

Galatians

The Epistle to the Galatians has been called “the character of Christian liberty.” It is Paul’s manifesto of justification by faith and the liberty it produces. Paul directs this great charter of Christian freedom to a people who are willing to give up the priceless liberty they possess in Christ. Certain Jewish legalists are influencing the followers of Jesus in Galatia to trade their freedom in Christ for bondage to the Law. Paul writes to refute their false gospel of works and to demonstrate the superiority of justification by faith.

INTRODUCTION

The Galatians, having launched their Christian experience by faith, seem content to leave their voyage of faith and chart a new course based on works. Paul finds this disturbing and writes a vigorous attack against this gospel of works and a defense of the gospel of faith.

Paul begins by stating his credentials as an apostle with a message from God. The message is simple, blessings come from God on the basis of faith, not law. The law declares men guilty and imprisons them; faith sets men free to enjoy liberty in Christ. Liberty is not a license. Freedom in Christ means freedom to produce the fruits of righteousness through a Spirit-led lifestyle.

AUTHOR

The Pauline authorship and the unity of this epistle are virtually unchallenged. The first verse clearly identifies the author as “Paul, an apostle.” Also in chapter 5 verse 2 we read, “Look: I, Paul, say to you.” In fact, Paul actually wrote Galatians (6:11) instead of dictating it, as was his usual practice.

The book is called *Pros Galatas*, “To the Galatians.” It is the only letter of Paul that is specifically addressed to a number of churches (“To the churches of Galatia in 1:2).

DATE & SETTING

The name Galatians was given to this Celtic people because they originally lived in Gaul before migrating to Asia Minor. The term Galatia was used in an ethnographic sense (that is cultural and geographic origin) and in a political sense. The original ethnographic sense refers to the central part of Asia Minor where these Celtic tribes eventually settled after their conflicts with the Romans and Macedonians. Later in 189 B.C. Galatia came under Roman domination, and in 25 B.C. Augustus declared it a Roman province. The political or provincial Galatia included territory to the south that was not originally considered part of Galatia (e.g., the cities of Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe).

Paul most likely wrote this epistle around A.D. 49 in response to a report that the Galatian churches were suddenly taken over by the false teaching of certain Judaizers who professed Jesus yet sought to place gentile converts under the requirements of the Mosaic Law (1:7; 4:17, 21; 5:2-12; 6:12-13).