

"The Study of Galatians"

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"Introduction to Galatians"

Introduction: As we begin our study in Galatians tonight, I want to begin by doing an overview of the entire letter by considering several points. Just as we considered in our study of Acts, it is quite easy to get so caught up in the details that we miss the big picture and I do not want that to happen. The overall view that we look at this evening will help you considerably as you read ahead through the letter.

➤ The Writer

Notice Galatians 1:1, 5:2

Here in these two verses, we can see clearly that the writer is the Apostle Paul. This seems obvious and at first glance it seems to be of little importance. But as we move through the letter, we shall see that he is more than qualified to write this letter. In this letter he will be addressing the false teaching of the Pharisees. Let us keep in mind that before Paul was saved, he was a Pharisee, but not just any Pharisee.

Philippians 3:4-6

⁴ *Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:*

⁵ *Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;*

⁶ *Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

Acts 22:3-4

³ *I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.*

⁴ *And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.*

➤ The Recipients

Now we need to know to whom this letter was written.

Notice Galatians 1:2

Here we see that this letter was not written to just one church but it was written to the churches in Galatia. These churches were started on Paul's first missionary journey. It is especially important to know that this letter is written to believers.

Notice Galatians 3:1-3

Here we see that these people had the Spirit and they had "BEGUN" the Christian life. The people who received this letter were believers.

Notice Galatians 4:6

Here we see that these people had received the Holy Spirit therefore they were saved. These are not unbelievers that Paul is writing to.

Paul wrote this letter from Syrian Antioch after his first missionary journey. This is the city where all three of Paul's missionary journeys started. It is believed to be the first letter that he wrote. The letter was written in 49 AD.

➤ The Occasion

Now we need to understand why the letter was written to these churches. This letter is addressed to new believers. They had not been saved long. After Paul departed, they were targeted by the Pharisees. These believers were young in the Lord and they were hungry and Satan was quick to run the Pharisees in to flood their minds with false teaching. This then brings up a question, "What is a Pharisee?" Pharisees were those who held strictly to the Law of Moses and they taught that you must keep the Law in order to accomplish your salvation. We also need to know that there were three types of Pharisees that existed in Paul's day. This is important because these churches were dealing with a certain sect of the Pharisees.

1. There were Pharisees who believed that people had have faith and they had to keep the Law in order to be saved. This group mixed faith and works together for salvation.

Jesus addressed the false teaching of this group in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:20

²⁰ For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

In this statement Jesus was declaring that no one was saved by keeping the Law. He therefore completely destroyed their theology.

2. There was another group of Pharisees that taught a believer must keep the Law in order to become part of the church as well as to be saved. This group mixed faith and works for salvation and for entrance into the church.

This group shows up in Acts 15 because in Acts 13-14 there were many Gentiles that were coming to the Lord. The Pharisees were then demanding that the Gentile believers must come under the Law. So, the Jerusalem council met and reached a determination in Acts 15.

Acts 15:22-24, 28-29

²² Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

²³ And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.

²⁴ Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

²⁹ That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

3. The third group of Pharisees were teaching that in order for a believer to grow and to have power over sin that they must come under the Law. In other words, they were teaching that they must follow the Law for sanctification. These people were mixing faith and works for spiritual growth.

This is the very group that infiltrated the churches at Galatia. Now let us consider another thought that will help us to better grasp what these Pharisees were doing. Our salvation has three phases.

1. **Justification** - This happens the very moment that we are saved. We are at that moment declared righteous. This is freedom from sin's penalty. This is the past tense of salvation.

2. **Sanctification** – This is the growth in the believer's life after they are saved. This is becoming more and more like our Saviour. This is freedom from sin's power. This is the present tense of salvation.
3. **Glorification** – This happens the moment of the Rapture. This is freedom from sin's presence. This is the future tense of salvation.

Now, getting back to Galatians, the Pharisees had infiltrated the churches and they were telling the believers that they must come under the Law in order to grow spiritually. Many people see the book of Galatians as a book of salvation but it is not. Galatians is all about sanctification, getting free from the power of sin. This then raises a question. Why then does Paul write so much about justification in this letter if it is not about justification? The answer is, because Paul wants these believers and he wants us to know that we are not sanctified by keeping the Law but we are sanctified in the same way that we were justified, and that is by faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is going to instruct them that they started by faith and that is the very way they needed to continue.

Notice Galatians 3:1-3 again.

They began in the Spirit and they were to continue the very same way. In this letter he will explain to them that power over sin does not come by keeping the Law or any set of manmade rules but it comes by faith in the promises of God. Holiness in the life of the believer comes by the power of the Spirit as the believer walks by faith.

➤ **The Teaching of the Pharisees**

The Pharisees had made their way into the church shortly after Paul had departed the region and they began to teach this false doctrine. They then taught these believers that they had to follow the Mosaic Law. When the believers told them that Paul did not teach the need to come under the Law then the Pharisees resorted to another tactic. They declared that Paul was not a true Apostle. He was not part of the original group and for that reason he could not be trusted. Paul seen himself as one who was not worthy of being an Apostle.

1 Corinthians 15:8-9

⁸ *And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.*

⁹ *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

They could not dispute the Truth Paul taught so they resorted to attacking Paul himself. They would have attacked his Apostleship and they would have used his past as a means to

pull the believers in these churches away from Paul so that they would doubt and question his authority. Then they did something else. They told these believers that if they did not come under the Law they would be given over to a life of licentiousness. In other words, if they did not stay under the Law then they would go off into a life of deep sinful practices. You see they claimed that the only way they could walk in holiness was to come under the Law.

➤ **The Contents of the Letter**

There are three sections in the letter.

✓ **Chapters 1-2 – Paul defends his Apostleship.**

Paul will spend two chapters defending his Apostleship because of the attacks from the Pharisees upon his life.

✓ **Chapters 3-4 – Doctrine. A believer is sanctified the same way in which he was justified.**

In this section we will see much about justification because Paul wants his readers to grasp that holiness is achieved by faith in the same way that justification is achieved by faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

✓ **Chapters 5-6 – Practical. You will reach a high level of holiness as you walk by faith not by living a life under the Law.**

In this section Paul will teach us that as we continue to walk by faith and not by the Law, we will not go off into licentiousness but we will reach new levels of holiness by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion:

In closing this out tonight I want to raise a question. What is the importance of this study for us today? There are several reasons why this study is so very important today.

1. There are many believers who battle with besetting sins. In the battle they have tried many means in which to get free from the sin but they always seem to fall right back in the same pattern. They will step away from a while and do rather well. Then something happens and the sin that they vowed that they were finished with trips them up and they commit the same sin again. This pattern continues in their lives and they feel very defeated. This study will be of great benefit because this letter tells us how to be free of the power of sin.
2. Another reason why this study is so important is because there are many people in the church today who believe that following a set of manmade rules is the path to a

life of holiness. They believe that holiness is attained by what they do and do not do. Examples would be as such; there are people who will not go to certain places or shop at certain stores and that is their measure of holiness. There are others who will not wear certain clothing to church or will not do certain things on Sunday and to them this is the measure of holiness. This is legalism. Following the Law or following man's rules is not holiness. Holiness is attained by living by faith and living a life of surrender to the Spirit so that His power will work in our lives.

Galatians 3:10-11

¹⁰ *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*

¹¹ *But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.*

I will end with one last thought for tonight. Sanctification is not something that automatically happens to a believer. Yes, we are holy in standing/position because of what our Lord has done, but to be holy in practice depends upon us.

Romans 8:29-30

²⁹ *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

³⁰ *Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

The church was predestined, called, justified, and in God's eyes already glorified. This is all accomplished by God. But there is no mention of being sanctified. Why? Because this is dependent upon the believer to live by faith after justification.