

Galatians

Galatians 1:1-6:18

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2020-07-05

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Martin Luther once said, “The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine.” Katherine was his wife. You can tell from his commentary on this epistle that this book helped to free his soul from the bondage of legalism. He loved it. He reveled in it. And because of the influence of Luther’s bombastic commentary on Galatians, the whole Protestant world spoke of Galatians as “the battle-cry of the Reformation.” It is a book that defends the Gospel against all counterfeits. Chapter 1:8 says, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” And every age has had people who have tried to change Paul’s Gospel into a counterfeit. It’s a very important book for our own day, a day in which the Gospel is being diluted in so many circles. Let’s dive into it.

I. The Good News of Freedom (1:1-5)

A. Verses 1-2

The first five verses contain the main themes of the book and encapsulate what the Gospel is all about. I believe the book divides up in 15 sections, with one logically flowing into the next. Look at verse 1. Paul says, Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), In this book Paul will defend his apostleship, which had come under attack from the Judaizers. You can always expect heretics who can’t win the theological argument to attack the person. And that’s what happened with Paul. They tried in many ways to undermine his authority. He wasn’t one of the original twelve, but he will show how he met all the qualifications of a true apostle who represented Jesus Christ as an inspired prophet. He was not an apostle sent by men, but an apostle sent by Christ, the risen Lord. The implication is that if you reject Paul, you have rejected the Lord Jesus who sent Paul. Verse 2:
and all the brethren who are with me,
Paul is not a loner. He will show in this book that he has the backing of the churches, the apostles, and most importantly, of Christ himself. He is not in any way inferior to the other apostles and has been recognized to be a true apostle by the church. Verse 2 continues:
To the churches of Galatia:

There is controversy on whether Paul is using the term “Galatia” as a racial term, in which case it would be the northern Galatia theory and the book would have been written a few later, or whether he is referring to the Roman province of Galatia (as I believe), in which case Paul is writing to the churches he planted in Acts 13 and 14. In my Acts series I examined the evidence on both sides in detail to prove that the South Galatia theory is the correct one and that this book was written just before the Acts 15 council, somewhere in the time period of Acts 15:2-4. Don’t look at it now, but on the back of your outline I give thirteen proofs that this is the case. The South Galatian theory answers every issue perfectly. So there were numerous churches in the southern part of the province of Galatia that had been planted by Paul’s team during his first missionary journey.

B. Background in Acts 15:1-5

Please turn to Acts 15 for a bit more background. I will read the first five verses.

Acts 15:1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Notice that statement - “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” This was why Paul wrote Galatians. These men from Judea did not understand the Gospel. Yes, they were in the church, and until they were excommunicated, he could call them brethren, but Paul makes no bones about it - they did not understand the Gospel. They were forcing the newly converted Galatians to get circumcised before they could be treated as saved. No wonder Paul was so angry in his epistle to the Galatians. The early church father, Jerome, said that this epistle thundered. And it had to because these heretics had cut the heart out of Christianity. The stakes were very high. The eternal destinies of many hung in the balances. If you add anything to Christ for our justification, you have created another religion. Do not treat Roman Catholics as Christians - no matter how nice they are. They contradict Paul’s teaching in Galatians and constitute a hostile religion. And any Protestants (whether Reformed or not) who accept Roman Catholics as a true church, do not properly understand the Gospel of Paul.

Verse 2:

2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

I find it fascinating that Paul and Barnabas were “unable” to solve this problem on their own. Or was this call for the Jerusalem council a strategic move? I believe it was strategic since Paul could deal with the same issues worldwide and not just in Galatia. When you look at Paul’s epistles you find

out that these Judaizers are at work in Jerusalem, Galatia, Colossae, Rome, and virtually every part of the Roman empire. So this was a good move on Paul's part. He will kill several heretical birds with one stone. Verse 3:

Acts 15:3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.

There was the excitement of successful missions mixed in with the depressing news of heresy that was being largely unopposed. And Paul was upset that people weren't taking this seriously. This tends to happen in churches - Christians don't want conflict so they let heresy go unopposed for way too long. Verse 4:

4 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. 5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

Notice that they don't word things as strongly as in verse 2. Earlier they had said that it was necessary to be circumcised in order to be saved. But the apostles would have instantly recognized that error and opposed it, so they knew better. Now that the stakes are higher, these heretics soften the message a bit and simply say, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." What can be wrong with keeping the law of Moses? Converts to the true faith had done this for centuries. But they were hiding the fact that the Judaizers were making all of this a condition for justification; for salvation.

And that highlights two interesting things about heresy. It is deceptive and it keeps resurrecting its head no matter how many times you think you have dealt with it. You kill it in one place and it pops up in another. There is debate on who came up with the statement, whether Patrick Henry or someone else, but I like the expression, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." This is true in politics and it is true in religion. This issue of the Gentiles not being forced to become Jews had already been settled in Acts 10:9-48. It was settled a second time in Acts 11:4-18. According to Galatians 2:1-10 it was settled a third time during the visit mentioned in Acts 11:27-30, where Paul pushed the issue with the test case of Titus - a man he refused to circumcise. Paul was OK with circumcision, so long as it was not made an issue related to salvation. And the apostles agreed that Titus didn't need to be circumcised. So the apostles had settled this issue three times already. Yet there is still controversy in Galatians and in Acts 15? Why?

Well, there are three reasons. First, demons will ensure that heresy keeps getting resurrected. You can count on it. Second, Christians tend to believe

the best about fellow Christians. Third, there were eight things going on that made it harder for the church to recognize and deal with this problem. These eight things clouded the issue. Let me outline these eight things.

Culture: Is Paul destroying Jewish culture? (See false accusations against Paul in Acts 21:21.)

The first thing that made it tough is that Jews were immersed in a culture that made it hard to mix with Gentiles. The converted Pharisees accused Paul of trying to destroy Jewish culture. “You must hate Jews, Paul!” Paul was doing things that were unthinkable to Jews - they were unthinkable socially, aesthetically, morally, and culturally. They make this false accusation as late as Acts 21:21. And Paul shows that it is a false accusation. He values Jewish culture, but he distinguishes between what is cultural and what is morally required. Not everybody clearly did that. So this first issue clouded people’s understanding of what was going on.

Politics: During the years 46-52, Zealots were putting enormous pressure upon all Jews to not keep company with Gentiles and to follow the ceremonial law.

Second, just as people tend to bring their political philosophies (whether Republican or Democrat) into the church today (and we really shouldn’t), Jewish Christians were being influenced by the conservative politics of their day. During the years in which these controversies were happening (AD 46-52), there was a Jewish political movement that put enormous pressure upon conservative Jews to not have anything to do with Gentiles. In fact, Zealots were actually lynching any Jew they suspected of fraternizing with a Gentile or eating with a Gentile. When your friends are getting lynched for eating with Gentiles, it puts a damper on going out to lunch with them. I’ve had black pastor friends who were metaphorically tarred and feathered for going out to lunch with me. They were treated as sell-outs for eating with a white man. It’s easy for Christians to feel such social pressures and to have a tendency to avoid trouble - especially if they are more comfortable with the Jewish ways anyway. So they were basically saying, “Hey, we love you. But if you Gentiles care for our safety, why not play it safe and get circumcised? That way we can avoid these political dangers.” But Paul calls out such cowardice - especially since the Gospel is involved.

Salvation: Is circumcision a means of justification (Acts 15:1)?

But Acts 15:1 shows that there were at least some who took things one step further than the previous two and insisted that you couldn’t even be saved

unless you got circumcised. This is obviously heresy, but it gets hidden in with these other eight issues. People didn't notice it because of the other eight issues. And there was a certain plausibility to it. Think of it this way - their views would be 100% parallel to the views of some Christians today who think you can't get saved until you are baptized. After all, doesn't Peter say baptism saves you? Yeah, but a Peter explicitly denies that he was talking about water baptism. He was talking about Spirit baptism, not the sign. Others are more specific and say that water baptism regenerates you, or justifies you. And that can be confusing, because the Bible does indeed require water baptism, doesn't it? You can't be a member of the church until you are baptized, so it would be easy for people to jump to the conclusion that if the sign of the covenant is needed in order to be treated as a church member (which it is), then the sign of the covenant is necessary for justification (which it is not). We believe that just as circumcision didn't save anyone, baptism doesn't save us. The baptism is a sign of what saves us – God's grace. And Paul says the same thing about circumcision. In Galatians he points out that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised. So obviously circumcision didn't justify him. Even in the church today we wrestle with people on the same issues that Paul did in this epistle. Even in Reformed circles (as clear as the Reformed church is on most doctrines) there are people who muddy the waters on precisely this issue.

Salvation: Are ceremonial laws a means of justification (Acts 15:5)?

There was a third group that went even further. They said that the rest of the ceremonial law was also necessary for justification. They were the most obviously heretical, since no one could keep the ceremonial law perfectly. And Acts 15:5 points to that group.

Ceremonial law for Jews: Are there any Mosaic ceremonial laws binding on Jews today?

A fifth issue that came up was that some thought Gentiles didn't have to keep the ceremonial law, but that Jews like Peter and Paul were in sin for not keeping it. So they gave the illusion of submitting to God's will that had been expressed earlier by the church. Fine - we won't require the ceremonial law for Gentiles, but if you want to claim to be a Jew, you still have to keep it. They just insisted that Jews must act like Jews, and Peter was failing to be a good Jew when he ate with Gentiles. And Galatians 1 will address that argument as well.

Ceremonial law for Gentiles: Are Gentiles subject to the ceremonial law?

The sixth group were people who thought that the ceremonial law was indeed binding on Gentiles - not as a basis for salvation, but simply out of obedience. These would be equivalent to some modern Messianic congregations. In Galatians it was obvious that every aspect of the ceremonial law was being required of Gentiles, including the numerous Jewish day-keeping laws, food laws, cleanliness laws, sacrificial laws, etc. Some of those were actually a denial of the coming of Christ, since those ceremonial laws were only to be kept until Messiah came. So it wasn't a mild issue. The book of Hebrews was later written to convince people that the ceremonial laws are no longer binding, and to make them binding on anyone is to abandon Jesus as the final sacrifice. So you can see that this was an incredibly complicated issue.

Circumcision vs Baptism: What are the implications of requiring circumcision? (Heb. 7:12; 1 Cor. 7:19)

The seventh issue that is addressed in Galatians is showing the logical implications of requiring circumcision. If it is followed as a mandate, then it initiates you into keeping the whole ceremonial law. Galatians is quite clear on that.

Dividing wall of partition: Should believing Jews and Gentiles continue to be separated?

The last issue that was raised in this debate is whether Jews and Gentiles should continue to be separate. They disagreed with some of the other groups. They did not require the Gentiles to be circumcised or to follow any ceremonial law. They just thought for the peace of the church that there should be Gentile churches and Jewish churches and no mixing of cultures. They were the Kinists of that day. In Galatians Paul will insist that the Gentiles must be welcomed into the same body and the same fellowship as the Jews. They must be able to eat together and fellowship together and worship together. So if you have Kinist friends, Galatians is the book to go to.

OK, enough by way of background. Let's go back to Galatians. In Galatians 1:3-5 Paul introduces in a nutshell the good news of freedom. It starts with God, not man:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,
It is based upon the merits of Jesus alone and not our merits:

who gave Himself for our sins,

It is not an antinomian Gospel since it not only saves us without our merit, but it also makes us holy and law-keeping without our merit. And the next phrase in verse 4 shows that in a nutshell:

that He might deliver us from this present evil age

Too many commentaries think Galatians is against the moral of the Old Testament. Nothing could be further from the truth. Law-keeping doesn't save us, whether that law-keeping is the moral law or the ceremonial law, but salvation definitely saves us from lawlessness; from sin; from evil.

And who gets the credit on that deliverance? It is God. It's all of grace. And that grace starts with God's will in eternity past. So the next phrase says, according to the will of our God and Father,

And that means that God alone gets the glory for our salvation. Verse 5: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

What a great introduction! In kernel form that paragraph outlines everything in the rest of the book. It is free grace unearned by us. It is a grace that frees us from sin. It is a grace that is 100% based upon Christ's merits, not ours. And thus it is a grace that redounds to God's glory alone. And in the remainder of the book Paul will unpack this and add to it in a way that is logically tight, even if it is full of emotion. So verses 1-5 introduces us to the good news of freedom.

II. There is only one genuine good news of freedom (1:6-12)

In verses 6-12 Paul tells us that it is the only good news of freedom. It is the only Gospel. There is an exclusivity that must be maintained. You have not defended the truth adequately until you also renounce the errors. And in this next paragraph Paul says that all other counterfeits eviscerate the Gospel and turn it into works righteousness that robs us of our assurance. And Paul is astonished that these Galatians would trade in the wonderful news of the true Gospel for a different gospel. Verses 6-7:

Gal. 1:6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

There are people today who say that water baptism justifies you. That is another gospel, not the Gospel of Christ. Others say that your good works done by the grace of Jesus justifies you. That is another Gospel, not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Others say that you aren't justified until you persevere and make it to heaven. That is another Gospel, not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul says that we are justified forever at the moment of

conversion before we have done any good works. And Paul has very strong words for any deviation from justification by faith alone, through grace alone, based on the merits of Christ alone, and to God's glory alone. Look at verses 8-9:

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

There are books purporting to be Reformed that add to the Gospel of Jesus other requirements. You must view such things with the same emotion that Paul had and want nothing to do with it. No matter how eloquent the preacher; no matter how sincere; no matter if he is an angel himself, Paul warns us that if you deviate from the simplicity of His Gospel, you have wandered from Christ and will be accursed - which means, will be in hell forever. These are high stakes. And Paul said that he was not therefore in a popularity contest. Verse 10:

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

So verses 1-5 shows what the good news of freedom is. Verses 6-10 shows that there is only one good news of freedom - everything else is a false gospel.

III. Paul's call to apostleship illustrates what the good news is like (1:11-24)

In the next section Paul kills two birds with one stone. He defends his apostleship and he uses his own testimony of Christ calling him to show what the good news (which is what gospel means - what the good news) is like. And this answers the two-fold strategy of the legalists. They had played upon the immaturity and lack of doctrinal knowledge of these young Christians to promote their heresy while appearing to be Biblical. How were they appearing to be Biblical? Well, they talked about the ancient pedigree of both the ceremonial law and the oral traditions of the Jewish scribes. They claimed that both came through Moses. Second, they cast doubt on Paul's apostleship. Paul's answer is simple and devastating.

First, like Christ, Paul throws out all man-made traditions and says that if you cannot base your Gospel in the Bible alone, you have a false Gospel. You can see how all five solas of the Reformation are embedded in chapter 1. Roman Catholics say that the Gospel is not in the Bible alone - you also need tradition. Paul disagrees. But look at verses 11-12. They say,

Gal. 1:11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me

is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

He will be pointing out that the Judaizers were adding man-made traditions to the Gospel. Then Paul points out that he was actually an expert in those man-made traditions. In verse 13 he said those traditions made him persecute Christians. In verse 14 he says that he advanced in Judaism way beyond his contemporaries. Indeed, Paul studied under the famous Pharisee, Gamaliel, and was perhaps one of the top Pharisees in Israel. He calls himself elsewhere a Pharisee of the Pharisees. These Judaizers had nothing on him in that department. But Paul goes on to show that when God saved him, he jettisoned all that as rubbish.

Verse 16 says that he didn't confer with humans to learn the ropes of Christianity. Verse 17 says that he didn't go to Jerusalem to confer with the other apostles. Instead, he retreated to Arabia, where for three years he was taught directly by Jesus just like the other apostles had been.

And in verses 18 and following he gives a chronology. After three years he saw Peter for the first time, and then James, and then was sent by Christ to plant churches on his first missionary journey. And in the last two verses of chapter 1 he says that though the churches of Judea did not get to see him, the apostles themselves made sure that the churches of Judea glorified God for what Paul was doing.

Why does he say all this? To show that he didn't get his Gospel from man, but directly from Christ and to show that the other apostles backed up both his Gospel and his apostleship. He is undermining the Judaizer's contention that he is out of step with the rest of the church. He proves the exact opposite. He proves that his Gospel is the Gospel of the whole church.

IV. The counterfeit gospel that robs us of liberty was discredited long ago (2:1-10; cf. Acts 11:27-30)

The next section (which is the first ten verses of chapter 2) shows how the counterfeit gospel that was robbing the Galatians of their liberty had been discredited by all the apostles long ago. The incident he mentions happened fourteen years after Paul's conversion. And Paul wanted to make sure that whatever decision was made was not simply a theoretical one, so he had brought along Titus. Titus was the perfect test case because he had been a Christian for a long time and was actually a missionary leader. Would they make Titus get circumcised? Would they make him start all over as a brand new a Christian? Obviously some thought it would be good, but Paul held

his ground, and the apostles agreed with him. Again, this is a powerful argument that completely undermines the Judaizers. Not even the apostles in Jerusalem agree with these Judaizers. They did not make Titus get circumcised. So the Judaizers are really being deceptive when they say they represent a James. They are misrepresenting the situation.

V. How much freedom do Gentiles have? This too was settled long ago (2:11-21)

In the next section, Paul takes it a step further and proves how much freedom Gentiles have. Not only do they not need to get circumcised, they don't need to follow the food laws. Indeed, not even Jews needed to follow the food laws. If Paul can prove this, he has destroyed the Judaizers. And the story Paul uses to prove this is a bit embarrassing to Peter because Peter had succumbed to peer pressure for a while. Peer pressure is such a dangerous enemy. It can make us compromise our most dearly held principles and we must guard ourselves from giving in to peer pressure, which amounts to fearing man more than fearing God.

Anyway, verses 11-12 show that Peter used to eat Gentile food with Gentiles, but when certain men from James came, Peter knew that they would be grossed out by what he was doing, so he quickly separated from the Gentiles and started eating only Kosher food with the Jews. Paul saw this and called Peter out publicly, showing how his actions could actually undermine the Gospel unintentionally. Since the Judaizers were insisting on ceremonial observance for salvation, Peter could have completely undermined their influence by eating pork with Gentiles. But he caved in out of fear. After Paul called him out on this, the issue was once again settled. Jewish ceremonial laws could not be imposed on Jew or Gentile and God intended for both to fellowship together in unity in one body.

But those of you who compromise because your friends want you to need to realize the dangers of peer pressure. We need to learn to be driven more by the principles of the Bible than by what others think or what others want us to do. And especially as tensions mount in our culture wars, you need to guard your hearts on this issue. You may have Facebook friends who shame you into agreeing with them. You may have co-workers who do the same. Ground yourself in Scripture, recognize your weakness, and plead with God to keep you strong.

In verses 16 and following, Paul ties all of this previous information in with justification by faith and not by the works of the law. He says, "knowing that

a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” and then he repeats himself and then a third time he says, “by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” Why does he bring up justification in connection with food laws? It’s not moral laws he is dealing with here; it is food laws. And the answer is that some of the Judaizers required observance of all the ceremonial laws before they would treat you as a Christian. This logically meant that you were justified by food laws and by other ceremonial laws. Now, the Judaizers may not have been bold enough to always put it in such words, but that’s what their philosophy logically amounted to. It was works righteousness. And Paul is so consumed with the importance of this truth that he lets Peter have it.

Verses 17 and following show that God intentionally made perfect keeping of the ceremonial law impossible so that the Gospel in it would drive Jews to Christ. But whether you believe it was ceremonial or moral law, we must die to the law in order to be saved and we must live with a new identity in Christ. He alone was the perfect law keeper. But this means that even his post-conversion living was being done through the power of Christ living His life through Paul. Paul could not take credit for even His sanctification. This truly is a God-glorifying view of salvation. Verse 21 says,

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.

And that was the end of Paul’s speech to Peter in front of everyone. And the room is left silent - probably stunned silence. No one could answer his logic. The question at stake had been settled once again.

This whole section is a powerful argument on Paul’s part. It answers the question of how much freedom we have. We have total freedom from the ceremonial laws and also from the man-made oral traditions of the Pharisees. Salvation is by grace alone, is received by faith alone.

So in chapter 2 Paul has taught us that the Gospel frees us from many things:

- It frees us from those who would enslave us.
- It frees us from fear of people.
- It frees us from ethnic prejudice.
- It frees us from self-absorption and motivates us to liberate others.
- It frees us from judgment and hell.

VI. Christian freedom is received from the Scriptures by faith (3:1-14)

And Paul applies that theology in chapter 3, saying,

Gal. 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? 2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? 4 Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

Paul is definitely getting intense. The word “bewitched” has the idea of the seductive power of falsehood, and even hints at black magic. So there is a demonic power that was at work in these churches to try to deceive them. In 1 Timothy 4 Paul called the doctrines, “doctrines of demons.” I’m sure that the people who promoted those doctrines didn’t think of those doctrines as being demonic. They may have even thought that they were honoring the Bible. But they were deceived. But interestingly, despite that demonic deception, Paul holds them responsible. Despite the deception (or bewitching) Paul doesn’t let them blame the devil. He blames them. And he uses two more arguments to convince them of the simplicity of the Gospel.

The first argument is from their own experience. He asks them if they received the Spirit by a simple request of faith or did they earn the Spirit? They know the answer to that. They received the Spirit immediately upon profession of faith.

So Paul argues, if that is true, why do you think you can even mature in the Christian walk in your own strength? Even sanctification is not pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. It is a total dependence upon God’s grace. In verse 5 he says that sanctification comes in the same way that miracles come: “Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” You can’t earn the miracles that you perform. They are performed by reliance upon divine grace. Are you active? Of course, but no one would say that Paul is so powerful - look at the miracles he performs. No. They would say, “God is so powerful. Look at the miracles God performs through Paul.”

William Hendriksen summarizes this whole section saying that “the Galatians, by yielding to this influence, had failed to understand that a Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted.”¹ Now, most Christians realize that is true when it comes to justification, but Paul here applies it to sanctification

1 William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Galatians*, vol. 8, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 112.

as well. A Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted. How do Evangelicals supplement Christ in their pursuit of sanctification? John MacArthur wrote an entire book on that subject. It's called, *Our Sufficiency in Christ*. He points out that Galatianism is alive and well in the modern church when it comes to sanctification. Evangelicals believe in Christ plus something. When it comes to counseling (which is definitely dealing with sanctification issues), it is Christ plus secular psychology. When it comes to the parts of sanctification related to stewardship, it is Christ plus socialism. In other areas of sanctification it is Christ plus philosophy. For Fundamentalists, it is Christ plus a few rules - Don't drink, don't dance, don't smoke. For some Pentecostals it is Christ plus mysticism. For some hyper-guilty super-sensitive-conscience Christians, it is Christ plus asceticism. Don't think that Galatians is a book that is only relevant to justification. It is relevant to our whole lives. And MacArthur rightly says that Paul's admonition for our whole Christian life is that it must be Christ plus nothing.

Of course, the Judaizers claim to be following Christ and claimed to be following Abraham. After all, didn't Jesus get circumcised? Yes. Didn't Abraham get circumcised? Yes. But in verses 6-9 Paul makes clear that they have misunderstood Abraham's justification. So now he is getting back to getting saved - the beginning of our walk. Verses 6-9:

6 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

Abraham was justified before he had done any works. He was justified by faith alone. So Paul gives them a choice in the next verses of this section - either live by faith in what Christ has done or live under the curse of self-effort. Those are the only two choices - faith in Christ plus nothing, or the curse of Christ plus something. And Christ plus anything is a burden; it is a curse. Paul wanted them freed. Verse 10 summarizes the second choice rather well:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

If it is Christ plus law-keeping, then you feel hopeless because even as a Christian you cannot perfectly keep the law. The better choice is summarized in the phrase in verse 11, "The just shall live by faith." Our eyes must be fixed on Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith - justification and sanctification. The whole Christian life gets everything from Christ. Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing." And Paul says much the same here.

VII. The law and the promise (3:15-25)

Now, to the objection, “OK, then why did God give the law?” Paul answers that the ceremonial law was added long after God’s covenant with Abraham and it did not annul the covenant of promise. People under Moses were justified the same way Abraham was. The ceremonial law was not given for justification. Indeed, the ceremonial law given under Moses was intended to be a tutor teaching the Gospel that Jesus would bring. Thus to continue keeping the ceremonial laws after Jesus had fulfilled them is to totally miss the Gospel that they portray. Failure to see the Christ of the ceremonial law is to miss the Gospel of the ceremonial law and ultimately to substitute a so-called “good news” that isn’t good news. That’s the logic of his argument.

VIII. Faith ushers us into sonship privileges (3:23-4:7)

In chapter 3:23-4:7 Paul uses the analogy of a child under a tutor versus a child who has graduated from school to illustrate how silly it is to follow the ceremonial law. He likens the ceremonial law to guardians and tutors who prepare the way for a son to enter into his inheritance. The ceremonial law had the function of teaching Jews about the coming Messiah and His good news. Now that the Messiah has come, we have graduated from that and can enter the freedoms of maturity.

And the sonship that justification ushers us into is incompatible with the bondage that the Judaizers wanted to impose. Look at verses 6-7.

Gal. 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

So Paul warns them and woos them to the true Gospel.

IX. Paul’s passionate pleading with the Galatians to be free (4:8-20)

And in the next section Paul pleads with them. There needs to be more pleading and concern and grief when it comes to these issues. In chapter 4, verse 19 he says, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” He is in so much pain over their slipping away that he is like a mother giving birth. He is in pain. He loves them and considers them his children. He reminds them of the good times they had together, the Gospel that they first believed, the way he and Barnabas were so sick and they had gladly ministered to them, even treating them as if they were angels. He says that everything they formerly stood for is contradicted

by their succumbing to the ceremonial laws. This is the emotional and connectational level of his argument. He expresses his deep love and concern for them, concluding in verse 20,

20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

They are scaring him to death. It's like his own children running away, and he is heart broken.

X. Paul speaks of two covenants that traverse every age of history (4:21-31)

Paul then goes on to use an illustration from the Old Testament that is symbolic of the difference between the true Gospel and the false Gospel. I'll read it and tell you why this is such a brilliant illustration.

Gal. 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written: “Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband.”

Gal. 4:28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

Isaac and Ishmael were two sons of Abraham that illustrate quite well how people in the same church can believe two quite different Gospels yet appear to be so similar. Both Isaac and Ishmael were in the covenant of Abraham, which was a covenant of grace. They were in the same church together. Yet one of them represents a different covenant. How? These two sons represent two covenants that traverse every age of history and are found in every historical covenant, including the New Covenant era. Don't think of it as being a contrast between the Abrahamic Covenant versus the Mosaic covenant. That completely misses the point because neither son was from the time of the Mosaic covenant. They were both members of the Abrahamic covenant. Just take a look at the chart of the two covenants in your outline and you will see the contrasts:

Two Covenants that Traverse all Historical Periods

Chart by Phil Kayser

Ishmael	Isaac
Conceived naturally	Conceived supernaturally
The product of Abraham when he was not living by faith	The product of Abraham when he was living by faith
Son of Hagar (bondage)	Son of Sarah (liberty)
Flesh (our strength from Adam)	Promise (our strength from Christ)
Corresponds to Sinai (law and no blood)	Corresponds to New Covenant
Corresponds to Arabia (outside promised land)	Corresponds to heaven
Corresponds to unbelieving Jerusalem	Corresponds to heavenly Jerusalem
Persecutors	Persecuted
Cast out	Heir & son

Every covenantal period of history has people in it that represent these two covenants with two mediators. The first covenant was with Adam, the second with Christ. The first covenant only produces flesh, bondage, religiosity with no power, the curse of the law, and is outside of God's promised inheritance. The second covenant has the same moral law, but it is under the blood, is perfectly fulfilled in Christ, has the power of the Spirit, liberty, and ushers us into the inheritance of sons. Cain, Ishmael, Esau, and works-righteous people today are in the first covenant and have responsibility to the law but with no blood to cover their failures and no power to transform them. Abel, Abraham, Isaac, and true believers today are in the second covenant and we put off the Old Man (our former identity with Adam) and put on the New Man (our new identity with Christ). Thus, the two covenants represent Adam and Christ and two humanities. The one is by works of the law and the other is by the promise of grace.

- Ishmael was conceived naturally and represents what our flesh can do whereas Isaac was conceived supernaturally (miraculously) and represents what God's grace can do.
- Ishmael was a product of Abraham not living by faith whereas Isaac was the product of Abraham living by faith in God's promises. So I want you to notice that even an Abraham can occasionally revert to not living by faith. Any one of us can. We must watch out. Back to the chart:
- Ishmael was the son of Hagar (a bondswoman representing bondage) whereas Isaac was the son of Sarah (a freewoman representing the freedom brought by being in union with Christ).
- Ishmael represents the flesh (which is our strength from Adam) whereas Isaac represents promise (or our strength from Christ).
- Ishmael corresponds to Mount Sinai where the law was delivered but without the blood of sacrifices whereas Isaac corresponds to the New Covenant where Christ bore the penalty for sin and enables us to approach the law under the sprinkled mercy seat.

- Ishmael corresponds to Arabia (which was outside the promised land) whereas Isaac corresponds to heaven (which is in part what the promised land represented). Both covenants have the law, but only one covenant approaches the law through Christ.
- Ishmael corresponds to unbelieving Jerusalem whereas Isaac corresponds to the heavenly Jerusalem. Unbelieving Jerusalem didn't believe the Christ that their own ceremonial law was teaching.
- Ishmael represents the persecuting Jews whereas Isaac represents the persecuted church.
- Ishmael was cast out (a subtle reference to what needs to happen to these Judaizers - they need to be cast out of the church) whereas Isaac was the heir and son who would receive the promises of God.

On so many levels it is an amazing illustration of why you ought not to be fooled by people who (like Ishmael) claim to be in covenant with Christ, but their works righteousness denies it. There are Evangelicals and Reformed people today who are brilliant Ishmaels. They teach much truth, but they undermine the true good news by teaching Jesus plus something.

XI. Christ is the only thing that counts (5:1-6)

Based on that illustration, Paul logically concludes in chapter 5:1-6 that Christ is the only thing that counts. They might have argued that Christ plus circumcision is such a small thing, but Paul says,

Gal. 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

XII. Love fulfills the law by the power of the Spirit (5:7-26)

And that last phrase, "faith working through love" shows why the Gospel is not antinomian. Antinomianism throws out the law rather than approaching the law through Christ plus nothing. When we are saved by faith, that same faith causes us to cling to Christ in love, and that love gladly obeys the law (not to earn God's favor, but because we already have God's favor). There is a world of difference between those two phrases. We don't keep the law to earn God's favor. We keep the law as those who already have God's favor

and are secure in Christ. We keep the law because we love Christ. Verses 13-14 say,

Gal. 5:13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love is not the opposite of the law; love is the fulfillment of the law. So the moral law of God definitely has a place in the Christian's life. But that place is not as a means of being justified. Obedience to the law is our PS - Thank you Lord for having saved us. It is the evidence of our union with Christ and the evidence of our empowering by the Holy Spirit. So in verses 16-26 he outlines all the ways that our flesh violates God's laws (each sin is a law-breaking) and says that the Spirit moves us against those lawless deeds and replaces them with the fruit of the Spirit. Law keeping is thus Christ living His life through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. It has nothing to do with how we get saved. It is the evidence that we are saved. It is the evidence that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

XIII. So how do we deal with a brother who flagrantly disobeys the law? (6:1-5)

So how do we deal with a brother who flagrantly disobeys the moral law of God? The first five verses of chapter 6 tell us that we humbly lead that brother back to Christ and help him to see that he have been bought with a price and he must live his life in service to Christ. Everything leads to Christ in this book. And those who restore this brother recognize that there but for the grace of God go we. We restore with humility considering ourselves lest we also be tempted. When your eyes are fixed on Jesus, you don't have pride in yourself. You don't trust yourself. You know anything you have achieved is because of Jesus plus nothing.

XIV. Grace makes us sow to the Spirit, not to the flesh (6:6-10)

The next verses, verses 6-10, show another way in which grace is not antinomian - it leads us to sow to the Spirit and not to our flesh. This is the passage that I get my eight laws of harvest from. Without exception, you reap what you sow, and you reap an increased harvest of what you sow, and you reap in a different season than you sow, etc. And interestingly, he even applies this to the financial blessings you reap as you financially bless your preachers (verse 6). Even that is grace, not works, since you can't outgive God.

XV. We do have something to boast about - the cross of Christ (6:11-18)

And finally, in the last section Paul deals with the boasting and false glorying of the Judaizers. If you are going to boast about anything, verse 14 tells you what it should be:

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

As Timothy George words it, “When confronted with the infinitely amazing grace of God, the very thought of self-glorification, spiritual ego-stroking, vanishes away.”² It must vanish away since Christ is the author and finisher of our faith.

You can see that Paul had put his entire heart into getting these Galatians to look to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith. And now, weary from his exertions, Paul tells people not to trouble him any more about these things, and then wishes God’s grace upon them all.

So even though this is a small book, you can see that it is a dense book that packs a punch. It is a book that will help to anchor you in the doctrine of Justification by faith alone and the realization that even our sanctification is by Jesus plus nothing. May we always value the true good news and never allow it to be diluted. Amen.

Appendix A

The Date and Place of Galatians Summary of Arguments in Defense of the “South Galatian Theory” and a date of 49 AD. By Phillip G. Kayser

- Since the time of Ramsay, it has been conclusively shown that the cities of Acts 14 were included in the Roman province of Galatia. Thus the cities of Acts 13-14 are clearly within what would be termed “Galatia.” There would be no better term to group these disparate groups as one group than “Galatians.”
- Paul’s habit of defining regions is generally to use Roman nomenclature. Greg Herrick says, “Paul seems to prefer provincial titles when referring to churches “(cf. “Macedonia” in 2 Cor. 8:1; “Asia” in 1 Cor. 16:19; “Achaia” in 2 Cor 1:1). The apostle also speaks of Judea, Syria and Cilicia (cf. Gal. 1:21), but never of Lycaonia, Pisidia, Mysia and Lydia. It appears logical and consistent then to say that the term ‘Galatia’ in Galatians 1:2 and 3:1 is probably a provincial designation in which case the letter could have been sent to the churches of the south.”
- Paul addresses the Galatians in Greek, not Celtic.
- Paul mentions Barnabas three times in Galatians 2:1,9,13, and does so as if Barnabas was already well known by the Galatians. Yet Barnabas never visited

2 Timothy George, Galatians, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 435.

- North Galatia. He was however on Paul's journey to South Galatia (Acts 13-14).
- Acts 20:4 mentions the names of people who helped to carry the offerings from various regions. It is clear that "the churches of Galatia" sent an offering by their hand (1 Cor. 16:1). Therefore it is significant that none of the people carrying the offering are North Galatians, but there are two South Galatians mentioned: Gaius of Derbe and Timothy of Lystra.
 - Acts mentions Jewish people traveling to South Galatia, but there is no mention of such to North Galatia. Indeed, North Galatia was so dangerous, and so lacking in Jews, that it is unlikely that these Jewish adversaries would risk going that far. However, this is not conclusive.
 - On the South Galatian theory, the Galatians are influenced away from the true Gospel within a year, whereas on the North Galatian theory, it is (at best) a decade. The former fits Paul's complaint, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6). The latter view does not.
 - The North Galatian theory requires an assumption that churches were planted in North Galatia, something very difficult to square with Acts.
 - Historically it was believed that the order of Paul's writings were Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans. This fits the South Galatian theory much better.
 - It is unlikely that Acts 15 is the meeting mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2:1-10 for the following reasons: 1) The Galatians 2:1-10 meeting is the second trip Paul made to Jerusalem (see Gal. 1:16-2:1) whereas the Acts 15 trip is clearly the third trip Paul made to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29 being trip one, Acts 11:27-30/12:25 being the second trip and Acts 15 being the third). 2) It is difficult to believe that Paul would not have mentioned the Jerusalem decree in Galatians when that would have settled the question at hand without any debate. 3) Acts 15 is a public meeting whereas Galatians 2 emphasizes that the meeting was private (Gal. 2:2). 4) It is difficult to imagine even Peter engaging in the behavior mentioned in Galatians 2:11-14 after the clear decree in Acts 15. 5) It appears that Paul is listing his visits to Jerusalem in order (this is the force of the Epeita ["then"] clauses in 1:18; 1:21 and 2:1).
 - Since the only evidence we have of a "famine throughout all the world" (Acts 11:28) is in 46 AD (see Josephus), the famine trip (Acts 11:27-30; cf 12:25) likely took place in 46 AD. Since Galatians 2:1 indicates that this second trip to Jerusalem took place 13-14 years after his conversion (in Jewish reckoning, parts of a year count as a year), that would place Paul's conversion in 33 AD (about three years after the death of Jesus). This is a workable chronology.
 - The "first" or "former" visit to Galatia mentioned in Galatians 4:13 would be on the outgoing journey (up through Acts 14:20) and the second visit to the Galatian churches would have been the return trip in Acts 14:21-25.
 - This means that the letter to the Galatians was written between Acts 15:2 and Acts 15:5, in 49 AD.