

## Galatians Argument – Lesson 1 – Introduction

### Introduction

Tonight we are going to start a four week study of Galatians. It is a relatively short book but very important. In it, Paul is dealing with an attack on the gospel. There are always attacks against the Word of God and God's people – everywhere and in every age. The tactics are numerous and varied – but two of the big ones are distortion and persecution. These go hand in hand. Distortion destroys the very foundation that allows you to withstand persecution. And persecution softens you up and makes you open to distortion just to get some relief. You can withstand more persecution the better you understand the truth. So, the enemy uses them both to destroy the Church. For us in America, we are not really under much overt persecution, yet, but we are certainly dealing with all kinds of distortions.

The Galatian churches were dealing with both overt persecution and distortion – distortion of the gospel. This false gospel went to the heart of the true gospel – it would destroy their Christian liberty and reliance on Christ for living, replace it with legalism, and make them useless to God. If this false gospel prevails, the Church is back under the control and bondage of the flesh – which produces nothing but death; and Satan will have effectively neutralized the Church. Tom Constable said this about Galatians:

*[Slide 2] Galatians has been called the Manifesto of Christian Liberty. It explains that liberty: its nature, its laws, and its enemies. This little letter has at various times through history called God's people out of the bondage of legalism back into the liberty of freedom. Luther loved it so much he called it his wife<sup>1</sup>*

This battle is constant and it goes on today and it will continue to go on until the Final Judgment. The issue was legalism and human beings are drawn to legalism – the idea that we can be “good enough” - that we are somehow capable of making ourselves acceptable to God. That we can, in fact, tell God that He must accept us because we do “good works” – which, by the way, we also arrogantly define ourselves. That we can do something that, when we stand before God in judgment,

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, [\*Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible\*](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), 2 Co 13:14.

we can say – see how good I am, I did this or that for you, and you have to accept me. I earned it.

Jeremy taught Galatians in depth back in 2009, and I've reviewed a lot of his lessons to prepare for these next four weeks. My goal is to focus on what the attack was and the way Paul defended it. We want to understand his argument and the logic behind it. But we are not going to go deep into the woods on each passage like we normally do. We also aren't going to take the doctrines that arise systematically – we don't have time to do that and Jeremy's already done it when he taught Galatians. So, if you want to go deeper into some of the things that are going to come up, Jeremy's lessons are a great resource.

In other words, I'm going to try my best to focus only on what Galatians says. For example, in Chapter 3, Paul asks the question "Why then the Law?" and then he answers it by saying "the Law was added because of transgressions" and then he doesn't explain anymore about that statement. He doesn't go into what he means by "added because of transgressions". In other letters, like Romans, he does. And we could go over to Romans and other passages and use all these other passages to get more detail about "why the Law". But we aren't going to do that, because in Galatians, Paul didn't. We want to try to follow his argument in Galatians and let it speak for itself, and try not to add things we know from other books into the argument. Not that that is wrong, it's not. We are just not going to go that far.

There are reasons why this approach is helpful. First, in the process of exegesis, this is one of the earlier steps. You do this before you go outside the context of the book.

Also, it really helps us make sure that we are putting a passage in its proper context within the book itself. Many times, I think I know what a passage says and then, when you really study the context and argument of the book, I get surprised that it may mean something a little – or even a lot – different than I thought it did.

Third, at least for me, knowing the issues and argument helps me remember the book and where things are in the book. It's like an outline of the book.

Finally, knowing the argument helps equip us from an apologetic standpoint – it equips us to defend what we believe. If you know the issue and if you understand the way the issue was handled Biblically, when the issue comes up in your life, you will know how to respond using Biblical support and logic. It's the difference between responding with "the Bible said so" versus "here's what the Bible says

about that and why”. I’ve found that, for me, there are two kinds of apologetics going on – internal and external. The internal apologetic is the defense that is going on in my own head. My own head raises questions like Satan presented to Eve – “did God really say”. The external apologetic is the defense that is going on outside yourself, with other people. And you have to convince yourself that something is true – that God really said it - if you are going to be able to convince others. So, one apologetic is convincing yourself, another is convincing others. Knowing the argument of a letter like Galatians helps you on both counts – it helps you convince yourself which in turn helps you convince others. It equips you to “make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Pet. 3:15).

The approach we are going to take – to focus only on Paul’s argument in Galatians - is a bit difficult to do – particularly since we have covered the major doctrines of the gospel many times, and have heard Jeremy and other good teachers explain them. We tend to bring all this doctrine we know into our study of a book and read the book in light of the doctrine we know. This is fine, and it should be done, but I think it helps our understanding of Galatians if we just focus on what Paul is saying – there may be reasons why Paul chose not to go into a big explanation of a particular doctrine in Galatians, like he did later in Romans. Observing that, you can think about things like – why didn’t he go into more explanation of this point, or why did he explain this other point so much. You know he knew all this doctrine, but he chose to explain some things more deeply than others for a reason. Maybe he didn’t have time to write something as lengthy as Romans. Maybe he had already explained a lot when he was with them and thought he just needed to briefly refer to something to remind them. Maybe there was some urgency to get the letter out and he only included what he thought was necessary to get his point across. Probably, it’s all the above and more. I certainly think that Galatians was written with a sense of extreme urgency, and that lends itself to a bare bones, straightforward, argument – with explanations only where necessary.

With those preliminaries behind us, let’s move on to the background of Galatians. With this background, I want to try to put the letter in context, and consider some of the “human drama” that the people may have been experiencing. By “human drama”, I mean trying to place ourselves in their position to see how they might be thinking and what emotions they might be experiencing about the situation. Even though these people lived almost 2000 years ago in a culture quite foreign to ours, they are still human – with human feelings, thoughts and desires – and we can empathize with them precisely because we share our humanity – we can, to a limited extent, put ourselves in their place and think about what we would think or

how we would feel. This is one of those things about studying Scripture that you don't necessarily get unless you sit back and think about it a bit. That's one reason why it's good to not just read a passage, but try to take some time to stop and think about it.

### **Paul's Life Leading Up to First Missionary Journey**

Let's start with Paul. He was born around 4-5 AD in Tarsus (Acts 22:3). He was an Israelite of the Tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5), and was also a Roman citizen by birthright (Acts 22:28). Sometime during his youth, he moved to Jerusalem and was educated under Gamaliel, the most respected Jewish teacher of his day<sup>1</sup> (Acts 22:3), a very influential Pharisee. Paul became a Pharisee and was probably around 26 years old when Christ was crucified (in 30 AD). So, even if Paul never saw or heard Christ, he would have been well aware of Christ's ministry and His crucifixion. Unless he was out of town "on vacation", he would have been in Jerusalem when Christ was crucified (Acts 26:4). If he was there, did he actually witness it? He probably would have experienced the darkness that spread over the land for 3 hours when Christ was on the cross, as well as the earthquakes. Did he know about the tearing of the temple veil? Did he know about the opening of the tombs? What did he know about Christ's resurrection? He probably believed the story that the Pharisees concocted - that Jesus' disciples came and stole His body. He saw a lot, but at this point he was just as blind as any of the other Pharisees.

Paul was a model Pharisee and on track to advance high in the hierarchy of this legalistic, political and corrupt false religious system. According to his own words, he was a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil 3:5), educated "strictly according to the law..." (Acts 22:2), "as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless", and "was advancing in Judaism beyond many of [his] contemporaries...., being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions." He was completely sold out to the Judaistic legal system and completely bought into its false religion of merit based righteousness. He was a bright and rising star in Pharisaism. His zeal for the "ancestral traditions", and most likely, desire to impress the leadership and keep advancing, led him to persecute the early church. According to Paul own words in his defense in front of King Agrippa (Acts 26:9-11): *"So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."*<sup>10</sup> *"And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them."*<sup>11</sup> *"And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to*

*foreign cities*. At this point, Paul was focused like a laser on the total destruction of the Church. Imagine what a person of Paul's intelligence and ability, driven by rage and fury, would have been like. We get a picture here – he was merciless - Like all the rest of the Jewish leadership, some of the same guys who crucified Christ - Christ's description of the Pharisees and their students applied to Paul – he was a viper among the “brood of vipers”.

So, when Christ called him as he was headed to Damascus, it was certainly miraculous. Christ stopped him in his tracks and he turned on a dime. Here's what Paul told Agrippa about his conversion (Acts 26:12-18): *“While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,* <sup>13</sup> *at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.* <sup>14</sup> *“And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the<sup>b</sup> Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’* <sup>15</sup> *“And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.* <sup>16</sup> *‘But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; <sup>17</sup> rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’* Think about the magnitude of this change. Think about the effect Paul's “defection” from Judaism had on the Jewish leadership – they hated him - he would have gone from “weapon of mass destruction” to “public enemy number one”. I bet they had a lot of meetings about it.

[Slide 3] After his conversion, Paul went on to Damascus, stayed with the disciples there for “many days”, and preached Jesus in the synagogue. When the Jews plotted to kill him, he escaped by being let down from opening in the city wall. He traveled to Arabia and spent about 1 year there, then returned to Damascus.

Around 37 AD, 3 years after his conversion, he made his first trip to Jerusalem after his conversion. At Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples who were afraid of him. [No kidding!] Barnabas commended him to the apostles and he was accepted. [That took a lot of faith, could we do that?] He argued with the Hellenistic Jews who plotted to put him to death. He escaped to Caesarea and went to Tarsus, and he stayed in Tarsus for about 7 years.

While all this was going on with Paul, the church in Antioch in Syria was started by the preaching of believers who left Jerusalem because of the persecution. The church in Jerusalem heard about them and sent Barnabas to them. After spending some time with them, Barnabas went to Tarsus to get Paul and brought him to Antioch. This would have been around 43 AD when Paul was about 39 years old. About 9 years after his conversion.

14 years after his conversion, about 47 AD, while Paul was in Antioch, a prophet, Agabus, came from Jerusalem and prophesied of great famine to occur. The famine occurred during the reign of Claudius, and the Antioch church took up a collection for the brethren in Judea. Barnabas and Paul traveled to Jerusalem to take the collection to the elders. **They took Titus, a Gentile believer, with them on this trip.**

While they were in Jerusalem, Paul presented to Peter, James and John the gospel Christ commissioned him to proclaim – not because he thought he was teaching the wrong thing – he got it from Christ and he knew he wasn't - but to make sure they were all teaching the same thing – that they were all unified. Also, some Jews confronted them and insisted that Titus be circumcised – a foreshadowing of the issue in Galatians. Despite the pressure from these Jews, Titus was not required to be circumcised. They returned to Antioch from Jerusalem late in 47 AD.

### **The First Missionary Journey (48 – 49 AD) – Cyprus and Cities in “Southern Galatia”**

[Slide 4] Around 48 AD, Paul and Barnabas left Antioch on their first missionary journey, taking Barnabas' cousin John Mark with them. Their typical approach was to go to the synagogue first and preach the gospel to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles that attended. If, and usually when, the Jews realized what they were teaching, Paul and Barnabas would get kicked out of the synagogue and at that point they would take their message to the Gentiles.

Barnabas was from Cyprus and they began by preaching across the island of Cyprus – beginning on the east side at Salamis and moving west all the way to Paphos on the west side. At Paphos, they encountered the false prophet – Bar Jesus (aka Elymas, the magician), with the proconsul Sergius Paulus. Sergius Paulus summoned them, wanting to hear the word of God, but Paul and the others were opposed by Bar Jesus. Bar Jesus was blinded and Sergius Paulus believed.

After crossing Cyprus, they move into the Galatian region where they founded the churches that are the subjects of the Book of Galatians. First, they sailed from Paphos to Perga, where Mark left them and went back to Jerusalem. There is a lot of speculation about why Mark left, but really all we know is that Paul considered it desertion and it caused a split between Paul and Barnabas later - before the second missionary journey when Barnabas wanted to take Mark along and Paul didn't. Ultimately, Paul and Mark reconciled.

It doesn't sound like they spent very much time at all in Perga and went from there about 100 miles North to Pisidian Antioch (the "other Antioch"). This is where Paul preached the sermon described in Acts 13 that we will talk about in a minute. After spending some time there, the Jews aroused the devout women and leading men of the city, who instituted a persecution against them and drove them out.

From Pisidian Antioch, they went SE over 50 miles to Iconium. There, they were opposed by the unbelieving Jews, and the Jews and Gentiles were divided. Nevertheless, despite the increasing opposition, they *"spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that <sup>b</sup>signs and wonders be done by their hands."* Finally, an attempt was made to stone them and they left.

From Iconium, they went on to a couple of other cities - Lystra and Derbe. At Lystra, Paul healed a lame man. The people mistook them for two of their gods (Barnabas was Zeus, Paul was Hermes, the chief speaker), and wanted to sacrifice to them. Paul and Barnabas preached to them about the nature of the true God to correct their thinking. Meanwhile, Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium followed them to Lystra and stirred up the people, who stoned Paul and left him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But Paul was not dead - he got up and went back into Lystra and the next day Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe, where they preached the gospel and made many converts.

They returned through Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch *"strengthening the souls of the disciples and encouraging them to continue in the faith"* and they appointed elders in every church. They returned to Antioch though Perga and Attalia.

This trip lasted from 48 to 49 AD. They covered a lot of territory, bore much fruit and experienced a lot of persecution – primarily instigated by the Jews. Paul would have been about 45 years old when they returned to Antioch.

Very soon after Paul returned to Antioch, he became aware that the Galatian churches were in imminent danger. The Jews – Judaizers – had come to these churches and were preaching a false gospel – a Satanic attack that would bring them back under the slavery of the Law and the sin nature and render them useless to God. He wrote this very stern, but loving, letter to these churches – his “little children” – to save the them and the true gospel from this attack.

### **What Paul Taught in Galatia and How It was Received**

Let’s see what we can find out about the gospel Paul taught in these Galatian churches. To get the gist of this, turn to Acts 13. Acts 13:14 – 42 describes a sermon Paul taught in Pisidion Antioch at the synagogue there. In this sermon, Paul recounts what God as done for Israel – emphasizing that all of these things were initiated and done by God – God chose the patriarchs, God made them great in Egypt, God delivered them out of Egypt in the Exodus, God patiently put up with them during their 40 years in the wilderness, God destroyed 7 nations in Canaan, God distributed their land inheritance to them, God provided the judges for them, God answered their request for a king and appointed Saul, God removed Saul and appointed David, from the descendants of David according to God’s promise God brought Israel a Savior, Jesus Christ, and announced His coming through John the Baptist. God did everything, men did nothing. Paul then gives them the gospel:

**First, - vss 26 – 29 - Israel rejected God’s Savior – they crucified Jesus Christ in fulfillment of prophecy:** <sup>26</sup> *“Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent.”* <sup>27</sup> *“For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him.”* <sup>28</sup> *“And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed.”* <sup>29</sup> *“When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.”*

**Second, - vss 30 – 37 - God raised Christ from the dead, in fulfillment of prophecy and His promise:** <sup>30</sup> *“But God raised Him*



from the dead; <sup>31</sup> and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. <sup>32</sup> “And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, <sup>33</sup> that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘You are My Son; today I have begotten You.’ <sup>34</sup> “As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ <sup>35</sup> “Therefore He also says in another Psalm, ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.’ <sup>36</sup> “For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; <sup>37</sup> but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

**Third, - vss 38a - justification is available to men through Christ** <sup>38</sup>  
“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

**Fourth, - vss 38b - freedom is only available through Christ by faith, not works.** “everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses”.

Paul was in the synagogue and this sermon was directed at the people in the synagogue – the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. So, it was grounded in the OT for an audience who had the background to understand it. Take special note of the fourth point – Paul says - “**everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses**”. Many of these people would be well aware of the oppressing burden the Law had imposed on them and their utter failure to fulfill it. In that regard, it was very fertile ground for the gospel. Paul is going to hammer this point about freedom at length in Galatians.

So, look at how they responded: - **Acts 13:42-51** – “As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. <sup>43</sup> Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing <sup>b</sup>proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. <sup>44</sup> The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup> But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. <sup>46</sup> Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first;

*since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.* <sup>47</sup> *“For so the Lord has commanded us, ‘I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.’ ”*

<sup>48</sup> *When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.* <sup>49</sup> *And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.* <sup>50</sup> *But the Jews incited the <sup>b</sup>devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.*

This covers 2 Sabbaths – after the first one, they beg Paul to come back and tell them more. At the second one, “almost the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord” – Wow! That first sermon must have been something in person. Everyone wanted to hear the next one. So – everyone shows up – Jews, God-fearing Gentiles, and pagan Gentiles. This makes the Jewish leadership in the synagogue jealous and they begin to oppose Paul – contradicting him even to the point of blasphemy. They reject the gospel and Paul announces that they are turning to the Gentiles. At which point, the Gentiles erupt into rejoicing and many of them believed. The unbelieving Jews continue to oppose the gospel – through false teaching, political incitement and active persecution. They run Paul and Barnabas out of town.

The same type of thing happened in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. The unbelieving Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium were following them to all of these places – hounding them - using the same kinds of tactics – intellectual opposition, political incitement and persecution.

We know some of the things the Jewish opposition did to Paul and Barnabas at these cities, and I’m sure that they didn’t stop after Paul and Barnabas left. Some of the opposition was following Paul and Barnabas around, and others were left in the city to continue the opposition against the new believers there. You can bet that the believing Jews and Gentiles remaining in these cities continued under this opposition and overt persecution. Look at **Acts 14:21-22** - after leaving Derbe *“they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”* These churches were apparently under the gun and needed encouragement to stand firm.

### **Who the False Teachers Were and What They Were Teaching**

For simplicity, I'm going to call the false teachers the "Judaizers". Technically, when people use the term, they may sometimes be referring to the false teachers who were also believers, but I don't want to get bogged down trying to distinguish between the false teachers who were believers and those who weren't. So, I'm going to call everyone who was teaching this false gospel "Judaizers".

The Judaizers were vehemently opposed to the true gospel Paul taught, and they attacked it on two levels. First, they attacked his authority. If they could destroy his claim to be an apostle of Christ, this would effectively destroy his message. There's nothing new under the sun – we see this all the time. Think of our national politics – if someone can't win on the merits of a position, and even if they can, it's standard procedure to attack the messenger. If you destroy the messenger, you can destroy the message.

Paul's authority is still being attacked today. Here's a quote from a website called "Jesus Words Only". These guys deny that Paul was an apostle of Christ. They have a lot of junk on their website explaining why Paul was not a true apostle. They attack Paul's authority so that they can attack the gospel of grace: **[Slide 5]** *"The Modern Church has instead fallen in love with Paul, or, more correctly, the points in Paul's writings that soften the requirements of costly grace which Jesus taught. This causes a vying for control over the church. Either Paul and his Dispensation of Grace applies, or Jesus and His costly grace gospel applies....."* Note: Anytime you see the phrase "costly grace" in this kind of context, legalism is lurking in the background.

The Judaizers also attacked Paul's gospel with a "gospel" of their own. To see what the Judaizers were teaching, turn to **Acts 15**. Start **Acts 15:1**. ***"Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*** This was not too long after Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Galatia in AD 49 - Judaizers came from Judea to Syrian Antioch (not Pisidian Antioch in Galatia, but Paul and Barnabas' home church in Syria), and taught that *"unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved."* This caused great dissention in the Antioch church and they sent a delegation to Jerusalem to resolve the issue. This led to the Jerusalem Council later in AD 49. Look **Acts 15:5** to see how the question was presented at the Jerusalem Council – ***Acts 15:5 - But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."***

Remember this was a period of time when the Church was having to work through what happened at the Cross in relation to the prior dispensation of the Law. The Church was a new thing, everyone just didn't automatically know what happened,

that's why God appointed the apostles and prophets, like Paul, to the Church – to reveal the absolutely monumental dispensational change that had occurred. Galatians was written in 49 AD, sometime after Paul and Barnabas had returned from Pisidian Antioch, but before the Jerusalem Council, so the issue had not yet been resolved by the Jerusalem church.

Tom Constable characterized the times this way:

**[Slide 5]** *“The increasing number of Gentiles who were becoming Christians raised a problem within the church. What was the relationship of the church to Judaism? Some Christians, especially the more conservative Jewish believers, argued that Christianity was a party within Judaism, the party of true believers. They assumed that Gentile Christians, therefore, needed to become Jewish proselytes, which involved being circumcised and obeying the Mosaic Law. Other Christians, the more broad-minded Jewish believers and the Gentile converts, saw no need for these restrictions. They viewed the church not as a party within Judaism but as a distinct group separate from Judaism that incorporated both believing Jews and believing Gentiles.”<sup>2</sup>*

The Judaizers were under the impression that righteousness comes from obedience to the Mosaic Law. That a person has the power to make himself righteous – that he can do something, some kind of work, that makes him righteous. They were, in fact, completely wrong about the purpose and the power of the Law.

We need to remember the 3 Phases of Sanctification that we have studied before – Phase 1 - Justification (a one time occurrence when a person believes – through Christ, his sins are forgiven and Christ's righteousness is imputed to him), Phase 2 - Experiential Sanctification (this is the process of maturing spiritually – learning obedience to God – loyalty to God – living by faith in dependence on God through the leading of the Holy Spirit, like Christ did in His life), and Phase 3 - Glorification (or Ultimate Sanctification – this occurs at our rapture or resurrection - God gives us a new resurrection body without the sin nature and we live with Christ in heaven in complete freedom from the presence of sin.) Some of the Judaizers were probably teaching that you have to be circumcised to even be justified under Phase 1, and some were teaching that, although you might be justified by faith in Christ, you had to be circumcised and follow the Law for experiential sanctification.

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Constable, [\*Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible\*](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 14:27.

The question of whether these Judaizers were believers or unbelievers is not that pertinent to the discussion. I suspect that they were both believers and unbelievers. Acts 15:5 tells us that there were believers who were Pharisees who were promoting this false gospel, and I would doubt that a church like Antioch would allow someone they knew to be an unbeliever into its fellowship to teach. You would also expect some of the unbelieving Jews in Galatia to take the “honey is better than vinegar” approach and try to persuade their friends and family to come back into the synagogue. The thing that is the most pertinent is what they were teaching and that it is false. Even believers can teach a false gospel.

The fundamental issue in Galatians is faith v. works - the letter utterly destroys the idea that man can make himself righteous by works. Since Galatians was written to believers, it primarily deals with faith v. works as it applies to Phase 2 Experiential Sanctification – how does a believer live in obedience to God after he believes, although in answering the question, Paul will also lay the foundation by explaining faith v. works in Phase 1 Justification, and will even touch a little bit on Phase 3 Glorification.

### **Things to Think About As We Work Through Galatians**

Let's delve into a little “human drama” and think about a few things. First, the Galatian Churches - Think about the people in the Galatian churches. As Paul and Barnabas usually began their ministry in a city's synagogue, Jews, Jewish proselytes, and “God fearing” Gentiles would most likely be the believers coming out of their efforts there. After they left the synagogue, other Gentiles – worshippers of idols and all their various made up “gods” - would hear the gospel. So, within the Galatian churches, there would have been Jews, Gentile proselytes, God-fearing Gentiles and more pagan oriented Gentiles. The whole spectrum. The Jews and Jewish proselytes would be circumcised and followers of the Law. There would be the “God-fearing” Gentiles - like Cornelius – they knew God, feared God, worshipped God, but had not been circumcised and had not fully adopted Judaism. The pagan Gentiles would be worshippers of their pagan gods. Some probably knew about the Jews and their God and some probably were aware of their “strange” religious practices – such as their dietary laws – that prohibited fellowship with Gentiles. But, the point is, all of these kinds of people – and the wide spectrum of Biblical knowledge that they possessed – made up the Galatian churches.

Something else to consider – the Jews and proselytes had already been circumcised and were already followers of the Law. The Jews, in particular, had grown up under the Jewish culture and the Judaistic legal system – their whole worldview and way of thinking would be dictated by this – just as our culture and its worldview dictates the way we think. Granted, they are believers and had at least trusted in Christ, and many did realize the burden of the Law, but a lifetime in the Jewish worldview would be hard to break from completely. These men and women had been called out, but they still had the Judaistic ways of thinking and many of their family, friends, business relations, etc.. were still in this very exclusive system. What Paul was teaching would really “grind their gears” and would result in a total break from all these relationships. If you try to put yourself in their position, you can see where there might be a strong temptation to accept this false teaching and try to avoid the potentially devastating consequences of following the true gospel. We face some of the same types of temptations ourselves, but I don’t think we in America can conceive of the magnitude of what they must have been dealing with.

On the other hand, try to put yourself in the shoes of the Gentiles. Think about the God-fearing Gentiles, like Cornelius. They knew God the God of the Bible, they worshipped Him, they gave alms to the synagogue, but for whatever reasons, they had not gone “all in” and become Jewish proselytes – they had not received circumcision and become followers of Law. They actually worshipped and feared the God of the Jews and would be the very types of Gentiles with a desire to completely identify with His people through circumcision. But they hadn’t gone that far, despite their devotion. If those Gentiles had not submitted to circumcision, how big of a barrier would be set up by a gospel that required circumcision to be saved? Same for the pagan Gentiles, they were not even God-fearers. If you told them that – look, in order to be saved, you need to get some painful surgery done – you need to get circumcised – how do you think they would receive that? Especially if that meant that they had to put themselves under the Law – in which case they would suffer some of the same consequences that the Jewish believers faced – the Law would require that they live like Jews – dietary restrictions and all – which would alienate them from their friends and family. Yes, the true gospel can have these types of consequences, but it’s one thing to suffer these things because you are identified with Christ, and quite another to suffer them for a lie.

Think about the implications of this false gospel on the unity of the Church, the Body of Christ. If the false teachers were correct, that righteousness comes from the Law, then all the categories of the Mosaic Law would come into play – mainly the Jew/Gentile distinction. So, in the Church you could have Jews holding

themselves apart from the Gentiles (like Peter did at Antioch), implying that within the Church Jewish believers are somehow more privileged by God than Gentile believers. This teaching would destroy the unity of the Body of Christ.

Remember Paul's experience. The Galatians are being tempted to go back into the very system that Paul knew so well. He was an expert in Judaism because he lived it, was consumed by it before his conversion, saw what it produced – its fruit – knew it was absolutely corrupt and bankrupt, and now he was having to protect these churches he “birthed” – “his little children” – from the strangely attractive temptation to put themselves back under that system. I'm sure he was horrified, as well as dumbfounded.

Think about how deeply Paul cared about these churches – the kind of care that a parent has for a child. These churches were his spiritual “children” – he had, in a sense, given birth to them through the gospel, he loved and cared for them in their spiritual infancy and wanted them to grow to spiritual maturity. All parents can understand what Paul wanted for his “children”, as well as the depth of concern and heartbreak he experienced when they were in danger of falling away. Not only for the devastating spiritual damage it would do to them, but also personally for the separation – the broken fellowship – with them it would cause. He well knew where their failure would lead them – all of the terrible implications – and he did not want these things for his “children”. It's like you are watching your children go horribly wrong and you need to do something fast. This was urgent.

### **Starting on Galatians**

Ok, what I want to do now is get started with Galatians. For purposes of this study I'm going to divide the book into 3 parts – pretty simple because they follow a logical flow:

- Salutation and Paul's Defense of His Apostolic Authority (Chapters 1 and 2)
- Paul's Defense of The True Gospel (Chapters 3 and 4)
- How Shall We Then Live? (Chapters 5 and 6)

As you will see, Paul first had to defend himself against the claims of the Judaizers in order to establish his authority and the authority of the true gospel. Once he proves his authority, he explains the true gospel and totally destroys the idea that righteousness – justification or sanctification - can come by works. This leads to a

question – Ok, if we can't work for righteousness, how are we supposed to live? That's the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the book.

Before we get into the meat of Paul's defense, let's turn to **Galatians 1:1** and we will read through to **Galatians 1:5**:

**[Slide 6]** *“Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),<sup>2</sup> and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>4</sup> who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,<sup>5</sup> to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.”*

Right off the bat, this introduction tells us quite a bit about the rest of the book. Look at verse 1 and the first part of verse 2 - *“Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),<sup>2</sup> and all the brethren who are with me.”* What do you see Paul doing there? – Defending his authority. He says he is an apostle (remember, an apostle is a basically a person who has been commissioned by another person to accomplish some purpose. When an apostle acts in the name of the person who sent him, it's like the act of the person who sent him. In other words, when Paul speaks or acts as an apostle of Christ, it's Christ doing the speaking and acting.) And look how he says he was appointed – men had nothing to do with it, he was appointed directly – no human intervention was involved. Who directly appointed him? Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead). Wow! Those are some credentials – you don't get any better credentials than that. Paul has authority because he was directly appointed an apostle by Jesus Christ and God the Father.

Next, he mentions that the letter is not only from he, Paul, but also from *“all the brethren who are with me.”* Why do you think he adds this? It's not just words. He is saying – look, it's not just me telling you this, but everyone with me agrees with what I am going to tell you in this letter. They know who I am, they accept me as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and they are all in agreement with what I am about to say. Once again, it is calculated to supported his authority.

Next he refers to *“.... the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>4</sup> who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,<sup>5</sup> to whom be the glory forevermore.”* What's he doing here? In very



general terms, he's introducing the gospel – which he is going to get into later - the emphasis being that it is God who is doing it all (not us) – Christ gave Himself for our sins, Christ can rescue us. And it was all in accordance with the will of God the Father. It's all to God's glory, men and their works have nothing to do with it. Speaking of vs. 4, Tom Constable commented:

*“In this one verse Paul has described several aspects of the redemption wrought by Christ: its cause (‘for our sins,’ that is, because of them), its means (Christ ‘sacrificed himself’), its purpose and effect (‘for our sins,’ that is, for their expiation; ‘to rescue us’), and its origin (‘the will of our God and Father’). Thereby Paul has in fact touched on the chief argument of the letter, and succinctly announced in anticipatory fashion the main contents of its doctrinal section, inasmuch as the point of the controversy between Paul and His Galatian opponents lies precisely in the significance of Christ and his redemptive work and more specifically in the bearing of this work on the law.”<sup>3</sup>*

Now that Paul has, in the introduction, set up his argument for his authority and the truth of the gospel, he skips any other niceties and moves straight in on the Galatians and the Judaizers. Starting with **Gal 1:6**:

*“<sup>6</sup> I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; <sup>7</sup> which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be <sup>b</sup>accursed! <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be <sup>c</sup>accursed! <sup>10</sup>.”*

I don't know about you, but this would get my attention. Think back to how Paul felt about these Galatian churches – his “children”. He is treating them like a parent would treat a child that is in imminent danger. This is urgent and the risk is great and real. So – no messing around and no mincing of words. Look at how he describes what they are doing – they are doing nothing less than deserting God by following a different gospel. “Deserting” is μετατίθημι in Greek which pictures a

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Constable, [Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ga 1:3.

change of allegiance. The Galatians are deserting God, they are switching sides, they are changing their allegiance from Him to something else. This is a serious matter – contrary to what they think they are doing – pleasing God – by following the false gospel, they are in fact deserting God. It’s hard for me to convey this strongly enough. They are deserting the God of the Universe, and Christ, who gave Himself for them.

Another thing to remember – The false gospel they are deserting God for is not another gospel of the same kind, but a whole different animal. It is constitutionally, fundamentally different. It is not the gospel and it’s not even anything like it. The gospel is supposed to be “good news”, but in fact, when we get into it, we will see the Judaizer’s gospel is not any sort of “good news” at all – it’s very, very bad news.

Next week, we will cover Paul’s defense of his apostolic authority in Chapters 1 and 2. After that, we will cover Paul’s explanation of faith v works in Chapters 3 and 4, and the week after that we will cover how Christians are supposed to live in Chapters 5 and 6.

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<sup>i</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Ac 22:3. [Quoting Fung, p. 42. Cf. Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 43; E. de W. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 14.<sup>i</sup>