

What I Noticed When I Read The Letter To The Galatians Pleasant Plains 2-3-2019PM NICK ANGEL

- ***READ Galatians 1:1,2*** During Paul's preaching journeys, it was not uncommon for him to visit the same cities and towns multiple times on different occasions. Once such place that we see him visiting multiple times would have been the region of Galatia. Within this region the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were found. At least three times we find Paul making his way through this region and these cities because of its central location.
- We first find Paul visiting the city of Pisidian Antioch in **Acts 13:14**. It is in this place that we find him standing up in the Synagogue on the Sabbath and preaching to the people that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promises to them of a Savior, Messiah, and King. (**Acts 13:14-41**) It is in this city that many of the Jews offered strong resistance to the teachings of Paul and Barnabas, so they turn their attention towards the Gentiles as recipients of the Gospel message. (**Acts 13:44-52**)
- From there they go into Iconium where they again enter the synagogue of the Jews. Here they are able to speak and teach in such a way that many of both Jews and Greeks believed. Yet again we find that there were Jews who did not believe and they sought to turn the Gentiles against Paul and these new brethren. There was sharp disagreement among the people to the degree that their lives were threatened, so they fled from there to Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe. (**Acts 14:1-7**)
- In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas find a lame man who had never walked. They heal this man, and the natives take this as a sign that Paul and Barnabas were Gods who was worthy of praise. They believed Barnabas to be Zeus, and thought of Paul as Hermes. Paul tries to explain that they were simply men even as the people of the crowd were, but they could hardly stop the crowds from offering sacrifices in their name. Yet, once again the Jews show up on the scene and win over the crowd to the extend that they stone Paul and drag him out of the city thinking that he was dead. (**Acts 14:8-19**)
- At this point, the disciples gather around Paul, and by God's grace he was able to get up and continue on with Barnabas to Derbe where they were able to preach the Gospel and make many disciples. After leaving Derbe, these evangelists make their way back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch giving great effort to encourage these disciples to keep on keeping on. *"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God"* (**Acts 14:22**) was their mantra. After appointing elders in these churches, Paul and Barnabas make their way back to Antioch of Syria which was serving as Paul's home base it seems.
- During Paul's second and third journey's we seem him, again, continuing to stop in these regions and give effort to encourage these brethren. (**Acts 16:6 & 18:23**) Yet, Paul's interactions with these brethren were not limited to just face to face visits. In fact, we find one of Paul's supposedly earliest letters written to the brethren who found themselves in Galatia. Some believe this letter was written as early as 49, but most believe it was written sometime in the mid-50s. Regardless of when this letter was written, it was very easy to notice that Paul cared greatly for these brethren to the point that he was willing to show his disappointment in their inability to choose the proper side of The Law VS The Spirit debate that was raging during the early years of the church. This letter to the Galatians focuses on that struggle and debate, and with this having been our daily Bible reading over the past couple of weeks, we will use our time of study this evening considering some important things that I noticed when I read through the text.

The Law VS The Spirit

I. There is no warm greeting extended to these disciples in Galatia. (1:1-5)

- A. Right off the bat, it seems very clear to me that the tone of this letter was a very stern and serious tone. Whereas we seem to nearly always find a warm greeting in Paul's other letters (eleven out of thirteen to be exact), there simply isn't such a greeting in this letter. In **Romans 1:8; I Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:15,16; Colossians 1:3; I Thessalonians 1:2; II Thessalonians 1:3; II Timothy 1:3;**

& Philemon 1:4...Paul makes some version of a statement of how much he is thankful for these brethren and how often he prays for them. In **I Timothy 1:2 & Titus 1:4**, Paul switches things up a little bit to write how he sees these two young preachers as being his true sons in the faith.

- B. Regardless of what the language is that was used, it should be very obvious to us that Paul deeply cared for these brethren, and he had a strong habit of expressing that care through kind words during the opening of the letters he wrote to them. However, in this letter we find no such warm and cheerful greeting. Paul does not state that he is thankful in his prayers for these brethren, but instead he offers a confirmation of who he was, he extends courtesy greetings of God's grace and peace, and then he speaks to the Lordship of Jesus and His sacrifice. He then jumps right into a very strong rebuke that was the very next thing that I noticed as I read this letter to the Galatians.

II. These disciples had slid back into their old ways of the Law of Moses. (1:6-9)

- A. Again, many believe that this letter was one of Paul's earliest letters, and if it was addressed to those people that he visited in the Galatian cities then it seems to reason that Paul was having to write this letter in response to near certain trouble they were experiencing at the hands of the Jewish teachers who had been following Paul around everywhere he went in that regions. This especially seems to be the case when we consider Paul's words in **1:7**, *"only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."*
- B. It seems pretty evident that the brethren in these cities of Galatia were under very strong and severe attack by those who sought to bind the requirements of the Law of Moses upon them. The rest of the letter will bear that out pretty clearly, and show that this truly was a struggle between the Law and the Spirit, but for now just consider these other teachings as *"a different gospel."* In other words, these brethren in Galatia were being presented with what others thought to be a saving message that was apart from the message of Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead. All throughout the letter we're going to see Paul positioning the Law against the Spirit and how a choice had to be made between which of these they were going to follow.
- C. Paul was shocked and amazed that it took such a short amount of time for these brethren to be drawn away by this different Gospel, and Paul wasn't afraid to express these thoughts of his to them with this strong language. He even goes so far as to say that anyone coming to these brethren and sharing with them a different message than the one that Paul had delivered to them that surely was confirmed by the power of the Holy Spirit was to be *"accursed."* The word here is the word *"anathema"* and it brings along the idea of someone being cursed or even enterally condemned as the NIV translates. In other words...anyone who sought to mislead these brethren would be in for a big time hurt when it came to their actions being judged. Paul was very serious about this to the point that he even repeats himself again very quickly with the same words. Paul was seemingly not very happy with this church, and that unhappiness continues as he has to explain and defend himself and his work to these brethren whose minds had been warped by these false teachings and this false Gospel being spoken by these false teachers.

III. Paul has to defend his work in the Gospel. (1:10-2:21)

- A. The first thing I noticed in this section of the letter is Paul once again affirming that the message he was preaching was not a message that was of man. *"For I would have you know, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."* (**Galatians 1:11,12**) This is actually the second time in just the first few verses that we see Paul bringing attention to who it was that he was speaking on the behalf of. The very first words of this letter echo these thoughts. *"Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead) and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:"* (**Galatians 1:1,2**)

- B. It seems to me that Paul really wants to street to these brethren who it was that was behind everything he was teaching concerning Christ. The struggle between their following of the Law versus following the Spirit was also a struggle between what was being taught by man because of man's will and what was being taught by man because of God's will. Paul makes it very clear that he was not seeking the favor of men or to be approved by men. He cared not one bit for man's will. **(Galatians 1:10)** Therefore, it was Paul's mission to show these brethren of his motivation only being that of Christ and His will for Him in his life. He does that by recounting to these brethren the journey he had gone through from being Saul of Tarsus to Paul of Christ.
- Paul begins by addressing his *"former manner of life in Judaism."* He acknowledged his efforts in persecuting the church of God and admitted that he wanted to completely destroy it. He was the greatest of the Jews because of his efforts and zeal for his work. **(1:13,14)**
 - Yet, God had chosen Paul to be his last great mouthpiece as an Apostle, and it was Jesus Himself who appeared to Paul, and informed him of what God's plans were for him. Yet, it wasn't until some time last that Paul actually joined up with the early Apostles. According to **Act 9:19-26**, we find Paul spending time in Arabia and Damascus, three years according to Paul here in this letter, before he went to Jerusalem and joined up first with Peter and James and then the rest of the Apostles. **(1:15-20)**
 - Following his with the Apostles in Jerusalem, Paul went up to Syria and Cilicia continuing in his work for the kingdom. All the while, the churches that were in Judea were only hearing this and that about this former well known persecutor of the church that was not a part of the Lord's efforts. Even though they had not laid eyes on Paul the Apostle, they still rejoiced in his efforts to spread the Gospel. **(1:21-24)**
 - After fourteen years of that work, Paul (because of a revelation) goes back to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. It seems that he shifted his focus back to preaching to the Jews especially those who were of noted reputation. Probable that these were even Jewish leaders who were taught in private for fear of the Jewish persecution. However, in the process of doing so he still encountered Jewish spies who were seeking to cause the brethren problems. Yet, Paul says that he was not willing to give them any ground at all. He stood firm even against those who were of high reputation. He recognized the responsibility that had entrusted to him, and that this responsibility of teaching the Gentiles was given to him by the same Jesus who had entrusted Peter to preach to the Jews. Paul and all the Apostles one their duties and they worked together to accomplish the work giving to them to do. **(2:1-10)**
 - Paul did everything he could to keep things on the up and up while he was in Jerusalem among the Jews, but Peter failed to do the same when he came up to Antioch of Syria. Peter behaved lovingly and brotherly to all of the disciples up until some people arrived who had been sent by James. When these Jews came, Peter would withdraw himself from the Gentiles. Paul stood up to Peter and publicly rebuked him for his hypocrisy in showing favoritism and leading others into the same sin. **(2:11-14)**
 - Paul then uses this opportunity to turn their attention towards the teachings concerning dedication to the Law or to Christ. He states plainly that we are not justified by works but by faith in Christ Jesus, and any drifting away from that faith show the person as a transgressor. Paul affirms to these brethren that he has died to the Law so that he might live to God. He even goes far as to say that he had died with Christ so that Christ might be raised up and living through him in everything that he did. He was only going to live by faith in Jesus and in the grace of God which comes through Christ and not the Law. **(2:15-21)**

IV. Faith in Christ is the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. (3:1-5:9)

- A. At this point, Paul gets very stern with these brethren to the degree that he refers to them as “foolish Galatians.” **(3:1)** This might seem very harsh to us, but his point is simply that they had allowed for these false teachers to come in and do just as what was said in chapter 1. They had distorted their understanding of the Gospel to the point that they had gone in a different direction in their faiths. Paul tries to get them straightened out by looking at three main arguments.
- **(3:1-11)** Paul first makes an argument concerning how they had been benefitted. Had they been blessed through the Law or the Spirit? Had they been given the miraculous abilities through the Law or the Spirit? Had they been made true children of Abraham through the Law or the Spirit? Paul even brings up Abraham and makes the point that he himself was reckoned as righteous through his faith and not the Law, and that would be same for all the people of the earth.
 - **(3:12-29)** Paul then begins to show that all of the promises that God had made were going to be fulfilled in Jesus. That seed of Abraham that would save all of mankind had come in the form of Jesus Christ. This promise of the saving seed was still valid even if the Law of Moses had come into effect. In fact, the Law played a key role in bringing God’s people the Jews to a place where they would better understand what Christ was enacting in His covenant. Paul argues that the Law and Christ weren’t opposed to one another, but the Law compliment Christ by bringing the Jews to a fuller knowledge of Him. But now that He had come and established faith and the Gospel, it was time the Law to step aside so that the Gospel might have full reign and truly make all people of faith descendants of Abraham according to the promise.
 - **(4:1-31)** Paul then begins to stress to the brethren their new relationship to God as free and adopted sons and daughters of God. They had every right and inheritance in Christ, and any going back to the Law would enslave them once again. **(4:1-9)** It is Paul’s fear that he had labored with these brethren in vain trying to make sure that Christ had found place inside each of them. He had put too much work into these brethren to allow them to simply go back into bondage. **(4:11-20)** He closes this section by trying to help them see that they were the the children of promise, the sons of Sarah the free woman, the present day Isaacs while those under the Law were like the sons of Hagar the bondwoman. **(4:21-31)**
- B. With all of this argumentation, Paul seeks to make the application very simply in **5:1-9**. If they wanted to go back to the Law then they would need to adopt all of the Law and not just part of it. And in doing so...they would then be separated from Christ and would fall from knowing God’s grace through Jesus. Only through faith could they wait in hope, and it didn’t matter whether or not they were of the circumcision. God only cared for their faith working through love.

V. To be in Christ demands that we walk by the Spirit. (5:10-6:18)

- A. It is in this last section of the Letter to the Galatians that we really find the practical value of the letter for us. It is good know about the Law and how it related to the earliest disciples, but things really get significant for us once Paul starts talking about what walking and living in the spirit is supposed to look like in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Paul had hope that these Galatians would see the truth in what he was saying and be willing to fix everything in order to now start walking once again in the Spirit.
- B. This proper way of living is addressed from two different perspectives. Paul first draws their attention to each of themselves as individuals. They were to individually make sure that they were putting off the words of the flesh and the wicked associated with them. But if they continued in those evil ways then Paul assures that they would not have a spot in the kingdom of heaven. **(5:13-21)** Paul then contrast that with the good deeds and fruits of the Spirit which would show them as being people who had been crucified their flesh for living life with Christ. These people would be known as people living and walking by the Spirit. **(5:22-26)**

- C. Yet, there was also a collective component that Paul wanted for them to embrace. They were to look out for one another and if they saw a brother behaving wickedly they were to seek to restore that person with gentleness so that they might be faithful once again. They were to love one another to the point that they were going to bear one another's burdens, and make sure that they were each grounded and humble before God and their fellow man. **(6:1-3)**
- D. However, Paul additionally states that they needed to keep in mind that they were each going to have to individually give an account for themselves. It was good for them to look out for each other, but they couldn't expect for others to carry the load of others and their own. They each needed to make sure that they were sowing and reaping and not losing heart as they were all striving to do good work for the Lord. They needed to take advantage of all of the opportunities that were available to them. **(6:4-10)**
- E. Paul finishes the letter by reassuring them that this was indeed Paul who had been writing to them **(6:11)**, and that he only wrote such a strong letter so that they might be encouraged and motivated to make sure that they were not compelled to lay down their cross and pursue the flesh through the Law. His desire was for them to only boast, as he did, in the cross of Jesus and live as new creations according to God's grace and mercy. **(6:12-16)** He expected for them to shape up and not be of anymore outstanding concern for him in their faiths and practices. **(6:17,18)**

There certainly is a lot that is going on in this letter to the Galatians, but even though we are so far removed from any real understanding of the Law by never having been underneath it, we can sympathize with them to the extent that there truly is nothing better for us to commit ourselves to than the Gospel of Jesus and the blessings that come through it. The Spirit continues to wage war within us against the flesh and its desires, but may we be always committed to our Lord, even being as Paul was... crucified with Him daily so that He might live through us. May we be strengthened by His grace and mercy as we each go throughout this week.