

When was the last time you realized you just didn't measure up, not to your own standards, little less to the standards of others, and certainly not to the standards of God? At such a time we stand ready to start stockpiling good works as we try to offset our defilement *or else* we stand ready to plunge into depression at the hopelessness of the "real me." But neither of these alternatives can atone for our inner pollution and we remain bound up and held down by our guilt.

The letter to the Galatians broadcasts to us (as it did to them) the good news and only solution for our hostage hearts. In this letter the apostle Paul forcefully sets forth the liberty we have because of what God has done for us through Christ Jesus. The proclamation of this liberty is Paul's mission "in order to bring freedom to people whose spirits and souls are in chains." (Ray Stedman in *Adventuring Through the Bible*.)

Down through the years Galatians has had a profound impact on many, including Martin Luther and John Wesley, both of whom dearly loved this book. It stirred spiritual awakenings and peace for those who understood and embraced its liberating message.

Today God can use the book of Galatians to do the same for you. It can set *you* free.

### GALATIANS - AN OVERVIEW

Galatians was written to Gentile Christians (probably in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch in Southern Galatia) who had been converted during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13 and 14). Some false teachers, "false brethren" (Galatians 2:4) or "wolves" (Acts 20:29), known as Judaizers were now trying to impose on these new believers Jewish rituals and rules as additional and essential steps to pleasing God. In other words, they were saying that faith in what Jesus had done on the cross was important but it wasn't enough. "The heart of the false gospel wasn't grace and faith; it was works." (Stedman, *op. cit.*) The dissemination of this false gospel is what compelled Paul to write this letter.

Pray. Bow your heart before God, the author of the gospel and the truths of this book, as you begin your study. Thank Him that He wants you to understand and embrace His good news even more than you want to. Ask Him to set you free this year to love Him more and to freely show His other children increasing grace and mercy.

Read this letter to the Galatians at one sitting, just as you would any letter. Use an accurate and readable translation of the Bible such as the New International Version or the New American Standard Version.

1. **What** is the tone of this letter? **Jot down** the verses that indicate the tone to you. (Paul expresses words of commendation, caring and gratitude after his opening comments in all of his general epistles, *with one exception*. The book of Galatians is the one exception.)
  
2. **What** main themes or ideas do you see in this letter? (Often these will be emphasized by repetition of the idea.)
  
3. Was there one idea that really caused you to stop and think *or* that helped you? **What** got your attention and **why**?
  
4. PERSONAL - What is the biggest challenge facing you right now? (Write it down.) *Ask* God to help you in this challenge as you study Galatians. *Tell* Him you trust Him to do so.

5. a. Sing or say the words to this prayer song by Fanny Crosby, making them your own.

*Pass me not, O gentle Savior, hear my humble cry;  
While on others thou art calling, do not pass me by.  
Let me at thy throne of mercy find a sweet relief;  
Kneeling there in deep contrition, help my unbelief.  
Trusting only in thy merit, would I seek thy face;  
Heal my wounded, broken spirit, save me by thy grace.  
Thou the spring of all my comfort, more than life to me;  
Whom have I on earth besides thee? Whom in heaven but thee?*

- b. What do you see in this song that ties in with the book of Galatians?  
(Why not make that portion your own song all week, asking God to let it bring you His peace?)