



GALATIANS: WEEK 1

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GALATIANS

WEEK 1: Paul's Calling and the Gospel

BOTTOM LINE: We can experience true freedom through a restored relationship with God.

Bible: Jesus gave His life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, to rescue us from this evil world in which we live. **Galatians 1:4 (NLT)**

INTRODUCTION

Galatians is one of the books in the New Testament.

However, we need to recognize that this is actually a letter that we are reading.

This letter was written around 49 A.D.

We think of letters today as emails or something sent through the postal service to someone.

But in the first century, this letter would have been written very carefully and intentionally and hand delivered.

This one specifically is written to "the churches in Galatia." (Galatians 1:2)

This would have included a group of churches in the region of Galatia and specifically in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

This is the area that now would be east of Greece off the Mediterranean Sea in the modern-day country of Turkey.

The very first line of this letter identifies the author as the Apostle Paul, a man who came from a very devoted Jewish background and lived a life devoted to Jesus after a radical encounter with him.

This letter may be old, written by someone you've heard of but never met, and written to people who lived in a very different part of the world than you.

However, if you would rather enjoy a life of freedom instead of being focused on following rules about what you should and should not do, this is the perfect letter for you to study right now.

LESSON

In our world today, you hear a lot about rights and freedoms, especially when some people's rules seem to limit or remove rights and freedoms from others.

This situation is not new in the world and, in fact, describes what was happening almost two thousand years ago when this letter was written by Paul.

Paul had already shared the Gospel, or "Good News," about Jesus with the people living in these cities, and they had accepted and responded to his message, being baptized and starting to live lives that looked more and more like Jesus.

As they did this together, they formed churches in their cities and grew together as a community in this new faith.

At some point after Paul left, some very legalistic Christians traveled to Galatia from Jerusalem.

These believers had converted to Christianity from Judaism.

That family history and their previous beliefs now shaped their extreme focus on the rules and regulations, especially the writings of Moses in the Old Testament.

They came telling the believers in these cities in Galatia that following Jesus was not enough.

They told them that they also needed to conform to the rules and regulations that had been passed on from Moses and amended by their Jewish ancestors over generations.

They were removing the freedom these believers had found in Jesus and replacing it with a system of "do's and don'ts" that were radically different from what Paul had shared with them.

Paul wrote this letter out of frustration with these Christians from Jerusalem, who were missing the point and requiring behaviors from these Galatian Christians that Paul did not believe were necessary.

He was also frustrated that these Galatian Christians were caving in to these legalistic expectations instead of following the truths Paul had taught them about Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you get more upset when people don't follow the rules or when there are rules only you have to follow?

Give an example and explain why this bothers you.

2. When you think about "freedom," what comes to mind?

What freedoms do you have that you would hate to lose?

3. The "Good News" about Jesus is that He paid the penalty and took the punishment we deserved for our sin.

Our "free" gift of mercy and grace from Jesus is free to us but cost Him greatly.

How should this affect the importance we place on that gift of freedom?

Read Galatians 1:1-10 - Be a servant of God, not of man.

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle. I was not appointed by any group of people or any human authority, but by Jesus Christ himself and by God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.

2 All the brothers and sisters here join me in sending this letter to the churches of Galatia.

3 May God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. 4 Jesus gave his life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, to rescue us from this evil world in which we live. 5 All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.

6 I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News 7 but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ.

8 Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. 9 I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed.

10 Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant.

As Paul opens this letter, he begins by pointing out that his authority is from Jesus directly, not from any group of people.

He also points out that this letter is from the extended family of believers, so it is not just coming from Paul but from fellow believers at other churches.

Verses 3-4 point out the "Good News" one or two sentences.

We deserved to be punished for our sins, to be separated from God forever.

We don't get that punishment.

The word that summarizes not getting the punishment you deserve is "mercy."

Paul even uses it in verse 6: "the loving *mercy* of Christ."

When Jesus was crucified, He rescued us by dying in our place.

Because of His selfless sacrifice, we are offered the gift of forgiveness for our sins and the Holy Spirit lives inside of us when we become believers.

This act of getting a gift we definitely do not deserve is referred to as "grace."

Some people have even turned it into an acronym. The letters remind us of the definition: God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

This mercy and grace from God, through Jesus, is central to the Good News and so important that Paul actually asks for God to curse anyone who preaches something different and tries to call it the "Good News."

He is calling out these Christians from Jerusalem who had come to Galatia and changed the message of grace from being a gift from God to being some kind of agreement that required a bunch of rule-following.

This is is ironic and frustrating because the very reason Jesus had to die is that following the rules alone only pointed out how consistently God's people failed to obey and how much they needed His forgiveness!

And Paul isn't worried if they hear his message. He doesn't care if they are upset that he called them out.

In verse 10, he points out that his focus, as ours should be, is on pleasing God as we serve Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. How does it make you feel when you think about the fact that Jesus had to suffer and die because of the sins—the disobedience—of you and me and that His suffering replaced our punishment?
2. We like receiving gifts on our birthdays or Christmas. How does it make you feel when you realize that this Good News—this gift of Jesus—is offered freely to us, even though we don't deserve it?
3. In today's world, how can we find ourselves getting more caught up in making people happy than pleasing God?

What does that look like in your everyday life? (real examples preferred, but you can also talk about hypothetical situations)

Read Galatians 1:11-24 - The Gospel which Paul preaches is from God, not from man.

***11** Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. **12** I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ.*

***13** You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion—how I violently persecuted God's church. I did my best to destroy it. **14** I was far ahead of my fellow Jews in my zeal for the traditions of my ancestors.*

***15** But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace. Then it pleased him **16** to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles.*

When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being.

***17** Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. Instead, I went away into Arabia, and later I returned to the city of Damascus.*

***18** Then three years later I went to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. **19** The only other apostle I met at that time was James, the Lord's brother. **20** I declare before God that what I am writing to you is not a lie.*

***21** After that visit I went north into the provinces of Syria and Cilicia. **22** And still the churches in Christ that are in Judea didn't know me personally.*

23 All they knew was that people were saying, "The one who used to persecute us is now preaching the very faith he tried to destroy!" 24 And they praised God because of me.

In verses 11-12, Paul is reaffirming his authority with a unique declaration that very few people in history can honestly claim.

The Good News he is sharing came directly from Jesus, not any other human teacher!

Then, in the next two verses, Paul explains the common ground he has with these Christians from Jerusalem—he, too, was a Jew before meeting Jesus.

Paul explains that, not only was he a Jew, but he was so passionate about God and the Jewish faith, that he aggressively and violently sought out people who were following Jesus to have them persecuted, arrested, and—sometimes—killed.

He was trying his best to destroy what he saw as a new religion that was working against all that Moses and his ancestors had worked so hard to build—generations of traditions, rules, and regulations.

Even though this was his background, Paul did not seek out anyone to verify or help shape his belief in Jesus because he had actually met Jesus on the Damascus road and had heard this Good News directly from him.

He eventually met with the Apostles, Peter and James, but that was over three years after deciding to follow Jesus himself!

In a moment of transparency, Paul shares that he was not just making up how passionate he had been as a Jewish leader.

His reputation confirmed what he was saying and shocked people who heard that he was now following Jesus.

He closes this section by sharing how his life story was so crazy that people were praising God—giving Him all the credit.

No one but God could have made such a radical change in someone's life!

Paul who went from persecutor of Christians to preacher helping people follow Jesus and start churches! Only God could make that kind of change!

Discussion Questions

1. What difference does it make when you hear a story from someone who was a first-hand witness vs. when someone heard it from someone else or saw it online or on social media?

How does that compare to what Paul is saying about getting his Good News directly from Jesus?

2. Think about two teams that are big rivals.

How hard would it be to believe that a fan of one team had become a fan of that team's rival?

Would something like that make the news or trend on social media?

Discuss what the news reports or social media posts would say about Paul's change from a Jewish persecutor of Christians to a preacher sharing the Good News about Jesus and starting churches.

3. On a piece of paper or index card, write down the name of someone in your family, school, or community who most people (including you) think would never follow Jesus.

Share a little of their story with the group.

Then, as a group, pray for these people by name, keeping in mind that the same God who transformed Paul's life is the same God who is listening to your prayers today and ready to act upon them.