

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 93
Galatians

Key Concepts: The key concept in Galatians is that a person does not have to become a Jew (through circumcision) in order to become a follower of Jesus.

Background: The early church, being at first a Jewish sect, struggled with how to integrate Gentiles into the community. Though at the Jerusalem Council it had been agreed that Gentiles did not have to become Jewish before becoming part of the church there were still Jewish Christians (Judaizers) who believed otherwise. Some of those people traveled to area called Galatia (modern day Turkey) and tried to convince Gentiles that they needed circumcision.

Brief Summary: Greetings (1:1-1:5) In this opening piece Paul lays out his central themes, that he, Paul, is a messenger of God (not of human beings) and that in Jesus Christ God has delivered humanity from its sins.

Paul defends his Ministry (1:6-2:21) Paul will make two defenses of his position. The first has to do with his position as Apostle. Paul begins with harsh words, accusing the Galatians of having deserted the true gospel. The issue at hand is that the churches in Galatia are allowing the Judaizers to turn them away from a gospel of sheer grace and toward a faith focused on the law. Paul claims that the gospel he preaches was not given to him by any person, but was a revelation from Jesus Christ himself. He then sets out a bit of his history, that he was a persecutor of the church until Christ called him and made him a preacher to the Gentiles. When he was called he did not go up to Jerusalem to be taught by the nascent church, but instead went into Arabia to work out his theology.

Fourteen years later Paul, along with Barnabas and Titus, went up to Jerusalem and defended his call to preach to the Gentiles. He was attacked, yet in the end, the other Apostles (Peter, James and John) approved his mission. Their only stipulation was that Paul remember the poor. Soon thereafter Peter came to Antioch where Paul was staying, and because of the pressure of the Judaizers, refused to eat with the Gentiles. Paul confronted him, and reminded Peter that all persons, Jews and Gentiles, are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, and not through the law.

Paul defends his Message (3:1-4:31) Paul opens this section with a reminder that the Galatians had experience the indwelling of the Spirit when they believed in Jesus. This, he argues, should be proof enough of the saving power of faith. Paul then launches into a theological defense of his message. He begins with Abraham, who was justified because he believed God; not because he followed laws. Therefore all who have faith are children of Abraham. Paul continues by stating that the law cannot be fully obeyed by anyone, so there is a need for Christ to redeem us. He writes that the law was given not to make people perfect but to keep them in check; it pointed out where sin lay. It was a temporary custodian. Faith in Christ nullifies the need for the law and therefore all persons, Jews and Gentiles, male and female, free and slave are all one together through faith. Paul next uses the image of slavery and freedom; people are slaves under the law but are free in Christ.

Practical Application (5:1-6:18) The practical application of this is that the people are now guided by the Spirit and so are to love one another, avoid the works of the “flesh” (sexual immorality, anger, etc.), enjoy the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.), help one other, share goods with one another and do good to all people. He concludes by reminding them that they are to glory in the cross of Christ alone.

1. What do you make of Paul’s focus on grace rather than law?
2. What does this story tell us about Peter?
3. How might you apply Paul’s practical applications to your own life?