

“The Problem”
January 19, 2025
Galatians 1:6-10

I. Introduction

In many Christian circles being a Pharisee was and is synonymous with being a hypocrite or, as Christ called them in [Matthew 23:27](#), “**whitewashed tombs**.” But not all Pharisees were this way. Many Pharisees sincerely believed and followed traditional Judaism as God’s way of life for His chosen people. Although they were legalists of the strictest kind; they were honestly trying to please God by obeying what they thought was God’s will—they weren’t trying to please anyone else by their righteousness. They were the very religious—the ultra-religious of the day. Theirs’s was a righteousness-through-works doctrine.

This was Paul before he met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus in [Acts 9](#); but after that encounter everything changed. He was convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead and paid the price for his sins. Following his conversion, it was obvious that Paul had made Jesus his Lord as well as his Savior as he carried the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles throughout the Middle East and Europe. In those missionary journeys, he spent a lot of time ministering in the southern part of what we call Turkey in the province called Galatia. It was here in Galatia in the city of Lystra that he had been stoned and left for dead ([Acts 14:19](#)).

When the news reached Paul that some Galatian converts were responding positively to the Judaizers, he was both broken-hearted and angry. “*Galatians*” is a deeply personal letter written from the grieving heart of a godly man to his spiritual children, whose faith and living were being undermined by false teachers. Hoping to counteract the Judaizers’ claims and to answer their accusations, Paul fired off this letter. His heart cry to the Galatian believers is found in [Galatians 5:1](#): “**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**”

Unlike Paul’s other letters, there are no words of commendation, no praise, or thanksgiving in his letter to the Galatians. There is no request for prayer. No one with him is mentioned by name. After a brief, terse salutation, Paul launched into his reason for writing. In today’s Scripture Paul summarized “The Problem.”

II. The Problem

A. They were deserting the grace of God. Paul wrote in **verse 6**, “**I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ.**” This was the first part of the problem: the Galatians were deserting the grace of God. Paul wasn’t surprised by what the false teachers were doing—he had warned the churches over and over that false teachers would come—**turn to Acts 20:29-31a**. Paul wasn’t surprised by the false teachers, but he was “**astonished**”—shocked, if you please, by the response of the Christians in Galatia.

God is the “**One**” who had called them by His grace and saved them from their sins. But now they were moving from grace back into Law—back into works. They were abandoning liberty for legalism! And they were doing so quickly--easily, without even consulting Paul, their spiritual father or giving time for the Holy Spirit to teach them through God’s Word. They had become attracted to the religion of the Judaizers in the same way little children follow a stranger because he offers them candy. The believers offered little resistance to the false teachers and were turning their backs on their allegiance to God and Paul’s teaching.

These Galatians were true believers who had come to salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit—**Galatians 3:3** says, “**Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?**” These were Christian brothers and sisters who had become seriously confused and some were actually deserting. The false teachers were accountable for their corruption of God’s truth, but the Galatian Christians were accountable for being so easily misled by the false teachings and deserting to pursue legalism.

The grace of God is a basic theme of this letter—the word “**grace**” is used 7 or 8 times. Grace is simply God’s favor to undeserving sinners. “**The grace of Christ**” is God’s act of love and mercy, granting salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, apart from anything men are or can do. The words “grace” and “gift” go together, as Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, “**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.**” The Galatian believers were not simply changing religions or changing churches, they were actually

abandoning the very grace of God! They were deserting the very God of grace! God called them and saved them and now they were leaving God and His grace for human leaders who would bring them back to bondage.

Becoming a Christian isn't just agreeing to a set of doctrines or teachings, the Christian life is a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Believers are saved by grace, but it doesn't stop there--throughout our Christian lives, we are sustained or supported by grace—in [2 Corinthians 12:9](#), God told Paul in the midst of his difficulties, *‘My grace is sufficient for you.’*

The Judaizers who plagued the early church claimed to be Christians and much of their doctrine was correct. They must have recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah and even acknowledged the importance of His death on the cross; otherwise, if they hadn't, they would never have been allowed to speak in the churches. They claimed to believe all the truths that other Christians believed. They did not openly deny the gospel, but they sought to improve it by adding the requirements, ceremonies, standards of the old Covenant—Moses' Covenant—to the New Covenant that was made in Jesus' blood.

They must have been very sly and subtle—[turn to 2 Corinthians 11:13-15](#). Their conversations may have gone something like this: *“Has Brother Paul been here with you?”* Unsuspectingly, the Christians would have said, *“Yes, he came and preached the gospel, and we accepted it. We know Christ as our Savior and Lord. We are now part of God's family.”* The Judaizers could have responded, *“Oh, that's wonderful. Brother Paul has a heart for God and for God's people. Brother Paul was correct as far as he went, but he didn't go far enough. Did he tell you to keep the Mosaic Law? Well, he should have told you that. Yes, you are to trust Christ, but, like the early Jews, you must also follow the Mosaic Laws, or you won't be saved.”* This was the problem; adding anything to or subtracting anything from grace destroys it. You cannot mix grace and works; the one excludes the other. And to turn from grace to Law is to desert the God who saved you.

B. They were perverting the Gospel of God. The Judaizers claimed to be preaching “the Gospel,” but there cannot be two gospels, one based on works and the other based on grace. Paul wrote, they *“are turning*

to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all.” This is the second problem: they were perverting the Gospel of God. The word “*pervert*” means “*to distort*.” The Judaizers had distorted the Gospel—they had turned it around and had taken it back into the Law. Acts 15:1 says, “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch, another of the churches in Galatia, and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’” Grace can be destroyed, but it cannot be modified. It can be rejected, but it cannot be changed. Turn to Galatians 5:2-4.

Paul wrote that this deserting and perverting was throwing people “into confusion.” The churches in Galatia were being shaken to their very foundations by these false teachers who were contradicting God’s Word that had come through Paul and the Apostles. Turn to Titus 1:10-11. The grace of God leads to peace but for the believers who desert the grace of God for their daily lives, there will be no peace in their hearts. The greatest threat to the church and Christians isn’t those who openly contradict the Bible and denounce Christ. The greatest threat is those false teachers, ambassadors of Satan, who pretend to speak in God’s Name, but subtly undermine and distort and mutilate His true gospel with a system of righteousness based on works.

III. The False Teachers

A. They preached a false doctrine. Paul then turned to the false teachers. By adding to God’s Gospel, he wrote that they preached a false doctrine. The test of a man’s ministry isn’t his popularity, or miraculous signs and wonders—in Matthew 24:23-24 Jesus said, “At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible.” Turn to 2 Peter 2:1-3. The test of a man’s ministry is his faithfulness to the Word of God. Truth outranks anyone’s credentials, and every teacher and every preacher must be evaluated on the basis of what he says and does, not who he is or what his academic credentials are. Every believer must be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11 who “received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

The learned Judaizers had come along and substituted their false gospel for the true Gospel, and for this sin, Paul pronounced them “**eternally condemned.**” The word he used is the Greek word *anathema* which means *eternally condemned* or *delivered over to the wrath of God for eternal destruction*. No matter whom the preacher may be—an angel from heaven or even Paul himself—if he preaches any other gospel, he is anathema—eternally condemned. To emphasize what he said, Paul repeated his words, “**As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!**” They preached a false doctrine and . . .

B. They had false motives. Paul’s enemies had accused him of being a compromiser and tweaking the Gospel to fit the Gentiles. They claimed that he was a man-pleaser and shouldn’t be trusted. But in reality, it was his accusers that had false motives. They were the man-pleasers. In **Galatians 4:17**, Paul wrote, “**Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them.**” **Turn to Galatians 6:12-13.**

By nature, people pleasers are not martyrs. The desire to escape ridicule and trouble is high on their priorities. Pleasing men or a culture, doesn’t bring severe persecution. Paul’s ministry and message came from God. His desire was to please Christ and for that reason he *was* ridiculed and persecuted. In his actions as well as his words, Paul was a bond servant of Christ. The Judaizers were the ones with false motives.

IV. Conclusion

The Galatians had been privileged to be taught by one of the greatest teachers the church has ever known apart from Christ Himself; yet they readily rejected the truths of grace they had learned from him. It is possible, even for longtime believers, to drift from the truths of the Gospel and allow themselves to be weakened and perverted by ideas that supposedly improve on the pure and plain teachings of Scripture. Like the Bereans, we need to continually review God’s Word so that we don’t slip from what it says.

The Galatians had experienced the grace of Christ and had tasted the freedom that comes when in faith one trusts his life to Christ. Little time had passed, and here they were, back where they had been, slaves of a lifeless system that could only end in despair—no one can keep the Laws perfectly, and so no one

can save himself. **Romans 3:20** says, “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.” Sadly, we fall into the same trap over and over again, too. We get delivered from “the law,” discover the liberty that can be ours as we trust ourselves in faith to the Lord’s keeping and guidance—to His grace, mercy, and love. But then we get caught up in our self-sufficiency, we believe we must do something to save ourselves. We take on another system—another “law.” It may be a particular order or way of worship, e.g., hymns only or choruses only, a “correct” doctrine, e.g., to work or not work on the Sabbath. These are “laws” which do away with grace. Paul wrote that anyone who perverts, waters down, minimizes, abuses, or corrupts the gospel of God’s grace, freely given, requiring no law, involving only a response of faith, is anathema, i.e., eternally condemned. We must test what we preach and believe compared to God’s Word.

God—Christianity—is intolerant. There is only one way to be saved from an eternity in hell, Jesus said in **John 14:6**, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” We hear statements like “*What a person believes is their business; it’s a private matter.*” “We don’t need to be too concerned about theology and doctrine.” “*Being brotherly is what matters, living by the golden rule, doing good, refraining from harmful activity, that’s what counts.*” Or my favorite, “*All you have to be is sincere;*” all such statements are lies. There is only one way to salvation and there is only one way to live, in the grace of God—in **1 Cor. 15:10** Paul wrote, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them-- yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” We are saved by grace, and we live our lives in grace.

What about your life—why do you do the things you do? Are you trying to win God’s approval—which is another way of saying, “*earning your own way into heaven?*” Or do you do them as a way of saying “Thank You”—thank you to God for what He has done for you, a way of bringing praise and honor to God. As Paul wrote in **1 Cor. 10:31**, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”