

# Galatians

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Something was wrong in the Churches of Galatia. Certain teachers had come to them from Jerusalem declaring that in order to become genuinely saved and grow the Gentile believers would have to become circumcised and keep the law of Moses. These teachers were called Judaizers because they insisted that the gospel being preached to the Gentiles was incomplete without the addition of the restrictions, rules, rites, and rituals of the Jewish religion.

Something is wrong in Churches today! Certain teachers declare to you that in order to become genuinely saved and grow you have to keep certain restrictions, rules, rites, and rituals:

There are groups that insist you worship on the Sabbath. Some of them go so far as to say you cannot be saved unless you observe Sabbath worship and certain Sabbath restrictions.

There are groups that maintain and enforce strict dress codes upon their members. They, too, go so far as to say that unless you observe their dress codes you are not and cannot be saved.

The point isn't to make a list of all the restrictions, rules, rites, and rituals that folks add to the gospel; the point is whether or not the gospel needs anything added to it! The short answer is an emphatic "No!" The long answer is the Book of Galatians.

The Judaizers were adding their particular list of restrictions, rules, rites, and rituals to the gospel Paul had taught the believers in the region of Galatia. Paul called their teaching "a different gospel" in verse six of chapter one. What was different about it? In verse eleven of chapter one he said it was a gospel "according to man." It was a gospel of works according to man. In contrast, he spoke of the "gospel of Christ" in verse seven. It was the gospel of grace (v6) according to "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (v1 1 ).

Those are your choices! You can either follow a gospel of works according to man's teaching, or you can follow the gospel of grace according to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The choice should be an easy one... And yet you often find within you a terrible tendency toward a gospel of works that teaches you to follow certain restrictions, rules, rites, and rituals. In chapter one you learn, #1 You're Headed For Trouble If You Follow A Gospel Of Works According To The Teachings Of Man, but #2 You're Headed For Triumph If You Follow The Gospel Of Grace According To The Revelation Of Jesus Christ

#1 You're Headed For Trouble If You Follow A Gospel Of Works According To The Teachings Of Man  
(v1-9)

Paul was a man, but his teaching was not according to man. It was given to him by direct and divine revelation. Chapter one establishes that the gospel of grace he taught was indeed according to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

He begins by defending his right to teach the gospel. The Judaizers attacked Paul's authority; they told the believers in Galatia that Paul wasn't a true apostle, and that he watered down the message of salvation because he was a man-pleaser and didn't want to be rejected by Gentile believers who would object to the restrictions, rules, rites, and rituals of Judaism. As you read through these verses you have Paul's defense of his authority.

Galatians 1:1 Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Chdst and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),

An "apostle" is one sent with a commission. Paul was not one of the original apostles chosen by Jesus. Where, then, did he get his authority? It wasn't "from men or through man"; that is, he wasn't appointed by men nor did he appoint himself. The source of his apostleship, and of his authority, was Jesus Himself. He had seen the resurrected Lord and Jesus had personally chosen him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. In Acts 9:3-5 you read,

Acts 9:3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

Acts 9:4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Acts 9:5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

Jesus went on to tell Paul he was "a chosen instrument... to bear My name before the Gentiles..."

No church or Christian organization has ever truly ordained anyone for the ministry. God ordains you; the best we can do is to recognize what God has already done...

Galatians 1:1 Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),

Galatians 1:2 and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

Galatians 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

This is not a letter written to a single church. It is addressed to a number of churches in the region of Galatia. These churches were established by Paul when he was on his very first missionary journey traveling with Barnabas into the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra. It was in Lystra that Paul was stoned and dragged outside the city and left for dead having first been welcomed and treated as a god!

Think of the effect that grace had on Paul. These people had stoned him; he had gotten up and gone back into the city to preach Christ to them. Now he was writing to these same people, even though they were turning away from him...

Two great truths of the gospel of grace are announced in verses four and five:

Galatians 1:4 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,

Galatians 1:5 to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The two great truths are these: First, Jesus gave Himself for your sins; second, He gave Himself to deliver you from this present evil age. We would say that you are justified by grace, and that you are sanctified by grace. In other words, you enter the Christian life by

grace, and you go on to experience the Christian life by grace. It is all by grace; there is nothing to add either before or after you are saved. The Judaizers wanted to add works; but when you add works to the gospel, you subtract from grace!

Galatians 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,

Galatians 1:7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Paul was not surprised by what the Judaizers were doing; he was astounded and bewildered at what the believers were doing. They had all too quickly come under the influence of false teaching. In so doing, they who had entered the Christian life by grace were seeking now to experience the Christian life by keeping the Jewish law.

You are prey for the false teachers. They creep in unawares to the Church and try to draw off converts to themselves. Beloved, don't be easily troubled by teaching you hear that contradicts what you have believed...

Any gospel that includes works is not the gospel at all; it is a perversion of the gospel. Instead of following their teaching, Paul says,

Galatians 1:8 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.

Galatians 1:9 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.

Paul had previously warned them about false teachers; he had said it before and now he was saying it again. Teaching must be measured by the standard of God's revealed Word, the Bible. Anything that deviates is to be rejected. Anyone teaching a false gospel of works is to be rejected. They are devoted to destruction and are to be avoided by believers.

Galatians 1:10 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.

The Judaizers told the believers that Paul watered down the gospel. They said he was a man-pleaser who said what people wanted to hear. Obviously Paul's pronouncing a curse on false

teachers doesn't fit with that criticism! It shows that he always spoke the truth to honor God.

Jesus can "deliver you from this present evil world." You can triumph over this present evil world. But you're headed for trouble if you follow a gospel of works according to the teachings of man. When you turn away from grace, you turn away from the power of God to that of human effort. Self-effort only always leads to failure.

#2 You're Headed For Triumph  
If You Follow The Gospel Of Grace  
According To The Revelation Of Jesus Christ  
(v11-24)

If anyone could have entered or experienced a life with God by works and self-effort, it would have been Paul. In this section of chapter one he reviews his life to show that it wasn't until he was saved by grace that he was able to know God and walk in triumph.

Galatians 1:11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.

Galatians 1:12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The gospel of grace is not a human invention. If it were, it would - like all the religions of the world - include good works and self-righteousness as a means of entering and experiencing the Christian life. It doesn't! The Bible says that God justifies the ungodly; it says that all of your righteousness is as filthy rags; it says there is not one righteous person on the face of the earth; it says that all have fallen short of the glory of God.

God saves you who are in this hopeless condition solely on the basis of what Jesus has done for you and on your behalf. Salvation is the gift of God to you. You do not deserve it or merit it in any way. It is by grace through faith.

No man could have or would have ever invented such a method of salvation! It is a divine revelation from God to man that you enter the Christian life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone; it is a

divine revelation that you experience the Christian life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Galatians 1:13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.

Galatians 1:14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Paul had been far more zealous for the Jewish religion than any of the Judaizers. He more than any other Jew of his time had lived under law, despising grace as a principle for either entering or experiencing life with God. Spiritual life for Paul was a set of restrictions, rules, rites, and rituals that he believed would give him a right standing before God.

Galatians 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,

Galatians 1:16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...

The resurrected Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. He did an about face! Everything he had lived for and strove for he now considered a pile of rubbish in comparison to God's marvelous grace. By the Spirit, Jesus lived "in" Paul. What he could never accomplish through works and self-effort God could now accomplish in him as he simply yielded to the presence and power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

The Spirit-led life is the way of triumph, the way Jesus delivers you from the pressures and pulls of this present evil world...

Paul could look back and see the hand of God upon his life from the moment he was conceived. It had all been a wonderful preparation for his future ministry. He was a Jew, and had been trained in the strict Jewish tradition. But he had also been raised in the Greek culture and could understand the language and literature of the Gentiles. He enjoyed Roman citizenship, which would be a great help to him during his missionary journeys; eventually his Roman citizenship would allow him free passage to Rome where he would preach the gospel.

After you are saved you, too, can look back and see the hand of God upon your life from the moment you are conceived. God has a

wonderful plan for your life; He has long ago prepared good works for you to discover and do as you walk in the Spirit. Your whole life is a preparation for them; God can even use, and He does use, your experiences prior to conversion.

Galatians 1:16 ...I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,  
Galatians 1:17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.  
Galatians 1:18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.  
Galatians 1:19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.  
Galatians 1:20 (Now concerning the things which I wrote to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

After his conversion, Paul didn't go to Jerusalem and become indoctrinated by the other apostles. No one could accuse him of teaching a gospel according to any man's teaching. Instead, he spent three years in the desert. It was there, in the desert, alone with Jesus, that Paul was prepared for his ministry as a preacher of the gospel of grace to the Gentiles. When he did visit Jerusalem, he saw only Peter and James, and then only for about two weeks. By then he already had formulated his message.

We put a great emphasis on education and on degrees of education. That might be important in the secular realm... But in the spiritual realm, God confers His own degrees upon His servants. Often it's a DD degree - a *Doctorate of the Desert!*

Galatians 1:21 Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.  
Galatians 1:22 And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ.  
Galatians 1:23 But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy."  
Galatians 1:24 And they glorified God in me.

Paul left Jerusalem and the region of Judea and ministered in Gentile territories. He was not at all influenced by the Jewish believers. But even they didn't reject his teaching the gospel of grace. Far from rejecting Paul, they believed the testimony about him and they could only glorify God that His grace had so radically transformed him. The Judaizers were a very small minority and not at all representative of even the Jewish believers.

If anyone could have added and integrated works and law with grace, it would have been Paul. If works and law were God's way of justifying you and sanctifying you, Paul would have been the perfect one to teach it. Instead Paul rejected works and law as a means of either entering or experiencing the Christian life.

You should, too! Saved by grace, don't go on to put yourself under restrictions, rules, rites, and regulations as a means of experiencing the Christian life. Rather than blessing, you will experience bondage.

Paul puts it this way, in Galatians 3:3,

Galatians 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

You "began in the Spirit"; you entered the Christian life by grace through faith. You must go on to experience growth and progress in your Christian life by the same principle - by grace through faith. Your self-effort to keep restrictions, rules, rites and regulations cannot accomplish spiritual growth. Your self-effort to keep restrictions, rules, rites, and regulations is not called Judaism today; it is called legalism. It is just as deadly, though, as first century Judaism because it promotes self-effort that leads either to self-condemnation or self-righteousness.

## Conclusion

The Book of Galatians calls you to liberty in your walk with Jesus. There are two great enemies to liberty: one is legalism; the other is license doing whatever you want. Concerning legalism, Paul's exhortation is,

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Concerning license, Paul's exhortation is,

Galatians 5:13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.



Legalism is not liberty! No matter how spiritual they are, no matter how biblically based they are, restrictions, rules, rights, and regulations are external works of righteousness and can have only a detrimental effect on your growth.

License is not liberty. Today too many believers live according to the dictates and the desires of their sin nature and blame it on liberty when in fact they are given over to the works of the flesh.

It's can be tough some times to discern whether you are standing in liberty or walking in legalism or license. I struggle with it; I assume you do, too. Here is the problem: Let's say I feel prompted to restrict myself from watching certain movies. Is that legalism? If I go to those movies, how do I know I am not excusing my license by hiding behind liberty? What's the answer?

In Hebrews 4:12 you read,

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

You aren't always sure of the true "thoughts and intents" of your heart; you aren't always sure if your motives are from your "spirit" or from your "soul" - from your new nature or from your old. That's why you aren't always sure whether you are standing in liberty or walking in legalism or license.

God is sure! His Word can cut between the soul and the spirit and help you to discern your true motivations. As you expose yourself to God's Word, He uses it skillfully to perform spiritual heart surgery.

As you read God's Word - and especially as we study Galatians - let God's Word be your discernment. God wants to and will show you areas of legalism in your life; God wants to and will show you areas of license in your life.

The result can be liberty as you experience grace as your principle for loving God and serving God's people. You can both "stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made [you] free, and not

be entangled again with a yoke of [legalism]" and "not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh."