

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we introduce the letter to the GALATIANS.

POINT 1. THE WRITER OF GALATIANS.

The author is the apostle Paul. He is an apostle, because he was not sent by any man, but by the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. He wrote the letter in the first person singular (1:6,10-17). But before sending the letter, he had discussed the contents of the letter with “all the brothers with him”. Even though the church at Corinth may not yet have been organised as a church, these brothers were the first group of believers in Corinth. Some of them were Jewish converts, like Priscilla and Aquila, who had come from Rome. Because the letter was a sharp reproof against false Jewish Christian teachers that had come from Jerusalem in Israel, Paul regarded it necessary to discuss the letter’s contents with others who had the welfare of Israel on their hearts. Paul did not want to violate the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 about reproof.

POINT 2. THE RECIPIENTS OF GALATIANS.

All the evidence shows that Paul wrote this letter, not to some unknown churches in northern Galatia, but to the known churches in southern Galatia.

During the first missionary journey from A.D. 47-49, Paul and his team had established churches in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, which were in the region called southern Galatia. The gospel spread throughout that whole region (Acts 13:49). Soon thereafter false Jewish teachers came from Judea to Galatia and taught the Christians that unless they were circumcised and kept the Jewish law they could not be saved (Acts 15:1).

At the beginning of the second missionary journey in A.D. 50, Paul and his team travelled to the cities in southern Galatia, called Derbe, Lystra and Iconium. Then they continued to travel, not towards northern Galatia, but towards Asia in the west, “throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia”, which consisted of the more northern city of Antioch and its region. Acts 16:6 mentions that they were travelling, but does not mention that they were preaching the gospel or establishing churches at that time. The Holy Spirit led them to Troas and from there to Macedonia and Achaia in Europe. It is clear that Paul’s second missionary journey did not go through northern Galatia, but through southern Galatia, where he delivered the decisions of the Jerusalem Council to the existing churches in southern Galatia and strengthened the churches there that were attacked by the false Jewish teachers (Act 16:1-5).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul especially contends against these false Jewish teachers who tried to turn Christians into Jews by teaching that Christians should keep the Jewish law, especially physical circumcision. These false teachers would not bypass the churches in southern Galatia on their way to northern Galatia.

Moreover, Barnabas, who had worked with Paul in these southern Galatian churches, is mentioned three times in the letter to the Galatians (2:1,9,13).

Finally, it is only with respect to these southern Galatian churches that Paul could say at the Jerusalem Council that he had not for a moment given in to these false teachers who had infiltrated the Christian churches, so that the truth of the gospel might continue with the Christian churches (2:4-5)! The conclusion is that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians not to the Gauls in northern Galatia but to the churches in southern Galatia.

POINT 3. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING OF GALATIANS.

There are several good reasons to believe that Galatians was written about A.D. 50 from Corinth.

First. Galatians was written after the Jerusalem Council.

Against the theory that Galatians mentions all Paul’s visits to Jerusalem, is the fact that the words in Galatians 2:1, “Fourteen years later I went up *again* to Jerusalem” does not necessarily mean “for the second time.” It simply mentions a particular visit to Jerusalem in which the issue of the false teachers, who infiltrated the churches and the issue of the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians were discussed and decided. Therefore, the visit mentioned in Galatians 2:1 must be identified with the third visit of Paul to Jerusalem in A.D. 50, fourteen years after his first visit mentioned in Galatians 1:18. This third visit was during the Jerusalem Council, where Paul’s relation to the other great leaders, James, Peter and John was officially established.

Second. Galatians was written after two previous visits to Galatia.

According to Galatians 4:13, Paul implied that he had visited the Galatian churches twice before he wrote this letter. The first visit was during his first missionary journey recorded in Acts 13-14, and the second visit was during the

beginning of his second missionary journey in A.D. 50, recorded in Acts 15:36 to 16:5. Paul mentioned that during the former of these two visits, he was forced to continue his ministry there for a longer period than he had at first contemplated, because of some unexplained sickness.

Third. Galatians was written not long after the conversion of the Galatians.

According to Galatians 1:6, Paul was amazed that the Galatians had so quickly deserted God, who had graciously called them in Christ, and had turned towards a different gospel that was a false gospel. The letter to the Galatians must therefore have been written very soon after his second visit to them in A.D. 50.

Fourth. Galatians may well have been written in A.D. 50 from Corinth.

This was before the arrival of Timothy and Silas from Thessalonica (Acts 19:1-8). This would explain why Paul omits greetings from these two fellow workers in his letter to the Galatians. After Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul also wrote 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians from Corinth in A.D. 50. Galatians was therefore the very first and oldest of all the letters of Paul that have been preserved!

POINT 4. THE OCCASION AND PURPOSE OF WRITING GALATIANS

First. The occasion of writing Galatians.

Acts 8:1-3 and 11:19-21 relate that after the great persecution of Jewish Christians by the Jews in Jerusalem, these Christians were scattered and they travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch in Syria. First these Jewish Christians preached the gospel only to the Jews living there, but soon some Greek speaking Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene preached the gospel also to the Greek speaking Gentiles. Many Gentiles believed in Jesus Christ. In about A.D. 44/45, when many Gentiles were converted to the Christian faith in Antioch, Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch to help in the ministry among the Gentiles. It was in Antioch that it had been most clearly discerned that the followers of Jesus Christ were not just another Jewish sect, but had a faith that was completely unique among all the religions in the Roman Empire. It was at Antioch that the followers of Jesus Christ were first called *Christians* (Act 11:25-26). Thus, when nominal Jewish Christian converts from the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5) heard that the Gentiles were being saved by faith apart from keeping the law and particularly apart from being physically circumcised they immediately launched a campaign against the apostle Paul and his gospel. They sent some of their people without authorisation of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:24) to the church at Antioch to teach the Gentile Christians that unless they kept the law and particularly circumcision, they could not be saved. The Antioch church sent a delegation to Jerusalem to meet with the other apostles and the elders of the church at Jerusalem in order to discuss and decide the relationship of the Old Testament law to the New Testament gospel as well as the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Gentile Christian, Titus, was sent along as a test case and a challenge to the Jewish Christians (Gal 2:3). There were two important meetings in Jerusalem:

One. A private meeting of leaders in Jerusalem in A.D. 50. The Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15 was probably preceded by a private interview of the leaders described in Galatians 2:2-10. There was evidently complete agreement on every point. They agreed that Titus must not receive circumcision. They agreed that the basic doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ apart from the works of the law must be upheld for both Jews and Gentiles. They decided to make a division, probably a geographical division of labour, so that James, Peter and John would preach the gospel to Jews and Paul and Barnabas to Gentiles. And they agreed that the needy Christians in Jerusalem must be remembered. At the end of this interview, the Jerusalem leaders, called "pillars", gave Paul and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship."

Two. The Jerusalem Council in A.D. 50. At the Jerusalem Council, the Jewish Christian converts from the sect of the Pharisees that were falsely teaching that Christians had to keep the Jewish law were given an opportunity to defend their position (Acts 15:5). Then the apostle Peter reminded everyone how God himself made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles with respect to the way of salvation (Acts 15:7-11). The apostle Paul reported about the miraculous signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles. James concluded that what was happening in the Gentile world was clearly a fulfilment of prophecy in the Old Testament (Amos 9:11-12) and that they should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who were turning to God. Being a practical man, James suggested the adoption of certain 'requirements' (Act 15:28) in the sense of 'necessary things' in order to love brothers or 'decisions' (Act 16:4) in the sense of 'advice' that would make it possible for Jewish and Gentile Christians to live together in peace and harmony in this period of transition (Acts 15:20-21). Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Jerusalem Council decided that everybody is saved only by grace apart from the works of the law, and that especially physical circumcision was not necessary to be saved. The apostles, elders and the whole church reached a consensus, they recorded their decisions and made it known to all the Christian churches (Acts 15:22-29; Jn 16:13).

The Jewish false teachers, however, followed Paul everywhere and tried to destroy the results of his work among the Gentiles. They were partly to blame for Peter's reprehensible conduct at Antioch, when he refused to associate with

Gentiles (Gal 2:11-12). They also travelled throughout Galatia, insisting that the Gentile Christians be circumcised as a means unto salvation (Gal 5:2-3; 6:12). These false teachers did not deny that faith in Jesus Christ was necessary, but they loudly proclaimed that certain requirements of the Jewish ceremonial law were equally necessary for salvation (Gal 4:9-10). These false teachers preached *a different gospel* than Paul. They preached *a Christ plus the law gospel*, which consisted of faith in Jesus Christ *plus* obedience to the Old Testament law as necessary for salvation. In order to bolster their own cause they cast suspicion on Paul. They tried to discredit Paul by claiming that his apostleship was not from God but from men, and that therefore his gospel was second-hand (Gal 1:1; 1 Cor 9:1 ff.).

Paul knew that these Jewish false teachers were troublemakers and Christians in name only. They were insincere and inconsistent, because while trying to force others to observe the law, they themselves failed to keep it (Gal 6:13). Their aim was to alienate the Christian *Gentiles* from the apostle Paul, to escape persecution from other *Jews* and to boast that they had convinced *Gentiles* to receive the *Jewish* physical circumcision. In contrast to these false teachers, Paul preached only *the gospel about Christ crucified* (Gal 4:17; 6:12-14).

Second. The purpose of writing Galatians.

Because many Galatian Christians had listened to these false teachers who had infiltrated into the church, Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians with two purposes:

One. His first purpose was to defend the doctrine of salvation. Some Christians fell into the false extreme of thinking that they would be *saved by doing the works of the law*. Paul answered this perversion of the doctrine of salvation by teaching that both Jews and Gentiles are only saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from keeping the law. Whoever tries to be saved by keeping the law, must keep the law 100%. But because nobody has kept the law perfectly or can keep the law perfectly, no one will be saved by keeping the law! Whoever tries to keep the law, but does not keep it absolutely perfectly, is accursed. But whoever puts his trust in Jesus Christ is saved, because Christ fulfilled the law in his place and carried the curse of all his sins in his place (Gal 3:10-14).

Two. His second purpose was to defend the doctrine of grace. Other Christians fell into the other extreme of thinking that they had been *set free from doing the works of the law*. They thought that they may sin as they like, because they had already been saved by grace. Paul answered this perversion of the doctrine of grace by teaching that a Christian who walks by the Holy Spirit of freedom will not fulfil the desires of the flesh. Instead he will bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:13-26).

POINT 5. THE DIVISION OF GALATIANS

The letter of Paul to the Galatians may be given **the title**: "Galatians - the gospel of justification by faith apart from the works of the law." The letter portrays Jesus Christ crucified for our justification, which results in true freedom.

The theme of Galatians is written in Galatians 2:16,20-21, "A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. ... Righteous is not gained through the law, but by the grace of God."

The letter to the Galatians may be divided into three parts:

Part one. The origin of the gospel in Galatians 1-2.

The gospel, which Paul preached, was not made up by man, but by God. Paul did not receive it from any man, but by revelation from Christ (1:11-12). There is only one gospel and everyone who preaches another gospel is accursed (1:6-9). The apostles in Jerusalem fully agreed with the gospel that Paul preached everywhere (2:7-9).

Part two. The vindication of the gospel in Galatians 3-4.

The Old Testament law pronounced a curse on the disobedient. By being crucified, Christ redeemed all who believe in him from this curse (3:10-14). This promise or covenant is superior to the law and is still in force. The covenant came long before the law and came directly from God, while the law came 430 years later and came through mediation by Moses (3:15-20). The covenant is not annulled by the law, because the purpose of the law is to reveal our sinfulness and to lead us to Christ (3:21-24). The false teachers, who perverted the true gospel, caused the Galatians to exchange their former *slavery to paganism* for *slavery to Judaism* (4:8-11). The Old Testament history records the command to get rid of the slave-woman and her son, who will never share in the inheritance of the free-woman and her son. The Galatians are exhorted to cast out "the slave-woman and her son", who *represent bondage to the law*, and hold on to "the free-woman and her son", who *represent freedom in Christ* (4:21-31).

Part three. The application of the gospel in Galatians 5-6.

The false teachers tried to combine justification by the law with justification by faith. That is absolutely impossible! Whoever tries to be justified by his own works of the law is alienated from Christ and cannot be justified (5:2-4). On the one hand, when you are justified by faith in Jesus Christ you are set free from trying to be justified by the works of the law. Christ has set Christians free so that they can live in freedom from trying to save themselves (5:1). On the other hand, when you are justified by faith in Jesus Christ you are not free to live in sin and fulfil the desires of your sinful nature (5:13). Every Christian that lives by the Spirit of Christ will crucify the sinful nature and will bear the fruit of the Spirit (5:16-26). True freedom does not mean disregarding the law, but it means serving one another in love and love sums up the law (5:13-14). True freedom carries other people's burdens, shares all good things with their instructors, does things that please the Holy Spirit and never becomes weary to do good, especially to other Christians (6:1-10).

POINT 6. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF GALATIANS

First. Law and grace.

Paul's mind is so broad that it has room for both *sovereign grace* and *human responsibility*. Paul refuses to set aside the grace of God, as if righteousness could be gained through the law (2:21). The law shows us our need for salvation. God's grace shows us that we are completely saved by Christ's completed work on the cross. We are saved by sovereign divine grace and we are given the human responsibility to serve one another in love.

Second. Works and faith.

The false teachers preached a gospel of justification by works of the law besides faith. Paul preached the gospel of justification by faith alone apart from the works of the law (2:16). *Works keeps people striving to earn salvation. Faith makes people free to receive salvation.*

Third. Acts of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit.

The sinful nature (flesh) makes us prone to sin. The Holy Spirit gives us daily victory over sin and makes us fruitful Christians (5:19-23).

Fourth. Circumcision and the cross.

People who believe that physical circumcision is necessary for salvation are not saved and are not free. In stead they are slaves that have to obey the whole law. And they are accursed, because they cannot keep the law (5:3; 3:10). People who undergo circumcision try to avoid persecution by the Jews. And people who promote circumcision boast because they have succeeded to turn a Gentile into a Jew (6:13-14). Only the death of Jesus Christ on the cross saves people from the curse brought about by the law (3:13-14), rescues people from the present evil age (1:4) and crucifies the sinful nature in people with its passions and desires (5:24).

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read Ephesians 1-6. Next week we will introduce the letter to the Ephesians.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".