

Galatian Churches Denounced for Distorting the Gospel

Galatians 1:1-10

Galatians 1:1-10: “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),² and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia:

³ Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,⁴ who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,⁵ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.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.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.”

Background Notes

Galatians 1:1-5 is the “salutation” of the letter. A salutation was usually part of 1st century letters, and it generally included the name of the writer and the recipients. The apostle Paul wrote this letter (v1), and the recipients were the believers in the churches located in the region of Galatia (v2). The 1st century region of Galatia is part of the modern-day country of Turkey. Verse 3 is the writer’s “greeting” to the recipients.

In verse 1 the apostle Paul emphasized that **his apostleship came to him through the Lord Himself** - not through some human agency! This was a very important concept for the Galatians to understand, because false teachers, known as “Judaizers,” were trying to undermine Paul’s authority as an apostle.

Who were the “Judaizers”? In the letter to the Galatians, they were certain Jews who were influencing the believers in the churches of Galatia by teaching that salvation was not through faith in Christ alone. They taught that salvation must also include keeping the Old Testament Law of Moses. **No way!** - said the apostle Paul! Salvation is by God’s grace alone. The work of Christ on the cross saves us! We are not saved through our own good life, or by keeping the regulations of the Old Testament Law, or by any other kind of good works that we could do.

Notice the summary of the gospel in verse 4: “*Who gave Himself for our sins.*” That’s substitutionary atonement. That’s the gospel! We are not saved by following the good example or the good role model of Jesus Christ. No, we are saved when we believe that Jesus Christ died as our substitute on the cross. He died for our sins. As a result, our sins are eternally forgiven. That’s the good news.

Another benefit of our salvation is that Jesus Christ died to *“deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father”* (v4). When we receive Christ as our Savior, we escape the penalty of our sins - and we also receive power to live godly lives in this evil world that surrounds us.

A “section of thanksgiving” is notably missing from the letter to the Galatians. In 1st century letters, after the “salutation” and the “greeting,” and before the body of the letter, there would normally be a section of thanksgiving. When the section of thanksgiving was omitted, the writer was clearly intent on getting right to his point of the letter. It meant that the body of the letter was of critical importance.

That’s the case in the apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Most of the apostle Paul’s letters have a section of thanksgiving - but the letter to the Galatians does not. Why not? The reason is that a critical error was developing in the churches of Galatia. They were watering down the pure gospel by mixing in works - the requirements of the law.

Doctrinal Points

1. Only a gospel that is Christ-centered will save you.

Verses 6-8: *“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 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.”*

Paul was astounded that the Galatian churches had, in such a relatively short time, turned to *“a different gospel.”* The gospel that the Judaizers were teaching was a perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ (v7)!

It’s clear that Paul was very concerned. His language almost sounded like they were turning to paganism or a heathen religion! But they were not turning to paganism or an idolatrous religion. They were mixing the requirements of the Law that God gave through Moses with the pure gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Does that sound like heresy? **Yes!** It’s **heresy** - then and today!

Believing this false doctrine meant that they were turning away from the gospel (v6)! In fact, mixing the requirements of the Law - or adding any kind of human works - to the perfect work of Christ for salvation is worse than heresy. It’s the same as telling God you don’t believe that the value of Jesus Christ’s death on the cross was good enough for salvation - that some human merit needs to be added to the work of Christ! Could **any** human works possibly add to the perfection of the work of Christ on the cross? **No!**

Now don’t get me wrong! And don’t get the Scripture wrong! Good works have their place in the Christian life - but they have **no** place in salvation. Salvation is by God’s grace **alone!** You can’t add the requirements of the Law or any good human works to God’s grace, because it is then no longer grace. It’s impossible to have a mixture. God’s grace is God’s **unmerited** favor. If you add any works to God’s grace, then it’s **no longer grace!** A gospel that is not 100% Christ-centered will not save you.

Suppose an angel clothed in dazzling light were to appear beside me and say something like this: “Dave Reid means well, and what he teaches about Jesus Christ dying on the cross for the sins of the world is certainly important. But you have to do your part, too. You can’t expect to attain salvation without doing your part – and that’s your good works. God does His part, and then you do your part.”

Does that sound good? Would you believe the angel in dazzling light - or would you believe Dave Reid? I hope you would believe me - and tell that “angel” to go straight back where he came from! *“...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.”* As 2 Corinthians 11:14 says, *“For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”* We must be aware and alert to avoid Satan’s perversions of the pure gospel!

A gospel that says that we have to add something to what Christ has already done is a *“different gospel.”* It’s a distorted gospel. “Gospels” that teach you must clean up your act, or do good works, or give money to the church, or be baptized for salvation - those are *“different gospels.”* They will not save you. Only a gospel that is fully Christ-centered will save you. Salvation is by trusting in **Christ alone!**

2. Only a gospel that is Bible-based will save you.

Verses 8-9: *“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. 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.”*

This is strong language, isn’t it? To be accursed means to be eternally condemned! This curse is pronounced upon anyone who adds to, or takes away from, or changes in any way the gospel that was taught by the apostles.

Where do we find “the gospel that the apostles preached”? We find it right here in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 the apostle Paul wrote, *“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”*

That is the simple gospel that we must believe in order to be saved.

Notice that **no** requirements of the Law and **no** good works were added to the gospel as outlined in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4! And Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

Do you believe the gospel that was handed down from the apostles? Do you believe the gospel that is found in the Bible? Or do you believe a so-called “gospel” that has been changed or revised or distorted by a church or by a cult? There are all kinds of “gospels” out there that may sound good. They may appeal to our human natures. But in the end it is **only what is true that really counts!**

Only the gospel that is found in the Bible is the truth. Any other “gospel” is false. Only a gospel that is Bible-based will save you!

Practical Application

Don't preach to please people!

Verse 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.”*

How do you think this “Talk from Galatians” would go over in many churches? Not too well! People simply don't want to hear that we can't work our way to Heaven. That doesn't allow for human pride. People like to think that *their* good works will surely be good enough for God to accept them into Heaven!

And people don't like to hear that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven. They would much rather believe that there are many different ways to Heaven. They like the idea that “all roads lead up the same mountain.” Do “all roads” lead to God? **No!** That is **not** what the Bible teaches!

And by the way, don't be deceived by the totally false statements that the God of the Bible and “Allah” of the Muslim faith are one and the same. **The “Allah” of Islam is not the one true God of the Bible!** The Quran clearly demonstrates that.

People like to believe that “any person will make it as long as they are sincere” in what they believe. I'm so sorry – no way! The apostle Paul did not preach that false “gospel” - and we should not preach that way either. Many people would be pleased if we did but it would certainly not be the truth. And if we preached that way, we would not be true servants of Christ (v10).

Do you want to be a servant of Christ? **Preach to please God!** Don't preach to please people!