

## **GALATIANS : DESIGN OF THE EPISTLE**

(Credit to Barnes Notes with some modification)

It is easy to discern from the epistle itself that the following circumstances existed in the churches of Galatia, and that it was written with reference to them.

1. That they had been at first devotedly attached to the apostle Paul, and had received his commands and instructions with implicit confidence when he was among them, Ch.4:14,15; 1:6.
2. That they had been perverted from the doctrine of Christ, the gospel of Christ, which he had taught them soon after he had left them, Ch.1:6,7.
3. That this had been done by persons who were of Jewish origin, the Judaizers, and who insisted on the observance of the rites of the Jewish religion in addition to the gospel of Christ.
4. That they claimed to have come directly from Jerusalem (Cf. Ac.15), and to have derived their views of religion and their authority from the apostles there.
5. That they taught that the apostle Paul was inferior to the apostles there; that he had been called more recently into the apostolic office, or was no apostle at all; that the apostles at Jerusalem must be regarded as the source of authority in the church; and that, therefore, the teaching of Paul should yield to that which was derived directly from Jerusalem.
6. That the laws of Moses were binding, and were necessary in order to justification. That the rite of circumcision especially was of binding obligation; that it is probable (Ch.6:12), that they had prevailed on many of the Galatians to be circumcised, and certain that they had induced them to observe the Jewish festivals as binding, Ch.4:10.
7. They would seem, also, that they urged that Paul himself had changed his views since he had been among the Galatians, and now maintained the necessity of circumcision, Ch.5:11. Perhaps they alleged this, from the undoubted fact that Paul, when at Jerusalem (Ac.21:26), had complied with some of the customs of the Jewish ritual.
8. That they urged that all the promises of God were made to Abraham, and that whoever would partake of those promises, must be circumcised as Abraham was. This Paul answers, Ch.3:7; 4:7.
9. That in consequence of the promulgation of these views, great dissensions had arisen in the church, and strifes of an unhappy nature existed, greatly contrary to the spirit which should be manifested by those who bore the name of Christ as Christians, Ch.5.

From this description of the state of things in the churches of Galatia, the design of the epistle is apparent, and the scope of the argument will be easily seen.

I. The first object, therefore, was to show that he had received his commission as an apostle, ***directly from God***. He had not received it at all from man; he had not even been instructed by the other apostles; he had not acknowledged their superiority; he had not even consulted them. He did not acknowledge, therefore, that the apostles at Jerusalem possessed any superior rank or authority.

His commission, though he had not necessarily seen the before his crucifixion, was nevertheless derived immediately from the risen Lord whom he had seen. The doctrine, therefore, which he had taught them, that the Mosaic laws were no longer binding, and that there was no necessity of being circumcised, was a doctrine which had been derived directly from God.

In proof of this, he goes into an extended statement (Ch.1), of the manner in which he had been called, and of the fact, that he had not consulted with the apostles at Jerusalem, or confessed his inferiority to them; of the fact that when they had become acquainted with the manner in which he preached, they approved his course, Ch.1:24; 2:1-10; and of the fact that on one occasion, he had actually been constrained to differ from Peter, one of the apostles, on a point in which he was manifestly wrong, and on one of the very points then under consideration.

II. The second great object, therefore, was to show the real nature and design of the law of Moses, and to prove that the peculiar rites of the Mosaic ritual, and especially the rite of circumcision, were not necessary to justification and salvation; and that they who observed that rite as a means of salvation, did in fact renounce the Scripture method of justification; make the sacrifice of Christ of no value, and make slaves of themselves.

This leads him into a consideration of the true nature of the doctrine of justification, and of the way of salvation by a Redeemer, which point he shows the following manner:

1. By showing that those who lived before Christ, and especially Abraham, were in fact justified, not by obedience to the ritual law of Moses, but by faith in the promises of God, Ch.3:1-18.
2. By showing that the design of the Mosaic ritual was only temporary and provisional, and that it was intended to lead to Christ, Ch.3:19-29; 4:1-8.
3. In view of this, he reproveth the Galatians for having so readily fallen into the observance of these customs as essential to salvation, Ch.4:9-21.
4. This view of the design of the Mosaic law, and of its tendency, he illustrates by an allegory drawn from the case of Hagar, Ch.4:21-31.

This whole discourse is succeeded by an affectionate exhortation to the Galatians, to avoid the evils which had been engendered; reproveth them for the strifes existing in consequence of the attempt to introduce the Mosaic rites, and earnestly entreating them to stand firm in the liberty which Christ had bestowed to them from the servitude of the Mosaic institutions, Ch.5,6.

The design of the whole epistle, therefore, is to state and defend the true doctrine of justification, and to show that it did not depend on the observance of the works of the law of Moses. In the general purpose, therefore, it accords with the design of the epistle to the Romans.