



**FOUNDATIONS
OF FAITH**

The Message of the Bible

Week 30: Galatians

The Structure of Galatians

Prologue 1:1–10	Defense of and Explanation of Paul’s Gospel 1:11–6:10	Epilogue 6:11–18
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The Teaching of Galatians

The Prologue (1:1–10)

1. In the very first verse, Paul begins to show the authority by which he is writing.
2. Paul addresses his letter to the *churches* of Galatia. Acts 13–14 records the founding of these churches (cf. 16:6; 18:23 – subsequent visits).
3. The issue with which the rest of the book will deal is found in vv. 6–10: There were some who were preaching a different Gospel than that which Paul had preached, and the Galatians were falling victim.

Paul’s Defense/Vindication of His Ministry (1:11–2:21)

1. Paul’s Gospel was authoritative because he received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ (1:11–12).
2. In defending his ministry, Paul shows that after he received Christ, he did not go up to Jerusalem to consult with (learn from) the Apostles (1:15–17).
3. Paul did later go to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter, and at the same time he met James (1:18).
4. Fourteen years later, Paul returned to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. After making known the message they preached to the Gentiles, the “pillars” (James, Peter, and John) gave them “the right hand of fellowship” (2:9). That is, they agreed with the contents of Paul’s message to the Gentiles.
5. However, some time later in Antioch, Paul had to confront Peter for his hypocrisy with respect to the Gentiles (2:11–14).
6. Galatians 2:15–21 may or may not be a direct quote from Paul to Peter. Either way, it is Paul’s point:
 - a. Jews, yes, and not sinners like the Gentiles.

- b. Yet, works of the Law do not bring justification; only faith in Christ Jesus brings justification.
 - c. Even Jews had to believe in Christ; their works did not suffice.
 - d. Christ cannot be blamed for their actions that caused them to break some point of the Law (2:17).
 - e. If, then, Paul's gospel required a return to what faith in Christ destroyed, he became a transgressor, because life for Paul came only through death to the Law.
 - f. As a result, faith in the Son of God brought (and continues to bring) life (2:20).
7. The situation with Peter was a perfect analogy to what was happening in the Galatian churches.

Explanation of the Gospel (3–4)

1. Paul begins his dealing directly with the issue in the Galatian churches with several rhetorical questions. His point is simple: The Holy Spirit was not received through works of the Law but by virtue of faith (3:1–6).
2. Paul appeals to Abraham to make two important points:
 - a. As with Abraham, righteousness comes by faith (3:6; cf. Gen 3:15).
 - b. Believing Gentiles find blessing in Abraham (3:8–9; cf. Gen 12:3).
3. Using pertinent Old Testament passages, Paul builds a logical case for his readers:
 - a. Being under the Law brings cursing, because no one is able to maintain it perfectly (see Deut 27:26).
 - b. No one is justified by the Law; righteousness is by faith (see Habakkuk 2:4).
 - c. The Law is not of faith; practicing the Law requires strict conformity (see Lev 18:5).
 - d. Christ became a curse to redeem those under the curse of the Law (see Deut 21:23).
4. The work of Christ brings the blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Spirit to those who believe.
5. On the one hand, Paul argues that Christ is the proper object of the promises made to Abraham in that Genesis talks to Abraham's "seed."
6. On the other hand, he makes the point that the promises made to Abraham before the Law were not invalidated by the Law (3:15–18). This would naturally leave the typical Jew wondering why the Law came in the first place.
7. The purpose of the Law was not to impart life. As a result of the sin of those at Sinai, the Law came so that they might be protected "until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made" (3:19).
8. For the Jew, the Law provided a tutor that led to Christ and to justification. But as Paul argues, "now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (3:25).
9. As such, all of those who find themselves in Christ are no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. Faith has brought unity *in Christ*. And being in Christ now identifies us with Christ as Abraham's *seed*.

10. This identity of the believer as a fellow heir comes by virtue of redemption and adoption (vv. 4–5).
11. Why, then, would anyone who had been set free from something willingly return to what had enslaved them? (4:8–11). Paul can hardly fathom these things (4:12–20).
12. In order to solidify what he has been arguing, Paul draws an allegory from the life of Abraham. The conclusion is found in 4:31.

Hagar	Sarah
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bondwoman • Son born according to flesh • Mount Sinai • Present Jerusalem in slavery • Children of flesh persecute children of promise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free woman • Son (Isaac) born through the promise • Jerusalem above free • Believers, like Isaac, are children of promise

Implications of the Gospel (5:1–6:10)

1. Faith in Christ has resulted in a profound freedom from obligation to find justification in the Law. “For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness” (5:5).
2. Paul expressed (1) his disdain for those who deceive the church by distorting the Gospel and (2) his confidence that those who he was writing to would not adopt a contrary view of the Gospel (5:7–12).
3. Although faith brings freedom, Paul warns that freedom does not mean that the intent of the Law was to be ignored. Rather, believers love and serve one another (5:13–15).
4. Faith brings freedom from human conformity to the Law. However, true believers “walk by the Spirit,” as the Spirit inevitably produces its fruit (vv. 16, 22–23). This process is led by the Spirit and pursued by those who belong to Christ (vv. 18, 24).
5. Thus, the implication of Paul’s Gospel is that those who are in Christ love one another because they both live and walk by the Spirit (5:25). The opposite of this is to live by the flesh and its desires.
6. Since those who are free and are producing spiritual fruit have a fervent love for one another, they will have a mutual concern for one another (6:1–5). This includes restoring those who are in sin (like Paul with Peter, for example).
7. Paul summarizes many of these things in 6:8: “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” He cannot mean that our salvation is based upon whether or not *we* produce the fruits of 5:22–23. This would be in contradiction with the rest of the letter. Paul intends to make clear the following general principle: Faith in Christ inevitably results in spiritual life and fruit.

Epilogue (6:11–18)

1. Paul, writing with his own hand at this point, summarizes his letter.
2. Some wanted to boast in their outward conformity to the Law, even though they failed to keep the Law

3. In contrast, Paul wanted to boast only “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14).

The Purpose of Galatians

Paul declared and defended the Gospel of justification by faith alone and the implications of the Gospel for the Galatian believers.

Paul’s purpose in writing, then, is both specific and broad. It is specific in its insistence that to accept altered views of the apostolic message about Jesus Christ is to nullify the whole Christian life. It is broad in the range of arguments Paul musters and in the applications to faith and life he makes.¹

How should I respond?

¹ Elwell & Yarbrough, 298.