

For Freedom Christ has set you Free! Rediscovering Christian freedom through the Galatian correspondence.

A preaching series based on the Letter to the Galatians.

Introduction to Galatians in “The Message”

“When men and women get their hands on religion, one of the first things they often do is turn it into an instrument for controlling others, either putting or keeping them “in their place.” The history of such religious manipulation and coercion is long and tedious. It is little wonder that people who have only known religion on such terms experience release or escape from it as freedom. The problem is that the freedom turns out to be short-lived.

Paul of Tarsus was doing his diligent best to add yet another chapter to this dreary history when he was converted by Jesus to something radically and entirely different—a free life in God. Through Jesus, Paul learned that God was not an impersonal force to be used to make people behave in certain prescribed ways, but a personal Savior who set us free to live a free life. God did not coerce us from without, but set us free from within. It was a glorious experience, and Paul set off telling others, introducing and inviting everyone he met into this free life.

In his early travels he founded a series of churches in the Roman province of Galatia. A few years later Paul learned that religious leaders of the old school had come into those churches, called his views and authority into question, and were reintroducing the old ways, herding all these freedom-loving Christians back into the corral of religious rules and regulations.

Paul was, of course, furious. He was furious with the old guard for coming in with their strong-arm religious tactics and intimidating the Christians into giving up their free life in Jesus. But he was also furious with the Christians for caving in to the intimidation.

His letter to the Galatian churches helps them, and us, recover the original freedom. It also gives direction in the nature of God’s gift of freedom—most necessary guidance, for freedom is a delicate and subtle gift, easily perverted and often squandered.”¹

Historical Background

Paul had founded the churches in Galatia. Later these faith communities faced pressure from certain leaders who insisted on Jewish rituals, especially circumcision, if they were to belong to God’s people. Paul argues that faith in Christ, signified through baptism, is sufficient for inclusion into the people of God. Nothing else is needed. For Paul, the very essence of the Gospel is at stake. For him this is a vitally important battle to win as the freedom of the Gospel is at stake.

“Paul is obviously red-hot (just like God in the Old Testament when his love for Israel has been spurned). Full of the Holy Spirit and in keeping with the nature of rhetoric under such circumstances, Paul writes with passion and forcefulness.”²

¹ Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (Ga). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

² Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. K. (2002). *How to read the Bible book by book: a guided tour* (p. 341). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Social Issues

Food Crisis:

If written in AD49 – Easter half of Empire was experiencing food crisis due to poor grain harvests in Egypt

Persecution of Jews and Christians:

Jews and possibly also Jewish Christians were expelled from Rome in AD 49. Jews may have felt marginalised and threatened.

Cult of the Emperor:

Worshiping the Emperor as a “god” was increasingly popular – in part due to state sponsorship of banquets, gymnastic contests etc. and the provision of commodities such as oil.

Jews, however were not expected to participate. Perhaps, through engaging in practises that made them appear “Jewish”, Christians might evade social pressure to participate in the Imperial Cult. Possibly they sought to avoid loss of social status by appearing Jewish.

Series Outline

Date	Passage	Theme	Notes
5 June	Gal 1:11-24	“...But when God” (remembering God’s grace, living in freedom)	
12 June	Gal. 2:15-21	“It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me” (justifying grace-freedom to belong)	Remember June 16 th !
19 June	Gal. 3:23-29	“You are all one in Christ Jesus” (mature in grace, free from division)	
26 June	Gal. 5:1, 13–25	“Walk in the Spirit” (set free to bear the fruit of grace)	
3 July	Gal. 6:1-16	“Carry each other’s burdens... Do good to all” (sanctifying grace, freedom to follow Jesus)	Do all the good you can....