

Grace Isn't Dead
Don't Believe the Hype – There is NO Other Gospel
Galatians 1:6-9

Introduction: Have you ever put your heart and soul into something, expecting the people you are doing it for to show up and thank you, but instead, they say, “What in the world are you doing?” You expect them to praise you for your performance, but instead, they criticize you. I’m pretty sure this is how the believers in Galatia felt when they got this letter from Paul!

The believers in Galatia had received news about Jesus Christ from Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey (read Acts 13 and 14). With all kinds of excitement, they repented, believed in Jesus, received the Holy Spirit, and were experiencing God doing things that only He could get the credit for doing! The level of excitement and joy was ecstatic. However, not long after Paul and Barnabas left, some very talented preachers came to town with information they said was vital for truly experiencing all God had for them. It was information about religious rules and practices that they claimed people couldn’t really know God without, and they taught it in such a way that it made perfect sense! They convinced a noticeable portion of the new believers in Galatia that the means of receiving and experiencing God’s life was not simply to faithfully love and trust Him, but that a person also needed to do certain religious practices and traditions, especially those in the Jewish law, to truly receive and experience it. They claimed these were the true and most holy means of receiving the grace of Jesus Christ that Paul taught them all about; he just forgot to tell them that they needed to do these religious things and follow these laws to fully receive and grow in the grace of Christ.

Now, understand this: the believers in Galatia loved Paul. Paul had an incredible ministry with them as he and Barnabas traveled through Galatia. Undoubtedly, the believers in those churches would see him as a spiritual father. Paul and Barnabas are the reason they know Jesus! So, imagine the scene as news of a letter addressed to them from Paul had arrived! Imagine as they all gathered around to hear it read, getting as quiet as possible, excited to hear from the man they most admired! Mothers held their babies closely while subtly bouncing them to keep them from crying and causing a distraction. Little children were told to go outside and play. Everyone was dialed in and almost frozen by the anticipation of what they would hear written in that letter.

As we previously saw, it opens with the formality one would expect.

1 Paul, an apostle--not from men nor through man, but through 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:

They then heard a standard greeting and proclamation of faith that they likely heard Paul say when he was with them,

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

So far, the words in this letter seemed uneventful. They may have even first read them like you and I read a letter delivered to us. You look to see where it came from, and that it is indeed written to you; then you quickly rip it open and pull the letter out hoping its beneficial information, encouragement or money, rather than a bill or a worthless marketing piece to get you to buy something you don't actually need or even want!

So far in this letter, I can imagine that everyone was standing there with the assumption that Paul had heard of their newly "matured faith" and that he is now writing to congratulate them! In their mind, the teachers who showed up after Paul and Barnabas have come in and grown their faith into something more rich, deep and distinguishable. Therefore, they likely thought this letter was coming to them because of how excited Paul was that they were learning to follow all the laws and religious traditions of Judaism. They were likely confident Paul was about to congratulate them on how pious and righteous they were for living—dressing like a Jew, eating like a Jew, celebrating Jewish feasts and holidays, honoring the sabbath, and working hard to learn and obey all the other laws in the Law of Moses.

But, they instead heard, "What in the world are you doing?" Paul writes,

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (1:6-9)

Paul goes straight from the kindness of "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3) to a sarcastic rebuke when he states, **6 I am astonished**

Hendriksen and Kistemaker wrote,

"What we find *here* is not satisfaction but stupefaction: overwhelming amazement, painful perplexity."¹

¹ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Galatians* (Vol. 8, pp. 37–40). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Henry Alford noted the significance of the lack of mildness in the word Paul chose. He wrote, **“Still, like many such mild words, it carries to the guilty conscience even sharper rebuke than a harsher one would.”**²

Instead of putting fuel in their ego, Paul just stuck a knife in it!

In essence, then, he offers a second introduction to the letter. The first one was a very short and formal one that established the foundation of the letter, but the second one was an introduction to the purpose of the letter, which was clearly not to congratulate them but rather to rebuke and correct them!

Specifically, this second introduction in Galatians asserts three truths about the sinful reality of altering the Gospel of Jesus.

Proposition: Galatians 1:6-9 asserts three truths about the sinful reality of altering the Gospel of Jesus.

The first truth about the sinful reality of altering the Gospel is that,

(1) Turning away from the Gospel of Jesus is abandoning GOD! (1:6)

- A. 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel**
- B.** It baffled Paul how soon after his departure the believers in these towns turned to something that clearly wasn't what He preached! It truly makes no sense to him whatsoever why, after hearing about the sufficiency of Christ's death, the victory of His resurrection, and the Covenant that God made with us in Christ (all this being the Gospel), that anybody would ever want to believe in anything different; but especially that soon afterward!
- C.** Now it's important to note that they are in the process of deserting and turning. Paul writes this in the present tense rather than the perfect, indicating that this is an ongoing thing and not a done deal. They can repent and turn back!
- D.** But here's what I really want you to see in verse six. Turning to a different gospel necessarily means you are deserting or abandoning God! Look at the verse again. Paul writes,
- E. “6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ”**

² Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 3, p. 35). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

1. There are two points of emphasis here. The first and most obvious is that they are turning from GOD!
2. But Paul doesn't just say they are turning from God, but particularly from the God who CALLED them in the grace of Christ. The entire reason they are children of God is because God decided to CALL them, that is, not only choose them, but then reach out and call them into the covenant with Him that is only accessed and experienced because of the gracious gift of Christ and His work on the cross!
3. Think about that for a second. Imagine if my son got killed for something you did. He was totally innocent, but nonetheless, he ended up getting killed because of you. Then imagine how blown away you would be if, later, you got a call from me telling you that I had filled out the paperwork for you to receive all the inheritance he would have gotten from me when I died! You are the reason my son died an unjust death, but then, not because of any work done by you, and in spite of the work you did do, you got his inheritance. All you have to do is accept it!
4. That is precisely what Paul is communicating here. He is saying, God picked you to give you everything He is and has by His grace through all that Christ did, but you would rather ignore that and do things that you think better deserve it! You would rather do something to try and get to Him instead of being blown away by what He did for Him to get to you!
5. And here is where the rubber hits the road. If God's plan on coming to you isn't good enough for you (The Gospel), if you would rather replace it with some kind of plan to get to Him, then just know, you not only abandoned His plan, but you also abandoned HIM! If you are willing to lay aside the fact that He called you to Himself because of what Christ did, to instead trust in some other "gospel" on how to get to God, or how to more effectively get God to you, then you need to know that you are actually leaving God!

The second truth about the sinful reality of altering the Gospel is that,

(2) Altering the Gospel is abandoning the Gospel! (1:7b)

- A. "--7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."
- B. Notice verse 7 is separated from verse 6 by an "em" dash. An "em" dash, here denoted by a double dash, but can also be denoted with a longer dash, is a specific type of punctuation. Unlike the "en" dash that represents the continuation of numbers, an "em" dash is used by writers to tell their readers that they are about to take what they just wrote a little deeper. It's supposed to

alert the reader that they are about to get some really important and more profound thoughts on whatever it was they just read.

- C. So, in verse six, Paul just said they were abandoning God and turning to a different gospel. But then we get a double dash (an em dash) and he writes,

D. “--7 not that there is another one,

1. So, is there another Gospel to turn to or not? Are they turning to another gospel, or are they turning to something that is not the Gospel? Interestingly, Paul uses two different Greek words that both mean “different” or “another” but in a dissimilar way.
2. K.S. Wuest writes, “**Heteros (ἕτερος) means another of a different kind. allos (ἄλλος). another of the same kind.**”³
3. Therefore, when Paul writes, **6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel**, he is pointing out that they are leaving God to turn to something that is profoundly different (heteros) in every way. Notice “gospel” is lower case here to emphasize that the “heteros,” is fundamentally not the same thing; it is of a totally different kind. The gospel they are choosing is not eating a green apple instead of a red apple, so that they can say they are still eating an apple; but rather, the gospel they are choosing is essentially them putting down the apple and picking up a horseshoe and claiming that eating a metal horseshoe is the same thing as eating an apple! “An apple a day keeps the doctor away,” but eating a horseshoe will get you sent to the hospital and a dentist! A horseshoe is not of the same kind as an apple; it’s totally different in every way!
4. But in verse seven, Paul drives things a little deeper and offers a rebuttal to a hypothetical question. Is it possible to have a “green apple” type of Gospel instead of a “red apple” Gospel? Is it possible to have a Gospel, that is, it’s in every way the Gospel, just slightly different, like a green apple is to a red apple? They are both apples, just different kinds of apples. To this, Paul says no! There is no other Gospel, even within what somebody might say is the same kind of Gospel. There are no alternatives or variations. There are no such things as green apples when it comes to the Gospel, there’s just red ones! **“7 not that there is another one,**

- E. Now, why is this important? Well, it’s because there are those who “**want to distort the gospel of Christ.**”

³ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 36–37). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

1. The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament says of the word translated “distort,”

Note: **“to cause a change of state, with emphasis upon the difference in the resulting state—‘to change to, to turn into, to cause to be different from, to transform’”⁴**

2. The word “distort” in the original Greek is a compound word. It’s a combination of the word “beyond” (*meta*) and the word for “to twist, turn, bend” ⁵ (*stréphō*). Put together, then, Paul is saying these men teaching you this stuff want to go beyond twisting or turning or bending the Gospel; they want to change it entirely!
 3. They may claim to be offering a different (*allos*) apple that tastes better and is better for you, but you need to know there is no better gospel, because there is no such thing as an alternate gospel of the same kind. As such, while it seems they may only be slightly twisting, turning, or bending it to make it better, they are actually changing it because you can’t twist, turn, and bend the gospel; you can only offer a different one!
 4. There is no such thing as a Gospel of a similar kind. If you change the Gospel in any way, including adding something to it or taking something away from it, no matter if you claim you are creating a better Gospel of the same kind (making a new kind of apple), you are, in fact, creating a different Gospel!
- F.** Therefore, Paul is saying there are some, who are currently in your midst right now, that are creating a real problem for you because they are in the process of convincing you guys of something that they claim is a better kind of Gospel, when in fact, it’s a total perversion of the Gospel and as such it is no longer the Gospel!
- G.** When you add to “by grace through faith,” take away from “by grace through faith,” or redefine “by grace through faith,” then you no longer have the Gospel of Jesus. It’s not a different version of the same Gospel, but rather something that is totally different because any change to it is a total perversion of it! You and I are not chosen by God, saved by God, loved by God, or even matured by God, because of any kind of works; if we are, then it’s by definition no longer GRACE, and thus a gospel of a different kind! It’s why Paul wrote,
- H. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. (Romans 11:6)**

⁴ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 155). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁵ Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Abridged in One Volume*](#) (p. 1093). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

The third truth about the sinful reality of altering the Gospel is that we should,

(3) Treat those who alter the Gospel as those who are lost and under the judgment of God. (1:8-9)

- A. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.**
- B.** Hearing from an angel would be a pretty convincing experience, but Paul says don't believe it if it's different, and Paul includes himself! Paul said that even if he came back and said something different, then he should be considered accursed!
- C.** There will always be persuasive voices who, ironically, sometimes in the name of Jesus, claim to have something better than what Jesus Himself taught! In every generation, there have been people who sounded as convincing as you would imagine an angel standing in front of you would be, who have offered Christians a new and improved message from God; that is, a new and improved "gospel." Two of the most popular ones are Muhammad and Joseph Smith, both of whom claimed they got their gospel from an angel!
1. "Jibril – The bringer of good news. He is mentioned in both the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Angel Jibril revealed Allah's words in the form of the Qur'an to Muhammad on the Night of Power. Because of this, he is also known as the Angel of Revelation, as he played a vital role in communicating Islam to humanity."⁶
 2. "Moroni, according to the teaching of the [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#), an [angel](#) or resurrected being who appeared to [Joseph Smith](#) on September 21, 1823, to inform him that he had been chosen to restore God's church on earth. Four years later Smith purportedly received plates of gold from Moroni, who, as the last of the ancient prophets, had buried them in a hill called Cumorah (near Palmyra, New York) some 14 centuries earlier. On those plates were written history and teachings about ancient American prophets and peoples; it was that knowledge that Smith recorded in the *Book of Mormon* (see [Mormon, Book of](#)), which became accepted as a holy scripture by the [Mormon](#) church."⁷

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z43pfcw/revision/3>

⁷ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Moroni". Encyclopedia Britannica, 20 Aug. 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moroni-religious-figure>. Accessed 28 February 2023.

- D. But here's the kicker in these two verses. The word translated as "accursed" is the Greek word *anathema*.
1. The Faithlife Study Bible notes, "**The Greek word used here, *anathema*, refers to putting someone under God's judgment.**"⁸
 2. K.S. Wuest adds a little more context in his commentary when he writes, "**It is a word used ... of a person or thing set apart and devoted to destruction, ... Hence in a spiritual sense it denotes one who is alienated from God by sin.**"⁹
- E. Paul is saying, no matter if it's me, somebody else, or an angel; if anybody claims something that in any way alters the Gospel he preached, which is the Gospel Jesus Himself preached, then treat them as if they are an unrepentant sinner – because they are! This includes people who attempt to use the Old Testament Law that God gave Israel to be the means of receiving or growing in God's life. They will say, "If God gave it, it must still be good for us." It's like the children who claim eating dirt isn't unhealthy because God made dirt, so dirt must not hurt you! However, God didn't make dirt for eating! Likewise, God didn't create the Mosaic Law for us to receive or grow in righteousness, which is why Paul clearly told the Romans,
- F. **20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, (Romans 3:20)**
- G. Therefore, a person who teaches or trusts in anything other than the Grace of God in Jesus Christ through faith is trusting themselves to accomplish something that God Himself has declared cannot be done by them! In teaching that which contradicts what Christ Himself taught, they are literally teaching what is not Christian and thus shouldn't be called Christian. Therefore, things like Mormonism and the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses are not Christian; they are false gospels, and there is no hope of salvation in what they teach. For a Mormon or Jehovah's witness to have eternal life, they must therefore repent and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by the actual Jesus to His actual Apostles, not the angel Moroni, Joseph Smith, or some other would-be "prophet."
- H. In the same way, Muhammad's teachings are not the Gospel of Jesus in any way, fashion, shape, or form, and as such, there is no hope of salvation in them. According to the Bible, those who trust in the teachings of Islam stand accursed until they repent of their belief in the false gospel given to Muhammad by an

⁸ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Ga 1:8). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 3, pp. 39–40). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

angel and instead believe in and follow the Gospel Jesus gave us and accomplished in his death, burial, and resurrection!

- I. This doesn't mean we should in any way act violently towards Muslims, Mormons, or any other person who believes something contrary to the Gospel of Jesus. The mission of Christ is not to punish the accursed but to love them into realizing they can repent and receive His life at any point in their life! Jesus didn't come to strike sinners but die for them! He didn't come to condemn the lost for not knowing the way, but to show them He is the Way! Therefore, in the necessary clear rebuke of those who teach false gospels, the invitation to repent and trust in Christ is no less offered to them than it was and is to any other sinner, and such were we (1 Corinthians 6:11)!
- J. However, let me be clear: I'm 100% for coexisting on the planet with those who don't believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, I love being close friends with those who don't believe in His Gospel and follow Him. The Bible actually commands us to love those who do not! However, in that sincere friendship, my prayer and desire for them is to repent and believe in the Gospel of Jesus! Loving somebody doesn't mean I compromise the Gospel and think they're going to heaven even though they have rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ for another version of it, or even if they rejected it for no Gospel at all. It means I obey Jesus and love everybody the way He loves me, and He loves me enough to call me to repent and believe in Him and the Gospel He preached!

Challenge: What version of the Gospel are you trusting in?

Spurgeon wrote,

"The Galatians were a very fickle people. They seem very soon to have left the gospel, to have adulterated it, and to have fallen into Ritualism, into Sacramentarianism, into salvation by works, and all the errors into which people usually fall when they go away from the gospel."¹⁰

Todd Wilson wrote,

"When we're scared or hurting, discouraged or disillusioned, we're often more open to considering something in addition to the gospel that we first received. We may have found Jesus sufficient up to this point. But given the way things are now, we wonder if it's time to look elsewhere."¹¹

The following are five examples of some common alternate gospels that leave you "accursed" while claiming to be blessed!

¹⁰ Spurgeon, C. (2013). [*Galatians*](#). (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 1:6). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹¹ Wilson, T. (2013). [*Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*](#). (R. K. Hughes, Ed.) (p. 30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

- (1) **Religious traditionalism – the false gospel that participating in certain religious rituals enables you to receive and grow in God’s grace and favor.**

Note: Many refer to these traditions or rituals as “means of grace.” Oddly, there are numerous denominations of the Christian faith who claim to profess a solid belief in justification and sanctification by grace through faith alone, but then manipulate the teachings of massive amounts of Scripture’s, including entire books of the Bible like Galatians, to falsely claim their religious traditions are not just outward expressions of their faith, but are instead God ordained “works” whereby they receive and grow in His grace.

- (2) **Religious moralism – the false gospel that if you do the right things, especially certain right things, and don’t do too many of the wrong things, especially certain wrong things, then you will receive and grow in God’s grace and favor.**

- A. The sad result of religious moralism is an almost comical circus of debates over which things are right and which things are wrong, especially which things are deeply wrong! When you read the Sermon on the Mount and see Jesus saying stuff like, **“27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28)**, it should make you realize that religious moralism is an utterly ridiculous proposition! If God views a mental failure on the same level as an actionable failure, then there is no chance we can ever meet His standards!
- B. Furthermore, those who proclaim the “prosperity gospel” fit this category. The same false gospel was preached to Job in the Old Testament Book of Job, and God Himself rebuked it! The “prosperity gospel” teaches that if you do everything right, then everything goes right. Consequently, if things are going badly, it’s because you either have not done enough good to earn God’s favor, or you have done so much bad that God is now judging you. In religious moralism, Scriptures about God’s judgment on sin, and God’s covenant with Israel that promised prosperity as a nation if they obeyed His laws and promised judgment if they didn’t, are totally twisted, taken out of context, and misapplied. The Old Covenant of God with Israel through Moses wasn’t expanded on by Christ; it was fulfilled and replaced by Christ!

- (3) **Religious liberalism – the false gospel that you can believe whatever you want, and as such, define sin however you want. This false gospel frees you to sin with no regrets because it says sin is no longer an offense to God.**

- (4) **Religious intellectualism – the false gospel that knowledge equals godliness, and as such, the more you know about the Bible, the more you receive and grow in God’s grace and favor.**

- A. Now let me be VERY clear. The knowledge of God's Word, the Bible, is an absolute necessity to grow in the knowledge of God and mature as a follower of Christ.
 - B. **16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)**
 - C. However, being a Biblical scholar doesn't save you and doesn't mean you're a strong and faithful follower of Christ! For instance, the Jewish Scribes, who knew the Scriptures more than anybody, were at the center of those who called for the crucifixion of Jesus! You can learn everything there is to know about the Bible, but still choose not to live by grace through faith in Him. You can love the knowledge of Jesus and still not love Jesus!
 - D. This is not an excuse to not read and study your Bible, but it should be noted that the printing press wasn't invented until the 15th century! The Gospel was changing lives 1,500 years after the birth of Christ and long before words could be mass-produced for people to see. In addition, it wasn't until modern times that most people could even read at all. Therefore, the idea that spiritual maturity depends on my reading ability is not only a false gospel, but it also defies common sense.
 - E. This is, however, another reason faithful preachers of God's Word were so crucial throughout history and why the church gathered so frequently throughout history. Most people couldn't read, much less afford a scroll, so they gathered together regularly and frequently to listen to the reading and teaching of God's Word. The truth of Christ, the Gospel, will set you free, but you can't be set free by what you don't know.
 - F. **14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" (Romans 10:14-15)**
 - G. You may not be able to read, but that doesn't mean you can't learn God's Word and meditate on it to be transformed by it! But in so doing, it's equally important to know that learning God's Word, and even loving God's Word, doesn't mean you are living in a relationship with God.
- (5) **Church religion – the false gospel that if you love going to worship services, Bible studies, and serving in the church, then you are receiving and growing in God's grace and favor.**

Note: I could insert all kinds of church names in that blank. I could have even put the church I pastor in it! A person who buys into the false Gospel of church religion could literally turn Venture Church into a religion, all while I snort and stomp every Sunday about how church isn't our access to God because Jesus alone is! Attending a worship service is meant to help you understand the Gospel, inspire you on the worthiness of loving and obeying Jesus, help you build relationships with other believers; in short, help encourage you to live by grace through faith, not be your means of grace! The Bible commands the church to love one another, to be committed to gathering, to use our gifts to serve one another, and to labor together to spread the Gospel. So, understand that loving going to worship gatherings with other believers to hear God's Word preached and to sing praises to the Lord, being in Bible studies with other believers, using your gifts and talents to serve others in the church and laboring with others in the church to serve the lost world around you, is normal, good, and right for people who love Jesus! However, you can also love all those things and still have no love for Jesus, especially if you are involved in a church that works hard to do those things well! You can very much love the church and not Jesus. The answer is not to change the church into something you don't like so you like Jesus more, nor is it to run from the church; the answer is to repent and believe in Jesus! The answer is to live by grace through faith in Jesus alone!