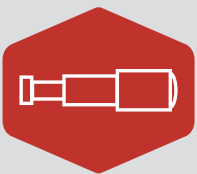




Lesson 2: One Truth, One Gospel

Main Idea: Paul wrote this letter to address a major source of opposition to the gospel message in the church in Galatia. In this lesson, you will discover the reasons for Paul's confidence to speak and act in ways that challenged the Galatians.

Scripture: Galatians 1:1-10



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

Galatia was not just one city but a province of Rome. New Testament scholar Craig Keener states, "The assemblies of God's people in Galatia (Galatians 1:2) include multiple house churches in multiple cities."¹ The churches were located in Galatian cities like Antioch of Syria, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul and Barnabas traveled to all of them to share Christ and start churches. God moved in miraculous ways as new believers lived in the power of the Holy Spirit and experienced God's grace.

Once Paul and Barnabas finished their missionary trip, Paul received a concerning letter with news that something had happened in the church at Galatia: some people had come to the church preached a different message than Paul's. And people were beginning to believe them.

Some commentators call these people *Judaizers*. The Judaizers would

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 51.

come to the church at Galatia and teach something like this: “You say you are Christians and following the Lord, but are you following all the Jewish customs? You do not have full citizenship in the kingdom of God unless you keep all the Jewish rules and regulations.” When Paul heard this news, he was furious. He sat down with a scribe and began to dictate a letter to the churches in Galatia.

In verse 1 of this letter, Paul describes himself as an *apostle*, which means “a sent one.” With this wording Paul likens himself to the original “sent ones,” the twelve disciples Jesus chose, including Judas who betrayed Him and had to be replaced (Acts 1:15–26).

After the original “sent ones” who walked with Jesus, there came another generation which included Paul. It appears that the Judaizers were trying to discredit Paul’s ministry specifically with divisive questions such as, “Who gave him his credentials? Who made him an apostle?” Paul clearly states to the Galatians that he was commissioned to be an apostle by God the Father and His Son Jesus—not by any person or committee. The Galatian believers have every reason to trust him because many had met him when he traveled to their cities and founded churches.

In verse 3, Paul uses the phrase “grace and peace” to address the churches of Galatia—a greeting Paul uses for most of his letters. Greeting people with some form of “peace to you” was common in the ancient world, but Paul has put the word *grace* in front of it, changing up the greeting by drawing attention to the salvation through grace that Christ offers. In contrast, the Judaizers’ message offered neither grace nor peace.

In verse 4, Paul begins discussing Jesus as our Savior and Rescuer. Jesus did not come just as a good teacher or an encourager, but He came as the God-man to rescue mankind. Jesus came to give a new perspective, a new understanding, and a new empowerment to live. Jesus did not go to the cross as a private citizen; He went as a representative for humanity. Paul explains to the believers in Galatia that when Jesus died, they died; when Jesus rose from the dead, they rose. Paul reminds the Galatians that Jesus came to take the death penalty that they deserved. God treated Jesus the way they deserved so that they could be treated the way Jesus deserved.

Usually at the beginning of his letters, Paul gives some type of affirmation. However, in Galatians Paul does not pause after the greeting to affirm the church. Instead he writes with urgency, coming to the heart of the issue by verse 6. Paul is surprised at the Galatians. The word Paul uses for “turning away” in verse 6 could be translated “deserted.” The Galatians did not just desert a proposition, a doctrine, or an idea: they deserted the Person of Jesus for another gospel, which Paul says is no gospel at all.

Paul told the Galatians that the good news of the gospel is not that you must do things to please God. Instead, the Good News is what God has done through Jesus to bring you into deep friendship with Him.

In the ancient world when a new king ascended the throne, messengers were sent out to the various areas of the Roman empire to declare the “good news” that a new emperor had come to the throne and that the people must give him their allegiance. Of course, this was only good news if the emperor was a good ruler.

Paul explains that the gospel of Christ really is good news. Therefore, if anybody preaches a gospel that is *not* good news, they are not preaching the gospel. Paul makes no attempt at religious tolerance when doing so means it doesn’t really matter what people believe so long as they believe.² The gospel proclaimed by the Judaizers was not good news—it was a message of bondage and despair.

Paul tells the church in Galatians that the Judaizers have perverted, or “reverted,” the gospel. In fact, in verse 7, he uses the phrase “*trouble you*.” Keener said this word “has a range of meaning that includes sowing division.”³ The Judaizers were causing divisions by reverting the gospel from the freedom that was in Christ back to the rules and regulations of Judaism. The gospel is that God has come in the person of Jesus, and now through Jesus alone a relationship with God is possible. The opposite of the gospel is that people have to make themselves acceptable to God. All religions in the world can be reduced to two kinds: religions of human accomplishment or religions of divine achievement. Paul defends the latter.

In verse 8, Paul uses the word “accursed,” which means that something is devoted to destruction. It literally meant to be condemned eternally. It could be translated as “damned.” Paul has quickly moved from grace and peace to damnation and judgment. He makes it clear that if any apostle including himself adds to the gospel message, he should be condemned eternally. Paul even goes so far as to say even angels should be ignored if they tell you a “new way” different from the gospel. Even today we hear of cults and false religions based on messages received from angels. Paul reminds the church that the apostles and prophets laid a foundation with Jesus as the chief cornerstone, and that foundation does not change.

In Psalm 23, the Good Shepherd has a staff and a rod. The staff was used to keep the sheep from danger; the rod was used to keep danger from the sheep. A shepherd would use the rod to beat a wolf if it tried to attack the sheep. In

² Keener, 22.

³ Keener, 63.

Galatians 1:8–9, Paul pulls out the rod and goes after the Judaizer “wolves” to say, in essence, “May they be eternally condemned if they preach any gospel other than what was delivered to you.”

In verse 10, we see that the Judaizers tried to convince the Galatian believers that Paul was a compromiser because he allowed Gentile men to avoid circumcision, which was required for Jewish males. They claimed that Paul was simply attempting to incur the people’s favor by declaring that they did not have to keep the Jewish rules, laws, and ordinances.

Three things should be noted about law and grace at this point. First, there is nothing necessarily wrong with rules unless they distort the gospel. Second, while grace is the work of God, it is not opposed to human effort in learning to follow Christ—effort is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Rather, grace is opposed to a mindset of trying to earn salvation and blessing from God. Third, the gospel neither makes holiness optional, nor does it limit our dependence on Jesus. Any gospel that takes you away from holiness or away from God’s grace for your sin is not the true gospel.

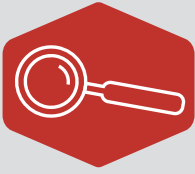


My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in the text and bullet points below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you today.

Read these statements and write below or in your journal what these truths say to you:

- Paul builds his argument for the gospel based on his own knowledge of who he was (vv. 1-5).
- Paul belongs to Jesus, he was sent out by Jesus, and his power is from Jesus (vv. 1-5).
- God's grace reaches its ultimate expression in Jesus (v. 4).
- God's peace is independent of outward circumstances (v. 5).
- What a person believes does matter (v. 6).
- What you believe determines how you live (v. 8).



The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Write down your answers to the following questions here or in your journal:

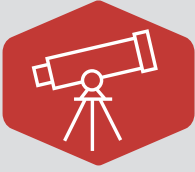
- Circle and write down any recurring words in this passage. (You may have done so in lesson one.)
- Who appears in this passage (Galatians 1:1-10)?
- Where is this passage taking place?
- When is this passage occurring?
- Why is this passage important?
- What is happening in this passage?
- How does this passage apply to my life?

- On a scale from 1 to 4 with 1 being well and 4 being poor, rate yourself in the following areas and then write out a plan to improve.
 - » Forgiveness over bitterness:
 - » Love over hate:
 - » Obedience over rebellion:
 - » Good over evil:
 - » Hope over despair:

How you might improve in these areas:

- When you hear that salvation is *all* about grace, what comes to your mind?
- Do you agree with this statement: “Our effort at living the life of discipleship is the result and expression of God’s grace.”? Why or why not?
- Read Galatians 1:4. Have you ever known anyone who was offended by the idea of needing a rescuer? Why do you think some find that idea offensive?
- What do you see as the difference between Jesus rescuing us “*out of* the present evil age” and Jesus rescuing us “*from* the present evil age?” What differences does this understanding make in your life?

- The sacrifice on the cross was substitutionary. What does that mean to you and why is it important?
- Read Galatians 1:5. Why does God alone deserve the glory in the grace-rescue operation? How and why do believers try to take some of the glory only God deserves?
- Read Galatians 1:7. How do you describe the gospel? What are some ways the gospel has been perverted? Was there a time when you misunderstood the gospel? What affect did it have on your walk with God?



Upward and Outward Focus (Telescope)

How does the Scripture affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers in your journal.

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about the text you just studied. How did these verses help deepen your love for God?

- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate this love to others?



Using My *Fire Bible*®

Read the Fire Bible study notes for the following verses and then answer the accompanying questions.

- **Galatians 1:4** What is the center of Christ's sacrifice? As a result of Christ's deliverance from the present evil age, how should Christians live today?
- **Galatians 1:6** What was the message of a "different gospel"? What happens when man-made notions and philosophies are mixed with the original message of Jesus?
- **Galatians 1:9** Describe the foundational truths Jesus taught in your own words. How can you make sure you are comfortable defending these truths?

- Read the *Fire Bible* article “Christians’ Relationship to the World.” Answer the following in your own words:
 - » How does John use the word “world” in this context?
 - » What are some ways in which Satan influences the world and its systems?
 - » Explain the three aspects of the sinful world. How well do you combat these aspects?