

Commentary on Galatians 1, by Chuck Smith 1.7.24

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January verse **Luke 24:45 (NKJV)** And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

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And John MacArthur Introduction to Galatians

Galatia was not a city. It was a territory. It encompassed an area that is now in Turkey. There were several churches founded by Paul in Galatia. And following Paul's evangelistic efforts through the area and the founding of many churches, there were men who came in and they began to pervert the gospel that Paul had taught, the gospel of grace. And they began to preach another gospel which is not a gospel.

Because the word gospel means good news. And if you tell me that God will forgive me of all my sins and account me righteous, if I will simply believe in Jesus Christ, that's good news. But if you tell me that I must then follow certain rules and regulations and be obedient to the law and keep the law of God in order to be righteous, that's not good news because no one's been able to do that. And so Paul is writing to the Galatians to correct this teaching that had followed his ministry in their midst and to free them again from that bondage of the law that men were seeking to put them under.

We in the Gentile church today have so much to be thankful for because of this man, Paul the apostle. Had it not been for his strong stubborn stand on salvation through grace, Christianity could have reverted to just another Jewish sect. But Paul made his stand in front of all of them insisting on this gospel of grace. Salvation through faith and through the grace of God.

And so Galatians is a very strong treatise against any form of legality. Any attempt to become righteous by our works or more righteous through our obedience to the law and it is really setting forth in a very powerful way the gospel of grace and justification by faith. It was this epistle to the Galatians that brought on the Protestant revolution, the reformation which was a revolution from the corruptive practices of the church of that day.

Martin Luther was much like Paul the apostle in that he was one of those fellows who went all out in his religious practices. He was one of the most monkish of all of the monks. And had gone to Rome and in order to appease God was climbing the steps on his knees, one step at a time, offering the prayers and all at each step. And as he was going up these steps the Spirit of God spoke to his heart out of Paul's letter to the Galatians, Martin, the just shall live by faith. And that burned in his heart. And thus was born the Protestant reformation.

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This glorious epistle that has set men free and has brought men into a vital relationship with God through faith. This epistle that opens the door to all men so that I may come freely unto God because, I learn to come to God through this epistle on the basis of God's love and God's grace, not on the basis of my merit, my works, my efforts.

Now these false teachers that came in, one of the first things they always sought to do was to discredit Paul. This is a typical ploy of false teachers. If you have been studying and learning under a minister, a man of God, they'll come in and their first thing is to try to discredit the one that you have been studying under or the one that you were converted under. Now it seems that these false teachers never really seek to evangelize. But they're always trying to go into those who believe and change their beliefs.

So Paul, first of all, reaffirms his apostleship and he says though that it is,

(not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) (Gal 1:1)

It is interesting how that even today, people are asking the same questions that the Pharisees asked John the Baptist while he was baptizing down at the Jordan river. They said, Who gave you the authority to do this? From whence comes your authority? When Jesus cleansed the temple, they asked Him the same question. "Who gave you the authority to do this" (Mark 11:28)? Paul. People it seems are always looking for the basis of your authority. And many times today people come up, especially the Mormons, and they'll say, Who gave you the authority to baptize? Because they teach that they are the only ones who have the right to give authority to anyone to baptize. They are the only true church because they are the only church which still has twelve apostles governing the church.

And their twelve apostles are the only ones who can ordain or grant authority unto men to exercise spiritual ministries. And so their trip is always an authority trip, Who gave you the authority? And so the question to Paul. Well, who gave Paul the authority to be an apostle? Who laid hands on Paul? And of course, we have also within the church today what they call the apostolic succession of the laying on of hands, as far as authority goes in the high church. They ordain the men for the ministry and the bishop lays his hand upon the candidate as he ordains him and this bishop had hands laid on him by another bishop who had hands laid on him by another bishop who had hands laid on him by another bishop who had hands laid on him all the way back to Peter.

So that you have the apostolic laying on of hands. So as the bishop lays his hand upon my head and consecrates me to the ministry, I in my mind perceive this hand as it goes, b-b-b-b-b-b-back to Peter. You know, you see this sort of quick frame kind of a thing all the way back to Peter and Peter is laying his hand on me and ordaining me for the ministry, the apostolic succession of the laying on of hands. And unless you have the

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bishop who had a bishop who had a bishop who had a bishop, then you're not really ordained.

Paul said, Hey, I wasn't ordained by man. I'm an apostle but "not of men, neither by man." I didn't look to man for my authority. I wasn't called by man. I wasn't ordained by man, "but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead."

So Paul's authority goes back one greater than Peter, to Jesus Christ and to God the Father. Now it is my feeling that the ordination of man is totally worthless. I'm not interested in being ordained by man. I believe that there is only one who can really ordain a man to the ministry and that is Jesus Christ. I believe that men at best can only ratify. Someone laying their hands on me isn't going to qualify me for the ministry and unfortunately, in the history of the church, hands had been laid upon scoundrels and they've been proclaimed by this action as ministers of Jesus Christ. But they were not and never have been. They're charlatans, they're scoundrels. Though they have the papers to show that they're ordained to the ministry.

It isn't what man says about me that I'm concerned with, it's what God says about me. And so Paul, an apostle, "not of men, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead."

And all of the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia (Gal 1:2):

So Paul is joining those companions of his in his writing to the church.

Now Paul quite often in the opening salutations of his epistles has some personal words to say but he really doesn't have much to say to the Galatians except the typical Pauline greeting of,

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 1:3),

The Greek word *grace* is a word that in its base meaning is beauty, charm. It has come to mean unmerited favor. And that is its theological kind of a definition. But there is always a beauty attached with grace. And it was the typical Greek greeting. Charis. Peace, the typical Jewish greeting, Shalom. Joined together always by Paul in his epistles, "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ."

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Gal 1:4-5).

The opening salutation of Paul.

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Now in speaking of Jesus Christ, he declares that He "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world." This world is governed by Satan. Jesus called Satan the prince of this world. And referring to him said, "The prince of this world is coming, and has nothing in me" ([John 14:30](#)). When Satan tempted Christ by showing to Him the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and promised to give them to Jesus, if He would just bow down to Satan, Satan bragged, They are mine and I can give them to whomever I will. Jesus did not dispute that. And because Satan is the god of this world, because it is under his control, being given to him by man, it is a present evil world but the purpose of Jesus Christ is to deliver you, His children, from this present evil world. That is God's will to deliver you from it.

Now that deliverance is really twofold. When I believe in Jesus Christ, I am delivered from the hold that the world has on me. One of these days Jesus is going to deliver me out of the world. Right now He's delivering me in the world. I have been delivered while I am here but one day He's going to take me out of here and I will be delivered then fully from the present evil world. But now I am delivered while I am still here. It doesn't have a hold on me any longer.

Now Paul immediately gets right into the issues.

I marvel [I'm shocked] that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel ([Gal 1:6](#)):

They were called into the grace of Christ. They were taught salvation through faith. That it is not something you can earn, it is not something you deserve, it is not something you can purchase, it is something that you can only receive as a free gift of God on the basis, not of your works, not of your efforts, not of your merit but on the basis of your simple trust in Jesus Christ. The gospel of the grace of Christ.

"Unto another gospel:"

Which is not another ([Gal 1:7](#));

That is, it isn't a gospel. It isn't good news.

there are those that would trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ ([Gal 1:7](#)).

There are still those today who are perverting the good news of Jesus Christ by again placing man under certain legal obligations or legal restraints, imposing upon man their rules, their regulations, their standards for holiness. That is not a gospel. If you give me a list of rules that I must abide by in order to be spiritual, that is not a gospel.

I lived for years in a legalistic relationship with God. Trying to follow the rules, trying to follow the regulations. Signing the pledge; annually we had a pledge signing. As we committed ourselves to these rules, I will not do this and that and the other thing. And I

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had a legal relationship with God that I had all kinds of problems with. Because though I had signed the pledge, many times I did not keep the pledge that I had signed. And so I felt doubly guilty.

Then I came into the knowledge of the grace of God through Jesus Christ. And rather than a legal relationship with God, I developed a loving relationship with God. And I've been happy ever since. How I love this relationship I have. Oh, you say, you then do anything you want, huh? Well, yes, I do. But I just don't want to do a lot of things anymore, you see. I really live a more strict life now in this loving relationship with God than I did with the legal relationship with God. You see, there's something perverse about me and about rules. I don't like rules. And if I walk by a sign that says, Don't touch, I'll touch it. Don't walk on the grass, I'll step on it. I just don't like rules.

And there's something within me that sort of rebels against rules. I like this loving relationship I have with God. And I don't walk on the grass. And I don't touch. Not because I can't, I don't want to. If it doesn't please the Father, I don't want to do it. And so this loving relationship is so far superior to the legal relationship with God. And so this gospel that they were proclaiming in that they were trying to put the people into a legal relationship with God, Paul said, is not really another gospel. It's a perversion of the gospel.

And though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed ([Gal 1:8](#)).

That's pretty strong language. "Let him be anathema." "If any man would preach another gospel, even if an angel of heaven would come and preach another gospel," even if Moroni would come and say, You've got to wear certain kind of underwear in order to be righteous and you must go through the temple rites and you must continue to be a faithful Mormon if you are to be saved; you see, that's adding to the salvation through the grace of God offered to us through Jesus Christ. That's putting the burden back on you.

I asked a young man one day who came up to me and I'm sure that he had been in a Sunday school class of mine years ago and he came up to me and said, Chuck, I'm no longer a Christian. Now I'm a Mormon. Now I'm sure that he wasn't schooled enough in the Mormon techniques at that point that he would say something like that, because now they seek to identify themselves as Christians. But he said, I'm a Mormon. And I said, Oh, what a shame. And he said, What do you mean? I said, I mean just what you said. I think it would be a shame if a person ceased being a Christian and started being a Mormon.

I said, But as a Mormon, tell me, Jerry, what do you, what is the base for your hope of eternal life? And he said, My faith in Jesus Christ and continued membership in the Mormon church. I said, Well, as far as I'm concerned you went one step too far. If the basis of your hope for eternal life is your faith in Jesus Christ, I can shake hands with

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you and say, Great, Jerry, continue. But the moment you add anything to that, then it's another gospel. And even if an angel of heaven has declared another gospel that would add something more than your faith in Jesus Christ as your hope for eternal life, then it is not a gospel. And so,

let them be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? if I please men, I would not be the servant of Christ (Gal 1:9-10).

Paul said I'm not really seeking to win a popularity contest among men. I'm seeking to please God. And I could give up this fight. I could give in to the legalism. But if I did, I would not be a servant of God. Thank God, Paul stuck by his guns. Boy, our church today would be something vastly different if Paul had not stuck by his guns.

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. Because I did not receive it from man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11-12).

So this gospel of grace is a revelation of Jesus Christ unto Paul. Now I am certain that God chose Paul and ordained Paul even as he said from his mother's womb that he should be the carrier of this gospel of grace because he was perfectly fitted by God for this task. You see, if you do not follow something to its end, then you always think, Well, my failure was not following it to its end. Had I followed it to the nth degree, then I would have found the satisfaction. And so I look at myself and I say, The failure lies in me, I didn't follow it completely enough.

It is an interesting observation that I have made concerning those who are Buddhists. When a person tells me, Well, I'm a Buddhist, I usually ask them, Well, have you achieved then the perfection and that complete peace in Buddhism? And they will always respond by saying, I am working towards it. Never have I found one who has claimed to achieve. They're always working towards it. It's always this carrot out here at the end of the stick. I'm still working. I hope, you know. But I keep trying. If I work a little harder I might achieve, I might attain, I might find the peace and satisfaction. I'm working towards it.

Paul the apostle had followed the law of God circumspectly. He had followed it down all the way. He writes concerning himself that "as far as the righteousness which is of the law is concerned, I was blameless" (Philippians 3:6). And so Paul speaks of his zeal above his own peers. His zeal for the lost, his zeal for God according to the law and all was above those around him. And yet Paul found himself zealously following the law still empty and frustrated and he did not find the fulfillment. And that is why when he came to the glorious knowledge of Jesus Christ he was so transformed because he had followed the law all the way as far as you could and didn't find the peace.

Now Peter could not really be the emissary of grace because Peter had not really followed the law that circumspectly, you see. And so Peter would think, Well if I had only

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followed the law, I might have achieved, I might have attained, you know. And so Paul was especially prepared of God to receive this gospel of grace and it came to Paul by direct revelation of Jesus Christ. He did not learn this in the church in Jerusalem or from the apostles or those brethren there. Taught to him by direct revelation of Jesus Christ.

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And I profited in the Jews' religion above many of my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers (Gal 1:13-14).

Hey, I was at the top of the class. I went all the way. I went all out for the law and for Judaism. "Above my equals, more exceedingly zealous."

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood (Gal 1:15-16):

When Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus and there had that complete a hundred and eighty degree turn, from persecuting Jesus to following Jesus, such a revolution, total revolution. Paul did not then look up the Christian brothers to learn all about it. But he went out into the desert and spent several years out in the deserts of Saudi Arabia just waiting upon God and receiving the revelation directly from Jesus of the gospel according to grace. So this is not Paul's gospel, this is the gospel of Jesus Christ delivered to Paul who in turn has delivered it to us. This is the truth of Christ; the salvation that is offered now unto you through your faith in Him. "I did not confer with flesh and blood."

I did not go up to Jerusalem to them which were the apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and then I returned to Damascus (Gal 1:17).

I didn't even return to Jerusalem.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18)

So he didn't get back to Jerusalem until about six-and-a-half, seven years after his conversion. He had gone from Jerusalem to Damascus to imprison the Christians, those that call upon God. He was met by Christ on the road so that when he got to Damascus he was a changed man. He ministered to the Christians that were there but realized that he needed to know more and went out into the deserts of Arabia and waited upon Jesus where he received the glorious revelation for three-and-a-half years; returned then to Damascus to stay there and now taught them for three years. And then finally came to Jerusalem.

to see Peter, and stayed with him for fifteen days. But of the other apostles he didn't see any of them, except James the brother of the Lord (Gal 1:18-19).

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This is the James who authored the epistle of James. This is the James who became one of the leaders in the early church. This is not James, the brother of John the fisherman. He was beheaded before Paul got there. This is James, the brother of Jesus Christ mentioned in Mark's gospel and Paul here identifies him.

Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:20-21);

So Paul went from Damascus seven years after his conversion and then went on back to Tarsus where he was born and he went back to making tents.

I was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they only heard, That the one who had persecuted us in times past is now preaching the faith. And they glorified God in me (Gal 1:22-24).

So Paul did not really have any close contact with the church in Jerusalem. In fact, the church in Jerusalem was a little fearful of Paul. They didn't know but what he was a KGB agent. And thus, they were really reluctant to receive Paul into fellowship. So Paul is emphasizing the fact that his gospel is not something that was passed unto him by the apostles or by any man. It was something that came to him through the direct revelation of Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - Galatians

Title Galatians derives its title (pros Galatas) from the region in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) where the churches addressed were located. It is the only one of Paul's epistles specifically addressed to churches in more than one city (1:2; cf. 3:1; 1 Cor. 16:1).

Author and Date There is no reason to question the internal claims that the apostle Paul wrote Galatians (1:1; 5:2). Paul was born in Tarsus, a city in the province of Cilicia, not far from Galatia. Under the famous rabbi, Gamaliel, Paul received a thorough training in the OT Scriptures and in the rabbinic traditions at Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). A member of the ultra-orthodox sect of the Pharisees (Acts 23:6), he was one of first-century Judaism's rising stars (1:14; cf. Phil. 3:5, 6).

The course of Paul's life took a sudden and startling turn when, on his way to Damascus from Jerusalem to persecute Christians, he was confronted by the risen, glorified Christ. That dramatic encounter turned Paul from Christianity's chief persecutor to its greatest missionary. His 3 missionary journeys and trip to Rome turned Christianity from a faith that included only a small group of Palestinian Jewish believers into an Empire-wide phenomenon. Galatians is one of 13 inspired letters he addressed to Gentile congregations or his fellow workers.

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In chap. 2, Paul described his visit to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, so he must have written Galatians after that event. Since most scholars date the Jerusalem Council about A.D. 49, the most likely date for Galatians is shortly thereafter.

Background and Setting In Paul's day, the word Galatia had two distinct meanings. In a strict ethnic sense, Galatia was the region of central Asia Minor inhabited by the Galatians. They were a Celtic people who had migrated to that region from Gaul (modern France) in the third century B.C. The Romans conquered the Galatians in 189 B.C. but allowed them to have some measure of independence until 25 B.C. when Galatia became a Roman province, incorporating some regions not inhabited by ethnic Galatians (e.g., parts of Lycaonia, Phrygia, and Pisidia). In a political sense, Galatia came to describe the entire Roman province, not merely the region inhabited by the ethnic Galatians.

Paul founded churches in the southern Galatian cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14–14:23). These cities, although within the Roman province of Galatia, were not in the ethnic Galatian region. There is no record of Paul's founding churches in that northern, less populated region.

Those two uses of the word Galatia make it more difficult to determine who the original recipients of the epistle were. Some interpret Galatia in its strict racial sense and argue that Paul addressed this epistle to churches in the northern Galatian region, inhabited by the ethnic descendants of the Gauls. Although the apostle apparently crossed the border into the fringes of ethnic Galatia on at least two occasions (Acts 16:6; 18:23), Acts does not record that he founded any churches or engaged in any evangelistic ministry there.

Because neither Acts nor Galatians mentions any cities or people from northern (ethnic) Galatia, it is reasonable to believe that Paul addressed this epistle to churches located in the southern part of the Roman province, but outside of the ethnic Galatian region. Acts records the apostle's founding of such churches at Pisidian Antioch (13:14–50), Iconium (13:51–14:7; cf. 16:2), Lystra (14:8–19; cf. 16:2), and Derbe (14:20, 21; cf. 16:1). In addition, the churches Paul addressed had apparently been established before the Jerusalem Council (2:5), and the churches of southern Galatia fit that criterion, having been founded during Paul's first missionary journey before the Council met. Paul did not visit northern (ethnic) Galatia until after the Jerusalem Council (Acts 16:6).

Paul wrote Galatians to counter judaizing false teachers who were undermining the central NT doctrine of justification by faith. Ignoring the express decree of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:23–29), they spread their dangerous teaching that Gentiles must first become Jewish proselytes and submit to all the Mosaic law before they could become Christians (see 1:7; 4:17, 21; 5:2–12; 6:12, 13). Shocked by the Galatians' openness to that damning heresy (cf. 1:6), Paul wrote this letter to defend justification by faith, and warn these churches of the dire consequences of abandoning that essential doctrine. Galatians is the only epistle Paul wrote that does not contain a commendation for its

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readers—that obvious omission reflects how urgently he felt about confronting the defection and defending the essential doctrine of justification.

Historical and Theological Themes Galatians provides valuable historical information about Paul's background (chaps. 1, 2), including his 3-year stay in Nabatean Arabia (1:17, 18), which Acts does not mention; his 15-day visit with Peter after his stay in Arabia (1:18, 19); his trip to the Jerusalem Council (2:1–10); and his confrontation of Peter (2:11–21).

As already noted, the central theme of Galatians (like that of Romans) is justification by faith. Paul defends that doctrine (which is the heart of the gospel) both in its theological (chaps. 3, 4) and practical (chaps. 5, 6) ramifications. He also defends his position as an apostle (chaps. 1, 2) since, as in Corinth, false teachers had attempted to gain a hearing for their heretical teaching by undermining Paul's credibility. The main theological themes of Galatians are strikingly similar to those of Romans, e.g., the inability of the law to justify (2:16; cf. Rom. 3:20); the believer's deadness to the law (2:19; cf. Rom. 7:4); the believer's crucifixion with Christ (2:20; cf. Rom. 6:6); Abraham's justification by faith (3:6; cf. Rom. 4:3); that believers are Abraham's spiritual children (3:7; cf. Rom. 4:10, 11) and therefore blessed (3:9; cf. Rom. 4:23, 24); that the law brings not salvation but God's wrath (3:10; cf. Rom. 4:15); that the just shall live by faith (3:11; cf. Rom. 1:17); the universality of sin (3:22; cf. Rom. 11:32); that believers are spiritually baptized into Christ (3:27; cf. Rom. 6:3); believers' adoption as God's spiritual children (4:5–7; cf. Rom. 8:14–17); that love fulfills the law (5:14; cf. Rom. 13:8–10); the importance of walking in the Spirit (5:16; cf. Rom. 8:4); the warfare of the flesh against the Spirit (5:17; cf. Rom. 7:23, 25); and the importance of believers bearing one another's burdens (6:2; cf. Rom. 15:1).

Interpretive Challenges First, Paul described a visit to Jerusalem and a subsequent meeting with Peter, James, and John (2:1–10). There is a question to be resolved in that text, as to whether that was his visit to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), or his earlier visit bringing famine relief to the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:27–30). Second, those who teach baptismal regeneration (the false doctrine that baptism is necessary for salvation) support their view from 3:27. Third, others have used this epistle to support their attacks on the biblical roles of men and women, claiming that the spiritual equality taught in 3:28 is incompatible with the traditional concept of authority and submission. Fourth, those who reject the doctrine of eternal security argue that the phrase "you have fallen from grace" (5:4) describes believers who lost their salvation. Fifth, there is disagreement whether Paul's statement "see with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!" refers to the entire letter, or merely the concluding verses. Finally, many claim that Paul erased the line between Israel and the church when he identified the church as the "Israel of God" (6:16). Those challenges will be addressed in the notes to the appropriate passages.