

=THE EPISTLES=

Lesson 4

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

AIM: to teach my pupils the teaching of the book of Galatians.

POINT OF CONTACT: One of the things that people said about the Galatian people is that they had tried to sew back up the rent veil. You may recall that when Jesus died, the veil in the temple was rent in twain. This means that all the Old Testament ceremony had been torn in two, and now every believer has access to God without coming through ceremonial observance, ritual, law, etc. The Galatian Christians were guilty of trying to go back to the old observances; hence, it is said of them that they tried to sew the veil again.

A good point of contact would be to take a piece of material (it could be anything from a handkerchief to something more like the veil) and tear it from top to bottom, telling the pupils that this is what happened in the temple when Jesus died. Of course, this was done by an unseen hand. God Himself did it. The teacher could then take a needle and thread and attempt to sew back the veil. This means they were trying to take away the liberty that the Christians enjoyed after Calvary and go back to the old way of doing things.

INTRODUCTION: Paul and Timothy preached the Gospel to the Galatians about A.D. 52, Acts 16:6. After about three years, the Apostle passed through the country of Galatia and Phrygia again, strengthening the disciples, Acts 18:23. Legalistic Judaizing teachers had followed the Apostle in Galatia, opposing his doctrine which respected the non-use of the ceremonial law by Gentile converts. They also doubted his right to be an Apostle, Galatians 1:1-11. They also required that all converts should be circumcised and keep the law. No doubt they had tremendous influence, and a strong party had been raised up against Paul personally as well as against his doctrine. Hence, the book was written in an emergency. Paul wrote it with his own hand. Notice Galatians 6:11. You will notice he said that he wrote a large letter with his own hand. We think that the Apostle Paul was afflicted with ophthalmia, which was a common disease in those days. It was, of course, an eye disease; and we feel in some ways that perhaps he was almost totally blind. Read Galatians 4:13-15. Because of this disease, Paul usually dictated his letters; but having no secretary at hand and being in a hurry to get the letter back to the Galatian Christians, he wrote his own letter in his own hand with large letters. This is because of his bad vision and the urgency of the occasion.

You will also notice that it was written to "the churches," not to a church. Look at Galatians 1:2. Many of the Epistles were written to a single church; but Paul had established several churches in Galatia, and he wrote this to the churches. Let us notice the argument that Paul places against legalism, etc.

- I. HE STARTS BY REMINDING THEM NOT TO LISTEN TO FALSE TEACHERS. Notice that in Galatians 1:1-10 he also says that if anybody preaches any other Gospel, "let him be accursed." This word "accursed" is the word "Anathema!" in the Greek, which means, "Let him stand before the judgment of God and be cast into Hell." This is what Paul said should be the attitude of the Galatians toward false teachers.
- II. HE SHOWS THAT THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM AND THE ORIGINAL APOSTLES AGREED WITH HIS POSITION. (Galatians 2:1-10) He is trying to present to them the truth that salvation is not through legalism or ritual but through simple faith in Christ, and that the cross of Calvary tore down the wall of partition and nailed to the cross the Old Testament ordinances. (Have your class read here Colossians 2:14-17.) Not a better argument could be presented than to explain that the first and early church in Jerusalem preached and believed this truth.
- III. PAUL SHOWS THAT HIS TEACHING HAD NOT CHANGED AND THAT HE IS STILL PREACHING WHAT HE HAD PREACHED BEFORE. See Galatians 2:11-21. You will notice the little episode that happened between Peter and Paul when Peter changed a little bit. Paul is saying that he was

the same that he had always been; hence, they should continue to accept the doctrine that he taught them in the first place.

- IV. HE SHOWS THEM THAT EVEN THEIR OWN SALVATION SHOULD PROVE TO THEM THAT SALVATION IS BY FAITH ALONE. (Galatians 3:1-5) This is good logic. In other words, he is saying to them, “How did you get saved? Your salvation was by faith. Why turn around and preach another Gospel other than the one which you believed and through which you were saved?”
- V. HE TURNS BACK TO ABRAHAM AND SHOWS THAT ABRAHAM WAS SAVED BY FAITH. (Galatians 3:6-9) This was before the Law. He was trying to show them that the Law had nothing to do with salvation, for salvation came before the Law. He showed them that the Law only brings a curse or penalty on sin, Galatians 3:10-12; and that Christ has redeemed us from the curse, having become a curse for us, Galatians 3:13, 14. Since Abraham was saved by faith and the Law came later, Paul is simply showing that the Law was intended to make men realize that sin is sin and that transgression is transgression, Galatians 3:19, 20. Hence, the Law was simply a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, Galatians 3:21-24; but it has nothing to do with saving us. It simply makes us realize our need of salvation.

Let us say, then, that the Law is the diagnostician and grace is the surgeon. Dr. Law is the one that shows our need of being saved and makes us realize that we are lost. Dr. Grace is the one that cures us.

CONCLUSION: The Epistle to the Galatians was a very popular one for early Christians. It told so much of Paul’s personal life, his experience with Peter, his own physical condition, etc. that it was appealing to early Christians. It also is the most concise refutation to ritualism, ceremonialism, legalism, etc. that can be found in the Bible. Just to read it is to learn the Scripture. It is a “little Romans.” It does not go into detail as much as Romans, but it outlines the argument against ceremonialism and legalism beautifully and logically.