

Review Questions (Lesson #1)

Answer T for true, F for false

1. Galatians and Romans were probably written at about the same time. _____
2. Paul identified himself as an apostle only in his letter to the Galatians. _____
3. Paul was ordained as an apostle by Ananias laying hands on him. _____
4. Righteousness and justification come from the same Greek word. _____
5. Paul had helped plant the Galatian churches on his first missionary journey. _____

Give short answers:

1. How did Galatia get its name? _____
2. What were the false teachers saying was necessary for salvation? _____
3. What were the false teachers saying about Paul? _____
4. How does mentioning the resurrection of Jesus (1:1) serve Paul's two purposes for Galatians? _____
5. Why did the Galatians need to be reminded of God's grace (1:3)? _____

Fill in the blanks:

1. Deliver is a powerful word, meaning literally to _____, to _____ (from a _____ or _____ situation).
2. Our sin makes us _____ of God, deserving of _____.
3. When we are _____ by His grace, then we are at _____ with _____.
4. In Galatians 2:21, _____, does not refer to _____, but to being made _____ with _____ (justified).
5. Paul was amazed at how _____ the Galatian Christians had changed from embracing the _____ to following after _____.

Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace

Lesson #1

Introduction

Paul's letter to the Galatians differs from his other letters to churches in that it is written to a group of congregations in various cities in a geographic area. Each of his other letters to churches is addressed to a single congregation in a specific city.

Galatia was in the central part of Asia Minor. The area was taken over in about 279 BC by invaders from Gaul (France), hence the name "Galatia." By 189 BC Rome had taken over Galatia. Many years later, Julius Caesar set out to conquer Gaul (France). He wrote that the Gauls were fickle (vacillating, capricious, inclined to change) and untrustworthy (Gallie Wars, Book IV, Section 5). This description matches well with Paul's amazement at how quickly the Galatian Christians had changed from embracing the true Gospel to following after Jewish legalism (Galatians 1:6-7).

Scholars have long debated about just which congregations should be included among "the churches of Galatia" (1:2). The teaching is the same regardless of which churches are included, so we will leave that debate for others to settle. It is obvious that Paul was personally acquainted with the Galatian churches to whom he wrote (see 4:13-15). Therefore, we are inclined to believe that the churches he helped to plant in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe would be the ones addressed in this letter (see Acts 14:1-21; this is known as Southern Galatia). We know that Paul's aim on his second journey was to visit the churches established on the first trip (Acts 15:36), and this is exactly what he did. Barnabas and John Mark sailed to Cyprus (15:39), while Paul and Silas went over land through Syria and Cilicia, then on to Derbe and Lystra (15:40 – 16:1). Paul visited the churches of Galatia again on the third journey (Acts 18:23).

Paul appears to have two major purposes in writing this letter, and those purposes are related to each other. First, he was refuting false teachers who taught the Galatian churches that they must submit to circumcision and other aspects of the Law of Moses in order to be saved (compare Acts 15:1; we commonly refer to them as "Judaizers"). Because Paul consistently opposed this doctrine, the false teachers claimed that he was not a genuine apostle of Christ, but a Johnny-come-lately counterfeiter whose word could not be trusted. Therefore, Paul's second purpose was to defend his apostleship.

In doing so, he was not seeking personal glory, but insuring that the gospel he preached would not lose credibility.

Because Paul's reasoning in Galatians is so similar in many ways to that in Romans, it is thought that the two letters were probably written at roughly the same time. It is impossible to say exactly when they were written, or where Paul was located when he wrote them. A "best guess" puts Paul in Corinth in AD 57-58 when he wrote Galatians. This would be on the third missionary journey, sometime after his third visit to Galatia (as discussed above).

Salutation, 1:1-5

Paul identifies himself as an apostle in two thirds of his letters, including Galatians. Note, however, that here in 1:1 he takes great pains to emphasize that his apostleship is by divine appointment, not by some inferior human authority. Men did not call him to this office, nor did any man ordain him, despite any accusations to the contrary by the Judaizing teachers who opposed him. Acts 9:15 and 26:16-17 confirm the truth of Paul's statement that his apostleship was "through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Galatians 1:1).

Mentioning that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead serves Paul's two purposes for this letter. First, to be an apostle, one must have seen the resurrected Christ (see Acts 1:22). Paul had seen Him (Acts 9:3-5; 1 Corinthians 9:1). Thus his enemies were wrong in claiming his apostleship was counterfeit. Second, Christ was raised "for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Thus the Judaizers were wrong in basing justification on the works of the Mosaic Law. Paul will point out in Galatians 2:21, "If righteousness (justification) comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." In this case, righteousness does not refer to correct conduct, but to being made right with God (justified). Righteousness and justification come from the same Greek word; context determines which shade of meaning applies.

In the second verse, Paul includes "all the brethren who are with me" in his salutation. The record in Acts does not state plainly who was with Paul on the third missionary journey. If we are correct that Galatians was written from Corinth at about the same time as Romans, then we have some insight into this matter by looking at Romans 16:21. Timothy is listed first; we know he also accompanied Paul on the second journey (Acts 16:1-3). Next are Lucius, Jason, and Sospater, whom Paul identifies as his countrymen

(some translations read kinsmen); whether they were distant blood kin or only countrymen is impossible to say with certainty. In any case, they were with Paul as he wrote Romans, and may have been with him when he wrote Galatians as well.

The identity of "the churches of Galatia" (1:2) was discussed in the introduction; we will not belabor the matter here.

Each of Paul's letters includes the hope that his readers may receive grace and peace (1:3). Grace is commonly defined as unmerited favor. Our sins make us enemies of God (Colossians 1:21), deserving of eternal death (Romans 6:23). Any good works we might do could never begin to pay the penalty for our sin. If we are to be saved at all, it must be by God's grace. When we are justified by His grace, we are then at peace with God (see Romans 5:1). The Christians in Galatia needed to be reminded of this, for they were falling from grace by attempting to be justified by the works of the Mosaic Law (Galatians 5:4).

In the last two verses of his salutation, Paul exalts Jesus and what He did for us (1:4-5). Note that He "gave Himself for our sins." This He did voluntarily (see John 10:17-18). Knowing that His sacrifice of Himself would result in our salvation filled Him with joy, so that He "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). If we could solve our sin problem by the works of the Law of Moses, we would not have needed Him to die for us.

Since we could never do that, Jesus died "that He might deliver us from this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). Deliver is a powerful word, meaning literally to snatch out, to rescue (from a dangerous or harmful situation). This word is used of Joseph being rescued from affliction in Egypt (Acts 7:10); the Israelites rescue from slavery (7:34); Peter rescued from prison (12:11); and Paul's rescue from a murderous mob (23:27). Jesus rescued the Galatians (and us) from this present evil age – that is from the power and dominion of sin (see also John 8:31-36). Neither the Law of Moses nor any other system of law could accomplish so great a deliverance.

Jesus' death for our sins, to deliver us from this present evil age, was all "according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4). Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's will (see John 6:38). And the Father willingly gave His precious, beloved Son to bear the sins of all the world as He suffered and died on Calvary. No wonder Paul ascribes to Him "glory forever and ever"! (1:5)