

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 18 – October 3rd, 2021

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalm 52-54

John 1-4

Readings in Class:

Galatians 1-6

Judges 1-10

Introduction to Galatians

Galatians is a letter written by Paul to the Church in Galatia, which is in modern day Turkey, perhaps in the years 51-53 AD. The letter was prompted by the fact that a group of Jews (Judaizers) had come into the area after Paul left and began to tell the people there that they needed to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. This sets off a major theological premise: What makes a person righteous? Is it being observant to the law, or is it faith? What is the path of salvation for those who are now Jews? How do Jews and Gentiles relate? These questions are important for Christian life and practice. More on this discussion can be read in Romans and in Acts 15.

All of these questions begins a very complex and important discussion. So urgent is the matter that Paul goes so far as to call what the Judaizers are preaching is a “different Gospel, which is really no gospel at all” (1:6-7). The importance of the letter to the Galatians is pivotal for the discussion on how we are saved, how various cultures are integrated into the Church, and the use and practice of the law into our lives.

A brief overview of Galatians

1. Greeting 1:1-5
2. The Main Issue: 1:6-12
 - a. Another Gospel? 1:6-10
 - b. Only One Gospel! 1:11-12
3. The Background leading into the problem: 1:13-2:14
 - a. Paul’s call as an apostle 1:13-24
 - b. Paul and the other Apostles 2:1-10
 - c. Paul and Peter 2:11-14
4. The Solution and Theological Center 2:15-21 Not by Works, but by Faith
5. The Supporting Arguments 3:1-6:10
 - a. 1st Argument: Abraham 3:1-18
 - b. 2nd Argument: The Purpose of the Law 3:19-4:7
 - c. 3rd Argument: Galatians before and after faith. 4:8-20
 - d. 4th Argument: Allegory of Sarah and Hagar 4:21-5:1
6. Life of Justified
 - a. 1st Point: Freedom in Christ 5:2-15
 - b. 2nd Point: Fruits of the Flesh vs. Fruit of the Spirit 5:16-26
 - c. 3rd Point: The Law of Christ 6:1-10
7. Summarizing Conclusion 6:11-18

Paul's Defense of His Ministry

As happens on a couple of occasions, Paul has to defend his ministry. The Judaizers perhaps were speaking badly about Paul and saying he didn't know what he was talking about. Paul gives his history again, recounts the few times he met with the other apostles, and even when he publicly rebuked Peter.

Paul's main point in the defense of his ministry is that his teaching comes from no man. He did not get taught by the apostles and he was not instructed by any church. His teachings come from a direct revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus himself authorized and commanded Paul to go preach. The proof for Paul is the persecution that has resulted in his teaching. The mocking and reviling that Paul has received for his teaching is further evidence that what is at stake is a correct understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself.

Saved by Faith not By Works

Galatians was Martin Luther's favorite book, probably because it so clearly articulates that we are saved by faith, not by works. Paul is concerned here about the Galatians because they have reverted to trying to be saved by what they do (the law) instead of by what they believe or who they believe in (the Gospel). He talks about how those who do not do the law are under a curse. No one can actually do the whole law. We all sin. Jesus, however, who did fulfill the law, became a curse for us to redeem us from the law. The law can't save. If it could, Jesus did not have to die. This leads to the idea of Christian freedom. Christians don't have *to* do the law *to be* saved, but we want to do the law *because* we are saved.

Three Uses of the Law

Lutherans talk about the three uses of the law: The curb, the mirror, and the guide. Each function is important and plays a part in the life of people.

The first, the curb, is essentially fear of punishment. It's slowing down when you see a cop or not shoplifting when you see a security camera. By this, evil is kept in check by God. Paul would say in Galatians that this is the Law acting as our babysitter. With this use, love is not the reason why someone fulfills the law, but out of obligation.

The second, the mirror is the prime use of the law. The mirror shows us our sin. It's the measuring stick that shows us we don't measure up. It shows us that we are under a curse and accuses us always of our sin. Paul in Galatians 3 will note that Christ has borne the punishment of the curse of the law and its accusations. Salvation is given not by the demands of the law for you to live up, but by Christ's grace and mercy which is making us new.

Third and finally, the law is the guide. The law is God's will and on this side of the resurrection we desire our flesh to be crucified with Christ and the law is what serves that end. Paul gets to this in chapter 5. The law shows us what God wills and has a proven track record of giving us ways to pursue good works. As Christians, we want what God wants (though our sinful flesh will still fight us on this) and therefore desire after God's will.