

EXPERIENCING GOD'S GRACE

PART 2: IS THERE ANOTHER GOSPEL?

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The Galatian Christians must have been confused. Paul had previously taught them that salvation comes through faith alone in Jesus Christ by God's grace alone.

Now, Judaizers were telling them they had to become Jews first. They had to keep the law (works) in order to gain a right standing before God. Unfortunately, many Galatians were buying into this teaching, so Paul is obviously greatly perturbed by their abandonment of

the true gospel which he previously gave to them.

There have always been those who balk at the idea of God's salvation being offered freely to those who believe. They reason that such a grand gift as forgiveness from such a holy God *must* require some kind of payment from us. We thank God for His grace, but we understand that He expects us to somehow *earn* that grace—in other words, there must be *something* that we can do to pay off the debt we owe to God. This is the primary issue in Galatians.

I. GALATIANS 1:1-10 (NIV)

A. Greetings (1:1-5)

"Paul, an apostle-- sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead-- 2 and all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

B. You are embracing a perverted gospel (1:6-10)

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and is turning to a different gospel-- 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! 10 Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ."

II. COMMENTS

A. Where was Paul when he wrote Galatians

Paul was back in his home the city of Antioch in Syria, shortly after finishing his first missionary journey when he gets the bad news about the Galatian churches. During his first journey Paul started churches in the cities of Antioch of Asia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14—14:23). These cities, although within the Roman province of Galatia, were not in the ethnic Galatian region. There is no record of Paul's founding churches in that northern, less-populated region.

B. Salvation is based on faith in Jesus Christ, not law-keeping

Paul made it clear that the gospel is based on faith in Jesus Christ, but Judaizers were teaching that salvation is based on faith plus law-keeping.

C. Paul apostleship is attacked

These Judaizers were also undermining Paul's authority as an apostle as a way to negate his gospel. They based their argument on three things First, Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles. Second, Paul had been a persecutor of those who followed Jesus. Third, Paul had no official endorsement from the church leaders in Jerusalem.

Paul's response was not an argument, it was a statement of fact. He owed his apostleship to no man but to a day on the Damascus Road when he had met Jesus Christ face to face. His office and his task had been given to him directly by God.

D. Paul's greeting shows his heart

Right at the beginning, Paul's heart for these Galatian believers is shown as he wishes them grace and peace.

First, he wishes them *grace*. There are two ideas behind this Greek word *charis* for grace. It contains the idea of sheer beauty. When the Christian life has grace in it, it must be a lovely thing of sheer beauty. The second idea behind this word is that of undeserved generosity, of a gift, which man never deserved and could never earn. It is given to the believer from the generous love of God. When Paul prays for grace on his Galatian friends it is as if he were saying, "May the beauty of the underserved love of God be on you so that it will make your life beautify too."

Next, he wishes them *peace*. Paul must have had in mind the Jewish greeting of *shalom* as he wrote the Greek word *eirene* for peace. *Shalom* means more than the mere absence of trouble. It means everything wishing the highest good for that person, everything that will make his mind pure, and his heart filled with gladness. It also has the sense of God's loving care, and a settled heart even when going through extremely difficult times.

The term "present evil age" (1:4) does not refer to a period of time but to an order or system and in particular, to the current world system ruled by Satan (Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:15-16; 5:19).

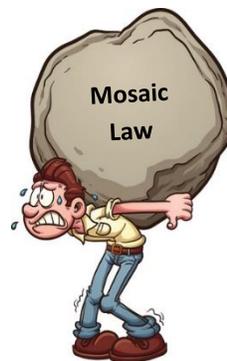
E. Paul is astonished

Because the true gospel is based on God's free grace, Paul is astonished that these Galatians Christians were so easily "buying into" another gospel.

It didn't make sense! Paul knew that nothing a man could do could ever earn the love of God and that all a person could do was yield to God's mercy in an act of faith in Jesus Christ. This was the true gospel that Paul had preached.

In contrast, these Judaizers were saying that if a man wished to please God, he must become a Jew first by being circumcised and then spend the rest of his life carrying out all the rules and regulations of the law.

Every time a man performed a deed of the law, so these Judaizers were saying, it was a credit in his account with God. They were teaching that it was necessary for a man to *earn* the favor of God. To Paul that was utterly impossible.



III. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is an "apostle" and what is their role?

V. APPLICATION



Have you ever felt exhausted by trying to earn God's love by following certain rules or regulations? Do you see God as a harsh judge with rules who loves to punish people when they break them? Do you ever feel that God has stopped loving you because you are not following man-made rules?

Remember this... God loves you because of who he is, not because of your performance as a Christian. You don't have to earn His love. You can't even get out of His love for you even if you wanted to. It's unconditional, unmerited, and free to you now and forever. That's the only gospel!