

“Letter from Paul was couched in common sense and a readable manner.
The study and personal commentary on Galatians will be a happy
addition to the ‘everyday reader’ and the library of every Bible student.”
—Rev. James J. Counihan

Letter
FROM
PAUL

TO THE
Church in Galatia...
AND US!

Will God get tired of forgiving me?
If I mess up, am I still saved?
What works for my salvation?
To find answers to these questions and more, read on!

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Welcome

As a preacher's kid, I was brought up in a strict, structured home environment. This upbringing created a harsh view of Christianity and an overwhelming fear of hell, fire, and damnation for me.

It was not until years later that I found a church emphasizing God's love. I read the Word and prayed daily, and began to develop a close, personal relationship with God. But fear kept haunting me until I really got into Galatians and broke it down, verse by verse. The book of Galatians is a key book of the Bible for me because it emphasizes God's love and forgiveness and provides assurance that, even though I mess up at times, God still loves me!

It is my hope and prayer that you, too, can embrace the beautiful message of love and acceptance contained in Galatians and apply it to your life. When we fully submit and trust God for our lives, an overwhelming peace envelops us. We no longer need to fear Him. He is a loving God who provides all our needs and protects, encourages, comforts, and directs us. He is our heavenly Father, our constant companion, and a friend who really does have all the right answers.

Living in a right relationship with God dramatically changes the way we view ourselves and the world. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Written in a down-to-earth, easy-to-read approach, the Bible studies contained in *Letter from Paul* highlight the main points covered in each chapter of Galatians. The Bible is a living entity, and through His Word, God reveals certain things to us at various times in our lives. To fully comprehend the studies, it is essential to read the referenced verses in addition to the ones in each chapter.

The overview provides historical background pertinent to the time, place, and circumstances under which Paul wrote the letter and gives us perspective on Paul's state of mind and the challenges he was facing.

Each chapter begins with a story illustrating the main points to be examined within. The story emphasizes how the critical aspects might be relevant to our lives today. Following the devotional is the Bible study itself. Read the verses noted for each section before beginning the study. Questions and Bible references follow each chapter to enhance your understanding.

Personal Application questions follow the Bible study section. These may help you identify areas of spiritual weakness in your life or could provide the assurance you are seeking. Ask God to reveal these to you and to help you overcome or accept them. After the personal application questions, space is provided for you to write down any points of enlightenment and to pause and reflect upon what you read.

Chapters conclude with Something to Ponder—an idea or question for you to internalize and pray about in your walk with the Lord. These are followed by a prayer you may want to incorporate into your daily life.

It is my personal prayer that you will embrace this Bible study series to develop an intimate relationship with the One who loves you more than you love yourself. God, our Father, is our only hope for salvation, through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Overview of the Book of Galatians

During his first missionary journey to Asia Minor, Paul worked with others to build churches in Galatia. It was through his work there that he developed a close relationship with Christians and taught them that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works or the law of Moses.

One of Paul's many concerns was to teach the Jewish people that gentiles were just as entitled to salvation as they were. This inclusion of the gentiles into the church was the first cause of controversy that upset the church in its early years—Jews and gentiles did not want to bond together. Paul emphasized how vital it was that people embraced unity in Christ, no matter what their race or ethnic background was.

Arriving back in Antioch from his first missionary trip, Paul received a report that the churches he had started in Galatia had become divided. A group of Judaizers—Jews promoting adherence to the Mosaic law—were teaching the necessity of living under the law as a requirement of the Christian faith, including old covenant rites such as circumcision. Additionally, they suggested that living by grace and freedom alone meant a lawless, reprehensible life. These false

teachings had significantly impacted the church in Galatia, and Paul was outraged.

Paul wrote his letter a few months before attending the Jerusalem Council in AD 49. The purpose of the Council was to discuss this particular topic. Paul used a sharp tone in his letter because he felt betrayed that some Christians were listening to the false teachers who had come to Galatia since his ministry there. The Christians accepting these false teachings also made clear their disloyalty to Paul's authority as an apostle.

Paul felt a special bond between himself and this church, as he had personally evangelized them. His letter to the Galatians was a swift and decisive attempt to counter the false teachers' message about living under the law. Paul wanted to be sure the Galatians were on the path of truth and were not being deceived.

The book of Galatians was written to emphasize the deadly dangers of relying on works for salvation. No one is ever granted eternal life based on works. In fact, anyone who lives by such confidence in actions is considered cursed, because no one can live a perfect life and completely obey the law (Gal. 3:10).

Adding works, rituals, or the law to the message of Christianity is a travesty; doing so essentially says that salvation through faith is impossible. Such beliefs are against Christianity. We stand justified before God *only* through faith in Jesus Christ; nothing else will save us.

Paul felt so strongly about the problems in the Galatian church that he took the pen from his scribe and signed his name in large, bold letters.

In the final section of his letter, Paul made clear that justification—an act of grace through faith—would not result in a sinful lifestyle. Christians are freed from bondage to the sinful nature and should naturally desire to glorify God through their righteous behavior.

We walk a fine line. On one hand, we do not want to fall into the legalism the Galatians struggled with, but on the other, we must not live as if anything goes. A Christian's commitment to Christ is based on the gift of grace through faith, but as Paul articulated at the end of

Galatians 2, it also results in a life of walking by the Spirit in love (Gal. 2:20).

Is the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life, or are you self-absorbed and living according to the flesh? Too often we lose ourselves at the extremes, ending in a legalistic attempt to earn our salvation or taking a lighthearted attitude about our sins because grace saves us.

Use Paul's words in Galatians as encouragement to pursue a life of holiness—not in your own strength, but in the knowledge of God's empowering grace for you.

CHAPTER 1

Works vs. God's Saving Grace

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9

Samantha's Story

Sitting with her friend Amy, Samantha confided, "I know I'm supposed to be this good Christian girl. Dad always said I'd better not mess up, because if I sin, I will go to hell. I've tried living by all the rules, but I just can't. I keep messing up. I feel like a complete failure, and I'm scared. I don't want to go to hell."

"There is a war going on inside me. I want to serve God and be a good Christian, but I feel like I'm missing out on all the fun in life. Everyone around me seems to be having so much fun, while I'm miserable. I don't go to parties. I don't drink. I don't mess around. I don't even dance, because that's supposed to be a sin too."

Amy said, "Sam, you're not going to hell if you dance. I can't believe the church would even say that. Hey, we're having a party Friday night. Everyone from the office will be there, so you should come. People say you're standoffish, and some say you're a snob. It would be good for you to get to know them better."

"I don't know. I wouldn't know what to talk about. I'll think about it."

Leaving work on Friday, Samantha thought about her conversation with Amy. *Maybe I should go to show them I'm not a snob. I don't have to drink or dance, but I probably should try to get to know them better so they see I'm friendly.*

Slipping into the party, Sam smiled as she walked through the room and headed for the chair in the corner.

Amy came running over. "Hi, Sam! Glad you could make it. Can I get you a drink?"

"I'll have a Coke."

"Oh, come on. Jim makes a great margarita. One drink won't kill you, and it won't send you to hell either."

I suppose I could sip one and make it last till I leave. Then everyone will realize I'm not a prude. "Okay, I'll try one."

Oh, this tastes pretty good. I'll just nurse it along for a while and then leave.

Fred, the office playboy, came running over. "Hi, Sam. Want to dance?"

I can't believe he asked me to dance. He's dated all the good-looking gals in the office. Why would he ask me to dance? I'm not a fashionista. "No, thank you. My feet are hurting after running around in these high heels all day."

"Oh, come on. Just one little dance."

Is he really interested in me after all the girls he's dated? "Okay, one dance."

I don't know why, but he seems to really like me. I'm not dressed up like the other girls. Maybe he has always been interested in me and just didn't think I would be receptive. Anyway, this is fun!

Flattered by Fred's attention, Sam was captivated by his charm. It didn't take him long to arrange a follow-up date with her.

After that party and a few more dates with Fred, she was hooked. Sam began going to many parties and meeting other guys, and thought she was having fun. She didn't realize that she was changing and drifting farther from God. The downhill slide had begun, and before she realized it, she was in full-blown rebellion to God.

This partying lasted a couple of years, and Samantha got to the point where she no longer cared about going to church, praying, or living a righteous life. Life was all about the next party or the next guy. She failed to realize that she no longer felt good about herself or who she was as a person. Her self-esteem now came from the compliments her new friends provided. It didn't matter that they were lowlifes living on the edge. They were building her up and supposedly putting her on a pedestal because she was such a decent person. In other words, she had not yet sunk to their level of behavior.

One night while cleaning up after a party in her home, she had an awakening. (God was speaking to her.) *No one offered to help me clean up tonight. I bet if I ever needed help or had a real problem, none of them would be there for me. My new friends are here only for the good times.*

God, forgive me. I know I've messed up, but I want to change. Please help me.

Samantha began attending a new church and, for the first time, heard about God's love for her. When she realized God loved her even when she made mistakes, a whole new world opened. Samantha accepted Christ as her Savior and then sought Christian counsel to turn her life around. She started reading Scripture to discern God's guidance for her life.

Losing interest in her friends and the parties, Sam made new friends in the church. Her life took on a new dimension. She now wanted to live a righteous life—not because she had to, but because she knew she had a loving Father who had forgiven her sins and would not hold them against her in the future.

Samantha realized that Christ hadn't just died for the sins of the world; He'd died for her sins personally. God would guide and direct her path and give her peace and joy within. For these reasons, she now wanted to serve Him.

Bible Study: Galatians 1

The book of Galatians teaches us the difference between salvation by works and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is not about obeying all the rules versus having a good time. It is about a personal relationship with our Creator and Savior. He is the only one who can give us real peace and joy within. We cannot obtain salvation by our works; our sinful nature will not allow us to live perfect lives. It is the work of the Holy Spirit within each of us that guides, directs, and empowers us, causing us to want to love and serve God and others instead of continuing with the self-serving lives we once led.

GALATIANS 1:1–10

Paul wrote to rebuke the Christians in Galatia for following the Judaizers who had asserted their authority and gained recognition as religious leaders in the churches he had helped to establish.

These leaders preached the necessity of living by the law of Moses and following their religious customs, such as circumcision and other ceremonies. They asserted that anyone who lived by faith in Jesus Christ alone could easily live a sinful life of debauchery, and that type of Christianity would not save them.

Test all things; hold fast

what is good.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

In his letter, Paul stated that these religious leaders were Satan's tool and were cursed by God (Gal. 1:8). It is important to note that we are challenged to test everything we are told or see, according to God's Word (1 Thess. 5:19–22).

The Judaizers were making rules that were not biblical, while making light of things God said were wrong. They did not believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. The Bible teaches that if we try to live by the law, we are in bondage to the law and are estranged from Christ.

The question arose that, since grace saves us, is it okay to sin? No. We are saved by grace, and we obey in love. Our new nature will cause

us to want to live a righteous life. We are free to live as we choose, but we should not use this liberty as an opportunity to sin (Galatians 5:13).

Of course, because of our sinful nature we all slip occasionally—no one can live a perfect life—but we must strive to live lives free from sin. We tend to fool ourselves sometimes, thinking it’s just a little white lie. We rationalize, justify, and play mind games with ourselves, but a sin is still a sin (Rom. 2:15).

It is important to ask God to show us our sins and to then ask for forgiveness and turn from them. If we truly repent and turn from our wicked ways, God is faithful and just to forgive us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

GALATIANS 1:11–24

Paul emphasizes that he is not a biblical scholar; he received the gospel through a personal revelation from Jesus Christ. God revealed His grace and plan of salvation to Paul while Paul was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9).

Before his conversion, Paul felt he was righteous before God because he was performing so well in the Jewish faith and observing all the Jewish laws and ceremonies. In his mind, he was the leader of the pack and the world revolved around him. Paul readily admits he had previously persecuted Christians while following in the footsteps of the fathers in the Jewish faith. When Christ encountered him on the road to Damascus, Paul immediately left Judaism behind and followed Christ. Paul then spent three years learning about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ before joining Peter and James—the Lord’s brother—in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18–20). From there Paul went to Syria and Cilicia to preach the gospel. Paul no longer lived to empower himself; he lived solely to glorify Jesus Christ.

The Christians in Judea were amazed when they saw Paul again because they knew of his background, and they praised God for the transformation that had taken place in his life.

Study Questions

GALATIANS 1:1–10

Who wrote the book of Galatians?

What was the purpose of his letter? (vv. 6–8)

How did the religious leaders in Galatia distort God's Word? (v. 1)

What happens to people who pervert the Word of God? (v. 9)

Should we take at face value everything a religious leader or pastor says?
(vs. 1:6-10)

GALATIANS 1:11–24

Was Paul looking for the real gospel while persecuting the Christians?
(vv. 3–14)

Was Paul a religious scholar before he began preaching the gospel of Christ? (vv. 16–21)

How quickly did Paul leave his Jewish traditions behind once God's grace was revealed to him? (v. 16)

How did he prepare himself to preach? (vv. 17–21)

How did the Galatians receive him? (vv. 23–24)

Personal Application

Before answering the following questions, it would be wise to go to God in prayer. Ask Him to reveal any spiritual weaknesses you may be unaware of, any new insights He would have you glean, or any assurances that would enhance your understanding and walk with Him.

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

Have you ever felt you weren't good enough to receive God's grace? (Phil. 1:6)

Do you believe God will forgive your sins? (1 John 2:2)

Under what circumstances do you believe He will forgive? (Acts 3:19)

Are you living under grace or under the law?

Something to Ponder

If I am living under grace, my new nature will be under the influence and control of the Spirit of God, and I will want to glorify God by living a Christ-centered life!

PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, for providing me with Your Word and Your Holy Spirit. Help me to stay focused on You and Your Word, and to trust only in You. Direct my path daily so I will live to glorify You and be a light unto the world.

Reflections

Use the space provided below to record your reflections on the lesson just completed. Think about the study and all the questions—including the personal application—and record anything that stood out, provided enlightenment, reduced your fears, or enriched your relationship with God.