

# Galatians 1 – Chapter Study

## INTRODUCTION

**This book** we're starting tonight has been one of the most important in the entire Bible in the development of the Christian Faith.

Really, we're here tonight, doing what we're doing because of what the Apostle Paul wrote here. You see, for hundreds of years, the great bulk of the Christian Faith & Church was caught up in what we call "**sacramentalism**."

Sacramentalism refers to the **sacraments** – special religious rituals, like confession, communion, marriage, baptism, & last rites.

These sacraments are performed by ordained priests on behalf of the laity, so they can discharge their duty to God.

In sacramentalism, people don't come directly to God on their own thru faith in Christ, they come through the mediation of the Church & its priests.

This is the practice of the Nicolaitans we're been reading about in our Sunday studies in Revelation 2. Apart from many reform & splinter groups, Sacramentalism **dominated** church life for hundreds of years because the common people were illiterate – they couldn't read the Bible.

And before the printing press, there weren't that many Bibles to read anyway.

**In the late 15<sup>th</sup>** Century things began to change.

The Church had become so corrupt, many sincere priests took exception to what was going on.

As they read & studied the Bible, they realized many of the practices of the Church were in direct conflict with what God had made clear.

As they studied further they realized that in fact, the whole practice of sacramentalism was wrong.

The 2 men at the focal point of speaking out about all this were Martin Luther & John Calvin.

**And the 2 books** they found the most helpful in getting back to the real Gospel were Romans & Galatians.

**Most likely**, the Apostle Paul wrote Galatians **while on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary** journey.

Galatia was a region, not a city.

Paul had been instrumental in planting several churches in this province of Asia Minor on a previous trip thru the area.

**Galatia** got its name because it had been settled by a large number of Celts from Gaul who'd migrated there.

The Celts had given the Roman army a rough time, defeating them time & again until eventually by sheer perseverance they were conquered.

Julius Caesar's defeat of the Celtic king Vercingetorix is one of the great stories of history.

The Celts were a stubborn lot.

Not known for being the sharpest knife in the drawer, they made up for it in their toughness & industry.

Once they latched on to an idea, they were diligent to put it into practice.

**So when they** were persuaded by the Gospel, they embraced it energetically & churches popped up all over Galatia.

Some time later, **a group of false teachers** arrived in Galatia, claiming to be official messengers from the Apostles at the Church at Jerusalem.

These false teachers were what is known as Judaizers.

They were Jews who said that in order for Gentiles like the Galatians to be genuinely right with God, they needed to keep the Law of Moses.

In essence, they needed to become Jews!

They needed to be circumcised, keep kosher, observe the Sabbath and all the rest.

Though the Galatians were by nature stubborn & on the slow side of change, the **legalism** of the Judaizers **appealed** to them because it played to their **pride**, to their in-born can-do attitude.

Word reached Paul that those perennial trouble-makers, the Judaizers had arrived in Galatia & were already making inroads with their insidious heresy.

It surprised him that the stubborn Galatians were being so quickly seduced by these false teachers.

**So he wrote what** is one of his most personal & potent letters.

While Romans is a careful and systematic *exposition* of the Gospel of Christ to a church Paul had yet to visit – Galatians is a far more personal *defense* of the Gospel of Grace to people he knew personally.

## Outline

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### I. INTRODUCTION Ch. 1:1-5

The Introduction of NT letters follows a consistent pattern.

We read who it's from, who it's to, then a few words of blessing & thanksgiving.

We find that here, with one exception--*there's no thanksgiving*.

The *absence* of thanks is a clue to both Paul's tone & urgency.

#### **<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),**

Paul begins affirming his call as an apostle because he knew from long experience with the Judaizers their strategy.

Before they could foist their lies on their audience, they had to break down Paul's reputation.

The Galatian churches were founded by Paul; as was the case in Corinth, Paul was their spiritual father.

All they believed is what he'd taught them.

So the Judaizers began by tearing down Paul's credibility.

They claimed to be sent from headquarters at Jerusalem while Paul had not been.

So Paul reminds the Galatians of his call; it had come from Jesus Himself just outside of Damascus.

#### **<sup>2</sup> and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:**

Accompanying Paul on his 3<sup>rd</sup> journey were several companions.

He'd learned from his previous missionary forays that it was good to have along several capable teachers & pastoral types he could leave behind in the new churches he planted.

These men would stay for a few weeks, building a solid foundation of on-going leadership from among the new converts.

As soon as they could appoint some leaders and turn the work over to another, then would then rejoin Paul.

That's what guys like Timothy & Titus did – they stayed behind for a while to help the new church get going.

#### **<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,**

As in most of his letters, Paul unites the Greek & Jewish greetings – Grace & Peace.

But note where grace & peace come from – God the Father & the Lord Jesus Christ.

The cults love to make a big to-do about Jesus not being God.

But in the mind of a first century Jew, the idea of linking Jesus to God the Father in this way was utterly unthinkable—**UNLESS** Jesus *is* God.

And for a Jew to attribute the title “Lord” to anyone but God is equally unthinkable!

On Sundays as we study the Letters to the 7 churches, we've learned about the problem Caesar worship was to the early church.

The problem was that Christian could not say, “Caesar is Lord” because that word ‘lord’ referred to deity – and only Jesus was Lord.

This is why in the Roman Empire, because Judaism was an officially sanctioned religion, Jews had been

given an exemption form having to say, “Caesar is Lord.”

They had to pay a tax to prove their loyalty to Rome, but they were dismissed from the rite of Caesar worship.

Christians *weren't* exempt because Christianity wasn't recognized as a legitimate faith.

The pseudo-Christian cults who deny the deity of Christ are woefully ignorant of history, as well as blind to the overwhelming evidence from Scripture on this.

**4 who [Christ] gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age,**

Not only did Jesus *pay for our the penalty* of our sin at the Cross,

His resurrection means our *deliverance from the power* of sin in our lives.

Though we live in the midst of a fallen world, among fallen people, we don't have to continue *ourselves IN* that fallenness.

We've been redeemed & have the potential to live as new men & women by the power of the Spirit.

That new life is -

**according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.**

The glory of God! That's what it's all about.

As odd or counter-intuitive as it may seem – Giving God glory is what we exist for.

Many years ago, a group of theologians gathered to hammer out the essence of Christian doctrine – to distill the Scriptures to their basic teaching on the core issues of The Faith.

One of the questions that concerned them was – What's the reason for humanity.

They boiled it down to this- “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”

Because we exist to glorify God, the satisfaction we long for will never be ours until we do!

We have a clue to our need to glorify God in the modern age's fascination with celebrity.

One of the things modern media has done is make the production & power of celebrity more pervasive.

Historically, people achieved fame for *accomplishing* something noble or noteworthy.

Today, fame is bestowed for fame's sake; celebrities don't have to DO anything other than get their name in everyone's mouth.

This is what drives the popularity of reality TV & the outrageous behavior found there.

People want fame, they want people to talk about them.

They want as many friends as possible on Facebook, for their video to get the most hits on YouTube, for everyone on Twitter to tweet about them.

Man is wired to worship, to give glory.

Because our culture has removed God from the public square, it turns its collective gaze & worship to an *American Idol*, a lesser *Star Search*.

The Christian is someone who's been redeemed to their right purpose & center.

Christians ought to be known as much for their worship of God as their devotion to Truth & love for one another.

Note what's missing in Paul's greeting; there's no mention of thanks, no commendation for how well they were doing.

There reason for this is because word had reached him of the dangerous sitch there.

So he gets right to it . . .

## II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE Ch. 1:6-7

### STAY LOYAL TO THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

**6 I marvel**

Am amazed, astonished -

**that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.**

It hadn't been that long since they first came to faith. For most of them it was but a couple years.

And their conversion had been a dramatic and obvious work of the Holy Spirit!

I mean – it was evident to all of them that God was at work among them, bringing them to faith in Christ. Part of the obviousness of God's work among them was that as Celts, they knew their own history, their classic stubbornness & slowness to change.

But the work of the Spirit had been so strong among them, they'd come to faith in dramatic fashion. The Spirit was the One they were turning from now as they gave heed to the Judaizers.

The Galatians had been won by grace, but were now moving away from grace toward a *different* message.

What the Judaizers promoted wasn't in *addition* to the Gospel of Grace; it wasn't an addendum to complete it.

It was a completely different & contrary message.

In fact, by heeding this different gospel they were *moving away* from grace.

This other message was no gospel, no good news! It was bad news because it was a legalism that would destroy them.

Notice how Paul sees the ideas of the Judaizers – they distort and corrupt the true Gospel.

There can be no connection between legalism & grace.

So Paul is going to launch now into a powerful, straight-forward defense of the Gospel of Grace.

Because he's dealing with hard-headed & sometimes dense Galatians, he gets pretty strong.

### III. MESSAGE Chs.1:8-6:10

#### A. One True Gospel 1:8-9

**<sup>8</sup> But even if we,**

Paul & his team of assistants

**or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.**

The Gospel of grace is not to be laid aside, no matter *who* speaks against, it, or how eloquent & convincing they are.

Even if some angelic being were to appear & began in on some message that ran contrary to grace they were to shut their ears.

Paul knew that even good men, good women, can go bad.

They can start off as anointed ministers, gifted teachers & preachers – then run off into error.

So he tells them even if **HE** were to one day show up with a message that contradicted the Gospel of Grace, to pay him no mind.

Actually, it's quite a bit stronger than that – he says all such messengers are to be counted as *cursed* – meaning lying under the condemnation of God.

Just for emphasis, in case they missed just how important this was—he says it again.

**<sup>9</sup> 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.**

If something is *cursed* by God, it's *off-limits*.

So let's be clear on what Paul is saying here.

When a false teacher promotes or proclaims a message that runs counter to the Gospel of Grace, we're to have absolutely *nothing* to do with it!

We're not to partner with such folks, we're to provide no platform for them.

If someone comes, claiming to be Christian or to represent the true faith, but they twist & distort the Gospel into something else, there's to be no fellowship & no toleration of their ideas within our fellowship.

Paul now turns to defend his calling as an apostle.

Again, this is one of the first things the Judaizers would have attacked.

So Paul reminds the Galatians of his credentials.

#### B. Paul's Apostleship 1:10-2:14

##### 1. The Gospel's Divine origin 1:10-12

**<sup>10</sup> 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.**

One of the great battles we all face is deciding who we'll live for, who we want to please.

We can please man or God, not both.

Paul decided early on that he would live to please the Lord, & trust God to take care of his earthly reputation.

Yeah, he faced a lot of brutal attacks during his life from false teachers like these clowns the Judaizers.

But today – who's admired, whose reputation do we honor?

Paul has gone down as one of the greatest men in the history of the entire world.

While the Judaizers are naught but a *footnote* in that history.

**<sup>11</sup> But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

The Gospel Paul proclaimed was not of human origin.

It wasn't something some philosopher reasoned to.

It wasn't received in a flash of enlightenment by some guru sitting on a barren mountain top.

There was Paul one day, on his way to the city of Damascus, intent on attacking the followers of Christ and ending their stupid little reform movement – when Jesus suddenly appeared to him & in an act of extreme mercy & grace, revealed Himself to him as the real deal – the Jewish Messiah, Savior, Redeemer.

Paul was saved and radically converted *from persecutor to proclaimer*.

He dives into a little of his past now.

The Galatians need to be reminded of where Paul came from & that the ideas behind what the Judaizers taught were not new to him.

They didn't come bringing a teaching Paul had not already heard – and vehemently rejected!

## **2. Paul's past 1:13-14**

**<sup>13</sup> For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to destroy it*. <sup>14</sup> And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.**

Our best evidence of Paul's early life & training makes him a student of the famous rabbi & scholar Gamaliel.

We know Paul had risen to a place of leadership in Jerusalem because he's the one who officiated at the stoning of Stephen.

## **3. Paul's conversion & training 1:15-17**

**<sup>15</sup> But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles,**

Take careful note of that: Looking back Paul could see how from birth & throughout his youth, God had groomed him to become an Apostle of Christ – specifically to the Gentiles.

Though Paul was passionate to see his fellow Jews brought to Christ, he knew his primary calling was to work among the Gentiles.

Looking back, I can see the hand of God molding & shaping me to do this.

At the time, some of those things were so difficult & I was so confused, crying out – “God, why? Where are You? What's going on?”

But now I see.

Following his conversion there just outside of Damascus,

**I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.**

The word “confer” in v. 16 means to *consult*, to appeal to another for *assistance*.

Following his conversion, Paul didn't seek out some scholar of the faith & ask for discipling.

Yes, he did what Jesus told him to do; he went into Damascus & was prayed for by Ananias.

But after that, Paul retreated to a solitary place to pray & think back through everything he'd learned in

his studies in Jerusalem, in light of the reality-bending truth that Jesus is God the Son & Savior. We don't know how long Paul spent in solitude, but in Acts 9 it says this period of Paul's life last many days.

#### **4. Paul & the Jerusalem Church 1:18-2:10**

**<sup>18</sup> Then after 3 years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him 15 days. <sup>19</sup> But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.**

Paul's point in relating all this was to remind the Galatians that the Gospel he preached wasn't of human origin; it had come straight from Christ.

3 years after his conversion he *did* meet with the leadership of the church at Jerusalem; not all of them but with the 2 most esteemed leaders –

Peter, who was recognized as the leader of the original disciples

And James, the brother of Jesus who'd become the leader of the Church.

**<sup>20</sup> (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)**

The Judaizers claimed to be official representatives of the Apostles at Jerusalem & that Paul had spun them a yarn about his relationship to headquarters.

So Paul take an oath of truthfulness.

What's remarkable about this oath is that Paul counted on his integrity & what the Galatians remembered about him.

He wasn't one to take oaths because he kept his word; they knew that about him.

So when he resorted to a pledge of honesty, they'd realize he was staking EVERYTHING on it.

**<sup>21</sup> Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.**

This was that period of time when Paul became part of the leadership team at the church at Antioch, then he and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey.

**<sup>22</sup> And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. <sup>23</sup> But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to* destroy." <sup>24</sup> And they glorified God in me.**

Paul's realm of ministry had never been to the churches outside Jerusalem.

All of the congregations scattered around Israel heard about his conversion, but they wouldn't; have recognized him because he moved into the field he was called to by God – work among the Gentiles.

He goes on in the first 10 verses of ch. 2 to talk about his relationship with the leaders of the Jerusalem Church – but we'll save that till next week.

**Feed My Sheep**

**Feed My Sheep**