



Galatians: God of Tension

Memory Verse: Galatians 5:24-25 "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Background

Galatians is the 48th book of the Bible and the ninth book of the New Testament. Paul wrote this letter "To the churches in Galatia" (1:2). Galatia was a region in Central Asia Minor in what is modern-day Turkey. While the borders of Galatia varied at times, Galatia included the cities of Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Pisidian Antioch. Paul had visited these cities on his first missionary journey c. 45-48 AD. In Galatia, Paul had great success as many Gentiles enthusiastically accepted Christ (Acts 13-14). Paul re-visited the Galatian churches that he had founded as he set out on his second missionary journey c. 50 AD, and again, on his third journey c. 54-58 AD (Acts 16:1-6 & 18:23). Soon after Paul had left the Galatian churches, certain Jewish teachers or "Judaizers" were insisting that the newly converted Gentiles could not truly be Christians unless they also kept the Law of Moses which included circumcision. Paul directly speaks to this issue in his letter to the Galatians. The accepted date of this letter varies among scholars. Some believe that it was written c. 58 AD near the end of Paul's third missionary journey. Other scholars estimate it was written nearly ten years earlier in 49 AD before Paul attended the Jerusalem Council c. 49-50 AD, which specifically addressed this topic and sent a letter "To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:" stating that circumcision was not necessary (Acts 15). If Galatians was written in 49 AD, it would have been one of Paul's earliest letters.

The Short Story

Justification is found only by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, not by the works of the Law.

What's the Big Idea?

The Galatian churches had quickly fallen away from the gospel of grace that Paul had preached to them. These Gentile Christians had been influenced by the Judaizers who were seeking to make living under the Jewish Law a requirement of the Christian faith, specifically regarding circumcision, as it was the main initiatory physical rite into the Jewish faith. Therefore, the Galatians had tried to find justification through the Law of Moses. Paul's strong and blunt tone in his letter shows his close relationship to the Galatians and just how serious he felt this issue was. He begins his letter by defending his apostleship since the Galatians had so quickly been swayed by a different gospel than he had preached, thus challenging his authority. Paul proclaims that he himself had been devoted to Judaism and its traditions to the point of trying to destroy the church of God. However, he was now called by God to preach the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles (1:11-24). This gospel presents the truth that man can not be saved by following the Law, only through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul writes, "So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian." (3:24-25). Believers in Christ are set free from legalism. However, Paul also shares that the alternative to legalism is not the absence of restraint nor should freedom be used to indulge the flesh (5:13). Instead, we are to walk and live in the power of the Holy Spirit. "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (5:16-23). Paul concludes his letter by stating that what truly counts is the new creation in Christ, not circumcision (6:15).

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

Freedom is found only in Christ Jesus. In Jesus, we have freedom from sin, freedom from the Law of Moses, and freedom from the doctrines of man. In Jesus, we have freedom to live a life of holiness in the power of the Holy Spirit. "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." (5:24-25).

Teaching Text

Gal 5:16--25 “So I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not **gratify the desires of the flesh**. For the flesh **desires** what is contrary **to the Spirit**, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. **They are in conflict with each other**,... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- Read the 5th chapter of Galatians: What are the apparent tensions and contrasts between the flesh & Spirit?
- What does it mean to “walk by the Spirit”? Why are we told to do so? How does it effect us as Christians?
- What is the opposite of walking and being led by the Spirit? What impact does this have on our witness?
- What does this mean: “I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” to you?”
- How do you live by and keep in step with the Spirit? How hard is it to accomplish that? Why?

Practical Application

- Where does the tension between the flesh and Spirit effect you the most? Is there a reoccurring problem?
- How hard is it to crucify your flesh on a daily basis? What gives you the greatest challenge?
- What are the evidences of the Holy Spirit occupation in your life? How does that make you feel?
- Are you feeling a off track with God? If so, what do you need to do? Who can you talk to for some support?
- What next step is the Holy Spirit leading you to take? How are you going to accomplish this in a practical way?

Hitting the Highpoints

- 1:11-12 “the gospel I preached is not of human origin....I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”
- 2:16 “know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ”
- 3:1 “Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified”
- 3:24-25 “Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”
- 5:16 “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

Bonus Feature– The Fruit of the Spirit

In Galatians 5:22-23 Paul shares, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” The fruit of the Spirit is the moral character developed by the power of the Spirit. The nine character qualities are a unity, a perfectly formed Christ-like character. Paul has expressed his desire to see Christ formed in the Galatian believers (4:19). Now he describes what they will be like when that formation is complete. These character qualities are not a new list of laws or moral codes that must be kept; they are the result of living and being led by the Spirit. *Excerpted from Biblegateway.com*

Personal Takeaways and Notes