

## **Stop Working Your Way to Heaven**

Galatians Overview

(preached Pine Grove 4/17/16; Sunday PM)

### **Introduction**

October 31, 2017 will be the 500th anniversary of the Protestant reformation...

Though you may not know it, you are all sitting in a Protestant church tonight...

Protestant denominations like Baptists or Presbyterians or Lutherans are the result of the events that stemmed from the actions of a man named Martin Luther on Oct 31, 2017.

On All Hallows Eve, a German monk named Martin Luther walked up to a catholic church in Wittenberg Germany and nailed a list of 95 unbiblical practices of the Catholic church...

And that was the beginning of the Protestant reformation...

In other words, that was the beginning of the protest against the Catholic Church, and it started the reformation of the true church based upon the Word of God.

You can read about Luther, and I would encourage you to do it.

He certainly had his own issues of sin, yet God still used him greatly to get the church back on a biblical path.

From a human perspective, you sit here in part due to Luther's incredible courage and loyalty to the Word of God.

Luther grew up in the Catholic church and eventually became a monk and teacher of the Bible at the University of Wittenberg...

However, in 1516, the Catholic church sent priests to Wittenberg and other parts of Europe to collect money for a new catholic basilica in Rome...

The man sent to Wittenberg by the pope was a man named Johann Tetzel...

The catholic church taught that giving money to the church would go a long way to getting people to heaven..

And giving money to the church could also open the door to heaven for those who had already died and were in purgatory.

Purgatory is an unbiblical Catholic teaching that those who die but don't have enough good works go to a place to earn enough holiness after death to get to heaven.

There is no Biblical support whatsoever for such teaching..

However, the Catholic church used the idea of purgatory to raise money for building projects and to fatten the bank accounts of its leadership..

Now, Luther had grown up in the Catholic church and he had been taught the idea of purgatory for years...

However, this time when Catholic officials showed up in Wittenberg looking for money and telling people that their giving make get their dead loved ones into heaven, Luther had enough...

The reason that he had enough was that Luther had been deep in Bible study over the past few years in his teaching and personal study...

He especially had been moved by what he had been reading in the book of Romans and the book of Galatians..

And he was becoming more convinced of the unbiblical practices of the Catholic church.

It wasn't just the raising of money through the sale of indulgences, which is what these Catholic money raisers called them...

It was also other acts of Catholic priests that upset Luther as well..

The fact that priests often showed favoritism to relatives...

The fact that priests were taking bribes..

The fact that priests were lending money at high interest rates...

The fact that the priests were in effect telling people that a place in heaven could be bought.

So in 1516, Luther began to document his complaints against the church,....

And the following year on Oct 31, 1517, he nailed those list of complaints to a door of the Catholic church in his town

Here is a picture of the door beside a picture of Martin Luther...

Here is a picture of a copy of the 95 Theses...

Let me you a small sample of some of the complaints that Luther had against the church...

#76 - We say that the selling of indulgences cannot remove in the very least the guilt of sin...

#86 - Why doesn't the pope who is richer than (the richest man alive) not build the new basilica with his own money instead of the money of the poor?

And though it took some time for those 95 Theses to get around Europe, they did spread and the Protestant reformation was born...

And it spread like wildfire, and though it caused much bloodshed, it allowed the Word of God to come center stage...

And that is really what the Reformation was all about...

It was a return to the Word of God and we are still reaping the blessings of it today...

Now, Luther would later write this...

"Take me, for example. I opposed indulgences and all popes, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. the Word did it all. I did nothing: I left it to the Word of God."

And then would later say that the reformation didn't begin in Wittenberg with 95 Theses posted to a door...

Rather the reformation began with "my nose pointed at the book of Galatians... That is my my favorite book. I am as married to it as I am to my wife."

But what in particular did the book of Galatians teach Luther that made him so opposed to the Catholic church?

It was simply this...

That a man is declared righteous before God by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

In fact, Sola Fide became a cry of the reformation, and it simply means FAITH ALONE...

And that stood in sharp contrast to what the catholic church had taught for centuries and still teaches today,....

That a man is made righteous before God through faith that comes through good works...

And that leads to all sorts of error..

Because it makes salvation dependent not upon the grace of God but upon the goodness of man....

And when you teach that, you can make up things like purgatory for people who don't have enough goodness yet...

You can sell indulgences to people who want to put some goodness in their pocket...

You can tell people it is necessary to confess your sins to a priest to build up more grace...

And look, those errors are still around today, and you don't have to go to the Catholic Church to find them...

Ever turned on your TV and heard a "preacher" telling you to send him money so that God will send them even more in return?

Ever heard a man telling you to sow a seed to their ministry so that they can ask God to pour out healing on their disease?

Where there is a dollar to be made, there is a man or a church who will preach error to get it.

And that was true in Luther's day and in our day, and it all comes back to the idea that man is saved through faith alone in Christ alone...

And Luther recovered that lost truth while reading and preaching through the book of Galatians...

And why was that the subject of the book of Galatians?

Because Paul was battling those in his day who were adding works to the requirement to be saved...

And so God inspired Paul to write to the Galatian churches that salvation is not by works but by faith alone in Jesus alone...

The people in Paul's day needed to hear that.

The people in Luther's day needed to hear that.

And the church in our day needs to hear that.

Because there are so many people even today who want to add their works as a requirement of salvation.

There are churches who say that you aren't saved unless you are baptized...

There are people who say you aren't saved until you join their church...



There are people who say you aren't saved until you first follow their rules for behavior and conduct.

The Bible says that you are saved through faith in Jesus Christ alone...

And the book of Galatians is going to make that case...

The book has a rather simple outline...

I. A Personal Defense of Justification by Faith Alone (1-2)

II. A Biblical Defense of Justification by Faith Alone (3-4)

III. A Practical Defense of Justification by Faith Alone (5-6)

Now if the phrase Justification by Faith Alone sounds familiar, it should.

The main idea of the book of Romans is the idea of Justification by Faith Alone..

It was also a favorite book of Luther, who used it to defend his view before bishops and popes.

Romans was a longer book that talked about the idea at length..

Galatians is shorter and way more personal...

Galatians is really a passionate plea from Paul to the churches in Galatia to not depart from the faith alone in Christ alone that saved them...

Now, let's set the stage for where this letter went..

Unlike Corinth or Thessalonica or Rome, Galatia was not a city but rather an area...

There was no one church at Galatia, but rather there were a collection of churches in the region of Galatia..

Here's a map that we are familiar with that details Paul's travels as a missionary all over the Mediterranean world..

Here's a map with the region of Galatia shaded a dark green...

And here's a close up of the region...

Now, people disagree over which area of Galatia that Paul was writing to...

Was he writing to the churches in the northern or southern sections of Galatia..

In the end, it really doesn't matter...

Any church in Galatia would benefit from it as much we benefit from it tonight...

Now, here's an interesting fact about Galatia...

Most of the people were folks who originally lived in western Europe...

The Galatians had originally came to area from France and Germany and even areas we now call the United Kingdom...

I say all that to say they would have been much like us..

Much of this region of the world is home to people of Irish, English and German decent...

And that is very similar to the people who lived in Galatia...

Now, not everyone was western European, but a lot were...

And that makes us have a lot in common with them...

Enough said about the the writer, the region and the audience of the book of Galatians...

Let's now look at the content of the book..

## **I. A Personal Defense of Justification by Faith Alone (1-2)**

In chapter 1, Paul quickly gets into the point of his letter...

Verse 6...

***6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you [c]by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.***

It was anger but amazement that characterized Paul's emotion toward the Galatians...

How could they so quickly desert the gospel that had saved them for another gospel...

Now, what is the other gospel that was luring them away...

Well, it was the gospel of a group known as the Judaizers...

The Judaizers were a group of Jewish teachers who told Christians that they couldn't be truly saved unless they converted to being Jewish and follow the Jewish law before they could be saved.

In essence, they were adding works to the gospel...

They were telling people that salvation was faith in Jesus plus following the laws and customs of the Jews...

Now, this gets to issue of salvation by faith alone...

Put yourself in the shoes of the Jews who came to believe in Jesus as Messiah...

All their life, they had kept the law and followed the rituals and festivals of the Jews...

And once Jesus came, and died and was resurrected, he sent his disciples into the world to tell people that they could be right with God by implying putting their faith alone in Him...

That's is the true gospel..

Faith alone..

Well, the Jews who had come to Christ were upset at that..

In their mind, that made salvation too easy...

You mean all they have to do is trust in Jesus to be saved?

Don't seem fair, we been following the law for all this time and they get in simply on the basis on faith alone without any works?

Most you know the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15..

The son goes away lives wild, but comes to he senses and heads home...

The father rejoices to see him and throws a huge party when he returns...

The prodigal had a brother, and do you remember the brother's reaction to his return?

He sat in the field, refused to go the party, and pouted...

The dad comes out to him, and says come on in son, your brother is home..

And all the older brother can say is...

I have been working my fingers to the bone for you and I never get a party...

He lives wild, but when he comes home, everyone celebrates...

That's not fair...

Well, the Judaizers would agree with the older brother a 100%.

Here are these Gentiles and new converts getting into heaven based on faith alone without any works?!!

Well, that's not fair...

So, we need to go out and teach that you must convert to Jewish law and follow Jewish customs if you are going to be truly saved...

And so, they took that teaching all over the region, but especially to churches in Galatia...

Let me stop here, and say something...

I have taught the story of the prodigal son, and I have had people come up to me afterwards and tell me that the older brother was right in who he felt...

And that it was wrong for the father to welcome back that boy and throw a party...

And they usually end with this phrase...

That is unfair...

And I usually respond with this phrase..

Do you want fairness?

And they usually say, "you bet i do."

And I always say this...

"Ok, well i remind you of this. If God treated you with complete fairness, you would end up in hell. You sinned against him and deserve death."

You still want fairness?

In some ways, I sympathize with the Judaizers...

They had been victims of the false religion of the Pharisees would put a heavy burden on people to follow the law to be right with God...

They had grown up in a false religious system that valued works over trusting God...

In some ways, they were the natural outcome of the false teaching that had surrounded them...



And to hear that the Law doesn't save but faith alone saves was probably more than they could take..

However, their teaching had to be stopped...

Following the law doesn't save; it only reveals the need to be saved.

The Law has its purpose, but it isn't the way to salvation...

Faith alone is...

So Paul is amazed that these churches are buying into this false teaching, and then he lays down this challenge to them in verses 8-9...

***8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel [d]contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be [e]accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel [f]contrary to what you received, he is to be [g]accursed!***

Paul simply says if I come back or any of my associates come back or even an angel from heaven appears with a different gospel...

Don't listen to them or follow them...

Their gospel is corrupt and they are accursed..

And for the rest of the chapter, Paul defends the gospel that he originally preached to them that spoke of faith alone in Jesus Christ as the way to be saved..

Look at verse 11...

***11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.***

In other words, Paul does some name dropping...

The gospel I gave you I got from Jesus Himself...

And that is really all that Paul needed to say to verify his authority and the genuineness of the gospel he preached to them..

The gospel that he preached is the gospel that God preached...

Paul then finishes up chapter 1 describing his past as a Jewish terrorist who killed Christians to describe the amazing work God had done in his life.

Chapter 2 is much of the same personal information about Paul to defend his God given ministry of preaching the true gospel...

But then we get this incredible statement in 2:15-16...

***15 “We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of [n]the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of [o]the Law; since by the works of [p]the Law no [q]flesh will be justified.***

What Paul is saying is this...

Though the Jews were highly blessed by God in many ways...

They were given a land...

They were the nation who gave birth to the Savior of the world..

They were given the responsibility of preserving the word of God...

None of their privilege extends to how they are saved...

You don't get a favor in salvation because you are Jewish or a woman or the child of preacher or the preacher yourself...

Everyone is saved, not by works, but by faith alone in Christ alone.

Whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, man or woman, justification comes through faith and not works...

Now, we talked about this in Romans but don't forget what justification means...

Justification means that a person goes from being a sinner to being declared righteous before God....

God doesn't make you righteous at salvation in the sense of filling you up at the gas pump...

He declares you righteous based upon your faith in Jesus alone..

That's another important difference from the Catholic church...

The Catholic church teaches that a person is made righteous through good works...

Every good deed add a little more righteousness to a person's life...

The true biblical gospel says this...

When you exercise faith in Jesus alone to save you, you are declared righteous at that point in time not due to any works of your own...

Think about a marriage...

When a pastor announces a couple husband and wife, nothing inside them changes...

They have simply been declared husband and wife.

They are the same people in a sense, but also very different as well..

Same with a judge's verdict that he gives to a criminal...

When a judge declares a person innocent or guilty, nothing happens inside that person physically, but the declaration of innocence or guilt changes his life...

The same in true in justification...

Justification is the act of declaring a person innocent before God based on their faith alone...

True biblical justification is when the sinner is credited with the life of Jesus Christ...

He doesn't become the righteousness of Christ, he simply is treated as if he were Christ...

How you define justification is very important...

Let's turn from Paul's personal defense of Faith Alone to....

## **II. A Biblical Defense of Justification by Faith Alone (3-4)**

In chapters 3-4, we find what the Scriptures teach in other places about being saved by faith alone in God..

Paul uses the example of Abraham in the OT, who was saved by simply believing God's promise to send a Savior...

And then Paul answers the question that many people ask...

What is the purpose of the law for Christians today?

He answers that in Galatians 3:24...

***24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.***

Simply put, the law of God we see in the OT leads us to Christ...

That just means that the Law serves to point out our sin and point us to a solution for sin, which is the Lord Jesus Christ...

Therefore, you should use the Law in your evangelism..

One popular method of sharing the gospel takes people through some of the 10 commandments, which is only a portion of the OT law...

By asking them if they have ever lied or stolen or taken the Lord's name in vain...

And then pointing them to the penalty for breaking just one of God's laws...

And then pointing them to Christ who can stand in the sinner's place before God because he has received Gods' wrath in their place...

The Law is a tutor.

Now that is not to say that we should ignore all of the law of God..

It is simply saying that the law cannot save anyone; it can only point out their need to be saved..

This leads us to the final 2 chapters of Galatians which describe the benefits of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone..



### **III. A Practical Defense of Justification by Faith Alone (5-6)**

Simply put, those who understand and live by the biblical truth that God saves through faith alone are blessed in many way...

The primary benefit of rejecting the idea that we are saved by works is found in verse 1 of chapter 5..

***5 [a]It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.***

Christian freedom is a wonderful blessing of those who hold to faith alone for salvation...

And here is why...

Working your way to heaven enslaves you...

You have to do this and you have to do that...

Remember the widow in the temple in the book of Mark..

The Jewish system of works had so burdened her that she felt like she had to give her last two coins in order to keep her place in heaven....

The same can be said for legalist Christian churches today that enslave...

If you don't wear a skirt a certain length or have your hair fixed a certain way, you aint' going to heaven...

Or if you don't read this certain translation of the Bible or follow our rules for movie, TV and entertainment, then you aint going to heaven...

IF you do this on Sunday or don't do this on Sunday, then you aint' going to heaven...

Legalism is the opposite of freedom....

Working your way to heaven is working your way into bondage...

Faith alone saves, but faith alone also frees...

Faith alone also grows...

In chapter 5, Paul also discusses that following the law stifles our maturity as believers...

However, those who hold to salvation by faith alone are not led by the Law but by the Spirit of God...

Law says do this or else...

The Spirit says do whatever as long as you do it for the glory of God...

Walking according to the laws of men makes bitter and complaining people....

Walking in the freedom of the Spirit makes content and happy Christians...

Churches that are dominated by their own set of rules produce people that are filled with stress and anxiety and have little joy...

Churches that point people to the Scripture and trust the Lord to do His work in their lives produce Christians who are free to do ministry that glorifies the Lord and fits their strengths...

Let's end in verses 1-2 of chapter 6...

This is a really good picture of what churches that believe in faith alone for salvation do...

And what churches that place an importance on works don't do..

***6 Brethren, even if [a]nyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.***

***2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.***

We have talked about the process of church discipline, and how a church is to deal with an unrepentant sinner in the church..

Go to him once alone, go to him twice with 2-3 witnesses, go to the church, and if still no repentance, sever ties with the unrepentant man.

But what if that sinner repents?

Well, he is to be restored.

Now, that looks different depending on the situation and may involve different actions, but if biblical repentance occurs, biblical restoration should follow.

And you see how that looks in verses 1-2..

Now, why is this in this letter?

Were the churches in Galatia dealing with a situation like this?

Maybe...but more than likely, Paul was just offering a final contrast to people who put an emphasis on faith alone and people who put an emphasis on works alone...

Verse 2 says that we are to bear one another's burdens, yet people who put an importance on works creates burdens for others...

But even more important, people who value works are not in the restoration business..

If you sin, you are out...

Doesn't matter if you repent or not...

The world has seen your sin, so we have seen enough of you...

However, the opposite should be true...

And here is why...

Folks who value faith alone know this....

No work gets you closer to God and no work can send you farther away...

If you sin, repent, and you will be restored...

Works don't make us greater Christians or lesser Christians...

God wants your faith in Christ alone and he wants a repentant heart...

And churches who understand that are quick to restore repentant sinners who want to be saved....

And repentant believers who want to rejoin the fellowship...

## **Conclusion**

The old saying is this...

History is bound to repeat itself...

And false teachers who point to good works as the way of salvation have been around forever...

They are called Judaizers in Paul's day...

The Catholic church in Luther's day...

And Legalists in our day...

And when we hear their teaching, we must be quick to find our way to the book of Galatians...

Justification comes by faith alone in Christ alone...

That was nailed to the church at Wittenberg 499 years ago...

And it should be nailed to our hearts and minds tonight...

Let us pray.