

The Galatian Heresy

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Recorded on January 17, 2026

As I'm sure most of you are aware, the Apostle Paul wrote more of the New Testament than any other single author. And oftentimes when Paul was writing his epistles, he often focused on addressing problems that were affecting the particular congregation that he was addressing his epistle to. One of the common issues that he addressed in these epistles was problems of false teachings or heresies that were affecting that particular congregation. Oftentimes, one of his purposes in his letters was to correct these issues and to straighten out the misunderstandings associated with it.

This is particularly true when it comes to his letter to the Galatians. As we'll see today in the sermon, from the beginning of Galatians 1 he makes it very clear that he's writing to address a significant heresy that's affecting the congregation there. But oftentimes, the details of what that heresy was about and what we should learn from it are oftentimes not real clearly understood. So, what we're going to do today in the sermon is to take a closer look at the book of Galatians to understand what exactly was the source of the heresy there, and what exactly was this heresy about? And more importantly what important lessons can we learn from this to apply in our Christian lives to today? So, if you'd like a title for the sermon, it's:

The Galatian Heresy

So, if you'll turn over to the book of Galatians, as I mentioned from the beginning of Galatians 1, Paul makes it very clear that the purpose of why he's writing this letter is to address a significant heresy that was affecting the congregation there. If we start reading here in Galatians 1:6, we'll see here he specifically states this.

Gal 1:6 *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7) which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ."* (NKJV)

So, you can see he's specifically writing to address false teachings. He refers to it as a "different gospel". Then he says, well, it might be more accurately stated as a "perversion of the gospel". We'll see here as we start to unravel this why he says this. Because in this particular case, this wasn't someone coming with for example, like Islam that has their own book like the Quran and just teaching a totally different story.

Now what we're going to see here as we go through this sermon is that the source of the heresy here, these were individuals who had come into the New Covenant Church that came from a Pharisaical background. We'll see here as we look into this in more detail, the Pharisees they weren't just followers of the Old Testament who were now learning that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah and coming into the Church.

For a Pharisee they weren't just following the written law that was in the Old Testament. They had what they called their "oral law" and their "oral traditions" which is a totally different thing that they lumped into and combined with the actual written scripture. The actual written law. See, this was really the source of the problem. They were trying to pull in these concepts from the Pharisaical Rabbinical oral law and to combine that with the gospel. That was this "perversion of the gospel". But to continue on here in verse 8:

"8) But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9) As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. 10) For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." (NKJV)

Now just as a side note here, as I mentioned the main issue of heresy here that he's addressing in this letter to the Galatians really comes from the influence of Pharisees and they're basically trying to introduce their oral traditions into New Covenant Christianity.

But just as a side note here, notice how verse 8 talked about even if an angel from heaven were to come down and present a different gospel you should reject it. Now, what's interesting to note here is in the case of both Islam and Mormonism that's actually the claim that both of them make. Because in Islam Muhammad is who they look to. In Mormonism it's Joseph Smith. Now both of those individuals claim that an angel from heaven came down to them and revealed to them this different gospel. And they both produced their own book as a result. In the case of Muhammad, it's the Quran. In the case of Joseph Smith, it's the Book of Mormon. Again, if you look into the story behind both of them, both of them claim that an angel from heaven came down and revealed this to them, and it resulted in this different gospel. Paul here is warning us. He was foreseeing that those types of issues would happen in the future and they did. He's warning us we should reject that.

But as I mentioned, if we look more into the details of what he's specifically addressing here, that really wasn't the issue here. It wasn't the issue of a situation like Islam or Mormonism. What this was, was individuals who had a tradition of following the Old Testament. But they also had their oral traditions that they added in, and this perverted the true teachings of the Bible. They were trying to combine this with New Covenant Christianity and coming up with a perversion of what New Covenant Christianity is.

Now as we continue reading in the next several verses in chapter 1 here, what we're going to see here is Paul first starts off addressing his personal history. But if we dig into the details of here, what we're going to realize is he's talking about the fact that he was raised as a Pharisee and how he diligently followed and very zealously followed their oral law traditions as well. But when he was called into the Church he rejected all of this and put it behind him. To see that, let's continue on reading here in verse 11.

“11) But I make known to you, 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 it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. 13) For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. 14) And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” (NKJV)

Now in a minute we're going to look more into what that actually means. Because what he's saying here is a lot more than just the idea of I grew up obeying the Old Testament and everything that that teaches, and I just didn't understand that Christ was the true Messiah. Then once I understood that, then I moved forward. That's not really what he's saying here. He's speaking about the fact that he followed these oral traditions of the Pharisees because he was a Pharisee. And what he's getting at is how he turned his back on all of that when he's called as a Christian. But continue on now in verse 15.

“15) But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, 16) to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17) nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” (NKJV)

Now if you notice what we just read here in these verses, nothing here directly states that Paul was previously a Pharisee. But that is stated several other times in the Bible. But just notice again in verse 14, he talked about being “more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers”. The culture he was raised in. The tradition that he was taught from childhood is what he's referring to. Now if we look over in the book of Acts, we'll see him clearly state what this tradition was. Turn over to Acts 26. This is Acts 26, and we're going to pick up here in verse 1.

Acts 26:1 *“Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.” So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: 2) “I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, 3) especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. 4) “My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. 5) They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.” (NKJV)*

See, when he is referring to the “tradition of my fathers”, the culture that I was raised up in, and what I was taught from childhood, it's being a Pharisee. Now, again, as I mentioned, as a Pharisee -- and we will see this more and more as we go through this sermon. To a Pharisee there was what they called the “written Torah”. In other words what we would call scripture. Not only the writings of Moses that he recorded but the rest of the Old Testament. They would refer to that as the “written Torah”. But they also

referred to what they called the “oral Torah”. Because “Torah” is the Hebrew word for “law”. This was like their “oral law”.

Well, they try to connect that to Moses but that's really mythology. Because see, in their tradition Moses actually wrote down the “written Torah” (as they would call it). In other words, the five books of the Old Testament that Moses actually received from God and recorded. But their mythology is that, well, Moses also received this “oral Torah”. It's these oral traditions that were just passed down orally over the years. Now that's been since written down. That today is what we know as the Talmud and the Mishnah and other Rabbinical related writings.

See, that in their mind is the “oral law” and they lump these together when they refer to the “law of Moses”. We'll see that later as we go through the sermon. That's what a Pharisee means when they refer to the “law of Moses”, because they try to connect all of their oral traditions to Moses. But again, that's mythology that's not valid.

But understand when Paul's referring to his life growing up as a Pharisee, he was taught these oral traditions of the Pharisees. As we'll see later in this sermon, they gave that more weight and more value and that had a greater influence upon their lives than the actual written scripture that was inspired by God. Turn over to Philippians 3. We'll see here that Paul, in one of his own epistles, again mentions his history of growing up and being taught as a Pharisee. This is in Philippians 3. We will start reading in verse 3.

Phil 3:3 *“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4) though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5) circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6) concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”* (NKJV)

You can see when Paul refers to the “tradition of his fathers” and how zealous he was for that “tradition”, he's referring to what he was taught being a Pharisee. That's very important to understand to unpack what's going on in the book of Galatians. Because as we're going to see as we go through this, understanding that Pharisee influence and that perspective and even what a Pharisee means when they use some of the terminology that we're going to look at, that is very important for correctly understanding what's going on in the book of Galatians.

But now turn back over to the book of Galatians and we'll pick up in chapter 2. What we're going to see here in the first part of chapter 2 is Paul basically tells his account of the events around the Jerusalem conference. We're going to see here later that's recorded in Acts 15. And we'll read that here in a minute. But let's just read through the first 10 verses here of Galatians 2. We'll see Paul's account of these events associated with the Jerusalem conference and what brought about the necessity for that conference to take place in the first place. This is Galatians 2 and we'll start in verse 1.

Gal 2:1 *“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. 2) And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. 3) Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4) And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),” (NKJV)*

Now there are a couple things to realize here. One, he refers to this as “false brethren brought in”. So, realize that this heresy is coming from within the Church. Now, these are individuals as we're going to see when we read through Acts 15 who came from a Pharisaical background, but they didn't basically leave that behind them like Paul did. They wanted to bring concepts of their oral tradition -- of their Pharisaical oral law -- and bring that into New Covenant Christianity. They wanted basically all the rules of this oral law to be enforced upon New Covenant Christians. That was the source of the problem.

That's also important to understand when Paul refers to bringing them into “bondage”. Because oftentimes people read this not understanding these Pharisaical concepts. And the way that they interpret this statement is just keeping the commandments and the Sabbath and the Holy Days and God's food laws, well that was just bondage. We've been freed from that law, and they just want to bring us back into bondage as a result. That's their definition of what he meant by “bondage”.

That's not what he's talking about. He's talking about wanting to place the requirements of this Pharisaical oral law on New Covenant Christians. When you understand all these elaborate rituals and how burdensome a lot of this was to those trying to follow them, that's why he's referring to this as a “burden” and a “bondage”. We'll see this language in Acts 15 as well.

But again, it's just important to understand that historical context so you don't read this and think, well, it's a burden, and it's bondage to keep the 10 Commandments and to keep God's Sabbath and to not eat unclean meats and to keep the Holy Days. *That's not what he's referring to at all.* Again, having that historical perspective is very important to correctly understand what's taking place here in Galatians and in Acts 15, which we'll look at here in a minute. But now pick up here in verse 5.

“5) to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. 6) But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. 7) But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter 8) (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), 9) and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that

had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10) They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” (NKJV)

We're going to see here as we read through Acts 15, one of the decisions that comes out of this is, no we're not placing any of this Pharisaical oral law issues on New Covenant Christians. That's totally irrelevant and that's a burden and bondage and we're not doing it. But see, that's the key to understanding what's really going on here.

Because oftentimes today in the Protestant world people read this not understanding how a Pharisee looks at the “law of Moses”. And that when a Pharisee uses that term they're lumping both of these together. Again, what I mean by “both” is from the eyes of a Pharisee there's the “written Torah” as they would call it – what we would call scripture. Specifically with Moses, that would be all the five books that Moses actually wrote. The actual scripture that God inspired him to record. But again, in a Pharisee's mind there is also their “oral law” and they also attach this to Moses as well. But this is just their manmade tradition. But they attach this to Moses as well. So, when a Pharisee says “law of Moses” they're lumping it all together. And that's very important to understand.

Now let's flip over to Acts 15 and read here the account of the Jerusalem conference. Because again, we just read Paul's version of the story of his involvement and how this came about. Now let's read Luke's account here in the book of Acts. This is Acts 15:1.

Acts 15:1 *“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”” (NKJV)*

Now we're going to come back to this here in a minute. But it's also important to understand not only does the term “law of Moses” mean a whole lot more to a Pharisee than it does just from a Biblical context -- just referring to the laws that God inspired Moses to record. Typically, when we see the term “law of Moses” that's what we're thinking of. Realize, to a Pharisee there's a lot more lumped into that. But we're also going to see to a Pharisee there was actually a different definition of circumcision than the circumcision that God commanded Abraham to do and was then brought down through Moses and to all of Israel. As I said we will get into that here in a minute. But realize that that term had some different definitions for a Pharisee as well. Now pick up in verse 2.

“2) Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. 3) So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. 4) And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by

the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. 5) But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." (NKJV)

See verse 5 is very important in understanding all of this. Because again, this is coming from a Pharisee. It's Pharisaical influence that's creating all of these issues and stirring up this controversy that they're having to deal with. Again, as I mentioned, and we're going to come back to this in more detail here in a minute. When a Pharisee says "law of Moses", they're talking about a whole lot more than just the laws that God directly gave to Moses and had him record.

Because that's oftentimes the misunderstanding people have with this is they read this and they think, well, he's just referring to all the laws that God gave to Moses. And then they read the rest of the chapter, and they think, well, that's all irrelevant to us today because they didn't put that on New Covenant Christians. That's not the pivotal issue here. Remember, it's a Pharisee who is speaking here and to a Pharisee "law of Moses" and even circumcision has a different definition. But we'll come back to this here in a minute. Now continue on in verse 6.

"6) Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 7) And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8) So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, 9) and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10) Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (NKJV)

Now, as I mentioned understanding the Pharisaical oral law -- that's at the heart of the matter here -- is very important in understanding verse 10. Because otherwise people read this and they think, well, see, just keeping the commandments and the Sabbath and the Holy Days and avoiding unclean meats, that was just so burdensome that even the Apostles admit that they just couldn't do it. That's not what they're saying at all. What they're referring to is all the ritualistic burdens and all the rules that the Pharisees made up on their own, and they tried to attribute to Moses. That's what he's referring to by this "bondage" and "burden". Now pick up in verse 11.

"11) But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." 12) Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. 13) And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: 14) Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. 15) And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 16) "After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has

fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; 17) So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.' 18) "Known to God from eternity are all His works. 19) Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, 20) but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood." (NKJV)

Now if you understand the pagan backgrounds and the pagan temples. The sexual immorality, and the idolatry and meat offered to idols and things of that nature that were common among the culture, you'll understand why he's specifically calling these things out. He's saying basically tell them to stop all of these things. That's got to stop immediately. But then notice the next verse, because he's basically saying if they just stop all of these issues that are very common practices in pagan religions, they'll learn the rest of the details every Sabbath when they come to services. That is what he's saying. Because notice you're in verse 21.

"21) For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (NKJV)

Notice that the point he's making is if they just stop these common pagan practices that are extant in the cultures that they're coming from, they'll learn the rest of the details of what they need to follow every Sabbath. Notice he's not saying they'll learn the rest at Sunday school. He's not saying that. He's saying they're going to learn the rest of the details on the seventh day Sabbath. Because the Apostles were keeping the Sabbath as well as teaching it. Pick up in verse 22.

"22) Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. 23) They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. 24) Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"..." (NKJV)

Now again, this is quoting from what a Pharisee said to them. And both of those terms have totally different meanings to a Pharisee than just their standard Biblical definitions.

"...—to whom we gave no such commandment—..." (NKJV)

See, that's why they're saying that they "gave no such commandment". In verse 25.

"25) it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26) men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27) We have therefore sent Judas

and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28) For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29) that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” (NKJV)

Now again, keep in mind what we read earlier in verse 20 and verse 21. It wasn't just the matter of, well, as long as they abstain from sexual immorality and these pagan practices and the strangled and sacrificial meat and things of that nature. Well, they don't need to keep the commandments and the Holy Days and the Sabbath. They can forget all that. They just need a warm, fuzzy feeling in their heart and believe in Jesus. *That's not what he's saying at all.* Because he basically said you need to stop all these practices that are very common in your pagan cultures. Those are unacceptable. Stop all of that. But the rest -- the details of how you need to live as a Christian -- you're going to learn that every Sabbath. Because that's commonly taught -- the actual written law. That's commonly taught and you'll learn that along the way. *That's what he's actually saying here.*

Because as I mentioned all throughout the sermon so far, the key here is understanding when a Pharisee refers to the “law of Moses”, and even when a Pharisee refers to circumcision, -- and we'll get into some more details here in a minute as to what I'm talking about -- they pack a whole lot more into those statements than what you would think of if you're just defining those terms according to the Bible. Because again, the law of Moses -- Biblically you're thinking, okay, well these are just the commands that God gave to Moses and Moses recorded.

Well as we're going to see here in just a minute even Jesus Christ Himself made it very clear, that was not being abolished at all. That that needed to be taught that we're required to follow those. So, we have to understand this distinction here. Just to emphasize this, notice here in verse 1 of chapter 15, because this is the core issue. And again, think of these through the eyes of a Pharisee and not just defining the terms from the Bible itself but keeping in mind it's a Pharisee who's saying these things. This is in chapter 15 in verse 1.

Acts 15:1 *“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”” (NKJV)*

Notice the source of the problem is certain men saying this. Now, jump down to verse 5. We previously read this but let's just notice again, these “certain men”, these are guys from a Pharisaical background who are pushing their Pharisaical traditions on the Church. That's the source of the problem. In verse 5.

“5) But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”” (NKJV)

Now again, if we just keep all of this in context we'll see here when we look again at verses 23 and 24, when the Apostles were writing their letter obviously what this Pharisee meant by "law of Moses" was something different than what the Apostles were teaching. Because they specifically say they weren't teaching this. What these guys are wanting to do, we haven't been commanding anybody to have to do this. So, obviously there's something different going on here. To see that, just jump down to verse 23.

"23) They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. 24) Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law'—to whom we gave no such commandment—" (NKJV)

Or in other words, the Apostles were not teaching anyone to do this. Now we're about to see here directly out of the mouth of Jesus Christ, if the Apostles were teaching the people that they could totally disregard God's commandments and they didn't have to obey them, they would be disqualifying themselves from the Kingdom of God as a result of doing that. So, let's turn over to Matthew 5. We'll see here where Christ Himself directly says this. Matthew 5, and we'll pick up in verse 17.

Matt 5:17 *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18) For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."* (NKJV)

Notice that Christ Himself is directly saying that this concept that He came to nail the law to the cross and it's all been done away with, and you don't have to keep the commandments, you don't have to keep the Sabbath, you don't have to keep the Holy Days, that's just heresy. Because Christ Himself laid this out very clearly.

Now, I won't take the time to go into the meaning of the terms "destroy" and "fulfill" here that are oftentimes twisted to try to match this Protestant idea that the law has been done away with. But if you're interested in that, I recently did a multiple part sermon series addressing some of the more difficult statements of the Apostle Paul that are oftentimes twisted to come up with the conclusion that God's law is done away with, and Christians today don't have to obey it. You can find it on both my YouTube channel and on my website. It's a 3 part series titled The Apostle Paul and the "Curse of the Law". That'll go into that subject in a lot more detail if you're interested in researching that.

But now let's notice verse 19 here. Because as I pointed out as we were going through Acts 15, when the Apostles sent out their letter addressing the issues of the controversy there in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem conference, they specifically mentioned that what was troubling the people was certain people saying, well, you have to circumcise them and they have to keep the "law of Moses". And the Apostles said, "We gave no such commandment." Now as I mentioned when we went over that, I said, if they were teaching people that the law, the commandments are done away with, and you don't

have to keep them, they would be disqualifying themselves from the Kingdom of God. Well, let's read verse 19 here, and we'll see Christ Himself directly say that.

"19) Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."
(NKJV)

See, Christ has just referenced the "Law and the Prophets". Now, that's basically the Bible's way of referring to the Old Testament. When you lump those together that's typically a generic reference to the Old Testament. Everything that's legitimate scripture of the Old Testament and NOT the Rabbinical oral law. But He's saying that none of that's been done away with and you're supposed to keep that. In fact, He even goes further than that and says if anyone breaks this and teaches others that they can break it as well – even if it's just the least of these commandments -- they'll be least in the Kingdom of God. Now imagine if the Apostles go out and say all of it is done away with and you can just ignore all of it. You can break all of the commandments, and you don't have to keep any of them. Well, if you just follow Christ's logic here, they would just be disqualifying themselves from the Kingdom of God is what would happen. They would basically prove themselves to be false teachers if they were doing this because they're directly contradicting Christ.

Because see, the important thing to note here is, as I mentioned, when a Pharisee says "law of Moses" they're not just referring to the commandments that God gave to Moses and Moses recorded in his five books. No, that's kind of included in what they're talking about. But they lump in their "oral tradition" which is basically just manmade nonsense that they came up with on their own. Now they have a mythology where they try to connect it to Moses and kind of blame Moses for the stuff that they manufactured themselves. But they lump it all together. So, when they say, obey the "law of Moses", it's a collective thing for them.

In fact, as we're about to see, they put their tradition above actual written scripture. Because see, this issue came up in Christ's time. If you'll turn over to Mark 7, we'll see Christ Himself dealing with the Pharisees and they're judging Christ not based on scripture, based upon their oral tradition. What we're going to see here is Christ's reaction to this is the exact opposite of His reaction to what the Pharisees would call the "written Torah" -- Moses' actual writings. Because we can see here, in Matthew 5 Christ was very supportive of the inspired scripture that Moses recorded and said none of that's been done away with and you're required to obey that. And anybody who teaches otherwise, they're going to disqualify themselves from the Kingdom of God if they try to throw that away. Well, let's notice here when Christ addresses their oral tradition -- what the Pharisees would call their "oral Torah" -- He has a totally different perspective in that regard. Well, let's pick up here in Mark 7.

Mark 7:1 *"Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. 2) Now when they saw some of His disciples eat*

bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. 3) For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.” (NKJV)

Notice that this is their tradition. To put this in modern day Church of God terminology, we oftentimes refer to what “I’ve always been taught”. It’s kind of the same kind of logic if you’re referring to tradition rather than what’s actually scripture. But again, just keep in mind when they refer to the “tradition of the elders”. Notice before when we were reading through Galatians. In Galatians 1 and Paul’s referring to his history growing up as a Pharisee. What does he refer to? The “tradition of my fathers”. How he had zealously followed the “tradition of his fathers”. *This is what he’s referring to.* He’s referring to that Pharisaical tradition because he was raised as a Pharisee. But continue on here in verse 4.

“4) When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. 5) Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?”” (NKJV)

Notice that they’re not judging Him based upon scripture. In fact, you won’t find anything in the Old Testament that matches what they’re judging Christ on. This is just their made up oral tradition is what they’re judging Him on. Notice here when Christ responds to this how He talks about how they put their oral tradition above scripture and they will disregard scripture to follow their oral tradition. Pick up in verse 6 here.

“6) He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 7) And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ 8) For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” (NKJV)

See, as I mentioned, for a Pharisee their oral tradition -- their “oral Torah” as they would refer to it. They don’t just lump that in with the “written Torah” -- with the actual inspired scripture. They prefer it above written scripture. They’ll actually ignore what the Bible actually says and hold up their tradition. That’s very important to understand particularly when you’re reading the book of Galatians or like in Acts 15. Realize when a Pharisee refers to the law of Moses they’re lumping both of these together. So, you can’t just look at that term when a Pharisee says it and just give it the Biblical definition.

Because that’s why when you see the reaction and the arguments that come as a result of this and then them rejecting what this Pharisee is saying, they’re not rejecting the laws that were inspired and placed in scripture. They know that what God gave to Moses and had him write down still applies to Christians. What they’re rejecting is the

Pharisaical tradition. But if you don't understand the terminology, then it appears like they're rejecting the law as a whole.

Now when we were going through Acts 15 earlier, I mentioned that also to a Pharisee the definition of circumcision is a little different as well. Now I will try to explain this without getting unnecessarily graphic. But just so you understand this, the way that we define circumcision today in our modern world -- what would typically be performed in the United States after a baby is born. The circumcision that takes place there, that's actually a more extensive circumcision than is actually the Biblical definition. Because that's a total removal of the foreskin on the end of a male penis. Now the Biblical definition that God gave to Abraham and was then passed down through Moses as well, was actually just the removal of the foreskin that extends beyond the tip of the penis. It would just be cutting that off and kind of exposing part of the tip of the penis as well.

Well, then later the Pharisees adopted a more elaborate procedure where it was the total removal of all of the foreskin. See, from a Pharisee's perspective, if someone was just circumcised by Biblical definition without going further to meet their standards, well, that didn't qualify as being rightly circumcised. Because again, remember they elevated their oral tradition higher than what's recorded in scripture. Now, as I'm sure you're probably aware, throughout Paul's writings he explains that regardless of what your definition of circumcision is, circumcision is not required as a spiritual issue for New Covenant Christians. He makes that very clear through multiple of his epistles. But I think it's important to understand this terminology, so you realize particularly like when you're reading through Galatians or Acts 15, that this terminology when spoken by a Pharisee has very different meanings than the actual Biblical definition.

Now just to address another argument -- and this will also clarify more of chapter 2 of the book of Galatians -- oftentimes when you point out that the real issue in Acts 15 wasn't whether or not you're keeping the commandments -- keeping the actual commandments that God gave to Moses. The dispute was really about putting these Pharisaical oral traditions upon the Church. And that this controversy resulted in this conference where they all had to come together and discuss this, people kind of resist that. And they think, well, if it was just about Pharisaical issues that weren't valid in the first place and Christ Himself had already condemned them. Well, why would that be a significant question?

Well, it's important to understand with the Apostles and all of the Jews at that time, this was a culture that they had been raised in. It gets ingrained in people. Because we're about to see here in Galatians 2, how even Peter himself, even though he's the Apostle that God specifically worked with to reveal to everybody that God was working with the Gentiles. That they're not unclean and He even specifically addresses these concepts that came into their culture through Pharisaical oral law and saying reject all of this and accept the Gentiles as Christians just like the Jews. Even though Peter himself was the Apostle that God worked with to reveal this, we're going to see that Peter himself even backslides into some of this.

Just to kind of understand this, put it in the context of your everyday lives today. Because I'm sure all of us, particularly if you're a first generation Christian and you come into the Church. There's a lot of things that you did in your life previously. And this can even be true of second generation Christians like myself, who grew up in the Church. You had concepts that were false. Maybe they were part of your upbringing or just the culture of the area that you were in. Or particular sins that you tended to fall into. When you repented and you were baptized, you understood that this was wrong and this is something I need to reject and put behind me. But that doesn't mean that you did this perfectly going forward and you didn't backslide at times. That you didn't have to battle these things and have to work for years to totally put that behind you and to get it out of your thinking.

What we're about to see here is an example where this very issue was affecting even Peter himself. Paul brings this up in his letter to the Galatians. Addressing all these problems with Rabbinical issues and this Pharisaical oral law. Because even Peter himself had some backsliding and even some of the other Apostles in this regard. Keep in mind this was a culture that was ingrained in them and all the other Jews that they were raised around because they were taught this stuff from childhood. You can see why this would be kind of an ingrained issue that would create controversy and it would be a struggle for the Church to overcome these things. So, turn over to Galatians 2, and we'll continue here with the rest of the chapter. Let's pick up in verse 11.

Gal 2:11 *"Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12) for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13) And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. 14) But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?" (NKJV)*

We're going to see here Peter basically gets sucked in through peer pressure. Because again, these are cultural values. They're totally incorrect but they're a part of this Rabbinical tradition that came through the Pharisees. But it's been ingrained in people as part of the culture that they've lived all of their lives. So, they just don't easily walk away from that. There's a struggle involved. Realize through peer pressure Peter and even Barnabas and others kind of fall back into this. But I think it's also important to realize that what we're talking about here is not concepts that we are taught from the Old Testament, that are actually a part of scripture. This is the oral law. Rabbinical tradition of the Pharisees that we're talking about.

Just to clarify that let me quote to you from a commentary that's addressing the book of Galatians as a whole. But the section I'm going to read to you here is specifically addressing the verses that we just read. Now, the book I'm going to quote from the title is Galatians: A Torah-Based Commentary in First-Century Hebraic Context. It's

authored by Avi ben Mordechai. And the section I'm going to read to you is quoting from pages 197 and 198.

“Look carefully at this. He ate among the goyim. Pharisaic oral law had much to say about this. According to Rabbinic oral tradition, it was forbidden for a Jew to eat any of the food cooked by an idolater or to have table fellowship with the heathen. Why? Recall the doctrine of the Pharisees that all Gentiles were inherently idolaters and ritually impure. Only those who met the conditions of Pharisaic oral tradition were considered members of the family of Israel. As a result, Gentile food, wine, and slaughtered meat was completely forbidden.”

See, the whole concept here of not eating with a gentile because they're unclean, and any food that they prepare is unclean. This has nothing to do with the “written Torah” -- as a Pharisee would call it -- actual inspired scripture. This is all Rabbinical tradition. But notice, even the Apostles, some of them are backsliding into this. So, you can see why this would be a controversy and why dealing with this and coming out of these issues would create this major controversy that would result in the Jerusalem conference.

Just to cover the fact that it was Peter himself who God specifically worked with to clarify these issues, turn over to Acts 10. Because notice here the very issue that Paul was addressing with Peter was eating with Gentiles. Now, notice we're going to see Peter himself talking about the story here of how God revealed to him specifically that they should reject all of this and put it behind them. Because that was not valid and they should welcome the Gentiles into the Church and totally forget about this Rabbinical nonsense that had nothing to do with scripture. Let's pick up here in Acts 10:24.

Acts 10:24 *“And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25) As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26) But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” 27) And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. 28) Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29) Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” (NKJV)*

Notice Peter's saying it's unlawful for a Jew to do this. Well, that's not a law that's in the Old Testament. Again, this is out of Pharisaical tradition. But turn over to Acts 11, and we'll see the account here where Peter clarifies how God specifically revealed to him how they shouldn't be considering the Gentiles unclean. Because God's going to work with the Gentiles and call them into the Church, just like those He's calling those from an Israelite background. So, pick up here in Acts 11:1.

Acts 11:1 *"Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2) And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, 3) saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" (NKJV)*

Notice again, it's this Pharisaical concept that you can't eat with Gentiles. In verse 4.

Acts 11:4 *"But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying: 5) "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. 6) When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 7) And I heard a voice saying to me, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' 8) But I said, "Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.' 9) But the voice answered me again from heaven, "What God has cleansed you must not call common.' 10) Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11) At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. 12) Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13) And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, 14) who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.' 15) And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. 16) Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, "John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17) If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" 18) When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." (NKJV)*

Now, as you're probably familiar with, this chapter oftentimes gets taken out of context and people interpret this to mean that God was revealing that now we can eat unclean meats. Now we can eat pork and shellfish and everything that Moses's writings tell us is unclean. Well, obviously if you read it all in context that's not what he's talking about. He's saying these individuals, those who are from a Gentile background are not unclean. Again, this isn't a concept that came from scripture. This is a concept that came from Pharisaical tradition. But again, you can see from all this and the fact that Peter himself is kind of backsliding on this, again, why this would create such a controversy and why it would require the Acts 15 conference to address all of this and try to set things straight.

But let's also turn back over to Galatians 2. Because we'll see here that this whole concept, the heresy that was taking place here in Galatians of taking these Rabbinical traditions and trying to incorporate this into New Covenant Christianity. Well, it also had effects on the whole issue of justification before God. Because in a Pharisee's mind one

of the ways to be pure before God was you had to follow all of these oral tradition rituals that they followed. And what they were doing is these Pharisees were coming into the Church and saying, well, yes, Christ is the Messiah, but you also have to do all of these Rabbinical Pharisaical rituals as well to be right before God.

And see, this helps you understand the debate here in Galatians that Paul is straightening out. And it also helps clarify the term “works of the law”. Because if you understand, when a Pharisee talks about the “law of Moses”, they're lumping both together. Well, in their eyes “works of the law” that's not just obeying scripture. That's also involved with this Rabbinical oral law as well. Pick up here in verse 15.

Gal 2:15 *“We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16) knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” (NKJV)*

So, understand when a Pharisee talks about the “works of the law” they're lumping both of these together. And that was the heresy that Paul was addressing. Now, as I mentioned, I did a sermon series in the last month or two addressing the more difficult statements of Paul. I talked about the subject of justification. That regardless of how faithfully we obey God's law that doesn't cover our sins. We have to have the sacrifice of Christ to cover our sins and to enable eternal life. We can't earn salvation. That's true even when we're just talking about obeying written scripture. But if you want to understand the term “works of the law” and the controversy Paul is addressing there, you have to understand that to a Pharisee they're lumping all of this together.

But now just to address some bigger lessons regarding this whole issue of heresy. As I mentioned, this was heresy coming from within the Church. These were individuals who had come into the Church who professed belief in Christ. So, this was a problem coming from within the Church. Well, there are lessons that we can learn from this as well. Because heresy that comes from within the Church, we're much more susceptible to being misled by that than we are from heresy coming from outside.

This is something that we need to be aware of. Particularly if it's heresy like this where it's coming from the Rabbinical oral tradition, which today we call the Talmud and the Mishnah. If you take concepts associated with that and then try to define New Covenant Christianity with it, as Paul said here, that's a perversion of the gospel. Paul specifically warned us about dealing with false teachers. So, turn over to 2 Corinthians 11, we'll see here where Paul was warning specifically about dealing with false teachers. Again, specifically false teachings that come from within the Church of God.

2 Cor 11:1 *“Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. 2) For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3) But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness,*

so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4) For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!” (NKJV)

Again, just take note of the fact that in the beginning of Galatians Paul talked about a “different gospel”, but that it could also be referred to as a “perversion of the gospel”. In other words, false concepts just kind of mixed in with the truth that directs it in the wrong direction and perverts it. But continue on in verse 5.

“5) For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. 6) Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. 7) Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? 8) I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. 9) And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. 10) As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. 11) Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! 12) But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. 13) For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14) And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15) Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” (NKJV)

See, what he's pointing out here is false teachings that come from within the Church, those are really the biggest problem. Because we tend to be more on guard from things that come from the outside. But the things that come from within the Church, those are oftentimes the things that we can get more sucked into. I think it's important to look back at what he says here in verses 3 and 4. Because as I mentioned, issues that come from within the Church are oftentimes more seductive for us.

Now, again, we're all flawed human beings, and no one has perfect understanding. There's always going to be things you may disagree with the minister on -- this subject or that subject. But what he's talking about is significant heresy that really leads you off the course away from the truth. Because when it comes to error, oftentimes the thing that we struggle with is where do you draw the line. When is it time to take action and to get away from something and what's an error that you can just go, okay, I disagree with them on that subject, but we will just put that one on the shelf.

Well, as Paul's pointing out here, it can be particularly dangerous when we start seeing that something is seriously off track. We're significantly perverting the plan of God here in what's being taught. Well, the danger is that we can sit sometimes like the frog in the

water and just put up with it and put up with it and then we slowly ingest it over time, and it corrupts us. Notice here he warns about this in verse 3.

2 Cor 11:3 *"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4) For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!" (NKJV)*

In other words, his fear is you'll just keep sitting there and listening to it. You'll slowly ingest just a little more and a little more because you keep moving the bar before you'll take action, and say, no, this is heresy. This is wrong and I'm not going to subject myself to this anymore. And see, that's the danger. It's struggling with where do we draw the line? As I mentioned, we're all flawed human beings. Every teacher has their shortcomings and there's always going to be something. I kind of disagree with them on this point, or I disagree on that point. Those things are always going to happen.

But when you see someone start just totally perverting the plan of God and how it plays out, there's a point where you have to take Paul's advice here and go, okay, it's time to draw a line and to get away from this. Because see, Paul here refers to "ministers of Satan". Well, Christ warned us about "wolves in sheep's clothing". Christ also warned us about how we can be corrupted over time. So, turn over to Matthew 5. Because the analogy that Christ uses is salt that loses its flavor. It's Matthew 5:13.

Matt 5:13 *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." (NKJV)*

Christ is referring to us as New Covenant Christians. We're like the salt of the earth. But He says you can lose your flavor and kind of become worthless. Well, how does salt lose its flavor? Well, it does it through contamination. By being exposed to negative forces that over time just wind up corrupting it and it loses its flavor. Now to share with you some information on this, I did a search on Google looking for information on how salt loses its flavor. I'm just going to read to you a brief summary that Google AI provided to summarize the facts of how this works.

"Pure salt (NaCl) doesn't lose its flavor, but it can seem to if it becomes diluted, contaminated, or if its additives degrade, causing it to clump and mix with other tastes, or if moisture washes away the pure sodium chloride, leaving behind other minerals and dirt, making it less potent and "less salty". Humidity, strong odors, and impurities (like sand, gypsum, and anti-caking agents) are common culprits, making it taste "off" or weak, especially in ancient or poorly stored salt."

So, you can see pure sodium chloride doesn't lose its saltiness or its flavor in the same way that we're the salt of the earth. If we stay connected to God and following His Spirit, we won't become contaminated. But just like salt, we can be exposed to a negative

environment. To contaminants and slowly those can wear upon us. They can cause us to -- as the analogy that Christ uses -- we can lose our flavor over time by letting that slowly corrupt us.

See, that's why Paul warned us. His fear was you'll just sit there and keep listening to it. You'll keep exposing yourself to it rather than drawing the line and saying it's time to move on. I'm not going to be a part of this anymore. You see, Paul also gives us a similar warning here in Romans 16. Turn over to Romans 16:17.

Rom 16:17 *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18) For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."* (NKJV)

He's saying we can slowly be sucked in just like the story you've probably heard throughout all of your life. You can actually put a frog in water, and you just slowly turn up the heat. It gets warmer and warmer and warmer and they don't perceive the change until the frog just gets boiled in the water. Well see, that's what can happen to us if we sit in an environment of heresy.

I don't mean you just disagree on this subject or a little subject here or subject there. Everybody has different understandings on various subjects, and everyone has their own human flaws. I'm talking about major perversions of the plan of God and of the truth by taking in foreign concepts that are not Biblical and making them a part of God's word and trying to make them a part of how God's plan plays out. When you see that happening it's time to recognize that as heresy and draw a line in the sand.

So, we can see here brethren, when we look back at the book of Galatians, there's a lot of lessons we can learn from this book. One is, again, understanding the Pharisaical context of which Paul was addressing there. Because that clarifies a lot of Protestant misunderstandings of the book of Galatians and Acts 15. But we can also learn the lesson of how we should respond to heresy and taking it very seriously and realizing that if we're in an environment where God's word is being compromised and significantly perverted, we should take Paul's advice. We should not just put up with it. We should realize there comes a point where we should draw a line in the sand and we should note those who speak differently than the doctrines that the Bible reveals to us, and we should avoid them.