

# FREE

## PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

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### LIVE FREE.

Are you spinning along in a prison-like pinwheel of do's and don'ts, all the while feeling like you never can quite measure up to the expectations of other Christians? Do you believe God's love for you is dependent on your behavior? It's time to discover true freedom and joy in God's grace.

## LIVING IN LIBERTY AS PEOPLE OF GRACE

### CENTRAL PURPOSE

Called the "Magna Charta of Christian Liberty," this pivotal letter to the assemblies of Christ-followers in the region of Galatia was, in part, a strong corrective to call them back to the one true gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. Pseudo-righteous Christians from a Jewish background were enforcing legalistic measures as a means of gaining and maintaining a right standing with God, e.g. circumcision (5:2-3), celebration of Jewish feasts (4:9-10), as well as cultural sensibilities of Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

While there was nothing wrong with people continuing their Jewish way of life, to force extra-biblical rules and preferences upon others as the way to follow God is entirely contradictory to the good news of Christ. Therefore, Paul – inspired by the Holy Spirit – wrote so that the believers across Galatia would return to the one true gospel of grace as the way to live in a love-relationship with God (4:1-7) and with one another (5:13-6:10).

### AUTHOR and DATE

The content, style, and peculiar earmarks of authenticity lead nearly all scholars to agree Paul wrote this important message to the churches of Galatia.<sup>2</sup> His defense of his apostleship (1:1, 11-24), his first-hand retelling of a debate between the apostles (2:1-21), personal comments about his penmanship (6:11), and a mention of his scars from persecution (6:17), guide us to confidently conclude Paul was the author.

Our best estimate for the time in which Paul wrote this letter is A.D. 48. Two factors point toward this time stamp: (1) The letter was likely written immediately prior to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15; about A.D. 49-50), which addressed the relationship between New Testament believers and the Law of Moses. If this gathering had already taken place, Paul certainly would have mentioned the council's resolution to further strengthen his argument. (2) This epistle was certainly written after Paul's first missionary journey

(A.D. 47-48), which brought him through several cities in south Galatia (see *Setting*). Much to Paul's surprise, soon after evangelizing many people in the region, they began "quickly deserting" (1:6) the gospel of grace in Christ for religious enslavement to the Law, thus the need for a swift and direct rebuke.

### HISTORICAL SETTING

Paul directly addresses the "churches in Galatia" (1:2) in his greeting, but where exactly were these churches? While some have theorized that this letter was addressed to believers in the larger northern region of Galatia (originally settled by the Gauls who migrated from western Europe), it is far more likely that this letter was originally sent to Christians in the southern portion of the province. During Paul's first missionary journey he ministered in four key cities in south Galatia: Antioch (Pisidian), Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14-14:23). Paul continued planting churches in southern Galatia during his second . . . (cont. pg. 2)

## WARNING: SUBTLE DISTORTION

The central sin-issue in Galatia was not licentiousness but legalism. Outwardly religious, wise-looking behavior was promoted as the way of gaining and maintaining one's relationship with God. But the deception was subtle. Deconstruction of the gospel starts with a subtle distortion of the gospel. Legalism always disguises itself as a pious-sounding people-pleaser. Yet it slowly but steadily replaces joy with defeat, humility with arrogance, freedom with slavery, and motivation with exhaustion.

