

**Galatians**  
**February 2, 2008**  
**Galatians 1:1-24**

**I. Introduction**

The timing of the writing of this letter is difficult to determine. It might be the first book written in the NT; other possibilities are 1 Thessalonians or James. For the purposes of this course, we will assume that it was written early, shortly before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, and was written to the southern part of Galatians, those churches specially noted as being established in Paul's first missionary trip.

The first missionary trip occurred about 46-48 AD. The Galatians churches noted as established in Acts 13-14 were Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul likely wrote the letter from Syrian Antioch, probably about 49 or 50 AD. The Jerusalem Council was held about 50 AD.

The letter was written to combat a destructive cult called the Judaizers or the circumcision party. The Judaizers believed that the Christian converts had to become Jews first before they could be saved. Circumcision was the specific action that was required; circumcision was generally required for male converts before they could become a Jew.

Historically, this letter has had a greater impact than any of Paul's letters, including Romans (although Romans has had a greater impact of theology). The Letter to the Galatians was primary mover behind the reformation. Martin Luther loved the letter, having written two different commentaries on it. Others, including Calvin, were also enthralled by it. They were escaping from Catholic efforts with Galatians being the primary tool.

**II. Opening Verses**

**Gal 1:1-5**

**1:1 Paul, an apostle — sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— 2 and all the brothers with me,**

**To the churches in Galatia:**

**3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

**NIV**

The brothers were likely others that were with him, perhaps those that had visited the Galatian church.

What Paul writes, and does not write, in these verses become important in the rest of the letter. For example, Paul emphasizes his divine calling. He also does not indicate any praise for the Galatian churches, and he does not provide a prayer of thanksgiving for them, as he commonly does in his letters. He also emphasizes what Jesus did on the cross; while certainly not uncommon at the beginning of his letters, this point is particularly important in this one.

### III. Only One Gospel

**Gal 1:6-9**

**6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!**

NIV

What is the true gospel?

Verse 6 Rather than praise at the beginning of this letter, we get a rebuke.

Verse 7 While the different gospel that is no gospel is not now identified, Paul identifies it later in the letter, such as in 5:2-3 and 6:12.

Verse 7 “Pervert” is literally to turn about. It could be translated as reversed.

Verse 8 Whether Paul was referring to an actual situation concerning the angels is unknown. In 3:19, he refers to the angels in helping to bring the law.

Paul does not mince words in this section. When it is appropriate to allow our emotions to show as his does here?

### IV. From God or From Man?

**Gal 1:10-12**

**10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. 11 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.**

NIV

In his defense of the true gospel, Paul wanted to make sure that they realized that his motivation did not come from him or any human being, but rather it came from God.

Verse 10 Unfortunately in many pulpits today, verse 10 is no longer true.

Verse 10 Certainly, under the guidance of the Spirit, Paul did try to persuade men:

**2 Cor 5:11**

**11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.**

NIV

Verse 12 The Judaizers might have taught that he received it from James, Peter, and John, the leaders of the church at Jerusalem, thereby giving them license to say that Paul did not have it correct.

## **V. Paul's Background**

**Gal 1:13-17**

**13 For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.**

NIV

Since we do not have the full chronology of all the events that are associated with this letter and with Acts 9-18, we cannot be too dogmatic about how the exact events unfolded. This is a continuing problem throughout the autobiographical sections of this book. However, Acts 9:19-27 seems appropriate for this section, but the trip back to the Damascus is not identified in Acts.

Verse 13 Note that “churches” is used in verse 2, but only “church” in this verse. This would seem to be verification of both the local churches and of the universal church.

Verse 16 At this point, Paul's call was so strong that he did not need to confer or consult with any human being to have it confirmed. Note also verse 18.

## **VI. More on Paul**

**Gal 1:18-24**

**18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles — only James, the Lord's brother. 20 I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. 21 Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. 22 I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23 They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24 And they praised God because of me.**

NIV

Verse 18 It would have been very interesting—and instructive—to have been able to listen to Paul and Peter talk for 15 days.

Verse 18 “After three years” usually met “in the third year” since Hebrew time reckoning was generally inclusive. This will become important next week as we attempt to define the timing on the various events (with our somewhat limited information).

Verse 19 Apparently, Paul was not seen by most of the elite leadership in Jerusalem...only Peter and James are identified here. Acts also identifies Barnabas, but he was probably not in the top tier of apostles. James is the head of the Jerusalem church, and worldwide Christianity; he was also probably the half brother of Jesus.

Verse 20 The Amplified version does a good job of identifying the context of this verse:

**20 Now [note carefully what I am telling you, for it is the truth], I write this as if I were standing before the bar of God; I do not lie. AMP**

Verse 21 Antioch was the capital of the Roman province of Syria. Tarsus is the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia.

Verse 22 By both the account in Acts and Galatians, Paul was not totally unknown by those in Judea, but apparently he was also not well known. He was apparently in limbo for about 14 years. Clearly, as the next verse points out, they had some knowledge of him.

Why does Paul spend so much time discussing his background in this chapter? He also continues in it in the next chapter.

**VII. Discussion Point: Do Churches Have Any Tendencies Today to Bypass the Gospel of Christ Only (*Solus Christus*)?**

**VIII. Discussion Point: Why Is Paul So Negative to the Judaizers (i.e. to those who wanted Christians to become Jews first)?**

“Why can't we all just get along?” (President Dale from *Mars Attack*)