



# GALATIANS

Experiencing True Freedom in Christ



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*EXPLORE THE BIBLE: Galatians—  
Experiencing True Freedom in Christ*

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# ABOUT THIS STUDY

The Christian life is a life of faith that leads to freedom. The Book of Galatians says we're justified before God by faith. Once and for all, rules and rituals have been replaced by grace and faith. The Book of Galatians makes it plain that the way to live for the Lord isn't by keeping God's law but by trusting a loving God. In a real sense, the Book of Galatians is the Emancipation Proclamation for every child of God.

The *Explore the Bible* series will help you know and apply the encouraging and empowering truth of God's Word. Each session is organized in the following way.

**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT:** This page explains the original circumstances and setting of each passage and identifies the primary themes.

**EXPLORE THE TEXT:** This page introduces the Bible passage, providing helpful commentary and encouraging thoughtful interaction with God through His Word.

**APPLY THE TEXT:** This page helps you and your group members apply the truths you've explored. It's not enough to know what the Bible says. God's Word has the power to change your life.

**DAILY EXPLORATION:** Go deeper into God's Word, building on the group experience. Engage in these daily Bible studies, reflect on the questions, record your thoughts, and take action.

**OBEY THE TEXT:** These pages provide opportunities to obey the Scripture you've studied by responding to questions, memorizing verses, journaling, and praying.

**LEADER GUIDE:** This final section provides discussion starters and suggested questions to help someone lead a group in reviewing the daily exploration.



## GENERAL EDITOR

**James Merritt** serves as the senior pastor of Cross Pointe Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Merritt earned degrees from Stetson University and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He's the author of *God, I've Got a Question*; *Fifty-Two Weeks with Jesus*; *Fifty-Two Weeks through the Psalms*; *Fifty-Two Weeks through the Bible*; and *What God Wants Every Dad to Know*. Each week his messages are broadcast through the Touching Lives television and media ministry.

# ABOUT THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

Galatians, which may be the earliest of Paul's letters, is also his most impassioned. Paul wrote Galatians to emphasize salvation by grace and not by works. After Paul had founded churches in the Galatian region, some men had come preaching circumcision and obedience to the ceremonial law as necessary for salvation. Paul wrote his letter to emphasize faith in Christ alone as necessary for salvation. He didn't write to disparage the Jewish customs but to prove them unnecessary for salvation. He wrote to boast in the cross of Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Paul stated that he wrote the letter to clarify and defend "the truth of the gospel" (2:5) in the face of a false gospel. Paul did this by—

1. defending his message and authority as an apostle;
2. considering the Old Testament basis of the gospel message;
3. demonstrating how the gospel message he preached worked practically in daily Christian living.

Paul chose this approach to correct those in the Galatian churches in regard to both their faith in and practice of the gospel.

Much about the life and movements of the apostle Paul is known only from—or is filled in significantly by—Galatians 1:13–2:14 (and the personal glimpse in 4:13-14). Included are a mention of Paul's sojourn to Arabia (see 1:17) and descriptions of two trips to Jerusalem (see 1:18-19; 2:1-10). Paul described a confrontation with Peter (see 2:11-14) that's mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament.

In the middle third of Galatians, certain aspects of the gospel's Old Testament background are explained in unique ways. Notable are (1) the curse related to Jesus' crucifixion (see Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13), (2) Jesus' fulfilling the prophecy of the singular physical seed of Abraham (see Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16), (3) the roles of the law as prison (see Gal. 3:22-23) and guardian (see 3:24-25) until Christ, and (4) the extended allegory of the slave and free sons of Abraham (see 4:21-31).

Galatians tells us much about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Christian life. After God sends His Spirit into the hearts of believers, adopting them as his children (see Gal. 4:5-6), they're commanded to "walk by the Spirit" (5:16), be "led by the Spirit" (5:18), and "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25), as well as sow to the Spirit and reap the related eternal harvest (see 6:8). The moment-by-moment outcome of that kind of sensitivity to the ministry of the Holy Spirit is captured by Paul's teaching on the fruit of the Spirit (see 5:22-23).



For helps on how to use *Explore the Bible*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading, visit [ministrygrid.com/web/explorethebible](http://ministrygrid.com/web/explorethebible).

Session 1

# True Gospel

*Believers must faithfully hold to the only true gospel message—  
Jesus crucified and resurrected.*

Galatians 1:1-10



## **How could a false spiritual message be confused for the true gospel?**

Have you ever tried to open a door with the wrong key? Perhaps the key wouldn't fit in the lock. Or perhaps the key fit but didn't turn the lock. Only one key will actually unlock the door. Some keys clearly don't fit the lock, while others appear to fit but aren't the true key. Christians must hold to the only true gospel message and be able to distinguish the true gospel from the various alternatives.

## **► UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

Context is crucial in understanding Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Most likely, the apostle wrote the letter to the churches he had planted on his first missionary journey in the southern portion of the province of Galatia. Those who embrace this locale have dated the book around AD 48–50. In Acts 15 the apostles and others gathered in Jerusalem to address the issues of Jewish legalism. They determined to decide whether it was possible for the Gentiles to be saved without circumcision (see vv. 1,6). Because the council was in AD 49, Galatians could have been written either prior to or after the Jerusalem Council. Either view is possible.

The subject of the debate at the Jerusalem Council was the same as the main topic addressed in Galatians. The Galatians had deserted the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ and had turned to a works-oriented salvation accompanied by remnants of Jewish legalism. They weren't saying Jesus was unnecessary, but they were implying that He wasn't enough. They claimed that faith in Christ had to be accompanied by circumcision and other Jewish rituals. This is the context in which Paul wrote to the Galatians.

As Paul received news from the new churches in Galatia, he was astonished that some believers had deserted the gospel he had preached to them (see Gal. 1:6). He had experienced trouble in Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium from a strong Jewish contingent (see Acts 14). Paul's surprise wasn't that some people were stirring up trouble in Galatia but that those who had claimed to embrace the gospel followed them.

## ➤ GALATIANS 1:1-10

**1 Paul A**, an apostle—not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead— **2** and all the brothers 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 B** for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. **5** To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. **6** I am amazed that you are so quickly **turning away G** from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a **different gospel D** — **7** not that there is another gospel, but there are **some E** who are troubling you and want to distort the **gospel of Christ G**. **8** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! **9** As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him! **10** For am I now trying to **persuade G** people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

### Passage Outline

Appointed by God  
(Gal. 1:1-2)

Through His Grace  
(Gal. 1:3-5)

Distorted by Some  
(Gal. 1:6-10)

### Keywords

- A** Once called Saul, he was a persecutor of the church (Acts 8:3). After having an encounter with Christ (Acts 9:1-9), he became consumed with sharing the gospel with all people.
- B** This is an idiom for the events of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.
- C** This term has been compared to a political or military defection.
- D** A substantive difference in message—a heresy
- E** Judaizers were Jewish Christians who taught that people had to be circumcised to truly follow Christ.
- F** God has provided just one way for salvation: Jesus Christ (see John 14:6).
- G** To win the approval of people by one's message



## ► EXPLORE THE TEXT

Letters written by Paul usually began with a statement of why he was thankful for the person or group being addressed. The notable exception is Galatians, and this absence spoke volumes. How could he express thanksgiving for people who had deserted the true gospel? Therefore, Paul omitted any reference to thanksgiving and praise for the Galatians and instead focused on establishing his own authority as an apostle.

### **When might a person need to set forth his or her credentials in order to speak authoritatively on the gospel?**

Paul often greeted his readers with grace and peace. Grace was the message needed in the Galatian churches. Paul summarized the work of Christ, who gave Himself for their sins. Jesus' substitutionary death allowed the Galatians to experience God's grace and therefore His peace. We don't need simply to try harder; we need to be rescued. A false gospel that centers on human effort and achievement would call attention to people and their efforts to reach God. However, the true gospel that centers on the death and resurrection of Jesus would highlight the One who went to the cross and rose from the grave.

### **What are the dangers of embracing a religion, as the Galatians did, that centers on legalism? How can believers keep Jesus as the central focus of the gospel?**

Paul was astonished that the Galatians were so quickly turning from God to a different gospel. Whether the letter was written early or late, he wouldn't have expected new Christians to desert Christ so quickly after they had received salvation. Although Paul said some were turning to a different gospel, he was quick to remind them that there's actually no different gospel. A "gospel" of human effort and achievement isn't good news.

### **What could cause a person to turn away from following Christ today? How have people distorted the gospel today?**

The content, not the messenger, was the most crucial element of the gospel. Even apostles like Paul had no right to preach a gospel contrary to the death and resurrection of Christ. His goal wasn't his own glory but Christ's glory. Although Paul hadn't won favor but scorn by following Christ, the sacrifice was worth it because only the true gospel gave him the hope of pleasing God.

**BIBLE SKILL:** Use a Bible dictionary (either print or on the Internet) to learn more about the concept of grace. >> Read the definition of *grace* in a Bible dictionary. Take note of the background of the word translated "grace" or "mercy" in the Hebrew and Greek languages. Write a definition of *grace* in your own words. Considering what you know about Paul, why do you think the doctrine of grace was so important to him?

## ➤ APPLY THE TEXT

- › God appoints all believers to deliver His gospel message.
- › True peace comes only by the grace of God through faith in the sacrificial death of His Son.
- › Believers must safeguard their faith, resisting people who teach a salvation that comes through any means other than faith in Jesus.

**To whom has God appointed you to be a messenger of the gospel? What tools can you use to share the gospel with them during the next week?**

**How can you encourage group members to distinguish between the true gospel and the works-based gospel embraced by the Galatians?**

**What similarities do you see between the perversions of the gospel in Paul's day and in our day? What actions do you need to take to safeguard yourself from these perversions of the truth?**

A photograph of a window with a sign that reads "ONE WAY! JESUS". The sign is yellow with blue text. The window is framed in dark wood or metal. The background is a light blue sky.

## ► DAILY EXPLORATION

### Day 1: Salvation comes through Jesus alone.

*Read Galatians 1:1-2, noting the way Paul began his letter.*

Paul started all his letters by identifying himself and any cowriters who were with him and by expressing a greeting of grace. Usually in letters to churches, he followed that greeting with an expression of thanksgiving or praise to God for the church (see Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4). The notable exception is Galatians. Paul wrote to young churches he had planted during his first missionary journey to correct serious perversions of doctrine. These churches had ventured from the true gospel that Paul preached—salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. They had listened to the teachings of the Judaizers, who had infiltrated the church and taught that the Galatians, in addition to believing in Christ, also had to submit themselves to the laws of the Old Testament in order to be saved.

Paul argued against a salvation that included Jesus plus something else. This was a perversion of the true gospel. Therefore, Paul began his letter with a huge omission. How could he express thanksgiving for a people who had deserted the true gospel? For that reason he omitted any reference to thanksgiving and praise for the Galatians and instead focused on establishing his own authority as an apostle.

**When might you need to set forth your credentials to speak authoritatively on the gospel?**

### Day 2: Jesus gives authority to those He chooses.

*Read Galatians 1:1-2 again. Consider why Paul thought it was so important to call himself an apostle.*

The Greek word for *apostle* originally referred to a naval expedition commissioned to represent Greek interests in a foreign location. In other passages Paul referred to himself as a prisoner (see Philem. 1) or a slave (see Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1), but in eight of the twelve letters Paul wrote in the New Testament, he designated himself as an apostle. In Galatians he expanded and reinforced that title, emphasizing that he was an apostle “not from men or by man” (1:1). Almost certainly this was a reference to his calling on the Damascus road, when he was confronted by Jesus (see Acts 9:1-9). No human being called Paul—only Jesus! Any authority Paul had for speaking to the Galatians about their misconceptions about the gospel came not from himself but from God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.

**How could you as a believer introduce yourself to establish your credibility as someone who knows the truth about Jesus?**

### Day 3: Salvation can't be obtained through works.

*Read Galatians 1:3-5, underlining verse 4.*

Grace was the message the Galatian churches needed. They had abandoned the grace of Jesus Christ (see v. 6) and had become entangled in legalism as the means of obtaining and maintaining salvation. At the outset of the letter, the apostle assured the Galatians that the true gospel doesn't consist of what we've done for God but of what God has done for us. He sent Jesus, who offered His life as a sacrifice for our sins. This sacrifice set in motion Jesus' plan to rescue us.

We need more than self-improvement; we need a new self. This won't happen because of our effort. God willed it and accomplished it through His Son. If we could achieve salvation by our own efforts, we could boast in our own abilities. Paul said he would boast only in the cross of Christ (see 6:14).

**KEY DOCTRINE: Salvation** >> By His own blood Jesus obtained eternal redemption for believers (see Eph. 1:7).

**How can you keep Jesus as the central focus of the gospel?**

### Day 4: False teachers distort the gospel of Christ.

*Read Galatians 1:6-7 and circle the word amazed.*

Normally, Paul would insert an expression of praise at this point in his letters but not here. He did the opposite. He said he was amazed by two actions of the Galatians. First, the Galatians were turning away from the One who had called them by the grace of Christ. True grace has the power to keep believers in its grip, so Paul was astonished that the Galatians were turning from Christ. This was a clue that the Galatians were, secondly, turning to "a different gospel" (v. 6). The Greek word used refers to another of a different kind. It wasn't the same quality as the true gospel, and Paul made that clear. False teachers had arisen who were troubling the Galatians and trying to distort the gospel of Christ. To tamper with the gospel is to trouble the church. The gospel must remain pure and simple to be effective; otherwise, it's not the gospel.

**What could cause a person to turn away from following Christ today? How have you seen the gospel distorted?**

## Day 5: False teachers must face divine judgment.

*Read Galatians 1:8-10, identifying the penalty for preaching a false gospel.*

Paul argued that even if an angel preached the law-based gospel of the Judaizers, that angel was wrong. Satan, whom Paul called “an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14), preached a different “gospel” to Eve in Genesis 3. People who preached a false gospel stood under a *curse*. This word referred to something that was delivered over to God for divine judgment. Those who tamper with the gospel face God’s judgment.

Some opponents had accused Paul of trying to please people with his preaching (see 2 Cor. 10; Gal. 6:12). However, Paul made it clear that he wasn’t trying to please people but God. Apparently, some thought Paul avoided preaching circumcision and the law for salvation because he was trying to gain the favor of Gentiles. Nothing could be further from the truth. If Paul had wanted the approval of people, he would have remained a respected Pharisee, zealously persecuting the church. He wouldn’t have signed up to be a servant of Christ.

**How can you test teaching to make sure it’s true?**



*None are more hopelessly enslaved  
than those who falsely believe they are free.*

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

## ➤ OBEY THE TEXT

**Reflect on the truths found in Galatians 1 and record your responses to the following questions or discuss them with two other members of your Bible-study group.**

In what ways do Christians today try to exert their authority? When is it appropriate to speak authoritatively as a Christian?

In what ways do you get distracted from the true message of the gospel? What steps can you take to remove those distractions?

When have you seen God's message distorted in the lives of your family and friends? How have you seen God correct their views?

## MEMORIZE

Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!

**GALATIANS 1:8**

## MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from this session's group experience and daily exploration.

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## MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

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## MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

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