

## ~ACTS~

## Lesson 57- An Overview of the Epistle to the Galatians

As we study the life and travels of Paul through the book of Acts, we find Paul remaining in Corinth for a year and a half. And during this time, God has given him the grace and reprieve from his enemies to write three of his fourteen epistles: 1&2 Thessalonians and Galatians. We spent last week looking at the two epistles to the Thessalonians. This week we will focus our attention on the epistle to the Galatians.

This letter to the Galatians is a short letter jam packed with amazing Truths about our Justification in Christ Jesus. And it's considered by some Christians their favorite book of the Bible. It was Martin Luther's favorite book. In fact he said "This is my epistle to which I have wedded myself to it." And just as Paul was battling the Judaizers on the doctrine of our Justification, so too was Martin Luther on the front lines in the 16<sup>th</sup> century defending the doctrine of our Justification by faith against the Catholic Church. But what is interesting about this letter is the underlying purpose of this epistle is a harsh rebuke to the Galatian church for abandoning the faith and putting themselves under the bondage of the Law. There are no commendations to this church, no salutations or thanksgiving, just pure love in Truth to turn this church around, **Galatians 1:1-6**. This is a much different letter than we saw last week to the Thessalonians. The Thessalonian letters are epistles of comfort, hope and encouragement and there was much commendation and praise given to the believers in Thessalonica. But this letter to the Galatians, it is a letter of correction to wake them up from the deception of the Judaizers and get them back on the path of following Jesus. To not turn away from Him who gave Himself your our sins. The churches of Galatia were in danger of apostacy because there were a group of Jews called Judaizers who had infiltrated into the church and were distorting and perverting the gospel by telling believers that they must follow the Law of Moses to be saved. These Judaizers professed Jesus as the Messiah, but they were still deeply rooted in the legalistic ways of the Law. Which results in a doctrine that says that Jesus isn't enough; that you must also add your own works to His grace in order to be saved. But that's not the Gospel and it is as Paul says in Hebrews one who has *trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace*, Hebrews 10:29. So this letter is a warning to the Galatians telling them that they are in jeopardy of rejecting their salvation, **Gal 4:11; 5:4**. This is a letter that contrasts the freedom of Grace with the bondage of the Law, **Gal 2:4; 3:2, 22-23; 4:3-7, 9-11, 21-31; 5:1**. These Judaizers were trying to keep Christians bound under the bondage of the Law.

We have met these Judaizers before in Acts 15 when they infiltrated into the church in Antioch Syria, and started telling these believers they must follow the Law of Moses to be saved, **Acts 15:1-2, 5**. This prompted the Jerusalem Council meeting in 50ad which determined that Gentiles were not required to follow the Law of Moses to be saved. And even more, that the Jews didn't have to follow the Law of Moses either, **Acts 15:11**. This was the heart of God; that salvation was truly by grace through faith apart from the Law of Moses, but James wasn't willing to accept this for the Jews, so he decrees that Gentiles don't have to follow the Law of Moses. But this decree didn't stop these Judaizers because after the council meeting, these Judaizers, these "men from James" as Paul calls them in Gal 2:12, return to Antioch to continue troubling these Christians. To the point that Peter and Barnabas were swept away in their hypocrisy. So as a result, this prompted the second missionary journey because Paul felt the need to travel to the Galatian churches to see how they are doing, Acts 15:36. So Paul and Silas journey back to the Galatian churches and discover that the Judaizers have indeed infiltrated into the church. These Judaizers were like parasites who would follow the Apostle Paul to these new churches he had established and then drain the life out of them by perverting the Gospel and blaspheming Paul's character as an Apostle. In fact, these Judaizers hated Paul and did everything they could to destroy his mission, **Gal 4:16**. So on this second journey, Paul and Silas edify and strengthen the churches in the faith, **Acts 16:4-5**. And now Paul has made his way to Corinth and the deep the concern for this church is weighing on his heart and the Spirit prompts him to write this letter of correction and instruction to set them straight.

The epistle to the Galatians can be divided up into three sections: 1) Chapter 1-2: Paul defends his Apostleship; 2) Chapters 3-4: The Doctrine of Justification by grace alone through faith alone; 3) Chapters 5-6: The walk of faith. As a result of the Judaizers slandering Paul, he spends the first two chapters defending the Gospel and his call as an Apostle., [Gal 1:6-24](#). In chapter 2, Paul recounts the Jerusalem Council meeting and tells them that even the so called “pillars of the church” had nothing to add to the Gospel that was given to him by Jesus Christ, [Gal 2:1-21](#).

Chapter 3 begins with teaching the doctrine of Justification by grace through faith. Chapters 3-4 is like a mini book of Romans and there is so many Truths we could dig out of these two chapters. But since this is just an overview, we’ll just lightly touch on some of the main points. But notice the harshness that he begins chapter 3 with... O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? And Paul begins describing the doctrine of Justification by faith, [Gal 3:1-7](#). The Jews were constantly boasting about their Jewish heritage because they believed that because they were biological heirs of Abraham, they automatically had a right to the promise of Abraham. Remember what Jesus said about this in John 8. He said if you were Abraham’s descendants you would do the works of Abraham. But instead, you are of your father the devil, John 8:31-41. Throughout this letter, Paul will downplay the physical heritage of the Jews in comparison with the promise of God for those who are in Christ. Paul continues explaining the plan of redemption and the inclusion of the Gentiles to the promise of Abraham (which was a major sore spot to the Jews) The Jew’s answer to Gentiles being part of the promise is for them to become proselytes and conform to the Law. But again Jesus had words against this. He said, *“For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”* So Paul continues talking about the promise given to the Gentiles by faith, [Gal 3:7-14](#). Paul is detailing the vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our place. And that this was God’s plan to bring the promise of Abraham to the world. Not just to Jews, but to Jews and Gentiles, to all who believe in Jesus, [Gal 3:15-29](#); [4:1-7](#). From verses 12-17 Paul gets personal with them again. The Judaizers had made Paul out to be the enemy, so he reminds them of their first meeting and exposes their deception, [Gal 4:12-17](#). Paul continues for the remainder of chapter 4 giving another example of our freedom in Christ versus the bondage of the Law, [Gal 4:21-31](#), comparing the bondservant, Hagar and the freewoman, Sarah, [Gal 4:23-26](#).

Chapter 5 then begins the last section in which he explains the walk of faith, [Gal 5:1-6](#). The Judaizers were bound under Legalism and Paul continues warning them of these deceivers, [Gal 5:7-12](#). These Judaizers felt the Christian needed the Law as a safeguard to keep them from sinning. But if a Christian truly understands the concept of Grace, this Grace will lead you in a sanctified life of serving God, not by compulsion, but out from the heart, [Gal 5:13-15](#). Grace leads us to good works and not the other way around. We want to do good and serve Him because He has been so gracious and good to us. Grace humbles you but the Law puffs up the pride of man. This is walking in the Spirit, walking in the knowledge and understanding of His Grace and goodness. And if we walk like this, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh, [Gal 5:16-18](#). Paul goes on to contrast the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Notice that terminology: works versus fruit. Fruit doesn’t come from striving and working, but from resting and abiding in Him. If we are connected to the Vine, we are going to bear fruit, [Gal 5:19-26](#).

Chapter 6 continues with the walk of faith and the endurance of the Spirit and Spiritual principles, [Gal 6:6-10](#). Then Paul wraps up his letter by exposing the Judaizers true selfish motives, [Gal 6:11-18](#). This comment from verse 17 is a contrast to the boast of circumcision with the marks of suffering persecution for the sake of the Gospel.

This letter is a harsh rebuke to anyone who would try and add their works to the finished work of Christ, but with this harsh letter comes the message of hope. That Jesus has made us free from the bondage of the Law and those who believe in Him will receive the promise of Everlasting Life in Him.