere he went Paul was hounded and harassed by the legalistic Judaizers with their insistence that organized religion was the only means to salvation.

Through all of this, our attention will be fixed upon one central truth, the grace of God which was poured out at Calvary.

Overall, the book of Galatians is parallel to the book of Ephesians.

Both books address the subject of grace versus legalism, however, where Ephesians emphasizes the positive side, Galatians stresses the negative aspect of this constant conflict, not that the book itself is negative.

In Ephesians Paul places more emphasis on how wonderful it is to understand grace, while in Galatians he spends a great deal of time pointing out the absurdity of falling for legalism.

As we approach this book, we must remember that Paul has learned through written letters about what has been happening in the churches in Galatia during his absence, after his first missionary journey to the region.

You will be able to perceive that he is very upset about the direction the churches are heading in, and like a disturbed father, he wants to set things right again.

Note that Paul is not coming to Galatia in person to straighten things out.

He is simply writing a letter to these churches to confront them with their foolishness in turning back to “dead works” after having once received the Gospel of grace.

In our study, we will see that this is not a sweet letter.

Paul is obviously angry with these people and makes no attempt to hide this fact.

I can't help but get the distinct impression that he must have been pounding on the table as he wrote these words of rebuke.

The overall tone of his message can only be described as dire.

The Galatians were trying to straddle the fence between legalism and grace, to live by the precepts of the New Testament while adhering to the rules and regulations of the Old.

As we will well see, Paul makes it abundantly clear that such a walk is not only impossible, it is a denial of the atonement and an abomination in the sight of God.

We will see that these people simply did not have a proper understanding of the Old and New Testament and how they work together to point people to Christ.

They had no idea that the Old Covenant was not abolished, but rather fulfilled by the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This why the Old Covenant is still to be studied and taught.

But it is not to be practiced in its totality like the people of the Old Testament were taught to do.

The Old Testament merely pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ who perfectly and completely fulfilled all the righteous demands of the law for all those who would accept that fulfillment by faith.

Old things are passed away, all things become new.

The shadow gave way to the reality.

This letter was delivered to Galatia, to be passed around among the churches.

Let's begin our study of this book, which is the most scathing accusation ever leveled against religion, allowing it to set us free from the law of sin and death, that in it, we may discover the fulness of life in the Spirit.

Apostleship

Galatians 1: 1 Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—

Paul... In this opening verse Paul immediately identifies himself as the author of this book.

The word *Paul* in Greek is *Paulus*, meaning "little."

In the natural, Paul considered himself small.

But we know that if a person is small in his own eyes, God considers him great in the spiritual realm.

So many Christians today are boasting of how they are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, which is scripturally accurate.

But it is also nothing to get puffed up in pride about.

Unless a person realizes that he is nothing in the natural, he will be nothing in the spiritual either.

God looks upon the heart, and no heart is great which boasts of its own greatness.

It is the inner man that is important, not the outer man.

...an apostle... Here Paul makes the strongest claim to his calling, noting that he is an apostle, ***not from men***, (plural), ***nor through man***, (singular), ***but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.***

If you will forgive my boldness, I will attempt to interpret for you what I believe Paul was saying here.



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What he was saying plainly is, “I am an apostle.”

“No group of men chose me, and no individual man chose me: I was ordained by Jesus Christ and by God the Father.”

So, he stresses two negative aspects of his calling, and one important positive aspect of it.

He was NOT appointed by men, and NOT by man, but by the Lord Himself.

This raises the question, what is an apostle?

The English word, *apostle*, is a translation of the Greek word, *apostolos*.

Just as the English word *baptize*, is a translation of the Greek word *baptizo*, meaning to immerse or dip in water.

Since we had no word in English for this concept, the original translators simply adopted the Greek word into the English language.

That’s how it was with *apostle*.

Since English had no real equivalent for the word *apostolos*, the translators adopted it almost letter for letter into our language.

Not that it really matters, and certainly not to sound smarter than I am, (or am not), the English word for this process is called, transliteration.

But what does the word *apostle* mean? Strong’s Concordance defines it as “*a delegate: specifically, an ambassador of the Gospel, officially a commissioner of Christ [“apostle”] (with miraculous powers): -apostle, messenger, he that is sent.*”

We know from ***Ephesians 4: 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers***, that the office of apostle is one of the five-fold ministry gifts given to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father.

But in order to fully understand this office, we are going to consider seven different aspects of the word *apostle*:

1. Apostleship is the highest office in the Church of Jesus Christ.

As we have seen, the Greek word *apostolos* simply means “a sent one.”

But if we trace the word back even farther into history, we learn that it came from the ancient Phoenician language in which it referred to the highest-ranking officer in the Phoenician navy (the equivalent of our English word *admiral*).

Does this have any significance for us today?

I think it does.

I Corinthians 12: 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Notice the words, ...*first apostles*.

This at least implies that this ministry gift was the highest ranking one.

However, this raises the question of, was Paul a high-ranking official in the early Church?

I believe so.

II Corinthians 11: 26-28 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers;

27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Paul was an overseer of all the churches he established during his missionary journeys.

So, his was the work of an apostle, of one of the highest rank.

2. Apostleship is a spiritual ministry gift given by Jesus Christ and God the Father.

In ***I Corinthians 12: 28*** notice who it is that sets these gifts in the Church: ***And God has appointed in the church***

If I may be so bold in Christ to pen this truth, Carl Dennis did not set Carl Dennis in the office of Pastor, God the Father did.

If you have a calling on your life, to one of the five-fold ministry offices or gifts, no man placed that calling on you but God.

And if God has called you, He will surely see to it that you have ample opportunity to fulfill that calling.

All you must do is stand firm and allow Him to fulfill it through you.

Your part is to pray and stay in the Word.

God will develop the gift.

It's not up to you to promote yourself, your task is simply to show yourself faithful.

God will take care of the rest.

Remember, not only is apostleship not conferred by man, it is not determined by talent, rather it is strictly a matter of grace, God's grace.

In other words, apostleship is not a matter of talent, it is a matter of divine appointment.

3. Apostleship under the earthly ministry of Jesus is not the same as apostleship to the Church.

It is important to understand that Apostles to the Church were not appointed until after the resurrection of the Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4: 7-11 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?

10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

This passage makes it clear that Christ ordained and established the five-fold ministry after His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven.

It should be obvious that there is a difference between the “apostles” chosen and appointed in the four Gospels before Christ’s ascension, and those apostles given to the Church after the ascension.

Especially considering that the Church of Jesus Christ did not come into existence until after the resurrection and ascension.

The five-fold ministry was initiated with the beginning of the Church age which did not begin with the Gospel of Matthew but rather in the book of Acts.

Let’s take a different point of view of this subject by looking in:

Matthew 10: 1-6 And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.

2 The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;

3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;

4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

5 These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans,

6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Even those these men were referred to as *disciples* in verse one and *apostles* in verse two, how can they be identical to the five-fold ministry gift apostles if they are restricted to ministry to the Jews only.

Keep in mind that most these disciples in the book of Matthew went on to be five-fold ministry apostles later in the early Church.

4. Apostleship still exists today.

Some people claim that “the day of miracles” has ceased because “the day of the apostles” has passed.

Is this true?

Do you mean to say that there are apostles today?

Yes, I do.

However, there are some churches that preach that when the original apostles died off, miracles and tongues and prophesy died with them.

Look again at *1 Corinthians 12; 28* ***And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.***

Here is a compelling question, if this scripture starts with, “***And God has appointed in the church,***” has the church gone away?

If God has set some in the Church to be apostles and the Church is still alive and functioning, what makes think for a moment that these gifts to the Church no longer exists.

How can we say that apostles and prophets have disappeared when we still have evangelists, pastors and teachers?

5. Apostleship is always accompanied by spiritual gifts.

The office of Apostle carries with it, spiritual gifts.

The same holds true of any one of the other five-fold ministry gifts.

If a person is called to be a teacher of the Word of God, they are endowed with the spiritual gifts to accomplish that work.

Romans 11: 29 ***For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.***

Know this, that gifts and callings go together, hand in hand.

Again, if you have been called by God to a ministry, then you have been equipped by Him with the spiritual gifts to carry out that ministry.

The story is told of young man who went to his pastor and told him that he believed he might have received a call to the ministry to be a preacher, but that he wasn't sure.

The Pastor told the young man that "I guess we'll all know if you are called a week from Wednesday.

6. Apostleship is conferred by God, not man.

Not to over address this subject, in **Galatians 1: 1** Paul claimed that he was appointed an apostle by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, not by man or men.

Look at this story.

Acts 2: 15-26 *In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said,*

16 *"Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.*

17 *For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry."*

18 *(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.*

19 *And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)*

20 *"For it is written in the Book of Psalms, "'May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it'; and "'Let another take his office.'*

21 *So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,*

22 *beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."*

23 *And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.*

24 *And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen*

25 *to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."*

26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

In this story, I must ask this question, when these people were told to go to the upper room, who told them they were supposed to pick a replacement for Judas?

What they were told to do was wait for the Holy Ghost.

By the way, Mathias was chosen by lot or vote if you will, then we proceed to never hear his name again in the bible.

7. Apostleship can be conferred by God upon others besides the original disciples.

The seventh and final point we need to understand about apostleship is that it can be conferred upon whomsoever the Lord desires, it is not limited to the original disciples of Jesus.

There are several instances in the New Testament in which it is evident that people other than the original disciples were recognized as apostles.

Luke identifies Barnabas among the apostles.

Acts 14: 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out,

Paul himself mentions at least four others that he identifies as apostles.

A. James

Galatians 1: 18-19 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

B. Apollos

1 Corinthians 4: 6-9 I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!

9 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.

C./ D. Silas and Timothy

1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, Silvanus (Greek for Silas), and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

1 Thessalonians 2: 6 Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

The reason why I have stressed these seven points about apostleship is because the book of Galatians is the strongest defense Paul ever made of his ministry office.

And so, we will see as we proceed.