

The Book of Galatians

The apostle Paul had preached in Galatia and established churches in four cities during the years of AD 45 – 48. Not long after these churches were established, Judaizing Christians began scattering through the area with their erroneous teachings. They denied Paul's apostleship and thereby discounted his teaching in the hearing of the Galatian brethren. The consequences of their work were so widespread that it prompted a conference in Jerusalem that was attended by the apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1ff). One of the primary functions of the meeting was to determine whether Paul's teachings were inspired and in agreement with the other apostles (cf. Gal. 2:7ff). These teachers were going about saying that Christians need to keep the Mosaic Law (circumcision) and the Law of Christ together to be saved (cf. Acts 15:5). Paul was fearful that the Galatians were going to completely turn their back to truth and lose their souls due to these men's work (Gal. 4:11). At one time the Galatians considered themselves blessed to have heard Paul's message of salvation (Gal. 4:15), yet after the Judaizers got through with them, they considered Paul their enemy (Gal. 4:16). Paul said, '*you were running so well*' (what happened?) (Gal. 5:7). Paul had preached the gospel, and they received the message by the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2). Consequently, the Galatians were baptized for the remission of their sins (Gal. 3:26). Yet now the Galatians were second guessing Paul because of the terrible things they were hearing about him. Paul wasted no time in writing the Galatians this epistle to counter the Judaizer's teaching.

The Judaizers had apparently said many derogatory things about Paul, his teaching, and his apostleship. Some said that Paul preached to gain the "*favor of men*" (Gal. 1:10). Some said that he "*lied*" about being an apostle (Gal. 1:20). Many challenged his teaching as not being inspired. They said that Paul's teaching was different than what the other apostles taught (Gal. 2:2-10). Still some charged Paul with being inconsistent with his teaching on circumcision (cf. Gal. 5:11). These Judaizers were motivated to say bad things about Paul and teach another gospel because they did not want to be "*persecuted*" and neither did they want to see others persecuted (Gal. 6:12). Therefore, they sought to appease the Jews by teaching the Mosaic Law to Christians, and they sought to appease the Christians by exhibiting faith in Jesus (cf. Acts 15:5; Gal. 6:12). They sought peace at the cost of men's souls. The overall message of the Judaizers to other Christians was that the Mosaic Law must be kept (Acts 15:5), that all must be circumcised (Gal. 6:13), and that all must keep the set Mosaic feasts and special days of worship (Gal. 4:10). Though these teachers taught these things, they did not do so themselves (Gal. 6:13). **The Judaizer's objective in life was to obtain peace with all men, whereas Paul's objective was justification through faith in Jesus Christ no matter the cost (Gal. 3:8-9; 6:17).**

Apparently the Galatians had given these false teachers the right hand of fellowship and an ear to their doctrines (Gal. 1:6; 3:1; 5:2). The consequence of said acceptance was that they were severed from Christ and had fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). Instead of trying to protect these false teachers, Paul labeled them as "*false brethren*" and spoke of the damage they were causing (Gal. 2:4). Paul said some were "*troubling*" (causing confusion) among the Galatians with a "*perverted gospel*" (a changed doctrine) (Gal. 1:6-7). These teachers had "*bewitched*" the Galatians (Gal. 3:1). The false teacher's were "*zealously seeking you* (the Galatians) *in no good way*" (Gal. 4:17). These teachers "*hindered,*" "*troubled,*" and "*unsettled*" the Galatians by "*persuading*" them with false doctrines (Gal. 5:7-12).

Paul's remedy to the situation is given throughout the book. First, the Galatians were to test the doctrines of men to see whether they stood the test of the inspired revelation of God (Gal. 1:8-9). For an effective test to be run, the brethren needed to understand the difference between divine revelation and human reason. Paul lay claims to teaching divine revelation and then proved this by looking to his apostleship (Gal. 1:11-12). The Jerusalem conference was devastating to the false teachers of Galatia because the results unequivocally marked Paul as an apostle of Jesus Christ who preached truth (cf. Gal. 2:2, 9 compared to Acts 15:24-27). Secondly, the Galatians were admonished to cast out those who sought them in no good way with their teaching (Gal. 4:17, 30) because such men were accursed (Gal. 1:6). Finally, Paul suggested to the Galatians that they crucify the flesh (Gal. 6:14) and walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Paul spent a considerable amount of this epistle explaining the fatal uselessness of attempting to follow any one part of the Mosaic Law with the expectation of getting one closer to God. To follow any part of the Mosaic Law is to be under a curse because no man could keep it perfectly, and when one failed there was no remedy for the sin (Gal. 3:10). To follow the Mosaic Law is to be kept in ward as a prisoner (Gal. 3:22; 4:3). When one obeys the gospel, he is set free from the bondage of sin (Gal. 4:7). Paul explained to the Galatians that any system that did not represent Christ only held one in bondage to sin because the forgiveness of sins came through Christ alone. Many in the religious world today are seeking their justification by means other than what Christ's words revealed and are consequently held hostage to that system (whether it be Baptist faith, Methodist faith, etc.).

The lesson that you and I need to learn from the book of Galatians is that we must seek our salvation in the teachings of Christ alone. If someone brings another teaching, we should test it rather than receiving the man because he seems good. If the doctrines these men present to us do not represent Christ teaching, we should cast it away from us. Christians are always to live by the Spirit (God's instructions) rather than living by the flesh (man's ideas).