

GALATIANS 1

Don't Pervert The Gospel!

"In India a Hindu of the highest caste, Sundar Singh, became a Christian...Like Saul of Tarsus, he had been endued with a fanatical zeal against the things of Christ. As an act of malice he one day poured kerosene over a Bible and burned it. This act of sacrilege occurred early on the morning of December 18, 1904. He immediately, as he recorded in his diary,

*"I thought the place was on fire...I saw the form of the Lord Jesus Christ. It has such an appearance of glory and love." Following this experience Singh became one of the most widely read Christian writers and evangelists in modern Asia."*¹

Pre-Article Questions:

1. Describe a powerful situation from your life that helped shape your view and understanding of God?
2. In what ways has that event impacted your passion and direction in life?

Glory and love, this is Christ. Maybe your vision of Christ is not so. If that is the case, this study will offer you a fresh perspective and an opportunity to change your mind. If you have been following Christ for a long time but are tired and weary, here is your breath of fresh air: Galatians. Breath it in; after studying this letter you will be renewed and refreshed. If you are reading this right now with an already burning heart for Jesus, may this epistle add some embers to that flame in its simplicity and depth. This Pauline letter was almost singlehandedly used as the sword of the Reformation. Martin Luther loved this letter so much he regarded it as his "wife," according to some of his writings. He also coined it the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty."²

Undoubtedly and with unanimity it is agreed upon that the Apostle Paul was the author. In Galatians 1, we are offered one of the most valuable autobiographical clips of his life. He speaks of his previous ways as a persecutor of Christians and passion for the traditions of his fathers in Judaism. Paul had one of the most dramatic and powerful conversion experiences in the Bible. He was knocked off his horse, literally, On his way to persecute more Christians, he was stricken with blindness by the voice and light of Christ, never again to be the same. Timothy George, Biblical scholar, writes: "Blinded by the dazzling light, Paul stumbled in darkness towards his original destination. The irony is profound: he who had gone to Damascus to take others captive was himself led, helpless and blind, to one of the very disciples he intended to subdue."³

Paul's conversion was unique in that he was a witness of the resurrected Christ and that his conversion was his calling. This calling is evident throughout the book of Galatians. It is with fire and thunder he storms through this letter, passionately proclaiming the truths of the gospel that had been perverted by false teachers among those in the churches of Galatia. The destination and date of this epistle is often disputed but the South Galatia Theory seems most favored. This theory dates this letter at 48 to 49 A.D., assuming that "Galatians was written to churches in the southern area of the Roman province of Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) that Paul had founded on his first missionary journey."⁴ One proof to this theory is Paul's double mention of Barnabas (2:1,13) in Galatians and that he was with him on his first missionary

1. George, Timothy. The New American Commentary: Galatians, Vol. 30. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1994. 32.

2. Fee, Gordon. Pentecostal Commentary Series: Galatians. Dorchester, UK: Deo Publishing, 2007. xii.

3. George, 30.

4. Commentary: TNIV Study Bible. Michigan: Zondervan, 2006. 1972.

trek in the Southern provinces. As far as when this letter was written within the corpus of his other letters, the best logic is to place it between 2 Corinthians and Romans, making it the fifth letter in the Pauline Cannon (after 1 & 2 Thessalonians and 1 & 2 Corinthians).⁵ Biblical scholar Fee states, "...my reason for dating Galatians in the mid-50s of the first century is its linguistic and stylistic relationship to 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans, on the one hand, and its almost total non-relationship to 1 and 2 Thessalonians, on the other."⁶

Paul surely had an excellent challenge set before him. The Hellenistic age, (period from Alexander the Great's death 323 B.C to the early centuries of the Christian era) with the consolidation of the Roman Empire, created a world ripe for spiritual experiences, understandings, and commitments. The Roman provinces were flooded with many mystery religions from the east, each offering eternal salvation and immortality through some kind of rite or ritual.⁷ Hearing the Christian message for the first time, many people could have brushed it off as yet another mystical religious system. It was of the utmost importance that the gospel of Jesus Christ was not perverted at all and that the historicity and exclusivity of the message was proclaimed in truth and power. Paul would be certain to contrast the gospel with the prevailing religions of the day by emphasizing these unique qualities. With this comparison in mind, Paul was undone that Jewish-Christians in the area, known as Judaizers, were teaching and promoting that salvation by grace and faith in Christ was not sufficient without the completion of certain Jewish rituals and practices, including circumcision.

Hence, the first four chapters of Galatians are Paul's confrontation and counter on this front. In the second and final portion of Galatians, Paul counters another false teaching of the gospel prevalent in the area and era by asking the question: "If God justifies us by faith alone no matter how great our sin, should we not then sin all the more in order to enjoy grace more?"⁸ One must not think that we, in the 21st century, do not struggle with these same perversions of the gospel. Praise be to God, His word, through scripture, is timeless and always relevant to our lives. May your faith be strengthened and your life changed as you examine your own heart in these matters and allow the Holy Spirit to give you an anchor for your soul through the study of Galatians.

Paul spends almost the entire first chapter of Galatians and part of the second verifying his apostolic authority and purpose of writing. It would be best to familiarize ourselves in this introductory study with his conversion in the Book of Acts to foreground our study of Galatians.

Article Questions:

1. What do you find interesting and helpful about the book of Galatians before you begin to study it in depth?
2. In what ways do you feel like this study will be relevant to your life after reading the article?

Acts 9:1-31, NIV

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on

5. Fee, 4.

6. Fee, 4.

7. George, 26,28.

8. George, 36.

his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." 13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." 17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. 23 After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. 26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. 30 When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

Study Questions:

1. What aspects of Paul's conversion experience strike you as the most profound?
2. Why do you think this encounter with God was so life altering for Paul?
3. What actions of Paul's, after his encounter, demonstrate the genuineness of his faith? In what ways do his actions challenge or encourage you tonight?
4. How would you feel if you were in Ananias' position? What actions and words of his were commendable and why?

Study Questions:

5. What do you observe about Barnabas from this passage of scripture? In what ways is God calling you to be a Barnabas to a friend this week?
6. Because Barnabas embraced Paul so readily, he had the joy of becoming a great friend and co-laborer in the gospel with Paul. In what ways has being one of the first people to accept and love a friend blessed you, changed your life, and grown your character?
7. Paul's community of followers saved his life all the time! We all need community. How do you feel this small group will be a community that "saves" your life this semester and year? What challenges will you have to hurdle over to stay in a close community this semester?
Paul called himself, "the chief of sinners." If God can change a man like Paul, He can change you. What area of your life are you hoping God will change and strengthen this semester by His power? How can we pray f

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Please meet with your prayer partner to read and discuss:

1. Recap and share some of the highlights of where you are at in your spiritual journey and what your experience has been thus far in Chi Alpha. Discuss the ways you are hoping to grow by attending a small group this year.
2. Read Acts 8:26-40 and list all the supernatural events that took place in the conversion of the Ethiopian. How does this story, as well as Paul's conversion experience, increase your faith in Christ and encourage you to share your faith?

Scripture Memory:

Acts 9:15-16

Galatians 1:8-9