

Galatians

Freed by Christ To Follow the Spirit

Galatians 1:1-7: "Setting the Stage"

Key Truth

When anything is added to the Gospel, it will have devastating results.

The first verses of Galatians will begin to set the stage, or context, for what the whole letter is about. A cursory look at verses 1-7 will introduce us to the primary **People** as well as the primary **Problem**. If we keep these in mind through the duration of our study we will be sure to handle and apply God's word accurately.

The Author: Paul the Apostle(1:1): There is much confusion even today as to what exactly an "Apostle" was. The term Apostle, meant "one who is sent", however, it is clear in the New Testament, that the term Apostle was not simply any messenger of Jesus, but rather was someone who had personally seen *the risen Jesus* and had been commissioned by the risen Jesus to take His message into the world. Turning our attention to Paul, we may remember that he did not receive his apostleship by the "normal" means of selection used for the other Apostles. (Luke 6:12-16) During his ministry, Jesus hand selected 12 to be apostles out of his large following of disciples. Of these 12, Judas fell away, and was replaced by a man named Matthias after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:21-26). No such selection for Paul. Paul, or Saul, you may remember, had grown up a practicing Jewish Pharisee, and had made it his life's mission to put a stop to this heretical sect called "The Way" aka Christianity. He oversaw and approved of the murder of the Deacon Stephen (Acts 7:58), he personally began ravaging the church, dragging believers out of their homes and throwing them into prison. (Acts 8:1-3) Needless to say, he was not the top candidate for being an Apostle of Jesus. But God in His sovereignty and wisdom had other plans in mind for Saul. You can read about his encounter with the risen Jesus in Acts 9:1-18. It is here that Paul was selected as an Apostle, and given the message and authority to represent Jesus to the world. A task which he went about with great fervor and passion. He devoted his life to traveling and speaking the truth about Jesus, and establishing churches wherever he would find a response of faith. The churches formed in the region of Galatia were some of the first Christian churches on earth! (Acts 13-14) Let's turn our attention to the Galatian believers.

The Recipient: The Galatian Christians: (1:3) These were primarily Gentiles in the Galatian region, who had responded with faith to the Gospel preached by Paul on his journeys. A Gospel that declares, "yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16) As groups of people responded to this Gospel, they grouped together in the towns and cities to form "churches". In a dark and oppressive world, they were thrilled to be part of God's family and have God as their true king and rescuer! They were experiencing the forgiveness of sins, they were being welcomed into homes of Jewish christians and sharing meals with them! Formerly this would have never been acceptable for the Jews! What a wonderful, blossoming and inclusive family of God! But they were young fledgling believers, lacking deep foundations of faith and knowledge. Paul was not able to stay in one place for very long, as he would often get run out of town, or snuck out of town for his own

protection. So these believers were young, but devoted to growing and studying the scriptures together. Enter the “Agitators”

The Agitators (1:6-7) These agitators were Jewish leaders, experts, who had come into the area behind Paul to set the record straight. They were the source of the primary **Problem** Paul deals with in Galatians. They were doing a number of things that were shredding at the core of what had brought these new believers together. They were attacking the credibility of Paul. Bringing into question his authority and apostleship. But worse than that, they were tearing the very foundation out of the Gospel itself. They were imposing the requirements of the Jewish law upon these young believers, making the claim that if they really wanted to be part of God’s family, then they needed to follow God’s laws regarding the Jewish holidays, food laws, and of utmost necessity was the practice of circumcision. They were teaching that unless these gentile believers receive circumcision, and come under the Mosaic Law, that they could never be part of God’s family. The worst part is that these young believers were being convinced and led astray by this deceptive teaching! This false gospel. (1:6) This teaching was not only putting an extra requirement on the Gentile believers, but it was rekindling the old divisive thinking that the believing Jews had been freed from, namely, that they were God’s chosen people, and anyone who wasn’t a Jew, was unclean and not to be associated with, much less share a meal with! So the believing Jews were beginning to cut fellowship with the Gentiles out of fear of these “experts”. We see this very attitude briefly taking hold of the Apostle Peter in a story that Paul tells the Galatians (2:11-14)

While in Antioch. Paul gets a first hand experience of how powerful and devastating this teaching is to the true Gospel and family of God (Acts 14:24-15:21) He then finds out that this teaching has begun to spread across the region of Galatia, and quickly composes this letter to put a stop to it. He then travels down into Jerusalem, the hub of Christianity and Judaism, to have a debate among the religious leaders about this very issue (Acts 15:1-35). Here we see the truth of God Grace victorious. As we will see through this letter, Paul is seriously concerned for the believers of Galatia and that the true Gospel of “Grace through Faith” is preserved. So that the full family of God, made up of Jew and Gentile alike, would be Freed by Christ to Follow the Spirit.