

Galatians—Grace Above the Law
Our Freedom in Christ

Lesson 1—Galatians 1.1-10

If It Seems Too Good To Be True...

I asked my wife to go ahead and place some of the songs from her music library on my new iPod to listen to when I was out running our dogs. I had forgotten just how eclectic and diverse her taste in tunes was until I got two Elvis Presley songs back-to-back. I actually enjoyed his version of the classic “Amazing Grace” but stopped dead in my track when it was followed by “I Did It My Way.” The basic premise of these songs could not be more diametrically opposed. “Amazing Grace” acknowledges the sufficiency of the gift of salvation given to undeserving man while “I Did It My Way” exalts the accomplishments and self-sufficiency of man independent of God.

As I thought about the pairing of these two songs and the principles behind them, I realized these would have made the playlist for a worship service in the churches of Galatia, to whom Paul was writing. The principles or message when you put these two songs together is God’s grace plus the required works of man yield salvation. This frames the basic heresy the letter to the churches in Galatia is written to combat. Paul and Barnabas had established the churches of Antioch (Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (see Acts 13 and 14) on the first missionary journey in the southern portion of the province of Galatia around AD 46. It is believed that Paul later visited the northern region of Galatia during his second missionary journey.

Sometimes shortly after the churches were established in Galatia, a group known as the Judaizers brought an additional revelation to the newly converted Gentiles that composed the churches of Galatia. The Judaizers taught that in addition to accepting Jesus as Lord, converts, especially Gentiles, would have to follow the

Laws of Moses such as circumcision, celebrating Passover, and keeping the Sabbath to be fully saved. The Judaizers (Greek *loudaikos* found only in Galatians 2:14) were mostly Pharisees that had come to accept Jesus as their Messiah but still saw the need for strict adherence to the Torah (the Law) and the Talmud (the teachings). The Judaizers forced the Gentiles to become Jewish converts (proselytes) plus accept Christ to be saved. About five years later this issue would be resolved at the Council of Jerusalem with James, Peter, and the elders declaring that the Laws of the Old Testament were no longer binding on New Testament believers (see Acts 15).

Paul recognized the danger in the teaching of the Judaizers and wrote this letter to the Galatians around AD 49. Within the church, there are certain non-essentials that believers can agree to disagree upon the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice is not one of them. To believe that man can add anything to the atoning work of Jesus upon the cross is arrogant, prideful, and nothing short of heresy. Paul would later write to the Ephesians, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV). The writer of Hebrews clearly brings into focus the severity of the offense of adding to God's grace. He writes, *"How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?"* (Hebrews 10:29 ESV).

Saving grace is nothing short of amazing and is almost incomprehensible. Because of this, a saying that has become an American proverb, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is," seems to be hard-wired into our psyche and makes this heresy more plausible to many. This accounts for the popularity of various cults which deny the sufficiency of Christ. The Judaizers have not only attacked the essential message of the gospel but went on to discredit the messenger, Paul, as well. The best way to refute these false teachings is head-on and that is exactly what Paul will do in this letter.

Prayer

Start by praying over the passage and asking the Holy Spirit to give you fresh insights and wisdom in understanding it. Then read through the entire passage two or three times.

Background Information:

This epistle is unique in that doesn't contain a single commendation or thanks for the recipients and no individuals are mentioned by name. Who were these people? During the fourth century BC, Gauls (Celtic tribes from Europe) had invaded this region and settled in what later became known as the Province of Galatia in the Roman Empire in 60 BC. The inhabitants of Galatia were of a very different ethnic and cultural background than the Judaizers who were largely Jewish Pharisees.

Paul and Barnabas had visited the southern part of the province on the first missionary journey. The churches in Pisidia Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were established at this time (see Acts 13-14). It was in Lystra that Paul was stoned and left for dead. Some scholars feel that Paul may have revisited the region on his second missionary journey, visiting these four churches and establishing churches in the northern part of the province.

Scripture Meditation/Memorization

One of the most fundamental and rewarding Christian disciplines that pays back in full spiritual dividends is Bible meditation/memorization. It is an absolutely fundamental in the formation of your spiritual development, spiritual walk and faith growth. In Psalm 1:1-2 (NLT), the Psalmist warrior, King David said,

*“Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.
But they delight in the law of the Lord,
meditating on it day and night.”*

Use the suggested verse(s) to meditate on during the course of this week's study.

Memory Verse

*“[3] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
[4] who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age,
according to the will of our God and Father.”—Galatians 1:3-4 (ESV)*

Galatians 1:1-5—Greetings to the Galatians

Paul's letter followed a format found in most correspondence of this period. However, even in this brief introductory greeting, a careful reading will give you a hint of the problem within the churches of Galatia. When a message itself can't be refuted, detractors often resort to attacking the messenger (ad hominem arguments). It appears as though the Judaizers had attacked Paul's authority as an apostle. Since Paul is the author of much of the New Testament, his apostolic authority should be of great concern to us as well.

1. When Matthias was being chosen to replace Judas just prior to Pentecost, Peter gave specific qualifications for apostleship. According to Acts 1:21-22, what were those qualifications, and could Paul have met them?

2. On what basis, according to Galatians 1:1, is Paul qualified as an apostle? From previous studies, can you think of any other evidence of Paul's apostleship?

3. Compare the greeting to the Galatians in verses 1 and 2 with the greetings in the other epistles we will study this year (Ephesians 1:1-2, Philippians 1:1-2, and Colossians 1:1-2). What stands out to you as different in this epistle?

4. Grace (Greek *charis*) and peace (Hebrew *shalom*) are greetings found in all of Paul's epistles. It has been said the order is significant because without grace you cannot find peace. Verses 4 and 5 are almost the gospel (literally *Good News*) in condensed form. How would you explain verses 3-5 to an unsaved friend or relative?

5. *Why is the fact that the Father initiated salvation important for understanding that the gospel is free?¹

Galatians 1:6-10—No Other Gospel

Paul is not amazed that the gospel message was attacked. Paul had predicted to the Ephesian elders that savage wolves would try to decimate the flock after he had left (Acts 20:29). Paul was astonished how quickly (Greek word from which we get *tachometer*) the Galatians fell for this perversion of the truth. This problem is relevant to us, as unfortunately we see some who make a profession of faith in church or at crusades quickly fall away following their profession.

1. It is important to note that the Galatians were not accused of deserting the church. What or whom were they leaving?

2. The Good News of Jesus is at the heart of the gospel. All cults, and even some other religions such as Islam, acknowledge Jesus but they add or take away from the essential message. It is essential that we are able to define the gospel of Jesus to have a standard against which to measure any perversions. In your own words, define what is meant by the gospel. (If you need help read 1st Corinthians 15:1-11.)

¹ Question taken from Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary—Galatians, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tenn., 2014

3. Satan has always been a great deceiver, starting in the Garden of Eden.
- a) According to 2 Corinthians 11:14, why do we need to be vigilant when charismatic preacher with fresh word from God speaks to us?

- b) According to Hebrew 2:1, how can we protect ourselves against such attacks?

4. According to Galatians 1:8-9, against what are we to measure any teaching or preaching?

5. What is the final destination for those who would lead God's people astray (verse 9)?

6. Paul never failed to preach the whole gospel despite the heavy toll it took on him. What was the point of contention between Paul and the Jewish authorities (read over Acts 22:19-22)?

7. *In what ways do we add to the Gospel? What are some “Jesus + something else” messages taught today?²

8. *Have you ever deserted the gospel of grace Paul is referring to in this letter? If so, what did that look like?³

a) What was it that tempted you away from the gospel of grace?

b) What did you do to rediscover grace?

9. *Does free grace lead to carelessness about sin? Explain.⁴

10.*Paul insists here that “there is only one gospel and that this gospel does not change.” How then can we recognize the true gospel?⁵

² Question taken from Galatians, Christ-Centered Exposition commentary, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tenn., 2014

³ Question taken from The Wiersbe Bible Study Series: Galatians, published by David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2010

⁴ Question taken from Galatians, Christ-Centered Exposition commentary, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tenn., 2014

⁵ Question taken from The Message of Galatians, The Bible Speaks Today commentary, Inter-Varsity Press-USA, 1986

Let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8)

Tool Box

Step 1: The Bible. Read the passage in a couple of different versions. If you are having trouble understanding a passage, choose a more dynamic version such as *New Living Translation*. To focus in on the exact meaning of a verse, choose a more literal translation such as *English Standard Version*, *New American Standard Bible* or *New King James Version*.

Step 2: Study Tools. Use these to help you dig deeper. Background Information: 1) Unger's Bible Dictionary, 2) Bible Dictionaries online at biblestudytools.com and blueletterbible.com. (recommend both David Guzik and Chuck Smith's commentaries/study notes); Word Studies: 1) Zodhiates' *The Complete Word Study New Testament*, 2) Vine's *Complete Expository Dictionary*, and 3) Strong's *Dictionary of Bible Words*.

Step 3: Commentaries. Commentaries should not be used in place of studying God's Word directly, but they can give you additional insights. Some good commentaries include: Warren Wiersbe, J. Vernon McGee, F.F. Bruce, *the Expositors Bible Commentary*, *NIV Application Commentary*, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (edited by Walvoord & Zuck), *the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, and William Barclay (*great for background and culture, but be careful of his spiritual applications).

Step 4: Online Assistance. Should you have a specific question about the study please e-mail your inquiry to: mannyqwcm@gmail.com

A Timeline of Paul's Missionary Work and Writings

This timeline shows the major events of Paul's life and the approximate date of his Epistles.

<i>Paul's Letters</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Events</i>
	35	35 Martyrdom of Stephen—Acts 7:57 35 Saul's Conversion—Acts 9:1
		35-38 Arabian Sojourn—Gal. 1:17 fits into Acts 9:23 (many days)
		38 Visit to Jerusalem—Acts 9:26
	40	38-43 Ministry in Syria and Cilicia—Acts 9:30 and Gal. 1:21
		43 Arrival in Antioch—Acts 11:25 43/44 Famine Visit—Acts 11:27
	45	
GALATIANS From Antioch 48/49		46-48 Paul's First Missionary Journey—Acts 13 and 14 49/50 Jerusalem conference—Acts 15 and Gal. 2:1
	50	50-52 Paul's Second Missionary Journey—Acts 15 through Acts 18 51/52 Before Gallio—Acts 18:12 52 Return to Antioch—Acts 18:22
1st CORINTHIANS From Ephesus 55	55	53-57 Paul's Third Missionary Journey—Acts 18 through Acts 21 53-55 In Ephesus—Acts 19
2nd CORINTHIANS From Macedonia 55/56		
		57 Arrested in Jerusalem—Acts 21
ROMANS From Cenchera or Corinth 57		57-59 Imprisoned in Caesarea—Acts 28
EPHESIANS, COLOSSIANS, & PHILEMON From Rome 60	60	59 Shipwrecked—Acts 23 59-61/62 First Roman Imprisonment—Acts 28
PHILIPPIANS From Rome 61		
		62-67 Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey—Titus 1:5
1st TIMOTHY & TITUS From Philippi 63-65	65	
		67/68 Second Roman Imprisonment—2 nd Tim. 4:6-8 68 Trial and Execution
2nd TIMOTHY From Mamertine Dungeon (2 nd Tim. 4:6) 68		

