

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

The Gospel of Freedom

Introduction

We are beginning a series of 8 talks on the letter to the Galatians. The aim is to help us see the centrality of the person of the Holy Spirit as he leads and empowers us to live the new life of the Kingdom. Also we will expose the pressures and the temptations of the powers of darkness to cause us to fall back into religion.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

(Galatians 5:1)

1. An Overview of the Letter The Birth of the Church in Galatia

So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.

(Acts 14:3-4)

2. The reason for the letter to the Galatians.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

(Galatians 1: 6-7)

3. How is the Gospel being perverted?

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

(Galatians 5:2-4)

4. Why is there pressure to be circumcised?

v4: “trying to be justified by the law “
“you who by Torah are being righteous”

- A group within the newly emerging Church in the Middle East are pressurizing new believers into getting circumcised and teaching them that unless the new Christians keep the Jewish customs and laws then they cannot please God and will not continue to live a life that pleases God.
- In contrast, Paul’s Gospel, which came by revelation (a significant theme in Galatians) is that we are saved by faith alone and that we continue in this new life with Christ through the indwelling presence of the power of the Holy Spirit. All external rules, customs, laws are therefore abolished because the indwelling Spirit gives us the desired yearning and power to please God.
- Another facet to this is that “obeying Torah” would identify you as “Jewish” and therefore part of the people of God. The pressure to conform to a standard way of living life.

- Paul's warning in this letter is very stern - that to rely on customs, laws and circumcision to keep walking with Christ is in fact disaster.

He calls it being enslaved (Ch 4:9), being burdened (Ch 5:1), falling from grace (Ch 5:4), being alienated from Christ (Ch 5:4).

5. An Aerial Supernatural View

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.
(Galatians 3:1)

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? Consider Abraham: He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.
(Galatians 3:3-6)

So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.
(Galatians 4:3)
(Gordon Fee translation)

The Greek work Stoicheia is translated as elemental spiritual forces or foundational demons.

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Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist. So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world? You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years. I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing. (Galatians 4:8-11)

- Fallen man and the foundational spiritual powers of the world system work in agreement to cause humans to rely primarily on human effort to attain our goals (see Genesis 3:17-19). This mindset manifests very clearly in religious customs, laws and observances, but deeply fails to enable us to live in the power and life of the Spirit.
- This contrasts radically to the life of faith/trust/reliance on the person of Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

6. CONCLUSION

The letter to the Galatians reveals the schemes of the spiritual forces of evil and how the fallen human mind comes into agreement with them to pervert the true freedom and power and simplicity of the gospel of Christ. Salvation by faith alone and a reliance and dependence on the Holy Spirit to live out the new Kingdom life is the only way to serve God and extend the Kingdom with true love and power.