

The Churches of Christ Salute You

Lesson Three

(Romans 16:16)

March 2, 2008

LESSONS FROM THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA

Overview:

1. Paul wrote to the Romans about the “churches of Christ.”
2. A plurality of churches did not mean a number of different denominations.
3. Instead, each was a local body of believers that belonged to Christ.
4. Since we also are a church of Christ, there are many lessons to be learned from these early churches.

Introduction:

1. In Paul’s time, the area known as Galatia consisted of several districts that were south and southwest of the historical kingdom of Galatia (Galatia proper).
 - a. During this time, Galatia was a Roman province.
 - b. It included the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.
2. Paul visited this region and established churches during his first “missionary journey” with Barnabas (Acts 13:2 – 14:7).
3. Paul returned to Galatia on his second “missionary journey” (Acts 15:36; 16:1-6).
4. He also went to Galatia on his third “missionary journey” (Acts 18:23).
5. Thus, when Paul writes to the churches of Galatia he is writing to several congregations in different cities in the region of Galatia.

I. A Review of the Church at Jerusalem

- A. Because of its location and the circumstances of its establishment, the church at Jerusalem primarily consisted of Jews (Acts 2:5; 6:7).
- B. However, some Jews who became Christians found it very difficult to let go of the Law of Moses and Judaism (cf. Acts 21:20-21).
- C. Some also had even greater difficulty in accepting Gentiles as brothers in Christ.
- D. As a result of these attitudes, within the church at Jerusalem a faction or party arose known as the Judaizers.
 1. They taught that keeping the Law of Moses was a part of the Gospel of Christ – especially the act of circumcision (Acts 15:1).
 2. They also taught that this principle must be bound upon all Gentiles who wanted to become Christians (Acts 15:5).
- E. This group was very vocal and adamant in their false teaching.
- F. As a result, the great unity that had existed in Jerusalem and among other churches began to be threatened.

II. A Review of the Church at Antioch

- A. The church at Antioch is the first in the record of Scripture to have a great number of Gentile converts (Acts 11:20-21).
- B. Consequently, the “circumcision party” from Jerusalem soon paid a visit to Antioch to attempt to force their false doctrine upon them (Acts 15:1).
- C. Here, their error was met head on by the stalwart Apostle Paul (Acts 15:2).
- D. Nevertheless, the peace and unity that had existed in the church at Antioch now was threatened by division over doctrine.

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- III. The Conflict between Jerusalem and Antioch
 - A. Acts 15 records the meeting in Jerusalem of the Apostles and church leaders to deal with the false doctrine of the Judaizers.
 - B. Peter defended the Truth by reminding them of his preaching to Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (15:7-11).
 - C. Paul and Barnabas defended the Truth by informing them of God's work among the Gentiles where they had preached (15:12).
 - D. Finally, James defended the Truth by referring to the Old Testament prophecies that salvation would be for all – Jew and Gentile (15:13-18).
 - E. At the conclusion of this meeting, it was decided to send letters to the other congregations informing them of the error of the Judaizers (15:19-29).

- IV. The Threat to the Churches of Galatia
 - A. The threat of false doctrine...
 - 1. False doctrine is not content to stay in one place.
 - 2. As it came to Galatia, it threatened them with condemnation (1:6-9).
 - B. The threat of compromise...
 - 1. The Judaizers seemed to be emphasizing only circumcision.
 - 2. However, compromise in one area soon leads to compromise in all (cf. Colossians 2:8-23).
 - 3. Compromise causes condemnation (Galatians 3:1; 2:21; 5:1-4).
 - C. The threat of division...
 - 1. Religious error is the cause of division (2:11-14).
 - 2. Those who stand firmly upon Truth will be divided from those who forsake it.
 - 3. Had the Judaizers had their way, a new denomination would have been formed – the Jewish Church of Christ.
 - a. It would not have been truly Jewish.
 - b. Nor would it have been the church of Christ.
 - c. This is the problem with denominationalism!
 - D. The threat of destruction...
 - 1. The Galatians were well on their way to abandoning God's Truth for error.
 - 2. The end of such action is separation from God and destruction of one's soul (6:7-8; 3:10-14).

Conclusion:

- 1. May we learn to imitate the good qualities of these Christians.
- 2. May we strive to be a faithful and dedicated congregation of the Lord.
- 3. May we ever be vigilant against error and never compromise the Word of God.