

## **Introduction to Galatians: The Defense of the Gospel**

Ian Murray in his *The Forgotten Spurgeon* records the three great controversies of Charles Spurgeon's ministry in London. In each controversy, Spurgeon battled for the gospel. The first was Spurgeon's confrontation with Arminianism or works for salvation in the 1850's, the second was Baptismal Regeneration in 1864, and the last was the Down-Grade controversy of 1887-1891. In the last controversy, Spurgeon virtually stood alone against the false doctrine in his denomination, the Baptist Union. This last battle put Spurgeon in an early grave. On October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1891, a few months before his death, Spurgeon said to some friends, "The fight is killing me" (Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1978, 163). This was a sacrifice Spurgeon was willing to make for the sake of the gospel.

In Galatians, Paul is equally contending for the gospel. He too will die for the gospel. A few weeks or months before his death, Paul said, "I have fought the good fight." He states twice in Galatians the importance of "the truth of the gospel" (2:5, 2:14).

Galatians has been called *Paul's Battle Epistle* and when you read his anathema on false teachers in 1:6-9 you understand Paul's zeal for this truth.

The false teachers were the Judaizers of the first century who now had invaded the new churches Paul had just planted on his first missionary journey.

The record of Paul's God blessed first missionary journey is in Acts 13:1-13:28. Paul travels to Asia Minor and plants churches in Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. When Paul retraced his steps to these churches, he installed pastors in each of them. A remarkable feat for this first term missionary. But just as soon as Paul is off the premises the proselytizing Judaizers penetrate those new churches with a false gospel. When Paul hears of the treat to his new converts and church plants, he fires off the Galatians epistle.

The entire letter is dedicated to rescuing these new converts from a works for salvation heresy.

### **1. In Chapters 1-2, Paul gives his Personal Response and Defends his Apostleship.**

The Judaizers were attacking Paul's credibility in order to under mind the message of grace preached by Paul.

### **2. In Chapters 3-4, Paul gives his Doctrinal Response and Defends Justification by Faith Alone in Christ Alone.**

In 2:16, Paul for the first time teaches with great force the doctrine of justification by faith. Paul will give his most comprehensive explanation of the gospel in Romans several years later while in prison at Rome (Acts 28). Paul writes Galatians at the end of his first missionary journey between Acts 14 and 15. In his first reference, Paul will mention "justification by faith" three times in this one verse stating twice that justification is not by works of the Law and once that justification is by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul was contending with the legalists in relationship to salvation. For good reasons, Galatians has also been called *The Cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation*. For a millennium before the Protestant Reformation, the RCC had dominated Christendom with its doctrine of infused righteousness instead of imputed righteousness which is taught in God's Word. Infused righteousness is the false doctrine that teaches that God gives you righteousness continually based on your good works. It confuses justification with sanctification.

Imputed righteousness is the Biblical doctrine that God imputes or puts the righteousness of Christ once and for all on your record in heaven when the sinner trusts Christ as Savior (2 Cor 5:21; Rom 4:3). Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Reformation, called imputed righteousness "alien righteousness" because it comes from God outside of us and not from our works. Martin Luther loved Paul's defense of the gospel in the book of Galatians because Luther was also battling for the gospel in his war with Roman Catholicism. Martin Luther in his commentary on Galatians wrote, "The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. Galatians is my Katherine [the name of his wife]" (Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, trans. Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids, n. d., p. iv).

Merrill C. Tenney wrote of the impact of the book of Galatians not just on Christianity but also on the entire world: "Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect, and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely pagan had it never been written. Galatians embodies the germinal teaching on Christian freedom which separated Christianity from Judaism, and which launched it upon a career of missionary conquest. It was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation, because its teaching of salvation by grace alone became the dominant theme of the preaching of the Reformers" (*Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957, 15). Translated, if in the providence of God the book of Galatians had not fallen into the hands of Martin Luther, the world still might be controlled by Roman Catholicism and works righteousness.

### **3. In Chapters 5-6, Paul gives his Practical Response and Defends Sanctification by Faith.**

The Judaizers were legalists who taught that a sinner in addition to faith in Christ must also keep the rules of the Law in order to be saved and continue to keep the rules of the law to be personally sanctified.

Here is how Warren W. Wiersbe opens his commentary on Galatians: "Galatians is a dangerous book. It exposes the most popular substitute for spiritual living that we have in our churches today---legalism. I didn't say 'among the false cults.' I said 'in the churches' because that is where much legalism is today. Millions of believers think they are 'spiritual' because of what they don't do---or because of the group they belong to. The Lord shows us in Galatians how wrong we are---and how right we can be if only we would let the Holy Spirit take over" (*Be Free*. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1981, 6).

Legalism engenders a critical spirit. Legalists are critical of any believer who does not have the same "convictions" about what constitutes spirituality, which usually has to do with outward appearance, externals such as dress, and which version of the Bible you carry. It is not surprising that in this last section of Galatians, Paul warns: "If you bite and devour one another, take heed that you be not consumed one of another" (5:15).

It has been some years now, but I know a preacher who was rebuked by another preacher because of colored shirt he wore when preaching. The non-white shirt was worldly. That is legalism in sanctification. Our spirituality is not determined by some outward measurement such as hair length on a man or pants on a woman. Paul tells us that our spirituality is measured by our love for God and each other which is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23) not adherence to a man made set of rules.

In part two, we will see how Paul even used the form of the letter to communicate his passion for Defending the Gospel.

### **Paul even used the form of the letter of Galatians to communicate his passion for the Gospel:**

1. The Introduction (1:1-5)
2. The Body (1:6-6:10)
3. The Conclusion (6:11-18)

There are, however, a few glaring differences.

#### **1. In the introduction both the content of the epistle is introduced and the tone of the letter.**

A. The coming content of the letter is introduced in the word "Grace." Paul will emphasize that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ's cross work: "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father. To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." Salvation is not by works which diminishes the substitutionary death of Christ as insufficient and gives man the right to boast instead of giving all glory to God. Paul will conclude this letter shouting, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14) and "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (6:18).

B. Absent from the introduction is Paul's typical thanksgiving that he states in every other letter. Paul even thanked God for the carnal Corinthians. All he could be thankful for was that they had been saved and spiritually gifted by God, but at least Paul expressed some thanksgiving for them (1 Cor 1:4-7). In Thessalonians, Paul thanked God for their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope. In Galatians, Paul moves directly from the introduction to the body of the letter with no characteristic thanksgiving because he is so upset with the Galatians for listening to false teaching.

Someone said that you can tell much about a person by finding out what makes that person laugh, cry, and angry. What made Paul both cry and angry was false doctrine because of its eternal damage on his people.

#### **2. In the conclusion there is also a significant uniqueness.**

Paul sometimes took the pen from his scribe to sign his name as in 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17. But according to Galatians 6:11, Paul wrote the entire letter to the Galatians by his hand. Paul possibly wrote with large letters because of poor eyesight and also, for emphasis, with the larger Greek capital letters instead of smaller free flowing cursive letters which most scribes used. Here is how John MacArthur interpreted this concluding statement by Paul: "Because of my poor eyesight, you know how hard it is for me to write by my own hand, but what I have to say is so important and urgent that I want you to have this letter in your hands as soon as possible, with as bold lettering as possible. Unlike the Judaizers, I have never tried to impress you with my scholarship, personal skills, or superficial formalities. When I first came to you, you accepted my message with gladness, although my bodily presence was unattractive. This epistle is not written attractively, either, but I hope you will receive its message with the same urgency with which it is sent" (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Galatians*. Chicago: Moody, 1987, 195).

Paul reminds me of the pastor who is broken hearted over his people's shallowness when it comes to doctrine and especially the doctrine of salvation and he delivers not only his Sunday morning message but also, with great pathos and tears, his soul to his people: "LOVE ME FOR JESUS' SAKE AND RESPOND TO MY PREACHING, LOVE THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD AND READ AND LEARN IT, LOVE THE LORD MORE THAN YOUR SINS AND TURN TO HIM."