

23T17b Reflections Galatians
(Written by Dr. Kip Wehrman 07/17/2023)

Hello everyone. My name is Kip. Welcome to the PUNLA Coffee Table. Today, we are going to do something a little different. I recently read several of the letters from the Apostle Paul from start to finish in a single setting. These are not long letters, maybe 15 minutes to read each. Today, I want to look at the letter to the Galatians.

Let's pray.

Galatians Summary and Reflection

Context

The author is thought to be the Apostle Paul with Timothy. The audience is the churches in the region of Galatia. The Galatian churches were comprised of Jews and Gentiles. Paul visited this region on his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 16 & 18). Most historians believe the letter was written in the late AD40's to early AD50's.

Summary

General outline,

- The True Gospel of Christ (Galatians 1-2)
- God's People (Galatians 3-4)
- Transformed Life (Galatians 5-6)

The primary purpose of the letter to the Galatians was to address "false teachings" and "false teachers" which had tried to convince the Galatians they needed to follow the law of Moses. Paul is explaining how these "false teachings" are inconsistent with the gospel message that Paul had taught them. He is exhorting these churches to return to the gospel of Jesus.

After Paul's greeting, thanksgiving and prayer, Paul's focus for the first part of this letter is on what is the true gospel of Jesus. There is only one good news, and the message from Paul came from Jesus. Paul stresses that he has been accepted as an apostle by the twelve and the church in Jerusalem. Paul even goes further to illustrate that he confronted Peter about allowing Jewish cultural practices to impact his relationship with gentile Christians.

Paul's focus for the second part of this letter was to illustrate what God's people look like. The law pointed to and was fulfilled in Jesus. Faith in Jesus is the Christian priority not adhering to rituals or prescriptive rules. We are made right with God through our faith in Jesus alone just like Abraham. Paul also points out how the law pointed to the promise of God and how through faith in Jesus we become God's children not by rule following.

In the last portion of the letter Paul is explaining what freedom in Christ looks like. Christians live by the power of the Holy Spirit which guides our lives. This guidance transforms us from our sinful nature into people who demonstrate God's love with our

lives. After this Paul closes his letter in his customary way with greetings and closing remarks.

Reflections

One of the first thing I noticed is an underlying theme not just in Galatians but in most of Paul's letters. These churches had been taught by Paul recently but still were susceptible to false teachings. Things that "tickle our ears" and have a way of distracting us from the primary focus and purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In many of Paul's letters the primary topic is either Jews wanting Gentile Christians to adopt Jewish rituals and cultural observances, or gentile Christians embracing their faith in Christ but still partaking in pagan celebrations or behaviors. As I reflected on this, it became very apparent that we as the modern church often act like we are immune to this. Yet, in our modern churches false teaching and fringe rituals and doctrines not only divide the Church of Jesus but take our focus away from the purpose of the gospel of Jesus.

This introspection brought me to the primary focus of Paul's letter. What is the gospel of Jesus Christ? Galatians 1:6-9 (NLT), *"⁶I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News ⁷but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. ⁸Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. ⁹I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed."* Paul is shocked they have so quickly turned away from the message of Christ. We have the Bible, yet we seemed determined to only follow the portions we like. We seem determined to only teach the portions we like. Shame on us. As Paul says, regardless of who says something, if it is not in line with the gospel of Jesus, then ignore it.

Paul makes a very distinct claim in Chapter 3. Galatians 3:15-16 (NLT), *"¹⁵Dear brothers and sisters, here's an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or amend an irrevocable agreement, so it is in this case. ¹⁶God gave the promises to Abraham and his child. And notice that the Scripture doesn't say "to his children," as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says "to his child"—and that, of course, means Christ."* I found Paul's point particularly interesting. Here Paul is again reminding us that God's promises are kept to Abraham. But here Paul makes a special distinction, these promises are kept through "his child" not "his children." This means God's promises to Abraham are kept through the specific child which was of course Jesus Christ. This is just like the promises to David and to Moses are kept through the person of Jesus Christ. God has kept His promises and they are realized through His son Jesus Christ. Therefore, there is no conflict between God's law and God's promises. We are all God's children or God's people through our faith in Jesus. Just like Abraham was justified through his faith, so are we.

When we are living our lives in line with God, then our lives produce fruit by the Holy Spirit. Fruit is demonstrated by our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This is a very convicting list. If we are living our lives focused on Jesus and striving to be more like Jesus, then our lives exhibit these traits of our savior. When we are not living our lives focused on Jesus, then our sinful nature shows through our lives. But *“anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the kingdom of God”* (Galatians 5:21b NLT). If we take our focus off of Jesus and let our sinful nature be exhibited in our lives, then Paul says we have no part in the kingdom of God.

Let's Pray.

Let me leave you with this today. If you have never read Galatians in one setting please do and see if you can see what I was reflecting on. I'm sure you will see other things as well. Reading large sections and full books of the Bible in one setting is an amazing way to immerse yourself in the story. These letters would have been read to a church. Remember to do your homework and understand the context before you begin. The extra work will be worth it.

Thank you for joining me today @ the PUNLA CoffeeTable. If you liked the message, please share a link with a friend. You can contact me at kip@punla.org if you have comments or questions. So, until next time @ the PUNLA CoffeeTable. God bless.