

It is important today as it was then and indeed in any age because it answers the basic questions asked by the human heart: *'How can I find true happiness?'* *'How can I obtain real peace, tranquillity and freedom from fear?'*

Man in his attempts to answer such questions will veer between legalism and license. For all who will take God at His word, Galatians shows the way to true freedom [5:1]. As Hendriksen powerfully puts it: *'It is the freedom of 'bondage to Christ.' It consists in becoming a captive in his train that is surrendering oneself to God Triune as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ unto salvation.'*

The preacher is ever faced with a choice: tell the people what they want to hear or tell them the truth they need to hear! Paul does not flinch on this choice; he has no axe to grind but a truth to tell. His Apostolic authority is being questioned, Jewish legalisers are burdening a fledgling church – Paul's purpose was simple, counter these views by re-emphasising the gospel of free grace in Christ and justification by faith alone, apart from works of the law.

Outline: The letter breaks down naturally into three sections:

Chapters 1 & 2 – The Gospel's Origination: It is not of human but divine origin [ch1] and is therefore independent [ch2].

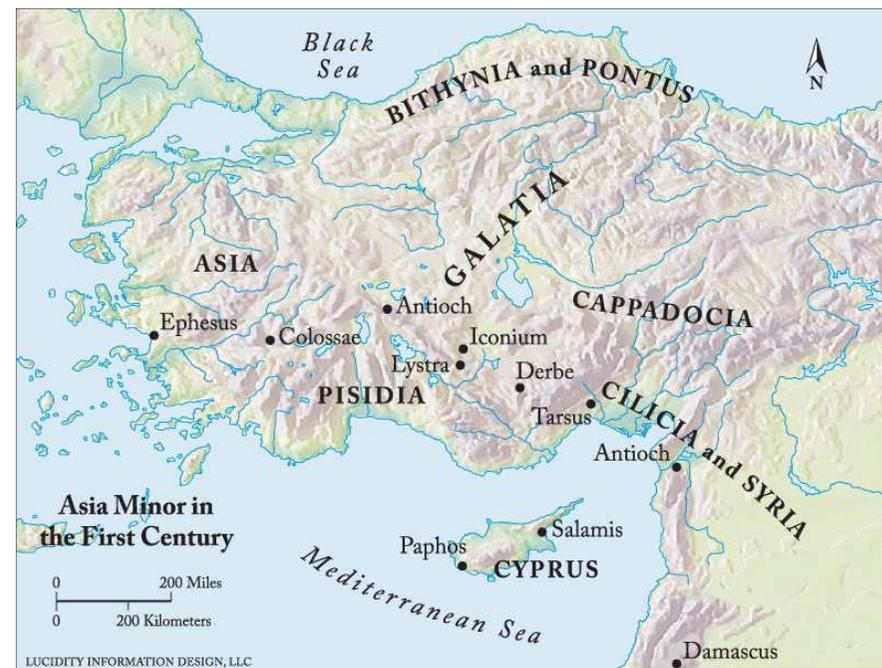
Chapters 3 & 4 – It's Vindication: Both Scripture, i.e. the Old Testament, and life (experience and past history) bear testimony to its truth.

Chapters 5 & 6 – It's Application: It produces true liberty. Let the Galatians stand firm, therefore, as does Paul, who glories only in the cross of Christ.

Trinity Church Liphook

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Sermon Series: Paul's Letter to the Galatians



Introduction & Background to the Letter

"Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers who are with me. To the churches of Galatia"

(Galatians 1:1-2 ESV)

Authorship: There is little dispute that the Apostle Paul is the author, as Philip Schaff puts it: *"that the internal evidences of the authorship of Paul is so strong that no sane divine has ever denied or even doubted it"*

Date & Place of Writing: These can be determined only approximately and will depend on which view one takes on those to whom it was written [see below the North/ South Galatia debate]. Further debate arises over the timing with regard to the Council at Jerusalem which can be dated with some certainty as 49. Some consider Paul's comments regarding his dispute with Peter [2:11-14] as preceding the Council and others following it. The earlier date would make it late A.D. 48 and thus possibly Paul's first letter. The mid-date [A.D. 50-53] would put it after Paul's first two visits to the area and suggest it was written from Corinth, at, or about, the same time as the Thessalonian letters, others suggest it was written as Paul travelled to Jerusalem for the Council meeting. The later date favours it being addressed to a North Galatian audience and this would be circa A.D. 54 and possibly written from Ephesus. In broad terms we can say it is linked closely to the Council of Jerusalem, written before Romans [A.D. 55] and has close links with the Corinthian letters.

Recipients: The 'who are the Galatians'? controversy is central to this and the debate has been going on for at least two hundred years! This Epistle differs from most of those written by Paul, in that it is not addressed directly to a specific church in a city [Rome, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, and Ephesus] or to an individual [Timothy, Philemon and Titus] but to the churches throughout a district of the Roman Empire called Galatia.

Galatia is shown on the map on the cover; it is in the interior of the great peninsula called Asia Minor, which was the theatre of so large a part of the labours of Paul.

A little background is required here. The people were of the Gallic stock, had marched from the Rhine to Greece, and then into Asia about 278 B.C. and had conquered a home in the interior of Asia Minor, which then took a new name from the people (Galli, or Gauls). They learned the Greek language, but retained in part their old tongue and the traits of their race. The people in the 'North' would have been much more ethnically defined [Gaul's] than those of the 'South' which had a much more cosmopolitan population, stronger Roman influence and a greater Jewish presence.

The difficulty is that Paul was in different parts of 'Galatia' on all three of his missionary journeys. On his first journey [circa A.D. 46-48] recorded in Acts 13:4-14:28 Paul planted churches in what is referred to as 'Southern Galatia'. It was on Paul's second missionary tour, [circa A.D. 49-52], that he, with Silas and Timothy passed through from Lycaonia in Phrygia and Galatia, and planted churches [Acts 15:40-18:23a]. On his third missionary journey, [circa A. D. 53-58] he *"went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples"* [Acts 18:23b following].

So was it written to 'North Galatia' or to 'South Galatia'? Much better men than I have failed to resolve this but William Hendriksen [NTC Galatians & Ephesians] presents a very balanced debate for those who want to enquire further. For my part I favour the 'South Galatia' opinion after wide reading, in the main because the content seems to address a mixed church with a strong Jewish influence amidst Gentile converts.

Purpose and Importance: Fortunately these two aspects are much clearer! On it Luther wrote: *"The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wed-lock. It is my Katherine."* It has been called: *'The battle-cry of the Reformation'*; *'the great charter of religious freedom'*; *'the Christian declaration of independence'* etc.