

## INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

We won't get too much into the text itself today. Today I actually want to look at some **reasons to study Galatians** and why should we study it from beginning to end? By doing that I want to **whet your appetite** for this powerful epistle and **introduce you to the way I preach** and remind us of some things we're looking for when we study the Word. Secondly, some of you haven't heard **my testimony**, and I want you too (I always like to know the testimony of the pastor), so as we begin this study it's the perfect time for me to share it because I once lived under law and legalism before I found God's grace in Christ. And then lastly, we'll get into the background of the book looking at the first couple of verses. First, let's look at some reasons to study it.

### I. REASONS TO STUDY

#### A. Reason #1 (You're going to think I'm a real genius for this one, good reminder) – Galatians is in the Bible.

That means Galatians is part of God's Word to us. God has communicated to us through this book. There are things God wants us to know in this book! 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is breathed out from the very mouth of God and profitable for us for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness so that we're equipped for every good work. This book is not your average book. It is not just another book written by men. It is God's Word. The men who wrote it were carried along by the Holy Spirit of God, not just writing their own words but God's, like a sailboat whose sails are filled with wind and driven along. Old Testament and New, it's all useful for our learning and growing in matters of faith and practice.

#### B. Reason #2 – Galatians is a letter.

And we should take time to read it like a letter written to us. When you get a letter from someone in the mail you don't read bits and pieces of it. You read the whole thing from beginning to end. And that's what we're going to do with Galatians. Many of our New Testament books are actually letters written to people, so reading them **entirely** and **together** as a body, is most natural. It makes the most sense to go through the books of the Bible the way they were written rather, verse by verse, rather than jumping around from topic to topic in the Bible. This verse by verse study is also known as **exposition**, or this style of preaching known as **expository preaching**. In exposition, or expository preaching, we're simply making our way through the text in a most-natural way, **exposing** the text, making it plain, going through it in an orderly fashion and pulling out of it the different **precepts and principles and promises** that it teaches. 1 Corinthians 14:3 says that preaching and teaching should have three effects on us: Edify, exhort and consol. Or Teach, correct and comfort. Precepts mainly Correct, Principles mainly teach. And promises mainly bring joy and comfort. **When properly expounded the Word should make us pure, wise, and filled with joy.**

1. **Precept** – Clearly defined instruction from the Lord. These are obvious do's and don'ts.
  - 1 Thess. 5:18 says that God's will for us is that we give thanks in all circumstances. It's clearly God's will. Let's do that.
  - When it comes to marriage, God's Word says, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." It's not God's will for you to marry an unbeliever. Don't do that.
2. **Principle** – These are more like general guidelines that require more thinking and spiritual discernment on our part. From the last series on Noah we pulled out several principles to live by based upon how he lived in light of a coming judgment. They

weren't some clearly defined, black and white precepts, but principles, underlying teachings that the Spirit of God illuminated for us to see.

So a precept is like a speed limit sign that says 65 (Swindoll). We know what we are to do. 65. But a principle is like caution sign. We are to use discernment depending upon the driving conditions. The other day I drove out west of town on the highway and they were filling in the potholes so there was a guy standing there with a sign that said "Slow Down". He didn't say what speed I have to go, but that I needed to exercise caution, using wisdom and discernment when it I get close to the men filling in potholes and dodging the different freshly-poured potholes so that I don't get asphalt all over my freshly washed pickup, which by the way, I executed poorly because I hit one.

3. **Promise** – The promises of God are something else we're also looking for. Things God has promised to us that He will fulfill that bring us great joy and comfort. For example, Jesus has said that He will never leave us nor forsake us. In John 14 he said don't be troubled, in My Father's house there's many rooms; Im going to prepare a place for you and will return again to receive you unto Myself. We can know 100% that He has a place for us in Heaven and will come and get us at the proper time.

When we go through the letters the way they were intended to be read, we do a more thorough job of discovering the precepts and principles to live by. And do a better job of exposing the intended meaning of the author and are less likely to impress upon a verse or a passage an interpretation that doesn't belong. It forces our thoughts to **bend** to the authority of the Scriptures, rather than the other way around.

For example, if I were to preach on a certain topic, I would search the Scriptures for what the Bible has to say about that topic and find supporting passages. **The topic becomes the starting point** then. But with expository preaching, the text is the topic and it communicates a biblical concept to us and the listener can read and study the passage for themselves and decide whether or not that it really is what the Word of God is really saying. **Scripture is the starting point**. Other Scriptures then becomes the support for that passage's main concept. And Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture.

And I'm not totally opposed to teaching topically or opposed to picking one verse and teaching on it (It'd be pretty hard to preach through Proverbs without doing it topically), but going through the books of the Bible systematically and expositively is most-natural and it's going to produce a couple of benefits for us as we sit under that style of preaching.

1. **Expository preaching gives God's people strength.**

Exposition makes us study hard, or at least the preacher, which means we're more precise in the interpretation and application of the original author. We learn a lot because we study harder and in greater detail. And when God's people know God's Word, they're strengthened by it. God's Word strengthens God's people and gives them confidence to step out and serve Him themselves, because they know what their Lord has required of them and can teach it to others. I wouldn't be standing up here today if I hadn't studied God's Word systematically. I just plain wouldn't have the confidence. With expository preaching, we want to come away with confidence knowing, "Thus saith the Lord."

2. **Expository preaching gives balance.**

It forces the preacher to get off of his hobby horse once in a while! Every preacher has a certain idea or concept that he likes to preach on but preaching through a book forces him to preach on multiple subjects that come up by the author! So we find ourselves studying

the full counsel of God and are less likely to skip over difficult passages because we're working our way through it.

Think of the food pyramid chart. You know what I'm talking about with the different food groups on it? Can you imagine how hard it would be on a person to just eat the bottom, grain portion of the pyramid all the time? It would get old. We need all the food groups: the veggies, fruit, dairy, meat and sugars too. A church that makes its way through the books of the Bible will be fed a healthier, more-balanced diet of all topics and we're less likely to skip over the difficult ones.

**C. Reason #3 – Galatians is written directly to churches.**

This is the only letter of Paul's to be written to multiple churches, as opposed to an individual church or individual. It was written to churches in Galatia to address a critical issue that had arisen in those churches, but God has preserved it and inspired it through the Holy Spirit in such a way that it is written for us as well because every church will inevitably have to address the issue of Law and legalism in one way or another. It is designed for all believers in all churches to learn from. And I believe it is no coincidence that this is likely the earliest epistle written, because it's SO important. This bombshell of an epistle defends the FREE gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. If you don't have the gospel, you don't have genuine, Spirit-led life. If we don't have the gospel, we're no longer a God-glorifying church. We're just another gathering of people on Sunday. If you get the gospel wrong, you can't do anything right. Nothing else matters, because you don't have the correct foundation to build on. It's **better to have the gospel and handful of people in a basement somewhere worshipping God than to have a big, beautiful building filled to the brim with people, who don't have the gospel.** Paul was never concerned about programs, buildings, money, or numbers – but about solid teaching. So when you really think about it, this is the ideal letter for the Early Church's foundation to build upon. But it's also ideal for the new believer in Jesus Christ to begin growing spiritually, which lead me to the next reason in that...

**D. Reason #4 – Galatians establishes us in the gospel.**

1. The gospel is the foundation we build our lives upon, and **though all true believers have believed it and been born again, not every believer has necessarily been established in the gospel, knowing clearly what it is and how to share it.** New believers can actually be really gullible. One of Paul's prayerful desires, specifically concerning the believers in Rome, was that he might come be able to come to them and teach them the gospel so that they could be established in it. That's one of the reasons he wrote Romans. He wanted them to be established in the gospel. We need to have it firmly fixed in our minds what the gospel is because there's a lot of false ideas out there as to what the it is. If I asked you what the gospel is, could you tell me? There should be no doubt in our mind what it is. Unless you have a clear gospel cemented in your mind, it's really difficult to grow and you're subject to falling prey to false teaching.
2. But this epistle establishes us in the gospel. Paul doesn't split any theological hairs here in this letter. It's black and white and very **corrective in nature.** He knows that truth and want us to know it and he is frustrated, as you'll notice by the tone of his voice at times in this letter, that the Galatians had left the truth and embraced lies. **We don't see a calm and collected Paul writing this letter. He's pretty agitated.** This epistle has actually been called "The fighting epistle of Paul". Swindoll said it is, "The most...in-your-face, no-holds-barred writing from Paul's passionate pen... a man unleashed, a man who **places vital truth above courtesy and plain facts above civility.**"

3. The reason for his in-your-face passion is because of the **situation and subject at hand**. False teachers, known as Judaizers, had infiltrated the church and started muddying up the gospel of free grace with works from the Mosaic Law out of the Old Testament, specifically adding the one little element of circumcision, and Paul basically says look, I told you what the gospel was and how the gospel is enough **for salvation AND sanctification** – it's enough to save you and to transform you in Christlikeness – so do not add anything to it. If you add to it at all, you negate it. **Kind of like a nice, clean cup of ice water**. It's great, it sounds good. It's so refreshing sometimes. But if you spit just a little tiny bit of saliva in it, you've just ruined it all. No one wants it anymore. Who cares if it's 99% crystal clear water, it's 1% spit and you can dump it out.
4. This is why the reformation had to happen 500 years ago and why we have protestant churches today. Guys read the Bible and said you know what? We've got it wrong. We've screwed up. You can't mix any works with grace. We've got to do something about this or else, according to Gal. 1:8-9, we're accursed and going to hell! It is so clear biblically that the breaking off from the Catholic church was a no-brainer.

**E. Reason #5 – Galatians separates authentic Christianity from all other religions.**

That's one of the effects of the gospel. Jesus didn't say the road to eternal life was narrow for nothing. One time He even said that one of the reasons He came was to bring a sword. "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter in law against her mother in law; and man's enemies will be the members of his household." The gospel divides. It divides families, friends. You know it and I know it. I've experienced it and you have experienced it. There's a spiritual tension that enters in, between the believing **and unbelieving**, or even the believing **and the religious**. As Paul will bring out in chapter 5, the cross is a stumbling block. People trip over it, thinking it's just too good to be true. It's too easy. Because grace is free, it is also sometimes hard to accept because man, in his pride, wants to be good enough and work for heaven....

But the gospel says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and that you cannot work for it. However, God in His grace, provided for you by sending His Son to die on the cross for our sins, so that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. That message puts a wedge between authentic Christianity and every single other religion out there. **Every other religion out there adds some type of work – They spit into God's grace in Christ and ruin it** by saying you know, if you want to get to heaven you have to do this and that, jump through this hoop and that hoop – go on this pilgrimage, pray this prayer, go to this church, do this ritual, do this good deed – and maybe, just maybe, you'll get into heaven. **Even churches that call themselves Christian churches will say, believe in Jesus, PLUS do this or PLUS do that**. Faith is not enough in their minds. Get baptized, repeatedly confess your sins to some guy in the church, become a member of that church. And what Paul says in this letter is that FAITH IN CHRIST IS ENOUGH. 21 times Paul uses the word faith in Galatians. We receive God's grace by faith in Christ because He died for our sins and that death was sufficient that message is coming from a man who was wrapped up in Judaism and the Law more than anyone else. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee of Pharisees, more zealous than his contemporaries and lived blamelessly according to the righteousness of the Law. Yet, Paul says now, whatever was gain under the Law, now that I have Christ, it's all rubbish. Worthless. Be free in Christ. Be free from legalism. Be free from the Law. Be free in Grace!

**F. Reason #6 – Galatians is a powerful, life-transforming book.**

And I say that from my own experience. I've probably read this little epistle more than any other book of the Bible. I LOVE IT. I kind of feel like Martin Luther... Luther said it was MY epistle.

My Katie von Bora – which was the name of his wife, saying he was wedded to it. I relate to him a lot because me and him were saved by God’s grace out of the same church, same religious system. The church I grew up in didn’t have a biblical definition of grace! That’s why this book means so much to me and why I’m so excited to go through it with you. It was the arguments presented in Galatians (and Romans too) that freed me from religion, from thinking that I had to have some guy in a big white hat, with a long robe and white collar who performed religious ceremonies, act as a mediator between me and God. I always thought grace was something that you could earn by the things you do. And since God’s grace is required to get into heaven, my idea was you do all of the religious works you can do or are told to do, you try to do more good than bad in your life, and when you die you just sort of cross your fingers and hope (with a hopeless hope, not a biblical hope) that when the scales are weighed that you’ve earned enough grace and God lets you in. But there’s no **hope** in that. There’s no **joy** in that. There’s no **peace with God** in that. And trying to serve God or even be a good person without God’s Spirit living inside of you is a cold and fruitless and frustrating waste of time.

So by the time I reached high school, I rebelled, which as we’ll study, is exactly what the Law produces – rebellion. I had totally given up on anything that had to do **with God or Church and considered myself an atheist**. I started living for anything that would bring me pleasure – anything the media was telling me would make me feel good. Relationships, pickups, motorcycles, drugs, alcohol, money, outdoor adventures, – you name it – and you know what I found? There’s no lasting satisfaction in any of those things. **There is no lasting satisfaction outside of Christ**. However, I did like the alcohol so much that I was nominated the biggest alcoholic in my graduating class. I might of already told you this but I even got a little award for it – “Biggest Alcoholic”. And that was just in high school, so by the time I was in college things just got worse. I dropped out after one semester and continued drinking every night and worked a bunch of crummy jobs. And I just got tired of life.

But I tell you what – I’m so glad we have a God who pursues us and a God who enlightens every man to a knowledge of His existence through creation and what-not, because there must have been an inkling in my soul that there was still a God because in desperation in my college apartment, I got down on my face one night beside my bed and I remember praying to God, whom I didn’t even know if I believed in, and said, “God, if you’re real, you’ve got to show me who You are.” There was no flash of light from heaven, not even a voice. But I’ll tell you what God did do. He started placing genuine Christians in my life immediately. A co-worker, a teacher, and a friend.

A **coworker** gave me a book on creation vs. evolution that I read and I remember how it just blew my mind the way he talked about the complexity of the human body. I remember him talking about the hand and telling me to move it. Then discussing how many things have to occur lightning fast from brain to hand in order to move it and yet, you don’t even have to think about it, you just do it. I began to understand I wasn’t an accident that came from cosmic goo or evolved from some monkey but that I was incredibly complex. Another **friend** shared some Scripture with me that put the fear of God in me – I just remember reading this Bible and Jesus’ words in red felt red-hot in my innermost being. Whenever I read in Luke 24 where Jesus had just witnessed to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and they say, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking with us as he explained the Scriptures?” I always think of that night I read those words in red. A few months later I went through a short taxidermy course in Colorado my **instructor** was a believer and gave all of us paperback Bibles when we graduated. Just the little things like that kept happening. God was getting my attention. I started reading that Bible whenever I could, while hunting or on my lunch break. Then

I started attending a Bible church with the friend who shared Scripture with me. Then, I started meeting with one of the elders in that church for a Bible study and began to develop **an unquenchable thirst** for God's Word. And somewhere along the line, somewhere in my searching, the gospel finally became clear to me and I ended up trusting in Jesus Christ as my Savior – understanding and accepting that He paid for my sins, in full, on the cross and that by trusting in Him and His sacrifice on the cross I was saved.

I was finally understanding Biblical grace! Understanding Biblical hope, joy, and peace with God! But do you see what I had to do?! I had to change my definition of grace from thinking it was something that could be earned through religious works or good deeds and instead realize that grace was free – heaven a free gift because of the work that Jesus already did for me on the cross! The book of Romans even says, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” But it took an intense study of God's Word to come to that conclusion for me. I wanted to know for myself what the Bible had to say about eternal life and not just take someone's word for it. And that's my hope for preaching through the book of Galatians or any other book for that matter. **I want you to see what God says!** Not what I say. What God says! I want to open up the incredible, inspired Word of God with you and for you to read it and study it with me and see if what I say is really what the Bible is saying. If we will purpose to prayerfully and seriously study this book together, God will do a great work in us!

SO we've seen some reasons to study, you've heard some of my testimony and then lastly I wanted to get into the background of the book so let's read the first couple of verses.

## II. **BACKGROUND**

As far as the background for the book is concerned, the custom for letter writing during this time makes it easy. Generally, both the author and recipient can be found right there at the beginning of the letter. When someone writes a letter today, sometimes you have to go all the way to the end to find out who it's from, but they used to put it right there at the beginning, which makes more sense to me. I wish that was still the custom.

### A. **The Author – In verse 1**

The author is the apostle Paul, no doubt about it. Several people, early church leaders and writings of the same time but outside of the Bible, refer to this epistle and to Paul as the **undisputed, unchallenged author**. No debates about it. In fact, this letter may have been written directly by Paul, whereas normally he would have used an amanuensis, or secretary, where he would tell them what to write. In Galatians 6:11 says he's the one who wrote it or at least the concluding parts of the letter “with my own hand.” And we're not sure where he wrote it from, but most likely from his home church in Antioch, Syria which would be just over 300 miles straight north of Jerusalem as a crow flies.

### B. **The Recipients – In verse 2**

It says right there, To the churches of Galatia. And Galatia is a province which would have been located north west of Israel on the Anatolian peninsula, also known as Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey. Today it is comprised mainly of Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Greeks and Arabs. In Paul's day when it belonged to the Roman Empire **it was mainly comprised of Celtic barbarians from the West-Central area of Europe like France and Belgium – the area of Europe known as Gaul, G.A.U.L. – which is why it is called Gaul-a-shuns**. They had migrated from Greece when they showed up there in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. And the churches he was likely referring to were the churches of Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Psidian Antioch – a different Antioch than the one in Syria.

If you remember, Acts 13 records the commissioning of Paul and Baranabas to be missionary church planters and these churches are likely the result of their ministry from **the first missionary**

**journey.** And these places were hard on them. Acts 13&14 reveal that wherever they went in Galatia, the unbelieving Jews were just irate with them and refuted them, **constantly stirring up the minds of the Gentiles and embittering each other against the other.** Jews from Antioch and Iconium even, when they heard about Paul's success in Lystra, came to Lystra and stoned Paul and dragged him out of town to leave for dead. So no wonder he writes this letter! He's been attacked there mercilessly since day one, but he continuously urges them in this letter, the same way he urged them in Acts 13:43 when he was planting the churches, to **CONTINUE IN THE GRACE OF GOD! CONTINUE IN THE GRACE OF GOD.**

### C. The Date

As far as the date, it's likely to have been written in **48-49 AD**, which means its the **earliest of the letters** Paul wrote and likely so, because it's unlikely that Peter and Barnabas would have acted the way they did in 2:11-14 where they start being affected by the Judaizers and dividing the Jew and Gentile by where they eat. It's almost like high school where people sit at different tables and Paul wasn't having it. Jews over here, Gentiles over there. But Paul's heart was for unity in this mixed congregation and his ministry was to break down that dividing wall so that we would all be one in Christ Jesus in the Church. Had the Jerusalem council of Acts took place already which clarified what was expected of believers, **circumcision not being one of them**, they likely wouldn't have split up like that and Paul doesn't mention the results of the council, which would have been a great argument for him. That indicates the issue wasn't resolved by a council yet and was probably the first letter written to the Church.

But I would also like to add that these churches were actually founded under the sovereign but **undesirable circumstance** of sickness. In Galatians 4:13 Paul says, "but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached to you the first time;" The illness forced him to slow down and stay put rather than continue on in his traveling ministry which became the means through which Paul would reach them with the gospel and plant these churches. Think of all good that came from one little sickness. What's that say to us who have undesirable circumstances? Don't put anything past God because God uses them and we need to respond appropriately in them.

Just for fun this powerful little epistle has been called:

- A "defense of the gospel of grace against legalistic perversion or contamination."
- "The Magna Carta of Christian Liberty"
- "The Christian's Declaration of Independence"
- "The Letter of Liberation"
- "The fighting epistle of Paul"
- "The battle cry of the reformation"
- "Spiritual Dynamite"

That's how important and how powerful this epistle is I am so excited to study it with you.

## III. CONCLUSION

### A. Read at home

In conclusion I would just say that this study is going to be so much more beneficial for you if you read it regularly at home while we go through it. You're going to get a lot more out of it. It's only six chapters and you can read it in one sitting. One of the best ways I've seen it outlined and how I like to outline it in my mind to help me track with Paul's thinking is by seeing this book in 3 segments:

1. Chapters 1-2 = The Gospel of Grace Defended

2. Chapters 3-4 = The Gospel of Grace Explained
3. Chapters 5-6 = The Gospel of Grace Applied

**B. Key Memory Verses**

Usually every book of the Bible sort of has a key verse that sums up the overall theme of the book that I would recommend for memorization. And for Galatians, I couldn't settle on one. I would say the best two in my opinion are:

1. **Gal. 2:16** - really drives home the fact that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ
2. **Gal. 5:1**- really drives home the fact that we are free from the Law.

One gives a defense for the gospel and one announces our freedom from the Law and legalism.

**C. Know The Main Idea of Galatians**

The best way to sum up this book is that it teaches that not only is grace enough for salvation, it is also enough for sanctification. It is enough for salvation and sanctification. To save us and to give us the proper motivation to grow in a genuine, Spirit-led way. In the words of Swindoll, "Grace is the way TO life and the way OF life." (Chuck Swindoll, 10.) But in the words of Paul from Acts, "You're saved by the grace of God, Now "Continue in the grace of God."