

INTRODUCTION

THE IMPORTANCE OF GALATIANS

The early Christian spokesmen Marcion (140 AD) and Tertullian put Galatians first among the New Testament epistles (now we have them in descending order of length). They felt it was not only chronologically first, but primary in order of importance. Martin Luther, perhaps more than any key figure in church history, loved Galatians almost as much as he loved his wife! He said, "The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine." Galatians has been called the battle-cry of the Reformation, the Magna Carta of spiritual emancipation, and spiritual dynamite! Its message - *Are we saved, and are we accepted, by believing or achieving?* - is foundational to both the doctrines of justification and sanctification. Some have said that without the strong letter of Galatians, Christianity might have remained a minor branch of Judaism.

In stating the central themes of Christianity, Galatians reminds us of some other New Testament letters. JB Lightfoot said that Galatians is like a "rough draft" of Romans. But it is unique in its treatment of the necessity to "protect" Christianity from any false, legalistic, "lookalike" versions of the gospel. Freedom, which occurs more in this book than any other in the New Testament, was of paramount importance to Paul. Grace, in contrast to works, is described as the touchstone of Biblical Christianity. And the Spirit, whose fruit is evident in those who live by faith, is portrayed as the One who makes it all happen.

LEARNING TO STUDY

This study guide is intended for individual or group use; groups amplify our study and force us to get down to the nitty-gritty of application. Always ask the "so-what?" question - what does this truth have to do with my real life? And remember, it is more important to grasp the central lesson in each passage than to answer every question in the study guide!

The three underlying principles of Bible Study, (observation, interpretation, and application) have been kept in mind in the writing of this study guide. Hopefully those skills will be reinforced as you study, so that you may become a well-equipped "lifetime student" of the Scriptures.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Jerry Bridges, [Transforming Grace](#)

Joseph Cooke, [Celebration of Grace](#)

Eugene Peterson, [Traveling Light \(Galatians\)](#)

David Seamands, [Healing Grace](#)

John Stott, [Only One Way \(Galatians\)](#)

Charles Swindoll, [The Grace Awakening](#)

Oletta Wald, [The Joy of Discovery \(Bible Study Methods\)](#)

Overview of the Book of Galatians (from Charles Swindoll)

ISSUE OF <i>TRUTH</i>		NATURE OF SALVATION		PRINCIPLE OF <i>HOLINESS</i>	
INTRODUCTION 1:1-10	Confusion	Works vs. Faith		Don't be enslaved!	
	Clarification	Legalism vs. Justification		Through love, serve!	
	Correction	Bondage vs. Freedom		Walk in the Spirit!	
				Bear other's burdens!	
		Let us do good!			
1:11	2:21	3:1	4:31	5:1	6:10
PERSONAL NARRATIVE		DOCTRINAL EMPHASIS		PRACTICAL APPLICATION	
THE GOSPEL IS <i>AUTHENTIC</i> (SOURCE)		THE GOSPEL IS <i>SUPERIOR</i> (DEFENSE)		THE GOSPEL IS <i>LIBERATING</i> (IMPACT)	
AUTHORITY OF APOSTLE		FAILURE OF LEGALISM		POWER OF SPIRIT	

A CHRONOLOGY of the MAJOR EVENTS in PAUL'S LIFE and MINISTRY

MAJOR EVENTS	(SUGGESTED) DATES	NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS
Born at Tarsus	?	
Trained in Jerusalem	?	
Persecuted the Earl Church	33 A.D.	
Converted	33	
Time in Arabia & Damascus	33-35	
Visit to Jerusalem	35	
Returned to Tarsus	35	
Taught at Antioch	45-47	
Famine Relief Visit to Jerusalem	46	
First Missionary Journey	47-48	
Minis in Antioch	48-49	Galatians
Jerusalem Council	49	
Second Missionary Journey	49-52	1 & 2 Thessalonians
Third Missionary Journey	53-57	1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans
Arrested in Jerusalem	57	
Imprisoned at Caesarea	57-59	
Transferred to Rome	59-60	
House Arrest in Rome	60-62	Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians
Release and Further Travels	62-65?	1 Timothy, Titus
Final Imprisonment & Death in Rome	65?	2 Timothy

Why it's so important to understand Grace

You know you don't understand grace when you ...

- ... live with a vague sense of His disapproval.
- ... don't really believe He likes you.
- ... fear that the day may not go as well as expected because you missed your quiet time.
- ... assume you can do something to make Him love you more, or less.
- ... feel you deserve an answer to prayer because of your hard work and sacrifice.
- ... assume that 1 John 1:9 no longer applies to you now that you've sinned so many times you've used up all your credit.

Jerry Bridges, Transforming Grace

There was a day for me when my whole life caved in -- when the edifice that I had painstakingly erected over many years came tumbling down like a house of cards. I had been born into a Christian home, carefully nurtured in Christian schools, surrounded by a Christian environment, and enriched by many Christian teachers and friends. I had early made a confession of Christ, and had grown year by year in Christian knowledge and teaching. I had also committed my life to Christ, received excellent Christian training in a good Bible college, and been commissioned as a missionary to Thailand under a reputable Christian mission board. Life had seemed wonderful. In so far as I was able, I had gone all the way with Christ, and I was looking forward to the challenges and rewards of a lifetime of missionary service.

And yet . . . after three years as a missionary in Thailand, I found myself at the end of the road. I had what they call a nervous breakdown, and became totally unable to go on. Instead, I had to return to the United States with my tail between my legs, so to speak. All my hopes and aspirations were shattered, and all the skills that I had acquired through the years of preparation became unusable. For I soon found myself unable to preach, unable to teach, unable to read my Bible, unable to pray, unable to face the least spiritual challenge or duty without the threat of personal disintegration. I was of no use to God, to my wife, to myself, to anyone. I had been reduced to absolute zero, and somehow I had to find a way to put my life back together and learn to live all over again.

This is not the place to tell about the long, slow climb back to life, hope, and wholeness; but I do want to tell you about one thing that has been crucial in this process --- a new understanding and appreciation of the grace of God.

Not that I was entirely ignorant of the grace of God before. I had always believed it and prized it as a central part of my faith. I had carefully studied Paul's teachings of the subject, especially as developed in the book of Romans and in Galatians; and I had frequently preached and taught these same truths. But at the same time, on a deeper level, I had lived most of my life with a legalistic, ungracious God. Only as I began to see how profoundly I had been living under the shadow of such a God, and to see the meaning of His grace on the heart-habit level, was I able to begin to work my way through to a life of greater freedom and fulfillment.

Joseph Cooke, Celebration of Grace

"It is doubtful if there is any greater joy on earth than the joy of being free. And the ecstasy is heightened if a person has once been in bondage, held captive by a power that is impossible to overcome. Being liberated from such clutches brings pleasure beyond description. Equally delightful is the experience of being delivered from the paralyzing chains of legalism. This letter does that - it sets us free. It is a bold statement of liberation, pointing us away from a "gospel" of works and toward the glorious grace Christ provides His won."

Charles Swindoll, The Grace Awakening