

Introducing Galatians (Gal 1:1-8)

Introduction: *The Beauty of Galatians*

The main theme of this letter is defending the doctrine of justification by faith (e.g. Gal 3:24), and this letter has been blessed to the conversion and strengthening of many.

William Holland: “There came such a power over me as I cannot well describe; my great burden fell off in an instant; my heart was so filled with peace and love that I burst into tears. I almost thought I saw our Saviour! My companions, perceiving me so affected, fell on their knees and prayed. When I afterwards went into the street, I could scarcely feel the ground I trod upon” (cited in Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 1.183).

1. Context

Paul and Barnabas had been sent out from Antioch on their first missionary journey, which took them through the Roman Province of Galatia, the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13-14). After their return, a terrible controversy broke out in the church. “Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). It’s now shortly before the Jerusalem synod of 48/49 A.D. recorded in Acts 15.

2. Conflict

(a) *An attack on the messenger of the gospel*

The judaizers were claiming that he was not a true apostle. If the false teachers were going to alter the gospel message, they had to attack the gospel messenger.

(b) *An attack on the message of the gospel*

Paul has been preaching that salvation is all of grace, apart from works (cf. Rom 3:23-30, Eph 2:8-10). The “believing Pharisees” (Acts 15:4) attacked that message, saying that Paul was just lowering the bar to get people in, just trying to please men (Gal 1:10). This false teaching worked well in their culture, because by having the Gentiles circumcised, the Christians could avoid persecution (6:12). And circumcision was just the beginning. They wanted the Gentiles to follow the food laws (2:2), observe the traditions (2:14), and celebrate some of our special Jewish feast days and seasons (4:10). Paul’s is as forceful and passionate as he could be in this letter (1:6, 1:9, 3:1, 5:12), though also very affectionate (4:19-20). “Paul was no advocate of undogmatic religion” (Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, p. 23-25).

3. Continuation

Galatians is a particularly timely study because its great, central theme, justification by faith, is once again the subject of renewed attack. Galatians was not only front and center in the days of the reformation; it’s been thrust front and center again into the debate today. Protestants have always charged, since the days of the Reformation, that the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification is, for all intents and purposes, the same doctrine that the Judaizers taught.

Judaizers	Roman Catholics
Must believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God	Must believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God
Must receive Jewish circumcision (Gal 5:2-3)	Must receive Roman baptism / sacraments
Must be justified by the law (Gal 2:16)	Must be justified by the law
Observe feast days (Gal 4:10)	Observe feast days
Observe dietary regulations (Gal 2:2)	Observe dietary regulations (recently changed)
Observe the traditions of the elders (Gal 2:14)	Observe the traditions of the elders