

Day 48, Galatians 1

by David Servant

David Servant's sermon on Galatians 1 emphasizes the importance of understanding salvation by grace and the dangers of distorting the gospel through legalism.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:16, Jeremiah 4:4, Acts 15:1, Romans 3:28, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:19, Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5

Topics: "Salvation By Faith", "Christian Holiness"

Description

David Servant delves into the letter of Galatians, written by Paul around 48 A.D., to address the unique problem of a distorted gospel that had surfaced among the churches. The early church thrived for 18 years without the need for Galatians, indicating God's timing in revealing this crucial message. Paul clarifies that holiness is not the means to salvation, countering the misconception that circumcision and adherence to the Law of Moses were necessary for Gentile believers. The essence of Galatians lies in becoming a new creation in Christ, emphasizing that salvation is by grace through faith, not by works or rituals.

Transcript

There is little doubt that Paul penned his letter to the Galatian churches not too long after his first missionary journey to their region (see 1:6), which we've been reading in the books of Acts over the past two days. So the year was around 48 A.D., 18 years from the church's birth in Jerusalem. That means the early church did quite well for 18 years without the book of Galatians. Or it could be said this way: God did not feel that the book of Galatians was needed by the church until then.

Why the need in 48 A.D.? Simply because a unique problem had surfaced. The gospel was being distorted (1:7). Paul wrote to fix that problem. Tragically, however, some have ripped verses from this letter---a letter that was meant to correct a distorted gospel---and used those verses to distort the gospel once again. We will consider the evidence for that over the next six days.

Having already read Matthew, James, and the first 14 chapters of the book of Acts, a foundation has been laid for us concerning the gospel. We've read Jesus' major teachings. We know He consistently taught that heaven is only for the holy. We've read James' words that faith without works cannot save anyone. We've studied the sermons of the apostles during the first 18 years of the church, and heard them call their audiences to repentance. So when someone tries to tell us that Paul, in his Galatian letter, was correcting a false doctrine that was misleading people into thinking that holiness is necessary for heaven, warning lights should start flashing in our minds! In fact, if we've ever read the entire book of Galatians,

we're immediately going to think of passages such as Galatians 5:19-21:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21, emphasis added).

Clearly, Paul was not trying to correct the "misconception" that holiness is required for heaven!

So how had the gospel been distorted? Some Jewish believers were teaching that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were circumcised. Circumcision was clearly the main issue. This is why we find circumcision mentioned at least thirteen times in the six chapters of Galatians. It was also being taught by some that Gentiles could not be saved unless they started keeping all the Law of Moses, particularly its feast days and more ritualistic, rather than moral, aspects. Consequently, in the minds of some Galatians, salvation had become something that one earned through circumcision and keeping some rituals, not something that was purchased by Christ and granted by God's grace to believers. It was indeed, "a different gospel" (1:6).

One of the final and concluding verses of Paul's letter says:

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation (Gal. 6:15).

That sentence sums up the entire letter. If we understand nothing else in Galatians, we can understand that. Clearly, Paul was declaring that circumcision has no bearing on salvation. The important thing is that one be a new creation in Christ. It was not the removal of a little piece of flesh that saves, but the removal of the old fleshly nature of sin, a circumcision of the heart (see Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4). And it was all by grace through faith! But not a dead faith!

In this first chapter, Paul focuses on proving the divine origin of the gospel he preached. By recounting the story of his former life as a devoted Pharisee and persecutor of the church, his supernatural conversion, and his scant contact with the early Christian leaders in Jerusalem, Paul attempts to persuade his Galatian readers that his message of salvation by grace through faith was given to him by God, not man. This was necessary, because the false teachers no doubt had their list of Old Testament scriptures in which God commanded circumcision.

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