

Study 8: Summary of the book

Introduction

This study is to review the whole letter. It is now some weeks since we began the study, and so it is appropriate to congeal the thoughts together.

Body of the Study

What is unique about the Galatian letter in the New Testament?

What are the characteristics of the Galatian churches?

What were the three basic problems in the Galatian churches?

How did Paul learn the gospel?

A subsequent visit to Jerusalem

Paul talks about the visit to Jerusalem – what was the occasion?

How does Paul address the Galatians at the beginning of chapter 3?

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What was the purpose of the Law?

Can salvation come by the Law?

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What does the Law say about itself?

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How does the Spiritual life contrast with the Fleshly life?

The conclusion

Notes for study 8: Summary of the book

Introduction

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Body of the Study

What is unique about the Galatian letter in the New Testament?

Galatians is the only letter in the New Testament (I'm ignoring Revelation) that is written for a specific *group* of churches.

- Specific letters: Romans, Corinthians, Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonians
- General letters: James, Peter, John, Hebrews, Jude
- Letters to individuals: Timothy, Titus, Philemon
- Galatians is the only letter written to a specific group of churches.

Paul had visited the churches (in order) Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. All of these are in the Southern area of Galatia. We know that Paul visited these churches at least three times. We do not know exactly where he went on his third journey, and there is much speculation as to whether he went to the Northern regions of Galatia.

Two notable people in the New Testament came from the Galatian region. Timothy came from Lystra (Acts 16:1), and Gaius from Derbe (Acts 20:4).

What are the characteristics of the Galatian churches?

The characteristics of the churches can be found in Luke's record in Acts. On the first journey at Pisidian Antioch, the Jews were at first really interested in Paul's preaching in the synagogue, and the Gentiles are begging for more (13:42). The next week "*...the whole city has turned out to hear the gospel...*" The Jews became jealous of what Paul was able to do and rebelled and rejected Paul & Barnabas (as they did in most places), and then stirred up the rest of the people against them. The result was that Paul & Barnabas were forced to leave (13:50).

In Iconium, "*...a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed...*" and they stayed there "*...a long time...*" but eventually the division between the Jews and the Greeks came up again. The Jews make a violent attempt to abuse and stone them, and Paul & Barnabas flee to Lystra.

In Lystra, Paul heals a man who had been lame from birth and Paul & Barnabas are held up "*...as gods come down in the form of men...*" They are held in such esteem in the city that "*...they could hardly restrain the people from offering sacrifices to them...*" (14:18). But soon after, the Jews come down from Antioch and Iconium and persuade the multitudes to turn against them. Paul is taken out of the city and stoned – being *left for dead*.

The fickleness of the churches can be clearly seen in the above passages. They overwhelmingly embraced the gospel at first, but are soon turned right around against Paul & Barnabas as soon as the Jews arrive and speak against them. This sets the *character and background* to the letter to the Galatians, and it is because of *exactly* such a fickleness of character that the letter is written.

What were the three basic problems in the Galatian churches?

The first problem was their fickleness. They had embraced the gospel at first, but then turned around soon after Paul had left and sided with the Judaisers – effectively with the Jews who had been persecuting them for the last 13 years. There were of course, implications for this, and the

Galatian letter spells out the consequences in very plain language – it is essentially the prime reason for the letter.

The second problem was that they were denying the power and authority of one of the apostles (Paul), even though they knew him, and knew that he had demonstrated the power that he had when he was with them. (This second problem is not unrelated to the first).

The third problem was the division that had come between the members of the church(es). The sides had become entrenched in their positions. Apparently the elders had even become involved so that they were unable to guide and nurture the christians in resolving the problems. This is a great example of how any church anywhere can (and should) resolve the issues and problems within the congregation.

The consequences of their actions was to deny the effect of the gospel and the sacrifice of Jesus. They had (in effect) said that Jesus was just another Old Testament prophet, and that keeping the Law of Moses was really what was necessary to be pleasing to God – and therefore that the sacrifice of Jesus was of no effect.

How did Paul learn the gospel?

If *anyone* knew about the Law, it was Paul – who was educated under Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of the Law and a member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:3). The Judaisers (who were saying that Paul did not really understand the Law) had *nothing* on him!!! His understanding of not only the Law, but also the gospel was equal to anybody – even the other apostles not withstanding.

Immediately after his conversion, Paul firstly went to Arabia for three years (1:17-18), then came back to Damascus (1:17; Acts 9:23), where the Jews are seeking to kill him, and he escapes through a window in the wall in a basket (Acts 9:25; 2 Cor 11:33).

It is only then that he makes his first trip back to Jerusalem since his conversion, and only saw Peter, and only stayed for 15 days. He had already spent the three years with the Lord where he “...received the gospel – not from man, neither by man – but from the Lord Jesus...” (1:12)

The point that Paul is making here is that he ***did not*** get or learn his doctrine from Peter or any of the other apostles, as he was not in Jerusalem long enough to have done so. ***So, where did he learn it from?*** The only credible answer is that he got it by revelation from Jesus whilst he was in Arabia, as he has already asserted in this chapter (1:12, 16, 19).

A subsequent visit to Jerusalem

Paul made another visit to Jerusalem between the two that are recorded here in Galatians.

During the time in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26), famine relief was collected by the brethren and sent to Judea by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11:28-30 (vs 30)). They might have even been in Jerusalem when James the brother of John was killed (Acts 12:1-2), as some time (weeks???) later they returned to Antioch, bringing with them Barnabas’ nephew John Mark (Acts 12:25).

Paul did not record this visit in the Galatian letter, as he did not meet with or visit any of the apostles – and so it was totally irrelevant to the argument and discussion in the letter. Had Paul in fact visited with the apostles whilst in Jerusalem and not mentioned it here, then it would have given the Judaisers ammunition for their argument that Paul only learned his doctrine from them.

Paul talks about the visit to Jerusalem – what was the occasion?

Paul describes this visit as being 14 years after his conversion. This places the visit at AD 51, and is the visit described in Acts chapter 15. The occasion of this visit was to address the issue of the

requirement for Gentile Christians to keep the Law of Moses – the very same issue that has now arisen amongst the Galatians.

It was not long after he returned from the first journey – the mission to the Galatians – and his work amongst the Gentiles had reached the ears of some of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Some of the Jews came (falsely) teaching “...that the apostles in Jerusalem said...that the Gentiles have to keep the Law of Moses...” (Acts 15:24).

When Paul went to Jerusalem, he reported to the elders and the apostles all that God had done amongst the Gentiles through him (Acts 15:4) – and clearly what Paul taught. He found that there was no discrepancy between the things he taught, and the things that the rest of the apostles taught (Acts 15:25 – they were of “one accord”). Paul reinforces this in Gal 2.

Paul took Titus – who was a Greek with him. The fact that the apostles in Jerusalem did not require Titus to be circumcised (2:3) proves the point that circumcision – and keeping the Law of Moses – is not required by Gentile Christians.

How does Paul address the Galatians at the beginning of chapter 3?

He addresses them in very strong terms “*O foolish Galatians!...*” “...*Who has bewitched you...*” (3:1) What Paul is saying to them is “I can’t believe this” he essentially says to them “You stupid idiots! – What were you thinking?” “*Are you so stupid? You have begun by walking with Christ, but you think that perfection now comes by going back to the Law of Moses?*” (my paraphrase of vs 3:3).

What was the test of the Galatians faith?

Paul presents initially two pieces of evidence to support the position that the Galatians should be taking:

- 1 Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified before your own eyes.

This is not to say that they literally saw the crucifixion of Jesus (although it could be possible that some of them did), but rather that the preaching of Paul was so focused on Jesus, His sufferings, and what he accomplished through the cross that it was just as if they had actually been there.

2. They had the spiritual gifts.

The implication that Paul makes on them is (tongue in cheek) “*I wonder where you got them???*” The spiritual gifts were of course, to *confirm the word* (Mk 16:20). Paul (who had the power that goes with the apostles) was able to give them the spiritual gifts. Whilst Barnabas and Silas had the gifts, they could not pass them on like Paul could.

So, God has confirmed the things that Paul taught through the miraculous gifts. That should have been the end of the matter as far as the Galatians were concerned. God had shown his approval of what Paul taught through the gifts, but what were the Judaizers offering as support for what they were teaching? The only thing that they could offer was a “*we say so*” from the brethren in Jerusalem.

How is Abraham presented as an example?

Abraham is presented as a typical life of faith. But the thing that both the Jews and the Galatians need to remember is that the blessings of Abraham did not come on account of his being a Jew. The Jews had the idea “We’re right with God because we are the children of Abraham” but Paul points them to the truth that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith like he did. In

fact, he was blessed a long time before the Law of Moses came along. And he was blessed *before he became a Jew*.

But because of Abraham's faith (3:8) God foresaw what would happen, and prophesied that "In you shall all nations be blessed" God was talking about Jesus the Messiah, who would be one of the physical descendants of Abraham. The Judaisers had not recognised the application of Abraham's faith – that he was blessed because of his *faith*, not because of his *Jewishness*.

The implication is that if we have faith like Abraham, then God will bless us too – and God's blessings do not come from keeping the Law of Moses!

God made three promises to Abraham – The Land promise, the National promise, and the Seed promise. The Jews thought that relationship to God came through the physical descent (the National promise), and they wanted to bind on the Gentiles the sign (circumcision) that made people Jews.

But Paul says that true relationship with God does not come from the National promise, but from the Seed promise! And that promise is available to everyone of every nation, Jew or Gentile. The Jews were looking at the wrong promise to Abraham!!!

What was the purpose of the Law?

The Law had a quite specific purpose. It was to be a training ground – a schoolmaster – a teacher. It set boundaries. It defined sin. And by so defining right and wrong, it showed that none of us could keep it perfectly. We are therefore all condemned by God (and rightly so) because we have all sinned.

We need God's help. We cannot do it on our own. We need a Saviour. We need the seed who was promised to Abraham.

Can salvation come by the Law?

If it was possible that salvation could have come by the Law, then the Law would have been given in that way. God did not want to sacrifice His only Son, but there was no other way. If there was, then God would have done it that way. (3:20).

Whilst keeping the Law perfectly was theoretically possible, it was a practical impossibility. And only God could do it. The Law therefore *brings us to Christ*. It makes us *understand* that we cannot do this on our own. It *convicts us* of our sins, and makes us *know* that we need a saviour.

The daily and the yearly sacrifices were like an aspirin, and took away the symptoms of sin, but did not take away the actuality of sin. The actuality of sin was only taken away by the Saviour. To follow the same line, God wants to take us to the dentist to have the bad teeth removed and take away the pain forever, whilst the Judaisers are just asking for more aspirin!

Paul then brings the crunch. The Law was to bring us to Christ. After Christ has come, why do we want to go back to the Law?

How does Paul compare an heir and a slave?

Through Christ, we become heirs of God. And importantly, that under the Law of Moses, we (the Jews) were under bondage. It was as if they were slaves.

Even if a physical heir has absolute and total entitlement to the inheritance, whilst he is a child he has absolutely no claim to any of it, and is no better off than a slave. At that point in time, neither of them have any access to the inheritance in any way.

Under the Law we were under bondage – in two ways. First, we were under the bondage of sin, and secondly we were under the bondage of the Law. It kept us under its protective custodianship (3:23). It was our guardian, *until such a time as we reached maturity* – the time when the Messiah was to come and give us the inheritance that has been ours all along.

Even although we were heirs of God all along (if we had faith in Him), under the Law we were really under bondage – so now that we have received the inheritance (by being christians), why would we want to go back to being “slaves” *under the control of the guardian* again? And that is *exactly* the consequence of conforming to the Law again after we have been freed from it.

What does the Law say about itself?

Paul presents the law as an allegory – a strange quirk of a parallel example that has an exact fulfilment.

The Jews kept coming back to their heritage as the children of Abraham. So Paul reminds them of the fact that Abraham had two sons:

- The first son was Ishmail, (by Hagar, who was Sarah’s hand maiden).
- The second was Isaac, by Sarah.

These two women represent the two covenants. Hagar represents the Law of Moses, and Sarah represents the gospel of Christ. Hagar represents Mt Sinai, where the Law was given, and Sarah represents Jerusalem from where the gospel was sent out.

Hagar was a bondwoman. But Sarah was a freewoman. And the two Laws are in exactly the same likeness. The Law of Moses represents bondage. Those under the Law were bound by its ordinances and the fact that it was incapable of delivering freedom from Sin.

Paul brings home the final nail. The allegorical prophecy of scripture, (Gen 21:8-13). Sarah demanded that Hagar and her son Ishmail be thrown out of the house, and that they would never share in the inheritance with Isaac. The implication is that the Law of Moses was to be thrown out, and that it would never share with the inheritance that we have from being “*in Christ*”.

What are the consequences of keeping the Law?

Paul says “...*you who are seeking to be justified by the Law...*” (5:4) And that is really the heart of the issue. The Jewish christians were *keeping* the Law (as a National issue), but there were not seeking *justification* by the Law, but the Judaisers wanted to bind the Law of Moses on the Gentiles – the seek justification through the Law of Moses!

The consequences are that:

- *They have become estranged from Christ,*
- *They have fallen from Grace,*

If we are christians, then it doesn’t matter the slightest if we are Gentiles or Jews, whether we are masters or slaves, or even if we are Aussies or Kiwi’s!!! What matters, is that we are *in Christ*.

Paul’s clear expectation *with confidence* is that they will *have no other view* other than what he himself has written to them about. His clear expectation is that they will return to the Lord.

The *state of the Galatians* is interesting to observe. Paul has told them that they *have fallen from grace* (5:4), and they *have become estranged from Christ*. Paul’s expectation is that they *will return*. They need to turn back – to repent. They cannot remain where they are and still have a right relationship with God. Their seeking justification through the Law has been to turn their back on God – even though the Jews worship the true and living God, His eternal purpose was to have salvation through Jesus and only through Jesus. Jesus was God’s way, and the Jewish Law was only a step along that path. To abandon Christ and go back to the Law is to abandon God.

How does the Spiritual life contrast with the Fleshly life?

There must have been a specific problem with the brethren in Galatia – they were biting and devouring one another. The verses on the fruit of the Spirit do not relate exactly to the major issue of salvation by keeping the Law of Moses rather than the keeping of the Law of Christ – but Paul is about to address the *consequence* of that issue (the Law issue).

A problem had come up within the church(es), and **how** the brethren had reacted to it resulted in factions and infighting, causing division amongst the brethren, fighting, backbiting, and devouring of one another. They needed to be focussed on Spiritual things, not on fleshly things, and so Paul gives a clear division and differentiation between the two types of behaviours.

If we think that our freedom in Christ (freedom from the Law of Moses) gives us license to sin, then we need to think again. Sin is contrary to the gospel of Christ, and comes from the lusts of the flesh – our failure to control our bodies and our desires.

Paul does not say the *fruitS* of the Spirit, but the *fruit* of the Spirit. It is what develops in us because we have the (Holy) Spirit dwelling in us. Because we are Christ's, we need to walk in a way that is appropriate. We mustn't *say* that we are Christ's if we do not show the *characteristics* that go with it – all that is doing is just putting on a false show. Our Spiritual characteristics will show what we are truly like.

That doesn't mean that we don't sin. But it does mean that we try to live the way that God wants us to. Paul admonishes them not to become conceited, nor provoke one another, nor envy one another. It has a direct application to the Galatian situation. Some of the fleshly characteristics would be obnoxious to almost anyone (murder, drunkenness, adultery (and idolatry would be to the Jews)). But Paul puts a whole lot of other sins equally on the list with them – envy, jealousy, outbursts of anger etc. So, even although the Galatians might not be committing the “*horrific sins*” , what they were doing was just as bad as if they were!

The conclusion

In his usual style, Paul concludes the main part of the letter, but still continues to emphasise his teaching in the conclusion. He has provided quite a positive slant – that they need to work together and not be conceited.

A synopsis of Paul's conclusion is:

- The Judaisers are trying to make a good showing – but it is fleshly [Remember what he has said about the works of the flesh]
- The reason that they are compelling you to be circumcised is so that they might escape the persecution from the Jews [Compare that with the things that Paul suffered because of the cross – and many of them amongst the Galatians!].
- The Judaisers compel you to be circumcised, yet they do not keep the Law themselves [Because no-one could keep it, except the Lord].
- They just want to glory (to the Jews) about you [But Paul says that I do not glory in anything except the cross of Christ – vs 14].
- I have totally set my self apart from the world – it has been crucified to me, and I to it [compare 2:20].
- It doesn't matter whether we have been crucified or not – what matters is whether we belong to Christ [He has dealt with this in detail in chapters 3 and 4, and parts of 5].
- When we walk the way that God wants us to, Paul wants us to have the peace and blessings of God – whether we are Gentiles, or even the Jews of Israel.