

On Paul's letter to the Galatians

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Paul's Epistle to the Galatians addresses many issues which are central to the Christian Faith: the Sovereignty of God, Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross, Justification by faith, the centrality of the Cross, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the community of faith, the arrival of the new Age and the already and not-yet eschatology(end-time).

God's sovereignty and power are revealed in His raising Christ from the dead(Gal 1:1) and by His rule expressed in the coming Kingdom(5:21).He works out His saving plan in history by sending both His Son(2:20; 4:4) and His Spirit(4:6) for the redemption of human beings. Believers are considered children of God through Christ Jesus (3:26; 4:6). Since God is sovereign, Paul warns the Galatians, He is not mocked: those who refuse to obey Him will face judgment on the Last Day (5:21;6:7-8)

But those who put their trust in His Son will be saved (2:16; 3:22). Paul identifies Jesus as God's son, who revealed to him on the Damascus Road(1:16)and who demonstrated His love by giving His life for him (2:20).The death of Jesus delivers us from the present evil age (1:4),brings righteousness(2:21),removes the curse of the law(3:13),and redeems us from the power of the law(4:3-5).Believers belong to Christ(3:29; 5:24);they are also Abraham's offspring, for Christ, by fulfilling the covenant made with David(2 Sam 7), is the true offspring of Abraham (3:16). Christ's sacrificial death means that the (Mosaic) law, which includes circumcision, is no longer required for believers to become people of God. The gospel is now Christ's gospel (1:7) .The truth of the gospel(2:5,14),which was revealed to Paul by Jesus Christ(1:12),is that one is justified not by works of the Law, but only through faith in the Messiah---Jesus Christ(2:16).

Justification by faith alone is one of the central themes in Galatians. Believers are righteous before God because they are united with Christ in His death and resurrection (1:4; 2:16-20 3:13 26-28; 4:4-5; 5:24; 6:14), and not due to any effort or works on their part ;otherwise ,Paul emphasises, Christ died for nothing(2:21).Justification is God's end-time (eschatological) pronouncement that those who trust in Christ rather than in themselves are declared to be not guilty. This eschatological verdict has been declared ahead of time, so that those who believe in Christ crucified and risen are now free from condemnation (2:17;5:5).

The Cross is fundamental to Justification. For it is through the cross that Christ delivers us "from the present evil age" (1: 4).Paul reminds the Galatians that death and sin can only be conquered by Christ taking the curse of the law upon himself(3:13),the curse that human beings deserve because of their sin(3:10). The wonder of the cross is that Christ acts as our representative and substitute, taking on himself the punishment we deserve. Paul warns the Galatians that those who rely on obedience to the law in order to be right with God nullify the cross (2:21). He underlines the significance of the cross by stating that his only boast is in Christ's cross, by which he is crucified to the world and the world(with its values of godless materialism, vanity and hypocrisy) is crucified to him (6:14).And the enticements of the world no longer hold the same attractiveness they once did prior to Paul's conversion.

The Holy Spirit also plays a central role in Galatians. It constitutes evidence that believers are right with God(3:1-5) and are truly the sons of God(4:6).The presence of the Spirit also means that the Galatians belonged to the people of God(Acts 15:7-11),and they enjoyed the blessing of Abraham(3:14).Paul reminds the Galatians that they received the Holy Spirit not by doing what the(Mosaic)law demands, but by putting their trust in the gospel of Christ crucified (3:2).The Spirit also plays a vital ethical role in Galatians, for the Galatians are exhorted to walk by the Spirit(5:16),led by the Spirit(5:18),march in step with the Spirit(5:25),and sow to the Spirit(6:8).Thereby they produce the fruit of the Spirit(5:22-23).Paul lists seventeen items as works of the Flesh, including sexual immorality ,idolatry, hatred ,strife, drunkenness, and warns that those who do such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God(5:19-21).Paul also lists nine items on the fruit of the Spirit, which includes love, joy, peace, long-suffering.. against such there is no law (5:22-23). Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (5:24). The “old evil” age no longer reigns over them.

Life in the Spirit is a community life. A life that is pleasing to God is humble and not self-absorbed. Galatians are urged to forsake conceit, which manifests itself in provoking and envying one another (5:26). Instead, they are to watch over and restore with humility and gentleness those who sin (6:1), keeping in mind no one is immune from temptations. Believers are also encouraged to support and bear one another’s burdens, so fulfilling the law of Christ(6:2).To live and walk in the Spirit is to demonstrate concern and care for others, “especially those who are of the household of faith” (6:6-10).

What matters in life, Paul reminds the Galatians, is the New Creation. For we will be raised from the dead and live under the New Heaven and New Earth (2 Peter 3:13; Rev 21:1; Isa 65:17; 66:22). Christ’s resurrection signifies that the age to come has invaded the present evil age (1:1).This old evil age has lost its hold over believers through the cross of Christ (6:14).Believers now belong to the New Creation(6:15).The New Creation has not yet consummated(Isa 65:17;66:22), but it has been inaugurated through the work of Jesus Christ(1:1,4). The gift of the Holy Spirit also represents the arrival of the New Creation (Isa 32:15; 44:7; Ezek 11:18-19;36: 26-27). Believers now live in the era of the Cross, the Resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Second Corinthians rightly summarizes Galatians:” if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). Paul extols the Galatians----and all believers, for that matter-----to continue in the way they started: by walking in the Spirit and trusting in Christ (Gal 3:2,3,5;5:5-6,18,25;6:8).