

# Freedom = Free Gospel

## Galatians 1:1-5

### **Authority of the Author/Apostle (1)**

Paul:

Apostle:

Qualifications:

### **Two contrasts of people (2)**

Free:

Not free:

### **Two gospel terms for those deceived (3)**

Grace:

Peace:

From what source?

### **The free gospel (4-5)**

Christ gave himself for our sins:

Why?

God willed it:

The result?

## Finding Freedom – a study in Galatians

### Background Notes for a Study of Galatians

#### Intro

Galatians gives us a crucial look at the apostle Paul. We get a look into his mind and heart. It probes the question, “How does a person come into a right relationship with God?” “Are there strings attached to beginning this relationship?” The gospel message permeates throughout the book. Readers are reminded about the vital role of the gospel at salvation, but also, its role throughout the Christian journey. Some would say Galatians is the charter of Christian freedom.

Along these lines, Galatians is critical in the unfolding of Christian history. A German monk named Martin Luther found this letter to be his guide leading him into Christian Freedom, ushering in the Protestant Reformation. He loved Galatians so much he called it his *Katie von Bora* – his wife!

The key verse in Galatians appears to be: “*Christ has liberated us to be free. Stand firm then and don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery.*” (5:1) The book is composed of three identifiable sections of two chapters each. Chapters 1-2 give Paul’s personal history as the starting point for his appeal to the Galatians. Chapters 3-4 provide his theological, doctrinal appeal. Chapters 5-6 offer a strong challenge for spiritual living.

Today, Galatians finds great relevance to us. Christianity is still battered on two fronts: one, the legalistic, self-righteous false teaching, and two, the turning of Christian freedom into license to sin. Ponder these two extremes and evaluate your life.

#### Author

The Apostle Paul. Only Paul fits the first two chapters that describe his experience with the gospel and apostleship. Paul shares his deep spiritual side and his human side in the letter.

#### Audience

The letter is not addressed to a specific church, but to a group of “churches in Galatia” (1:2), now known as modern day central Asia Minor (Turkey). Two opposing views today represent the audience. The first, the Northern Galatia view, is a lesser accepted theory. It assumes Paul did much missionary work in Northern Galatia on his second missionary journey. It is not the commonly held viewpoint. The second, the Southern Galatia view, is highly regarded by most scholars. Think of the Roman province called Galatia. Think of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, etc. Paul did more missionary work in this region, and in his other writings spoke in terms of Roman provinces, so it is easy to see why this theory is widely accepted. Also, the significant issues related to the

Judaizers and their twisted view of the gospel firmly fit into the southern region and Paul's case for faith alone.

### **Date of Writing**

Assuming the Southern Galatia view (of which I do), the date written would appear to be before the occasion of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), because Paul does not mention this historic meeting in this letter. It is also fairly clear that Paul's evangelization in Southern Galatia occurred prior to the composition of this letter. Therefore, many would believe this epistle to be written about A. D. 48-49. Of course, the date of the writing is not the important issue; the fact that God wrote this letter to the churches in Galatia through Paul is the essential matter. Thank you, God, for your Holy Word!

### **Occasion and Purpose**

Think about Paul for a moment. Especially Saul (before Paul's Damascus road conversion to Christianity). He had been devoted to the Law and to the traditions of Judaism as much as anyone. He was a Jew of all Jews. Yet God led him to see completely that the way of salvation and following Christ was not reliant on the "laws" of the Judaizers. Paul had come to Galatia with the good news of salvation in Christ. Now, a short time later, he was defending his authority as an apostle, explaining (once again) and proving the gospel message, and applying the gospel message to daily living by the Holy Spirit's power.

### **Meaning for Today**

There is a significant argument in Galatians for silencing the danger of spiritual legalism. Almost every cult and every distorted form of religion relies heavily on some sort of legalism. Even within the Christian church, the danger of legalism is present. Why is legalism so dangerous for us today? 1) It appeals to pride, whereas faith in Christ requires repentance and humility. 2) It is a natural fit for the human experience, thus placing our Christianity on the same trajectory as our other experiences. 3) It is easier to manage than grace, allowing us to control people with external force, rather than uplifting Christian freedom through the Holy Spirit. 4) Lastly, it seems safer than grace since freedom can appear to be uncontrollable. It is often easier for insecure people to let rules and regulations control them, hoping to keep life from "getting out of control."

On the flip side, Galatians also speaks to us about a significant trend in current life – the abuse of freedom and the absence of any moral order. Some would say today, "whatever you want, go for it!" Yet true morality comes from within as we are empowered and led by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, there is a need for understanding the nature of the gospel. The gospel Paul preached (the gospel/good news of the Bible) has no room for "Christ-plus-anything-else." There is no "different gospel" (1:6). Galatians shows us what the gospel is and how it works, and how it is continually applied throughout our Christian life and journey.