

1 Galatians: Who, What, Why and When?

Written by whom?

Universally accepted to have been written by Paul.

Written from where and when?

There is no certainty about where Paul was when he wrote this letter. Most modern commentators believe that he was writing to churches established by him in his early missionary period, in what is now southern Turkey. Most likely it was written between A.D. 49 and A.D. 58, between the times of an important meeting in Jerusalem and his imprisonment.

Written to whom?

Most likely written to the churches established by Paul on his first missionary journey.

Why was it written?

Paul had received word that the Galatian believers were on the point of leaving the faith they had previously received. Jewish teachers who were 'legalizers' had arrived from Jerusalem claiming to be from James, the Lord's brother. They had begun to teach that Paul was wrong in his doctrine. They were teaching that Gentiles had to obey the law of Moses to be saved, including being circumcised.

Paul knew immediately that if this was accepted, that grace and the cross would lose all meaning. This book addresses the accusations about Paul's authority, the place of grace in salvation, and the true basis for righteousness.

2 Galatians: Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. From whom did Paul receive his authority as an apostle? (vs. 1)
2. Why was Paul astonished by the Galatians? (vs. 6)
3. What did Paul say would happen to those who preached a different gospel? (vs. 9)
4. How did Paul receive the gospel he preached? (vs. 12)
5. Paul says, “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely _____ for the traditions of my fathers.” (vs. 14)
6. Why did God reveal his Son to Paul? (vs. 16)
7. Where did Paul go after this revelation? (vs. 17)
8. Who did Paul spend time with while he was in Jerusalem? (vs. 18)
9. What report was heard by the churches in Judea? (vs. 23)
10. How did the churches respond to this report? (vs. 24)

3 Galatians: Chapter 1 – Summary

Paul is addressing a serious problem for the churches 'in Galatia'. There were three issues: his authority as an apostle was being questioned, the doctrine of grace was under attack, and the promise of full deliverance from sin's power was faltering.

In this chapter, Paul first makes clear that his authority as an apostle had nothing to do with men or anything that Paul had been taught. Rather, he had been given his authority by God himself, through a revelation from Christ.

Paul was also amazed that his readers were so ready to give up the gospel as they had been taught it. He reminds them that this gospel is from Christ, and that no other gospel is to be accepted (no matter who teaches this other gospel).

Paul reminds them that he had been an extremely devout, extremely pious Jew. He was zealous about his faith. So only God could have changed his mind, and that is exactly what happened to him. In fact, Paul didn't even meet the other apostles for a very long time after his revelation.

Most of the church members only knew of him as someone who had formerly been a persecutor of the church, and was now a preacher of the faith.

4 Galatians: Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. The believers in Galatia were being confused by people who seemed to know what they were talking about. How can we avoid being confused about the gospel?
2. What is ‘the gospel’? In ten words or less, how would you describe it?
3. Paul believed that he had the right (and responsibility) to teach and correct believers when they were falling into error. Who has the right to correct you in your beliefs? What person (or persons) has authority over your beliefs?
4. What are the requirements for someone to be a messenger for God?

5 Galatians: Chapter 2 – Scripture Questions

1. Why did Paul go to Jerusalem, after 14 years away? (vs. 2a)
2. Why did Paul speak with the leaders privately? (vs. 2b)
3. How does Paul describe the motives of the false believers? (vs. 4)
4. What did the Jerusalem leaders think about Paul's message to the non-Jews (Gentiles)? (vs. 7)
5. What agreement did Paul and the apostles come to? What did they ask him to do? (vs. 9, 10)
6. Why did Paul confront Peter? (vs. 11)
7. What was Peter doing, according to Paul? (vs. 12, 13)
8. Why did Paul speak so sternly to Peter in front of the visiting Jews? (vs. 14)
9. How are we justified—set right with God? (vs. 16)
10. What accusation was Paul pushing back against? (vs. 17)
11. Paul says that he has been _____ with Christ, and that his life is lived by _____ in the Son of God. (vs. 20)
12. If we were able to have a righteous relationship with God by keeping rules, what would that mean about Christ's death? (vs. 21)

6 Galatians: Chapter 2 – Summary

In this chapter, Paul explains how he has the full backing of the apostles who actually lived with Jesus. He also explains a very important point of Christian doctrine: that we are not saved by keeping rules, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Fourteen years after his conversion, Paul goes to Jerusalem to have a meeting with the leaders of that church. He takes Barnabas and Titus with him. At this meeting, Paul explains the gospel that he has been preaching in Syria and Cilicia.

The reason Paul has to go through this is that there had been Jewish Christians infiltrating the churches he had established. These 'Judaizers' had been trying to convince the Gentile believers that they needed to be circumcised and follow the Old Testament Law in order to be saved. Paul emphatically denies this, and after discussion with the Jerusalem apostles they agree with him. They give him the 'right hand of fellowship' and ask him only to remember the poor.

Paul goes on to tell of his public rebuke of Peter, when that apostle backed away from eating and associating with Gentiles due to the presence of 'certain men' (Judaizers) that came from Jerusalem. Peter admitted his error, and Paul reaffirms that the Gentiles did not need to follow Jewish laws.

The most important point that Paul makes here is that we are justified by faith in Christ, not by observing the law. In fact, he says that if righteousness could be gained through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

7 Galatians: Chapter 2 – Application Questions

1. Even though Paul felt he was right, he traveled to Jerusalem to talk with the apostles. What do you think would have happened if he had not made this trip? How far should we go to make things right with believers who hold different viewpoints from us?
2. When Paul felt that Peter was wrong he confronted him publicly. Why was this okay? How can we know when we should confront other believers about their words or actions?
3. The people Paul was pushing back against believed that circumcision was required for salvation. What do you think our church believes is required for salvation? What do you, personally, believe is required for salvation?
4. Paul says that if it were possible to be righteous by following the law, then Christ died for nothing. Why do we seem to want to have lists of rules to follow? Is it possible for these lists to be helpful? How are lists dangerous?

8 Galatians: Chapter 3 – Scripture Questions

1. Paul practically shouts: 'Did you receive the Spirit by observing the _____, or by _____ what you heard?' (vs. 2)
2. Who are the children of Abraham? (vs. 7)
3. What happens to those who rely on observing the law? (vs. 10)
4. Is the law based on faith or performance? (vs. 12)
5. Jesus took the curse of the law (caused by the people's failure to live up to the law) on himself. 'He redeemed us in order that the _____ given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. (vs. 14)
6. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his 'seed'. Who is this? (vs. 16)
7. God gave the promises of inheritance to Abraham through a _____, not as a contract. (vs. 18)
8. What was the purpose of the law? (vs. 19)
9. If a law COULD exist that could give (eternal) life, then _____ would have certainly come by the law. (vs. 21)
10. Why was the law put in charge? (vs. 24)
11. How are we all equally children of God? (vs. 26)

9 Galatians: Chapter 3 – Summary

Paul begins this chapter by strongly rebuking the Galatians for letting go of the gospel they had learned. He clearly, repeatedly, asks them if they have received their salvation and the evidences of the Spirit and miracles by following the law or by their belief in what they heard.

Next, Paul reminds them that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith in Christ. This can be proved by remembering that Abraham was credited by God as being righteous, not because of laws or contracts but because Abraham believed in God and the promise that God gave to him about his future, and the future of Abraham's descendants.

If a person tries to guarantee their own salvation by following the law, they are doomed. If they COULD follow the law perfectly, they would be righteous. This is impossible. Only Christ did follow the law perfectly. However, he took the curse (the result of failing to follow the law) on himself so that we could be saved. Now, if we have faith, we can receive the promise of the Spirit.

In the next section, Paul goes through a complicated argument to show this:

1. The promises were given to Abraham and his seed.
2. This Seed is Christ.
3. The law, which came along 430 years later, doesn't affect these promises.
4. The law was put into place to show how impossible it is to live perfectly.
5. The law was to make people ready to have faith in Jesus.
6. The law was fulfilled by Jesus.
7. We are justified by faith in Jesus.
8. We are not under the supervision of the law.

10 Galatians: Chapter 3 – Application Questions

1. What does it mean to you, to ‘receive the Spirit’?
2. Paul seems to be making it pretty easy to be saved. All it took was faith, in his gospel. What kind of difference should this ‘faith’ make in the way people live?
3. Paul doesn’t say that the Law is bad, just that it can’t save people. In fact, he said it was good because it revealed sin. Do people need a way to reveal sin in themselves or others? Why or why not?
4. What does it mean to you, to be ‘justified by faith’? How would you explain it to someone who had never heard that term?

11 Galatians: Chapter 4 – Scripture Questions

1. How is a child, one who is heir to an estate, different from a slave? Why? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Paul says that those who lived under any religious system were living as children and slaves. Why is it different now? (vs. 4-7)
3. Why was Paul afraid that he had wasted his efforts on the Galatians? (vs. 8-10)
4. Remembering their original response to the gospel, Paul asks: “What has happened to all your _____? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your _____ and given them to me.” (vs. 15)
5. Why did the Judaizers, those who had come to influence the Galatian believers, work so hard to win them over? (vs. 17)
6. How was Ishmael, the son of Hagar, born? What does ‘ordinary way’ mean? (vs. 23)
7. How was Isaac, the son of Sarah, born? What does ‘result of a promise’ mean? (vs. 23)
8. Hagar = Law given on Mount Sinai = physical Jerusalem = _____ with her children. (vs. 25)
9. Sarah = Promise = Freedom = heavenly Jerusalem = children of _____. (vs. 28)
10. We are not children of the _____ woman, but the _____ woman. (vs. 31)

Galatians: Chapter 4

LAW	FAITH
Slave/child of household	Son/adult of household
Slaves to false gods	Heirs to God
Trust in rituals/achievements	Trust in Christ
Children of Hagar	Children of Sarah
Jerusalem enslaved	Jerusalem free
Children of slavery	Children of promise

13 Galatians: Chapter 4 – Summary

We are all children of God, because of our faith in Christ. This faith changes us, so that we are no longer defined by our race or gender or social status.

Before we accepted the gift of grace and salvation from Christ, we were under (essentially) slavery. Now that Christ has lived his perfect life and taken the sentence of death on himself, we are children and heirs of God. This adoption makes us free from the previous religious slavery.

Paul is very concerned for the Galatians. He worries because they are being influenced by the Jews from Jerusalem to take up rituals, following special days and regulations. It's not that they are zealous—zeal is a good thing. It is that they are giving up their freedom in Christ for the strangulation of the law, when the law is unable to save them.

Paul explains that the law is done. He uses the example of Hagar, Abraham's slave who bore him Ishmael. Ishmael was conceived in the usual way, through a sexual relationship between Abraham and Hagar. Isaac, on the other hand, was conceived by the intervention of God because Sarah was barren. So Hagar/Ishmael represent the Law and slavery to that Law. Sarah/Isaac represent the promise given to Abraham and independence/freedom from the Law.

Paul ends by emphasizing that we are not children of the slave woman (Law) but children of the free woman (Faith).

14 Galatians: Chapter 4 – Application Questions

1. Paul implies that people without Christ are like children, under the control of sin. How are the lives of 'children' different under the rule of sin than 'adults' under the rule of grace?
2. Paul is extremely clear that rituals, special days, achievements or even good works have no effect on our status as children and heirs to God. Do we, as a church, make some of these things more important than we should? How can we tell?
3. What does 'freedom' in Christ mean to you?
4. The 'slave woman and her son' represent laws and restrictions that substitute for faith. Do you have any of these in your life? For instance, do you feel that unless you come every Sunday and give 10%, you won't be saved? What are some laws or restrictions that people unnecessarily take on themselves?

15 Galatians: Chapter 5 – Scripture Questions

1. Why has Christ set us free? (vs. 1)
2. What happens if you choose legalism over grace? (vs. 2)
3. If legalism doesn't count towards righteousness, what does count? (vs. 6)
4. What does Paul say (sarcastically) that he wishes the agitators would do to themselves? (vs. 12)
5. What are we called to do with our freedom? (vs. 13)
6. How is the entire law summed in a single command? (vs. 14)
7. What prevents us from gratifying the desires of our sinful natures? (vs. 16)
8. List some of the acts of the sinful nature that Paul mentions: what is their result? (vs. 19-21)

9. List the fruit of the Spirit. (vs. 22, 23)
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
 6. _____
 7. _____
 8. _____
 9. _____
10. "Since we live by the Spirit, let us _____ with the Spirit." (vs. 25)

16 Galatians: Chapter 5 – Summary

So far, Paul has reached two important goals in his writing to the Galatians. He has defended his apostleship and he has defended the Gospel itself, showing that it is by grace alone and that the Christian is freed from the curse of the law.

The agitators, the Judaizers, were teaching the people that they had to be circumcised and follow the law in order to be saved. One of the reasons Paul condemned this so strongly is that it made works necessary for salvation. Also, you can't pick and choose what you want to follow in the Law. It is a complete package.

'Falling from grace' meant to give up the grace of God for legalism, trying to get his favor by following rules. One of the problems with trying to get a good standing by following rules is that it creates a self-righteous, critical spirit.

Faith is not something you do with your mind, but it is a way of living and trusting in God's grace. If you have this kind of faith, it will show itself in acts of love. Believing is putting your confidence in Christ, who loves us and gave himself for us. We respond in the same way, by loving others and putting them first.

This freedom and liberty is not an excuse to live any way we wish. It is freedom to choose to serve God and each other, in love. Paul talks about three kinds of slavery: slavery to sin, which is what we are born into—we can't escape it, human kind is broken by its very nature. Then there is slavery to Law, which is a foolish and difficult choice. Last is slavery to one another because of Christ. This is voluntary and brings a sense of deep joy.

The key to defeating sinful desires is to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is the presence of God in us. Through this Spirit, we have fellowship with God and we receive power to win the war against sin in our lives. Christian character is produced by the Holy Spirit in us. We can't make ourselves good enough by trying to follow rules, even if the rules are good ones.

17 Galatians: Chapter 5

Fruit of the Spirit	Definition
Love	Sacrificial, unmerited deeds to help another person
Joy	Inner happiness, not dependent on outward circumstances
Peace	Harmony in relationships
Patience	Putting up with others, even when severely tried
Kindness	Thoughtful deeds for others
Goodness	Generosity to others
Faithfulness	Trustworthiness and reliability
Gentleness	Meekness and humility
Self-control	Victory over sinful desires

This table is adapted from Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, Volume 2: New Testament, page 742 "The Fruit of the Spirit".

18 Galatians: Chapter 5 – Application Questions

1. How would Christians and churches live if they were manifesting the fruits of the Spirit? Would there be no disagreements? How would the world be different, if it was manifesting the same fruits? Would there be no conflict?
2. Circumcision was the form of legalism that was a problem in Paul's day. The choice, according to Paul, was between freedom in Christ and total commitment to the law—without Christ. What is a form of legalism in the church today?
3. How can we 'keep in step' with the Spirit? What does that mean in practical terms?
4. Paul warned the Galatians that they couldn't pick and choose which parts of the Law they followed. Does our church do anything similar to this with New Testament teachings?

For example, in some parts of the New Testament Paul seems to forbid women to take leadership roles in the church. Our denomination says this was a cultural matter. Is it possible we have simply chosen not to follow Paul's instructions because we don't like them?

19 Galatians: Chapter 6 – Scripture Questions

1. What was the responsibility of mature (spiritual) Christians towards those 'stuck' in trespass (sin)? (vs. 1)
2. How is the law of Christ fulfilled? (vs. (2)
3. To whom should we compare ourselves? (vs. 4)
4. "Do not be deceived; God cannot be _____. A man reaps what he _____." (vs. 7)
5. If you sow to please the Spirit, what will you reap? (vs. 8)
6. "Therefore, as we have _____, let us do good to all _____, especially to those who belong to the family of _____." (vs. 10)
7. Why were the Judaizers trying to compel the Gentile believers to be circumcised? (vs. 12, 13)
8. What does Paul boast about? (vs. 14)
9. "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything: what counts is a new _____." (vs. 15)
10. What blessing would be received by those who grow in faith as a new creation? (vs. 16)

20 Galatians: Chapter 6 – Summary

After Paul has described the fruit of the Spirit, he gives some practical ways to carry out the responsibilities of believers.

Those who are more mature in the Spirit had a responsibility to help those who struggled. If someone was having a hard time with a sin, his brothers had the obligation to help him overcome this sin. But they had to be careful, because they themselves were just as susceptible to sin. Paul called them to share the burden of living faithfully. However, each person was responsible for themselves; they shouldn't get proud of their own abilities, but constantly examine themselves to see if they were living up to the Spirit's call.

Paul also encourages them to support (probably financially) those who were instructors in the Word. Today, we would put preachers and pastors in this category, but Paul may have appointed teachers in the Galatians communities.

Paul warns his readers that it isn't possible to fake the Spirit-filled life—at least to God. God always knows what is in the heart. If a person pretends to be faithful but is really trying to serve himself, in the end it will come to nothing. On the other hand, one who tries to serve God will be rewarded by God. In another practical instruction, Paul tells them to take advantage of every opportunity to do good to the people around them, especially to the believers.

In closing, Paul warns them again about the Jews who had come from Jerusalem trying to undermine the faith of the Galatians. He tells them that the real purpose is not to bring them closer to God but to make these 'missionaries' look good in other people's eyes. They want to be able to go back to Jerusalem and brag about how many people they 'brought into the light' of the Law.

Paul is clear the the only thing that can be 'boasted' about is Christ. When he was crucified, the world and sin were destroyed. The only thing that matters now, Paul says, is the new creation. Follow that standard, Paul says, and you will have peace and the mercy of God.

21 Galatians: Chapter 6 – Application Questions

1. Paul understands that believers will fall into misconduct. He says that we are responsible for each other, to keep each other on the path of faithfulness. However, how can you 'gently' bring someone back to faithfulness?
2. To 'test' your work means to examine whether your behavior really shows the loving character of Christ. How can you look at yourself honestly without being cruel?
3. 'Sowing to the Spirit' means putting your confidence and hope in the working of the Holy Spirit. What does this working look like in everyday life? How do you know when it is happening?
4. Fulfilling the Law of Christ happens when people live self-sacrificially to one another, copying what Jesus did in his death. Who do you know that lives this way?