

Living A Spirit Filled Life

A Study of Galatians & Ephesians

by Matthew Allen

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Published by
Spiritbuilding Publishing
15591 N. State Rd. 9
Summitville, IN 46070

Spiritual “equipment” for the contest of life.

1st printing 2009

Allen, Matthew

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Ephesians

Photography: Cover photo of Emilea Allen at Whistler Mountain in British Columbia, Canda, taken by Matthew Allen. Photos of Ephesus taken by Billie Sue Parrish, Brownsburg, IN.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON	PAGE
Introduction	5
1 An Introduction to Galatians; Galatians 1 - <i>Paul Defends His Ministry</i>	6
2 Galatians 2 - <i>Jerusalem Council and Confrontation with Peter</i>	14
3 Galatians 3 - <i>Faith and Righteousness</i>	20
4 Galatians 4 - <i>Sons and Daughters of God</i>	26
5 Galatians 5 - <i>Freedom in Christ</i>	32
6 Galatians 6 - <i>Do Good to All</i>	38
7 An Introduction to Ephesians; Ephesians 1 - <i>Blessings of Redemption</i>	44
8 Ephesians 2 - <i>Alive in Christ</i>	50
9 Ephesians 3 - <i>Stewardship in the Gospel</i>	56
10 Ephesians 4 - <i>Growing Up into Christ</i>	62
11 Ephesians 5:1-21 - <i>Imitate God</i>	70
12 Ephesians 5:22-6:24 - <i>Be Strong in the Lord</i>	76

Introduction

Tucked in the middle of the New Testament are two practical epistles filled with relevant instruction by the Apostle Paul. Written to separate audiences, both books are rich with doctrinal teaching and modern application for today's Christian. I am excited to share with you some of my thoughts on these books.

Galatians was written with a sense of urgency. Writing to correct doctrinal error on the teaching of circumcision and the law, Paul passionately argues for the Galatian Christians to return to the teaching of the truth—which they had once wholeheartedly embraced. Galatians offers us an opportunity to learn important points on why the Old Covenant Law has been removed. Here Paul teaches on the freedom found through obedience to the gospel. Our coming to Christ enables us the privilege of being heirs of God. We are His sons and daughters and are brought near Him through the blood of Christ. In the last part of Galatians, Paul urges his readers to walk by the Spirit (5:16). Throughout the last two chapters, the apostle goes into great detail as to how we can fulfill this command.

Ephesians was written to a spiritually growing congregation that had been in existence for a decade or more. Paul knew them well. He labored there personally, at one point dwelling there for at least two years (Acts 19:10). This congregation found itself busy in God's work and reaching others with the gospel. They endured great opposition. They glorified God. In this epistle, Paul reminds them from where they came (they had been dead in their trespasses and sins, 2:1) and of their bountiful blessings in Christ. Once establishing these facts, Paul moves on to encourage them to continue their progress of putting off the old man and being renewed into the image of Christ. Just like he did in Galatians, Paul spends the last two and a half chapters explaining how Christians can live more like Jesus.

I hope you enjoy studying these two epistles. Every time you read them, there is something new to learn; challenging Christians of all time spiritually in their pursuit of God. This workbook has been designed to assist you in this endeavor. Use it for the glory of God.

Matthew Allen, August, 2009

An Introduction to Galatians; Galatians 1 *Paul Defends His Ministry*

Lesson 1

Galatians stresses the balance between legalism and a perversion of the doctrine of grace. The situation is urgent. The Galatian Christians were rapidly leaving pure Christianity for a twisted doctrine emphasizing Jewish works of the Law. The Galatian letter was penned by Paul in the mid 50's AD, most likely written while Paul labored for his two-year stay in Ephesus. It could have been written during the summer of 53 while Paul was at Corinth. It was most certainly written after the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) and before Paul's trial and imprisonment by the Jewish Sanhedrin.

In Paul's day, *Galatia* had a dual meaning. It could refer to an ethnic group of Celtic people who immigrated to Asia Minor three centuries before Christ. They lived primarily in northern Asia Minor and would have settled in the cities of Ancyra, Tavium, and Pessinus. There is no biblical record of congregations in these areas, but that does not necessarily mean there was an absence of Christians there.

The term *Galatia* could also refer to the official Roman province which encompassed an area from Bithynia in the north to Iconium in the south. The area in the south was more populated as it was located along major Roman roads that connected areas of the eastern Empire with the west. Galatia became a Roman province in 64 BC. You are probably more familiar with the cities in this region: Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium.

There has been much debate over which group Paul refers to by addressing his letter to the *Galatians*. Does it refer to the ethnic group of people or to *Galatia* in its official Roman designation—as a province? It seems that since Paul was a Roman

Galatians Over-view

Chapters 1-2 – The beginning of the gospel

Chapters 3-4 – The gospel vindicated

Chapters 5-6 – The gospel applied

Paul Defends His Ministry

citizen and that he had recently played a role in establishing the congregations in Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13-16), he was referring to the official Roman province and most likely the congregations mentioned above.

The Situation

In the years after Pentecost, there were a number of former Pharisees converted to Christ. With them, circumcision was not just a matter of preference; it was a necessity, Acts 15:5. They had become convinced God demanded *more* than faith to be saved. Even though the apostles issued a letter to all the churches stating emphatically that circumcision was not a requirement of salvation (Acts 15:23-29) certain groups of Jews were not convinced. They were determined not to allow Jewish interaction with Gentile Christians. Their mission: to disrupt the Gentile congregations and keep the wall of separation between the Jews and Gentiles intact. Within just a few short years of their establishment, the churches in Galatia were under assault. Here it seems that the Judaizing teachers were having success in their mission even though their motives were less than sincere. On top of this, they were less than consistent in their application of the Law. Speaking of them, Paul said, “For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh,” Galatians 6:13, NASU.

With so many being affected, the situation was urgent. Entire congregations were in grave danger of being lost to false doctrine. Paul’s message was intended to counteract the influence of these teachers by emphasizing the freedom found in the gospel of grace through Jesus Christ. The doctrine professed by the Judaizing teachers destroyed the very essence of Christianity. It took the Gentile converts back to a system of emphasis on keeping the Law of Moses for salvation.

In the book, Paul’s major emphasis was to focus on the need to maintain a balance between a legalistic approach of keeping the works and ceremonial feast days of the Law of Moses and the tendency to stress the absence of moral law because of the grace of Christ. This is seen in Chapter 5 as Paul drives home the application of his teaching when he instructed them to avoid the lusts of the flesh (5:19-21) and put on the fruit of the Spirit, 5:22-26.

Another Consideration

Not only were many of the early Christians motivated to submit to circumcision because of the pressure of the Judaizing teachers, but it also appears that some caved due to the threat of persecution. This is explained when considering the rise of the Jewish zealots in the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. *Any* association of Jews with Gentiles was looked upon with scorn by the Zealots. In fact, the Zealots sought to destroy any movement that worked to bring Jews and

Living a Spirit Filled Life – Galatians 1

Gentiles together. The Zealots would often resort to persecution to impose their will. Was it a problem in Galatia? We get a hint from the text itself: “Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ,” 6:12. It has been observed that many Jewish Christians sought to avoid persecution by giving off the impression that they had very little relationship with Gentiles. So not only did many of the Jewish Christians believe circumcision was necessary for the purpose of salvation, we see there were other motives for their pushing the practice on the Gentiles.

Organization of Galatians

The book is neatly organized into three compact sections and is constructed around a theme stated in 2:16: “a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.” In some ways Galatians offers some similarities to the book of Romans, but differs in the sharp responses to Judaizing teachers. See 1:8-9 and 5:12 for an example of how Paul cut no corners in explaining the consequences of subscribing to the false doctrine. When one reads of people being “accursed” (1:8-9) and “falling from grace” (5:12), it is important to remember that Paul did not write these things with glee. In fact, his heart ached for the Christians he helped lead to Christ. He writes, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you,” 4:19-20. Those who have struggled with writing a letter (or email) of correction understand the difficulty presented by communication in writing. Facial expressions and voice inflections are absent. The tone of writing can be easily misunderstood. Paul had a tremendous longing to be with them in person and was confident they would see his genuine concern for them if he were there in person.

Hendrickson gives a simple, concise outline of the book. Obviously, there are outlines available that are more detailed, but his seems to best convey the overall messages presented in the book. He divides the book in this way:

Galatians 1-2 – *The Beginning of the Gospel* – The gospel is not of human origin. These chapters contain Paul’s self-defense and right to be an apostle.

Galatians 3-4 – *The Gospel Vindicated* – Both testaments and life itself testify to the truth of the gospel.

Galatians 5-6 – *The Gospel Applied* – The gospel produces freedom. We must glory in the cross for what it does.

Paul Defends His Ministry

The chart above is from an unknown source but does a good job in outlining the book into three major sections: *truth*, *faith*, and *love*. Use these charts to acquaint yourself with the overall layout of the book and be sure to refer back to them as we move toward a more in-depth study of each chapter.

Chapter 1 – Paul Defends His Ministry

Chapter 1 starts off with an urgent tone. While Paul follows some of the standard writing protocol of the day in identifying himself as the author and issuing a greeting, the mood is tense. Paul identifies himself as an apostle, by the authority of Jesus and the Father. He then immediately lays out his concern for the Galatian Christians: his perplexity in that they would so soon desert the freedom found in Christ for another gospel. This was not a simple doctrinal disagreement; it was a matter that hinged on the very essence of Christianity. Judaizing teachers sought to destroy the very foundation of the message of the gospel: salvation by faith in Christ.

As they injected their teaching inside the Galatian churches, Judaizing teachers sought to discredit the authority of Paul. They insisted he was not an authentic apostle and the doctrine he espoused was his own. In this chapter, Paul sets out on a defense of the gospel through defending his authority as an apostle. Jesus Himself appointed Paul to minister to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16-18); therefore his message was from God, not men, 1:11.

1:1-5 – Introductory Thoughts

Paul is an apostle with the same authority as the twelve. Even though he came on the scene after Jesus' resurrection, his apostolic commission was from Jesus Himself, Acts 9:1-5; 26:16-18. Paul was sent to minister to the Gentiles directly by Jesus. Those who rejected Paul and his message rejected God Himself, the one who raised Jesus from the dead.

Not only was Paul concerned for the Galatian Christians, but those who traveled with him were also worried. After extending greetings of grace and peace, Paul advances a summary of the message of the gospel: “[Jesus] gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,” 1:3-4. The death of Jesus was an event that occurred once and for all and was absolutely essential. Nothing else could rescue mankind from

Galatians 1 Breakdown

1:1-5 - Introductory thoughts

1:6-10 – No other gospel

1:11-17 – The source of the gospel

1:18-24 – Paul's first visit to Jerusalem

Living a Spirit Filled Life – Galatians 1

his desperate condition. The usage of “rescue” in 1:4 should not be overlooked. Human beings could not deliver themselves from the bondage of sin. *Jesus* set us free. *Jesus* rescued us. Salvation does not come through works of the Law of Moses or via works of merit. This was all according to God’s plan from before time began.

1:6-10 – No Other Gospel

Instead of the usual statement of thankfulness and praise, this section of Galatians contains the reason for Paul’s writing. These verses are written in an authoritative and urgent manner. Paul was astonished at their rapid departure from the pure gospel. Their defection took place not too long after their obedience to the gospel. The Judaizing teachers were no longer a threat; their work was actually seeing success. Not all was lost, however. Paul believed they could turn away from the doctrines they now embraced and go back to the truth.

“Another gospel” presents a contrast between the false doctrine they had fallen for and the true gospel of God. One gospel demanded perfect obedience to the Law; the other depended on grace for salvation. In reality, there is no other gospel (1:7). Heaven is reached only through Jesus and the way He prescribes. The greatest problem with the false doctrine circulating in Galatia was that it took the emphasis off Jesus. The Christians had become convinced that they could give up their hope of trusting in Jesus for salvation.

Those who taught false doctrine were condemned. In fact, *anything* different from what they first received from Paul was to be rejected. The gospel cannot be changed, tweaked, or adjusted. It is applicable to all men everywhere for all times and cultures. Paul says the false teachers were to be “accursed.” “Accursed” has reference to being delivered up to divine wrath. In 1:9, Paul repeats himself, which adds to the emphasis. Those who taught an apostate doctrine would be lost.

In 1:10 Paul addresses one of the charges made by his detractors. They asserted he would do or say anything to gain converts. It was implied that he cared little for truth and was nothing more than a man pleaser. It would be easy to see his enemies twisting his words in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. Here Paul makes it clear that he sought to please God in all things. How could he be a man pleaser when he said that false teachers would be “accursed”? He took a stand and expected the Galatians to do so as well. Paul fully surrendered himself to God, not men.

1:11-17 – The Source of the Gospel

The gospel Paul preached came not from men but directly through Jesus. Jesus personally revealed it to him, thus what Paul taught had a divine origin. What man would have ever made up such a story? The gospel has to be divine. Who would

Paul Defends His Ministry

have ever concocted a story that said salvation comes through an innocent man being crucified on a cross? The gospel is divine in every way.

To sustain his point, Paul recounts his former life—as a persecutor of the church. Paul went beyond the call in his persecution, being zealous to eliminate the Christian faith. He advanced far and fast in the Jewish religion. Picture him as a young, ambitious man, willing to do whatever necessary to move up in authority, influence, and power. He was “extremely zealous for (his) ancestral traditions,” 1:14. Why does Paul recount his past? To prove the gospel came to him directly from God. His life as a Jew was in such conflict with Christianity that it could have come to him in no other way.

Paul then speaks of the independence of his apostleship. He says God revealed Jesus to him. God chose Paul. From his birth, God had designated him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He was not taught by men nor commissioned by any group of men. He received his call directly from God, independent of all the other apostles. Any charge that he became an apostle through other men was false.

Upon his conversion, Paul traveled to Arabia. Why Arabia? Where did he go in Arabia? Did he go away for solitude? To sort out the changes in his life? The answer has not been revealed. Some believe he went to the area around Mt. Sinai where he received further revelations from God. Of this we cannot be sure, although it certainly sounds plausible. After “many days,” Paul returned to Damascus (Acts 9:23) where he promptly began fleeing for his life, Acts 9:23-25; 2 Corinthians 11:32. The point? Paul had no opportunity to receive the gospel from any man during this time; it came directly from God.

1:18-24 – Paul’s First Visit to Jerusalem

In this section, Paul speaks of his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. “Three years” refers to three years after his conversion. He seeks to prove that his apostleship (and the gospel he preached) was completely independent from the apostles and leading men in Jerusalem. It cannot be emphasized enough that he had been preaching three years before meeting any of the apostles. Why did Paul go to Jerusalem? 1:19 says he wanted to become personally acquainted with Peter. He stayed there fifteen days. This would have been too short of a time to be taught all the intricacies of the gospel. He must have received it from God. The historical parallel to Galatians 1:18-19 is found in Acts 9:26-30 and 22:17-21. As stated previously, Paul left Jerusalem after only fifteen days because of a plot against his life.

While in Jerusalem, Paul met with Peter and also saw James, the brother of the Lord. Was James an apostle? Evidently. This is the only reference to his being an apostle even though there is no New Testament evidence that indicates his being

Living a Spirit Filled Life – Galatians 1

commissioned as one. Matthew and Mark’s gospels tell us Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) and that early in his ministry none of his brothers believed He was the Son of God, John 7:5. In 1 Corinthians 15:7 Paul tells us James saw Jesus resurrected. James would go on to become an important figure in the Jerusalem church, Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 2:9.

After departing Jerusalem, Paul traveled to Syria and Cilicia. Acts 9:30 tells us he went to Tarsus. Paul most likely used Tarsus as a base of operation while preaching in Cilicia. During this time, he also preached in the area around Damascus. While in these areas, Paul was completely separated from the influence of the apostles. Even those in the churches in Judea had no personal contact with him. Yet they heard of his work and glorified God because of it. This fact was a critical blow against the Judaizing teachers who were infecting the churches in Galatia. Men and women in the very congregations the false teachers came from approved the work of Paul. They recognized his teaching as the same gospel which he had once worked to destroy.

Galatians for Today

What Paul condemns here is applicable in every age. Salvation by works of merit will always fall short and unscriptural. It violates the very foundation of dependence upon Jesus for salvation. Salvation through grace is God’s way.

There are not many paths to salvation (many gospels); there is only one. It is through Jesus. A plural, multi-faith outlook is an invention of men.

Teaching holds a tremendous responsibility. In Galatians, Paul holds the Judaizing teachers responsible for their doctrine. If they continued to lead Christians astray, they would be lost. All who teach must endeavor to teach the truth. Souls are at stake. James wrote, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment,” James 3:1.

Even in the worst of situations, things are not hopeless. Despite the rapidity of the number of Galatian brethren defecting, Paul held out hope that things would change *for the better*. Paul wrote, “I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is,” 5:10. There was little to praise in these churches. But he still held out hope that his brothers and sisters would hold onto the truth.

Serving God and being faithful to His teaching may force us to make hard decisions. Who will we be faithful to? Will we allow persecution or bullying to push us toward doctrinal compromise? Like Paul, we must fully commit to Christ, 1:10.

Paul Defends His Ministry

Questions for Discussion

1. When was and to whom was Galatians written?
2. Describe the situation that led to the writing of the book of Galatians.
3. What is the theme of Galatians?
4. How did persecution fit into false doctrine taking root?
5. Why did Paul need to defend his apostleship?
6. What was so serious about the doctrine the Judaizing teachers were communicating?
7. How many gospels are there? Do you think Paul's language is too strong in 1:8-9? Why/why not?
8. From whom did Paul receive the gospel? Why was this important to know?
9. Where did Paul travel to immediately upon his conversion to Christ? What did he do there? How long was he there?
10. Where did Paul labor after fleeing for his life from Jerusalem? What was the reaction of the brethren in Judea over his labor in preaching?
11. Today's lesson has helped me to become a better Christian by: