

AUTUMN BIBLE STUDY SERIES [contd.]

The Reformer had lectured on this Epistle of Paul's in 1516-17, published his first Commentary on it 1519 and returned to it in 1531. It was his favourite among all the Biblical books. He published more on it than on all others combined.

In his Table Talks the saying is recorded: "*The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine.*" Much later when a friend of his was preparing an edition of all his Latin works, Luther remarked to his home circle: "*If I had my way about it they would republish only those of my books which have doctrine. My Galatians, for instance.*"



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- 4-8 September @ 8.00pm each night: *Week of Prayer.*
- 15 September @ 7.00pm: *Annual Sports Night, Henry Jones Playing Fields.*

MEETINGS TODAY

- Sunday School & Bible Class – 10.15am
- Morning Worship – 11.30am: *Introductory Message to the Book of Galatians*
- Evening Service – 7.00pm.

INSPIRATION IN A SENTENCE

"In my heart reigns this one article, faith in my dear Lord Christ, the beginning, middle and end of whatever spiritual and divine thoughts I may have, whether by day or by night."

[Martin Luther, *Introduction to Galatians*, 1538].



AUTUMN BIBLE STUDY SERIES - GALATIANS

As we approach the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation it seems to me that we cannot select a better book for our Bible Study this autumn than Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

Martin Luther consistently ranked the epistle as **one of the clearest distillations of the Gospel within the canon of scripture**. For example, in his 1546 Preface to the New Testament, he wrote that, "*St. John's Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine.*"

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THE MAN & HIS MESSAGE

Text: **Galatians 1:1-5.**

In Martin Luther's life, good things tended to come in small packages:

(i) His wife, Catherine Von Bora, arrived in Wittenberg on 7 April 1523 along with 11 other nuns who were hiding among the fish barrels in Leonhard Köppe's covered wagon.

(ii) The Book of Galatians, though small in size, became Luther's favourite: he said of it, "I have betrothed myself to it. It is my Katie – my wife!"

Acts 13&14 detail Paul's First Missionary Journey: he and Barnabas left Antioch and ended in the Roman province of Galatia (now central Turkey). People were saved and churches were formed. However, shortly after Paul's return to Antioch, controversy engulfed these new churches when false teachers ('Judiasers') arrived and insisted that the Gentile converts needed to be circumcised to be saved.

Paul has therefore several *reasons* for writing **Galatians**:

- (1) To Establish the Credibility of his Message – REVELATION from God alone (**Galatians 1-2**),
- (2) To Emphasise the Exclusivity of the Way of Salvation – JUSTIFICATION by Faith alone (**Galatians 3-4**),
- (3) To Explain the Necessity for Christian living – SANCTIFICATION through Grace alone (**Galatians 5-6**).

[1] THE MESSENGER; 1:1&2.

One means of denying the accuracy of a message is to discredit the authority of the messenger. This is precisely what the false teachers had done: they argued that Paul was not a real apostle.

(a) APOSTLESHIP, v1a.

Paul argues his right to be regarded as an Apostle – not merely as a representative sent out on a mission (cf. **Phil. 2:25, 2 Corin. 8:23**), but as one who had been sent by Christ Himself (**Galatians 1:1, 16**; cf. **2 Corin. 1:1, 1 Corin. 9:1; 15:8-9**).

Therefore, as we read Galatians, we hear Christ speaking. Many people in a quest to hear God speak today actually sidestep His written Word! The Protestant Reformation appeared when men like Luther returned to the study of the Scriptures, bringing the Bible out of the bondage in which the RC Church had placed it.

(b) APPOINTMENT, v1b.

Paul rejects the charge that he was self-appointed; his call was divine.

(c) ASSOCIATION, v2.

Brethren who accompanied him recognised Paul's apostleship.

[2] THE MESSAGE; 1:3-4.

The theology that emerges in this epistle is summarised in these two verses: it centres on the Cross of Christ.

Luther lectured on Galatians in 1516-17 and again in 1531. His *Commentary on Galatians* that grew from his lectures is one of the most influential books to come out of the Reformation: "it breathed fire and it started fires wherever it went."

• John Bunyan spoke of its value in his *Grace Abounding To The Chief Of Sinners*.

• It was also instrumental in bringing Charles Wesley to peace with God.

The Book of Galatians underscores the necessity to pursue doctrine, and reveals how Justification by Faith Alone remains the line of demarcation between truth and error.

(a) SALUTATION OF THIS GRACE, v3.

Grace is extended by God; peace is experienced by man.

(b) SOURCE OF THIS GRACE, v3-4.

Grace comes from Christ, flowing from His Substitutionary Sacrifice.

(c) SUCCESS OF THIS GRACE, v4.

It rescues us from the evil of this world (cf. Katie from convent).

[3] THE MOTIVE; 1:5.

Paul's motive in writing to the Galatian churches was that God might receive glory forevermore. (cf. WSC #1). 'All of Grace, to God's Glory' is the first major note of this wonderful letter!