

Introduction to Galatians”  
Galatians  
(Preached at Trinity, May 20, 2012)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been violated please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction.

1. I always begin a new series of sermons with a sense of excitement. This Book of the Bible will consume many hours of my life over the months it will take to cover the book. I have been praying that God will use it to enrich my life so that through the Spirit of God my preaching might be used to enrich your lives.  
This is the nature of preaching. It must first grip my heart before I can preach it with passion. And then the Holy Spirit must press it upon your hearts.  
All of this demands much prayer – both from me and from you.
2. Entering this book on the heels of our 5 ½ year journey through Romans has some benefits. There are some similarities between the two books. Paul’s defense of justification by faith alone remains unwavering. Romans was written somewhere between A.D. 55-58 but Galatians was written earlier. It provides for us a clear understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - A. The central theme of Galatians is the question of how we are accepted by God.
  - B. But there are numerous other topics such as:  
Union with Christ, liberty in Christ, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit, the demands of Christian living.
3. The Book of Galatians is truly unique. It may be the oldest of the Pauline letters. It is also key to understanding the theology of Paul. In fact, as Richard Longenecker writes in the *Word Biblical Commentary*:  
*“It is necessary to understand Galatians aright if we are to understand Paul and the rest of the NT aright. How one understands the issues and teaching of Galatians determines in large measure what kind of theology is espoused, what kind of message is proclaimed, and what kind of lifestyle is practiced.”*
4. The Book of Galatians had a major influence on the Reformation. Erasmus wrote on this Book. Calvin wrote a commentary on it. But the most influential was Luther’s commentary.  
Luther wrote: “The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am, as it were, in wedlock. Galatians is my Katherine.”  
Many believe that his commentary on Galatians formed the foundation of the Reformation. Paul’s teaching in Galatians that salvation is by grace alone became the dominant theme of Reformation preaching.
5. This morning I want to introduce this great book of the Bible. We’ll look at some important issues that we need to clarify so that we’ll have a proper foundation to begin this book. You may think such details are unimportant, but we are dealing with the Word of God. It is of infinite importance.  
I also want to step aside for a few moments this morning to look at the author of this book. The Apostle Paul is an amazing man. He was a fierce contender for the Gospel, but a man full of passion for Christ and love for His people.

- 6 The Book of Galatians was a letter written by Paul to the churches in Galatia.  
**Galatians 1:2 NAU** - "To the churches of Galatia"  
 The name Galatia was given to the large region in central Asia Minor which is modern Turkey. In Paul's day the name Galatia was also used to describe a smaller region within the larger province.
- A. There is debate as to whether Paul was writing to the churches of the larger region of northern Galatia or the churches of the smaller region of southern Galatia.
  - B. It is a very difficult debate but one of importance since it affects the date of the letter and it affects how we interpret certain passages in Acts.
  - C. The most widely accepted historical position is that Paul is writing to the larger Northern region of Galatia. The main problem with this view is none of the churches in northern Asia Minor are mentioned elsewhere in the NT.
7. Beginning around the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a theory began to circulate that Paul was writing to a smaller southern Roman province also referred to as Galatia. It would seem that this southern theory carries much weight.
- A. Paul is writing to churches that he had formed. He speaks of his great labor for them.  
**Galatians 4:11 NAU** - "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."  
**Galatians 4:19 NAU** - "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you--"
  - B. According to **Acts 13-14**, early in his ministry Paul established four churches in the southern part of the province in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.  
 Barnabas was his companion during his first missionary journey. Barnabas is mentioned three times in Galatians.  
 This would have taken place before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 which took place in A.D. 49.
  - C. One of the great issues Paul is dealing with in Galatians is the proper application of the law. Some over zealous Jews were insisting that obedience to certain Jewish laws must be added to the Gospel. These things were clearly addressed in the Jerusalem Council, but Paul doesn't mention the Jerusalem council by name in Galatians. This would have provided a strong argument for Paul against the legalism sweeping through the Galatian churches.
  - D. This suggests that this letter was written before the Jerusalem Council which was just after Paul's first missionary journey. If this is true then Galatians was probably written sometime around A.D. 49-50.
  - E. It was on Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey that he and Silas visited the Galatian churches delivering the decree of the Jerusalem Council  
**Acts 16:4-5 NAU** - "Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. <sup>5</sup> So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily."
  - F. All of this tells us that Galatians is one of the earliest books of the Pauline epistles.

8. All of the letters of Paul were public rather than private letters. They were written to churches and were meant to be read publically. Even the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus were meant to be publically read for the edification of the churches over which they were leaders.
9. But although they are public letters they all have a certain warmth to them.  
**1 Corinthians 1:4-8 NAU** - "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge"  
**Philippians 1:3-5 NAU** - " I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, <sup>5</sup> in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now."  
**1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 NAU** - "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of *you* in our prayers; <sup>3</sup> constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,"
10. The letters of Paul all have a certain warmth about them . . . except one.  
 A. While Paul's other letters begin with a salutation followed by words of blessing and encouragement this letter gets straight to the point—harsh words of rebuke.  
**Galatians 1:6 NAU** - " I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;"  
 B. Paul speaks with harsh words:  
**Galatians 3:1 NAU** - "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you"
11. In Galatians Paul is fighting false doctrine. Jewish leaders were seeking to make the observance of the Jewish ceremonial laws an essential part of the Gospel. Basically, in order for a Gentile to be saved he had to first become a Jew. In order to gain acceptance, these so called Judaizers were also calling into question the legitimacy of Paul's apostleship. Paul responds with fierce determination to protect the integrity of the Gospel.
12. As we begin our journey into Paul's letter to the Galatians I want us to pay close attention to Paul's heart towards these Galatian churches. Our own hearts should follow this pattern.
- I. The first thing we need to observe is Paul's heart of love for people.  
 A. He desired to see men brought to Christ and was willing to face whatever hardship necessary  
 1. When Paul arrived in Galatia he faced severe opposition. His life was constantly in danger. Remember, the southern Galatian cities included Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe and Paul suffered in them all.  
 2. In Antioch they were expelled from the city.  
**Acts 13:50 NAS** - "But the Jews aroused the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district."  
 3. In Lystra Paul was actually stoned so severely they thought he was dead.  
**Acts 14:19 NAS** - "But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead."

4. The next day after the stoning Paul and Barnabas traveled on to Derbe. After preaching the Gospel at Derbe we find they did an unusual thing. They returned to the very cities where they had been persecuted so sorely. **Acts 14:20-22 NAS** - "the next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. <sup>21</sup> And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
  5. Paul had this great love for the lost and he felt compelled with the Gospel **1 Corinthians 9:16-17 NAU** - "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. <sup>17</sup> For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me."
- B. Paul's love was most demonstrated with regard to other Christians
1. He treated them with patience and love  
Even in the harshness of this letter there is an overtone of love  
**Galatians 4:11-12 NAU** - "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. <sup>12</sup> I beg of you, brethren, become as I *am*, for I also *have become* as you *are*. You have done me no wrong;"
  2. You can sense Paul's displeasure at having to speak so firmly to them  
**Galatians 4:19-20 NAU** - "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you-- <sup>20</sup> but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."
- C. We need to demonstrate such love
1. Often we tend to dismiss other Christians particularly those we disagree with.
  2. We can even be guilty of treating them as our enemies.
  3. We must never forget that they are the beloved bride of Christ. We are all united to Christ. We must love them as Christ loves them.
  4. We must have a sincere interest in their edification
    - a. Paul's consuming desire was for his fellow Christians to grow in grace – to press on to completion.  
**2 Corinthians 13:9 NAU** - "For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete."  
**2 Corinthians 13:11 NAU** - "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."
    - b. Paul wanted every Christian to be presented to Christ as faithful virgins.  
**2 Corinthians 11:2 NAU** - "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin."
  5. May God protect us from hearts of segregation; hearts of jealousy or envy. May He protect us from a competitive spirit. We are laboring for the same thing.  
**Philippians 1:18 KJV** - "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

- II. The other thing we need to observe is Paul's unwavering heart for the Gospel
- A. Paul never allowed his personal inconvenience or suffering to hinder his faithfulness to the Gospel
1. The cross of Christ will always be offensive to the lost
    - a. One of the reasons the Galatian churches were allowing a different gospel was to soften its offensiveness and thus avoid persecution – particularly by those of the Jewish faith.  
**Galatians 6:12 NAS** - "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ."
    - b. Most of the persecution of Christians in South Galatia was instigated by the Jews – it probably only intensified after Paul left.  
**Acts 13:50 NAS** - "But the Jews aroused the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district."
  2. Christians have always suffered much for the Gospel's sake
    - a. Paul was opposed by men of all sorts.  
**2 Corinthians 11:26 NAS** - "dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;"
    - b. But he never softened the Gospel  
**2 Corinthians 4:2 NAS** - "but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."
  3. It would seem that these Galatian Christians were also suffering persecution and were being tempted to compromise just enough to soften the offense of the Gospel.
- B. We must never fear to risk friendships or popularity  
**Galatians 4:16 NAU** - "So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?"
1. We must speak the truth, always in love  
**Ephesians 4:15 NAS** - "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ,"
  2. The Gospel continues to be despised today. We must never give in to the temptation to make it more appealing.
  3. Love for the lost and love for the brethren does not necessarily mean the same thing as love of their approval. Love demands speaking the truth. The Word of God must never be compromised.
  4. Paul even rebuked Peter for a spirit of compromise.  
**Galatians 2:11 NAS** - "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned."

Conclusion:

1. So this is the pattern we will see in Galatians  
We'll see Paul's intense love for these churches and for the brethren.  
We'll also see Paul's unwavering commitment to the Gospel.
2. These two things are never in conflict.  
May this be our unwavering commitment: To love but to uphold God's truth no matter what.
3. In our modern age there is always pressure to compromise. May we stand firm unwavering upon the truths of the Gospel.