



### Galatians 1:6-9

This Study Paper contains the following:-

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#### Introduction to the passage

Paul had preached the good news of Jesus Christ in the region of Galatia. Many had heard and believed. Churches were formed but it did not take long for certain false teachers to come in amongst these new converts. News reached Paul and he wrote this letter. The language he uses in these verses is among the strongest in the New Testament. The purpose of writing in this way is to stop the Galatians from falling away from the gospel.

#### What these verses mean

Verse 6

##### ***I am astonished***

Paul had reason to be surprised. True believers know that they are sinners in God’s sight. Therefore they are not able to earn God’s favour by anything they do. The Bible teaching that God saves us by His grace alone is good news to such helpless sinners. How surprising then that the Galatians should give up this good news of salvation by grace and try to earn their salvation by keeping the laws of Moses – which, as

sinners, they had no ability to do! It **is** astonishing how readily people try to save themselves by their own hopeless efforts, instead of crying to God for mercy and grace.

##### ***that you are so quickly deserting***

“So quickly” means “rashly” or “with so little thought”. Paul used the same idea in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and 1 Timothy 5:22. Error spreads quickest when people behave thoughtlessly! The Galatians were deserting true Bible teaching about salvation without taking careful thought about their actions.

##### ***the one who called you***

The Greek word to “call” was used in everyday Greece for a summons to a law court. <sup>1</sup> It was used of calling someone **for a definite purpose**. Believers are people who have been specifically called to be believers. See Romans 9:24, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 9 and 24.

##### ***by the grace of Christ***

Paul wrote this expression to show that divine grace was the reason for their being called to be believers. They were not called because God was pleased with something they had done. They were called because God loved them even though they did not deserve it.

##### ***and are turning to a different gospel — <sup>2</sup>***

The Galatians were thinking that their idea of earning their salvation by keeping the laws of Moses was still a gospel, even if a different gospel from the gospel of salvation by God’s grace alone which Paul taught.

Verse 7

##### ***which is really no gospel at all. <sup>3</sup>***

No! said Paul – it is not a different gospel. It is no gospel. There cannot be two types of gospel, but only one. There is only one way of salvation, not two possible ways.

<sup>1</sup> A summons to a court of law carries with it the obligation to attend. It is **effectual** because even if someone does not attend voluntarily then law officers are sent to compel them to come. When God **calls** particular sinners to put their faith in Christ as their sin-bearer, he does so in such a way that those sinners believe in Christ. The **call** has its **effect**; it is **effectual calling**. The sinners have heard the call of God in their hearts, and respond. (A Dictionary of Theological Terms – M. E. Manton.) “For many are invited [called], but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14).

<sup>2</sup> In verse 6 Paul uses the word “heteros” for **different**. The word means **of a different kind**. Think of  
- hetero-sexual / of different sexes  
- hetero-dox / of different thinking i.e. heretical.

***Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion***

Compare 5:10,12. The word translated “are throwing you into confusion” is used in John 5:7 of the water being “stirred up”. It is also used to describe a situation when calmness of mind is destroyed by fear, excitement or perplexity. There were teachers who travelled among the churches, insisting that Gentile believers must keep Jewish ceremonial laws, as well as believe in Christ, for salvation. See Acts 15:1,2 and 24. The Galatian believers heard one message from Paul (salvation by grace) and another message from these teachers (salvation by grace plus human effort). The Galatians’ loyalty to the truth was being shaken.

***and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.***

The word Paul used for “pervert” means not merely to make a slight change of direction, but a complete reversal. Galatian believers were going from a gospel wholly of God’s doing to a “gospel” of believers strictly keeping ceremonial laws! Compare 3:3.

Verse 8

***But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you,***

Would **you** refuse to listen to a glorious angel preaching, if he taught contrary to Bible teaching? Never forget 2 Corinthians 11:14! How important it is to test all the preaching we do, and all we hear, by continually asking, “Does this truly agree with Bible teaching?”

***let him be eternally condemned!***

Paul speaks very strongly and does so twice – verses 8 and 9. This shows us how serious a thing it is to teach what is not Bible truth. Those who do so will have God’s curse on them. Compare Matthew 7:22,23; 15:13. Paul twice pronounces a curse here because in verse 8 he supposes something that would never actually happen – neither Paul, nor angels, would preach a false gospel. In verse 9 he speaks of something that is actually happening – men are preaching another gospel. Both the imaginary example and the example of what was actually happening merit God’s curse.

Verse 9

***As we have already said, so now I say again:***

The matter Paul is dealing with is serious. The Galatians have put themselves into a dangerous situation and Paul has to repeat his warning to re-enforce the point.

***If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted,***

False teachers were preaching a different message. Previously the Galatians “took to themselves” what Paul had taught them. Compare

4:14. Paul is reminding them how eagerly they received the gospel of the grace of God originally. How can they now reject it?

***let him be eternally condemned!***

This is Paul’s second pronouncement of a curse (see verse 8 above).



**Summary**

Paul is astonished at how quickly the Galatian believers had allowed themselves to be persuaded by false teachers to follow another gospel. In fact what these teachers were saying was not a gospel at all. It was not good news because it did not depend upon the grace of Christ. Anyone who perverts the gospel of Christ – and it doesn’t matter who it is, even if it were an apostle or an angel – would be eternally condemned.



**A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses**

**Get the true gospel!**

There are many Christian preachers and teachers; there are many Christian churches; there are many religions; there are many philosophies; but there is only **one** true gospel.

- i The wrong gospel is not a gospel at all (verse 7). We must not say: “Any apparently good teaching will save us.” One drop of poison ruins a good drink.
  - a. There are not “many different roads to God”; see John 14:6, Acts 4:12.
  - b. The true gospel does not change with changing years.
  - c. The true gospel is not a mixture of other gospels.

(The false teachers were trying to mix together Judaism and Christianity.)

- ii This is a most serious matter, so serious that Paul pronounces God’s curse on all teachers of a false gospel (verses 8,9).
  - a. The curse is spoken twice. That shows it was very deliberately intended; Paul is not speaking rashly.
  - b. The curse includes anyone, angels, apostles (“we”); Paul includes himself under the curse, if he teaches error! Teaching a wrong gospel is the devil’s work, deserving God’s curse.

- iii A false gospel is **so** sinful because :-
  - a. It belittles the glory of Christ. Paul **knew** his previous law-keeping and circumcision had **not** made him a Christian. He knew he was a Christian only because of Jesus Christ. Only union with Christ alone makes a person a Christian. Any other teaching takes away from Christ's work. It turns us "from him who has called us" (verse 6).
  - b. It misleads the hearers. If you teach people a way that does not go to heaven, you have taught them the way to hell! What could be more sinful than that?
- iv The false gospel is:
  - a. Anything different from what the apostles taught (verses 8,9). The importance of the preacher does not make his sermon truthful. The truthfulness of his sermon makes the preacher's rôle important. Any teaching or practice not clearly taught in the epistles is not truly the gospel.
  - b. Any teaching that the grace of God is not enough for our salvation (verse 6). Believers are saved by grace (Eph.2:8), not by baptism, communion, confession, good works, last rites, mass for the dead – or anything else!!

Have you got the **true** gospel? Can you find **all** your beliefs and practices taught in the epistles?



## Focus Point: Grace

### What is grace?

Paul uses the word for grace seven times in this letter. (The word occurs 156 times in the New Testament.) Obviously it is an important word. The Old Testament has Hebrew words for God's favour and his loving-kindness – ideas which are all included in the New Testament word for grace.

Grace means favour shown by a superior to an inferior, when there is no reason for it. Indeed, it is **not** grace unless there is every reason not to expect it! Grace, in the New Testament, always originates from God. He is superior to all other persons. No-one can compel God to be favourable to him or her. And since all men are sinners (living disobediently to God's Word) there is no reason to expect that God should

favour anyone. So everything outside of hell (which is the only thing we really earn) comes to us from God's gracious kindness. Paul uses the word grace in this sense in 1:3; 2:21; 6:18.

Grace also means the work that God does in changing men and women. God does this work through Jesus Christ. Grace is the force of God's love, in Christ, actually affecting people. Paul uses this word in this sense in 1:6 and 1:15.

Grace also means the effect produced in believers as God's Spirit changes them. Grace is the spiritual beauty, gentleness and holiness which the Spirit causes to grow in the believer. Paul speaks of grace in this sense in 2:9 and 5:4.

So grace is:

- i. a fountain of lovingkindness which springs up within God
- ii. a river of mercy pouring out which washes all believers
- iii. the Spirit filling them up like little vessels full of the very nature of God.

We cannot explain why God should act like this. There is no reason for it. Indeed, everything we sinful humans have done deserves everlasting punishment! No wonder Paul is full of praise for God's gracious ways. See Romans 11:33-36.

Once these meanings of grace are understood, then any teaching which excludes grace as the way of salvation, or makes grace only one part of the way of salvation, is shown to be unscriptural, and must be rejected. Sin has robbed us of all spiritual abilities. Only a salvation fully of grace **can** be any use to us! We can do absolutely nothing to earn our salvation.



## Over to you

How is the Christian gospel attacked/perverted today in your area?

How would you answer the person who says, "Religion is just a matter of opinion - people should believe whatever is true for them"?

How faithful have you been in preaching the one true gospel?