



## Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Eighth Series: "The Right Edge" New Testament: Epistles  
Lesson 25: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians

### I. Galatians

#### A. Introduction

"Galatians has been called the 'Magna Carta of Christian liberty,' and this is quite correct. For it rightly maintains that only through the grace of God in Jesus Christ is a person enabled to escape the curse of his sin and of the law and to live a new life, not in bondage or license, but in a genuine freedom of mind and spirit through the power of God." (Expositor's Commentary, # 11, p. 409)

B. Theme: A "vigorous attack against the gospel of works, and a defense of the gospel of faith." Salvation is by the grace of God through faith in the Christ (Eph. 2:8-9).

C. Author: Well accepted to be Paul

D. Audience: There are two prevailing views:

1. The churches of Galatia were in the northern part of what is current day Turkey. It is assumed that Paul visited that area twice. (See Acts 18:23.) Because Jewish leaders were trying to get these young believers to see that circumcision must be added to their faith, Paul is now refuting the idea that Gentile believers had to come under the Law of Moses in order to be saved.
2. More recently, commentators are suggesting that these churches were in the Southern part of Asia Minor. Specifically, this theory holds that they may be the churches of Lystra, Derbe and Iconium, and Antioch.

"...the general movement of Paul and Timothy suggested by Luke in Acts and the vast knowledge we have of the southern churches versus all lack of information about churches of the north, the likelihood of the Jewish legalizers would come first to the southern cities and Paul's general preference for Roman titles especially in referring to area churches, the theory of visits by Paul to the southern churches should be preferred." (Expositor's Commentary, #11, p. 41)"

E. Date: Depends on which group of churches you assume to be the audience. For the "northern" group: 56 AD. For the southern group: 49AD.

F. Purpose: A debate raged about how to handle the Gentile believers. Should Jewish and Gentile believers eat together? Should the Gentiles be required to be circumcised? The council of Acts 15 addressed these issues. But some Jewish legalizers have made their

way to these churches and are causing the people to question whether or not salvation is by faith alone. This is a major issue for the church.

- G. Setting: Three charges against Paul have arisen...
  1. Is he really an apostle? See chapters 1-2
  2. Is his gospel the true gospel? See chapters 3-4
  3. Does his gospel allow for “loose living”? See chapters 5-6
- H. An Outline (From “Talk thru the Bible”)
  1. 1:1-2:21 A biographical explanation
  2. 3:1-4:31 A doctrinal exposition
  3. 5:1-6:18 A practical exhortation

## II. Ephesians

### A. Introduction:

Because Ephesus was a key capital city, Paul’s ministry in and through them was crucial for the spreading of the gospel in that entire area.

### B. Author: Accepted to be Paul

- C. Audience: This epistle may have started out as a circular letter for several churches in Asia. (Evidence to support this idea is focused on the rather generalized approach, i.e. no personal greetings etc.) It may have been helpful to many churches, but it has mainly been associated with the church of Ephesus.

Paul had a brief visit in Ephesus in Acts 18:18-21. Later, on his third missionary journey, Paul had spent almost three years with this church. (See Acts 19.) And, on his way to Jerusalem, he spent some more time with the elders. (See Acts 20:17-30.)

- D. Date: It is generally believed that Paul wrote this letter (along with Colossians and Philemon) during his first imprisonment in Rome. Approximately 60-61 AD. It was carried by Tychius (see 6:21).

- E. Setting: Apparently Epaphras had visited Paul in Rome and gave him a progress report on the church. There was not a specific error within the church body to address. Instead, Paul takes a broader view and tries to encourage them with a discussion of God’s design for the church in general. He also addresses some of the practical demands of living in a hostile society.

### F. An Outline:

(From “Talk thru the Bible”)

1. 1:1-3:21 The Privileges of the Christian - Our Beliefs
2. 4:1-6:24 The Responsibilities of the Christian – Our Behavior

### G. Special Notes:

1. Consider the blessings of redemption outlined in chapter one

2. Notice the clarity of 2:8-10

### III. Philippians

#### A. Introduction:

“Philippians is the epistle of joy and encouragement in the midst of adverse circumstances.” In it, Paul affirms his fond affection for the people in this church and urges them to center all their thoughts and actions on Christ.

#### B. Author: Assumed to be Paul

#### C. Date: Approximately 61-62 AD

#### D. Setting:

Paul’s “Macedonian Call” during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:9) diverted him to the Roman colony of Philippi. This was a military town named after the father of Alexander the Great. It was not a large commercial town like Corinth. There were not even enough Jews in the region to need a synagogue. The first European convert was a business woman named Lydia.

Paul and Silas were beaten and jailed for their evangelistic efforts, but out of that trauma came the birth of a thriving young church. See Acts 16.

#### E. Theme: This book is primarily a thank you note to the believers. Paul takes the occasion to also speak to the issue of Christian unity.

#### F. An Outline:

1. 1:1-1:30 An Account of Circumstances
2. 2:1-2:30 An Appeal to have the Mind of Christ
3. 3:1-3:21 An Appeal to have the Knowledge of Christ
4. 4:1-4:23 An Appeal to have the Peace of Christ

#### G. Special Notes:

1. Notice the emphasis on joy in this epistle.
2. Consider the key phrase in chapter one: “For me to live in Christ and to die is gain.” (1:21)
3. Consider the great “kenosis” (emptying) passage in chapter two: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” (2:5)
4. Consider the encouragement found in chapter four: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (4:13)

### IV. Colossians

#### A. Introduction

Epaphras arrived in Rome with news that some heretical teaching about keeping the Law, embracing a “deceptive philosophy,” worshipping mysterious powers and a sense that the body is evil was affecting the church.

“There are indications, however that the errorists had not achieved complete success (2:4,8,20). Paul therefore can express gratitude for the Colossian Christians and rejoice over the order within their ranks and in the continued fidelity to Christ (see 1:3, 2:5).” (Expositors Commentary, #11, p. 168)

B. Author: Presumed to be Paul

C. Audience:

The city of Colossae was about 100 miles east of Ephesus. It was a center of commerce. Paul did not found this church, it was founded by Epaphras (see 1:4-8 and 2:1). Epaphras probably came to Christ while Paul was ministering in Ephesus. He later visited Paul in prison in Rome (see 4:12-13 and Philemon 23).

Apparently, he reported that there was a system of heresy threatening the church. He addresses legalism, dietary laws, rituals and even mystical experiences that were affecting the church’s ability to see the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ in everything.

D. Setting: Paul is in prison in Rome. This letter was written about the same time as Ephesians and Philemon.

E. Date: 60-61 AD.

F. An Outline:

(from “Talk thru the Bible”)

1. 1:1-2:23 The Supremacy of Christ
2. 3:1-4:18 Submission to Christ

G. Special Notes:

1. Notice the clear focus on His Supremacy in the key verses of 2:9-10
2. Consider then the need for us to set our affection on things above in chapter 3:1-2

## V. So what?

Paul had real people in mind when he wrote these letters. He addresses a wide array of issues. He scolds, encourages, teaches, affirms much like a father would. Consider 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have a favorite among these four books? Which one and why?
2. Discuss Galatians 2:20 and its affect on your life.
3. Make a list of the spiritual blessing listed in Ephesians 1. Which ones have you thanked God for recently?