

## **Good Works Won't Save You** ***Galatians: The True Gospel of Grace***

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The Book of Galatians is an introduction into the basics of how to grow as a Christian and avoid the main pitfall that Christians and non-Christians alike fall into- a self-reliance in accomplishing God's will in their lives through obedience to a set of laws. These laws, whether God's laws or man's traditions, never have the power to transform our lives, but rather lead us into bondage and self-deception as we rely on them to grow spiritually or to be saved by adherence to them. God has another way for us to be delivered from our sin and grow in our relationship with Him- it is the path of grace- it is undeserved and relies not on our power or goodness, but on God's gifts, power and sacrifice. This message flies in the face of all that we're used to believing in life, yet it is the fundamental message that must be understood to become a Christian and to grow as a Christian.

### **Paul told his Galatian readers why he wrote this epistle:**

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach another gospel to you that what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. (1:6-8)*

The true gospel of Christ is a gospel of grace, which means, "Unmerited favor." The false gospel (a perversion of the true gospel) ignores or redefines grace and replaces it (or adds to it) good works to obtain salvation or to please God. The Greek word for "accursed" in this passage is "anathema", the strongest possible word for condemnation in the Greek language. John MacArthur notes<sup>1</sup> "anathema refers to devoting someone to destruction in eternal hell." So vehement was Paul regarding those who taught this false gospel, that he said later of them, "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!" (5:12) Judiazers crept into the church saying that circumcision was an additional requirement, along with all the other laws of Moses, to being saved. Paul so vehemently rejected this false teaching that he sarcastically said they should not stop at circumcision but go all the way to castration or emasculation. When we read of such passionate words it ought to make us stop and take notice. Our ears should perk up to God's urgent warnings. Let us come to grips with what this false gospel was that the Judiazers were preaching and see how it applies throughout the history of the church and in other religions.

### **Galatians 1:1-5**

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV, 1997, p. 1788.

*Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

The tone of the opening words of Galatians is not peaceful like the other epistles. Paul started out defending his credentials as an apostle: he was called as an apostle by Jesus Christ, not by man (v. 1). In his opening salutation, Paul reminded them that the Lord Jesus Christ came to give them grace [undeserved favor] and peace- and that He accomplished this by dying on the cross for our sins to deliver us out of this world system, this present evil age, according to the Father's will and glory. The true gospel always emphasizes what Jesus Christ has done on the cross and the resultant grace, the free gift we've received because of His work, rather than a false gospel which...

- Has its origin in man and man's traditions instead of on God's revelation
- Emphasizes man's works instead of God's grace
- Seeks to please God through obedience to a set of laws instead of a reliance on God to lead us through His Spirit in a personal relationship

### **Galatians 1:6-10**

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 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. 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.*

The Galatians had been taught a gospel of grace by Paul (v. 6) yet turned away (this Greek phrase conjures up the imagery of a military desertion punishable by death) to a different gospel which was no gospel (not good news) at all since it was a message that if embraced led to eternal condemnation. This "gospel" was a perversion- it turned the true gospel into a message that was diametrically opposed to the true gospel yet used wording that made the shift in the message appear very subtle. Paul was so vehement about the necessity of not altering the gospel in even the slightest way that twice he proclaimed that no one should be listened to (not even angels or even Paul himself) if they changed this gospel and anyone who changed this gospel was eternally condemned. The Judiazers who preached this false gospel sought to please men and exalt themselves whereas Paul was persecuted by preaching the true gospel and was thus not seeking to be a man-pleaser but a servant of Christ.

### **Galatians 1:11-24**

*But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God in me.*

If anyone was qualified to preach about the difference between the true gospel and the false gospel of the Judiazers, it was Paul. The true gospel had its' origin in revelation by Jesus Christ (v. 12) to Paul which was consistent with all revelation of the Old Testament and with the other apostles. The false gospel had its' origins in man's traditions (v. 14). The Jews had a tradition (Halakah) that was man's interpretations of the law of God that carried equal or more weight than the Word of God. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for such reliance on man's traditions that often contradicted God's Word (*Matthew 15:1-11, cf. Colossians 2:8-23*).

Paul was also qualified to speak about the false gospel and its' origins in the traditions of man because before he became a follower of Jesus Christ, he eagerly pursued these traditions of man. In his quest for advancement to the pinnacle of Judaism as a teacher under the famous rabbi Gamaliel, Paul rose to the top of his field. In his Judaism he sought his own personal advancement, literally "chomping ahead" or as we say, "blazing a trail" beyond many of his contemporaries in Judaism. He was well respected as a zealous teacher of Judaism. He saw Christians as a threat to his advancement and to Judaism as more and more Jews became followers of Jesus and he persecuted the church more zealously than anyone else, seeking to destroy it. Unbeknownst to Paul at the time, God had a plan for him to bring him to a point of repentance and faith through God's grace. Paul described this transformation as God revealing "His Son in me." It was more than just a theology lesson- Paul had encountered the risen Christ and entered into a relationship with Him- He was reborn as Jesus Christ came into him by faith through God's grace-His unmerited favor.

The Judiazers accused Paul of going to see the apostles in Jerusalem to be corrected for his false teachings (v. 18-22) but Paul assured them that he wasn't lying, and that the apostles in Jerusalem saw him and glorified God in Paul- they recognized the miracle that Jesus Christ had taken a violent man who persecuted the church and transformed him from the inside out.

## **Galatians 2:1-10**

*Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But from those who seemed to be something--whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man--for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.*

Fourteen years after this conversion of Paul, Titus and Barnabus went up to Jerusalem with him, not to be corrected by the apostles in Jerusalem (as the Judaizers in Galatia accused them of), but rather because the Holy Spirit told Paul to go by revelation (v. 2). Titus, a strong Christian well known for his fruitful Christian faith, felt no compulsion to give into the pressures of the Judaizers and get circumcised. He recognized that circumcision added nothing to his faith and that he was not under the Mosaic Law. Thus Titus was a living witness that the Holy Spirit worked in Gentile's lives though he hadn't performed the works of the law by being circumcised. Meanwhile false brethren spied out the liberty of Titus and other Gentiles in order to bring them into the bondage of the law as a necessary requirement for salvation. Paul, Titus and the other Gentiles stood firm in the gospel of salvation by faith alone without adding works such as circumcision that would have brought them into the bondage of slavery of the Law of Moses that was unable to save anyone.

Paul plainly proclaimed that Peter, James and John, men of reputation as apostles, added nothing to his gospel of salvation by grace alone (v. 6). Rather these apostles affirmed that Paul was a preacher of the same gospel to the Gentiles that they preached to the circumcised Jews, and they rejoiced in the grace of God- His favor in Paul's ministry.

## **Galatians 2:11-14: Dark Days of Hypocrisy**

*Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not*

*straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"*

Paul rebuked and condemned Peter for his hypocrisy in Antioch. Peter came to Antioch and was regularly eating with the Gentiles. Peter then abandoned the dietary restrictions of the law (*Acts 10:9-22, 15:7-29*) by eating with the Gentiles, but when the Judiazers came to Antioch, Peter in his hypocrisy gradually and deceptively withdrew from eating with the Gentiles, going back to legalism- separating from them. He was motivated by his fear of his loss of popularity. Many other Jews in Antioch observed Peter's hypocrisy as a leader and joined with him. Paul rebuked Peter in public for his public sin that violated the gospel of grace. Peter's hypocrisy, until it was repented of, sent a message to the Gentiles by his actions that God's grace was insufficient by itself to justify a person and that the law of Moses needed to be adhered to in order to be saved.

### **Galatians 2:15-17**

*We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!*

Paul summarized the gospel of grace and how nothing can be added to it. The powerlessness of the law to justify is evident: "By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." Obedience to the law can never make a person right before God. It cannot add one iota to our justification by faith alone in Christ alone. The word "justified" "describes a judge declaring an accused person not guilty and therefore innocent before the law."<sup>2</sup> Why can't the law of God justify us? Because none of us have kept the perfect standard of God's law- the law doesn't justify us, it condemns us as utterly sinful people who will be declared guilty before a holy God (*cf. Rom 1:18, 2:1-3, 14-16, 3:9-31, 4:1-17, 5:1, 6-21, 7:1-8:4*). Imagine yourself in a courtroom being sentenced for a serious crime: 5 years in prison or \$500,000, and you don't have the resources to pay the fine. The judge is about to sentence you when in walks a stranger who offers you to pay your fine in your place. You receive the gift with gratitude and the fine is paid to the judge. Justice has been served and you are set free. That is what happened on your behalf when Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins. By faith you receive the free gift and are set free- you are justified before God's holy and perfect law by the price of Christ's blood shed in your place. Nothing you can do can add to that justification. It is a gift that must be received by faith- we confess our sins (acknowledging that the Judge is right in condemning all our sin), we repent of them (we make a choice to give up our sinful lifestyle) and we believe in Jesus Christ's blood shed on our behalf as the payment

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 1791

for our sins. That is the simple gospel message- have you received this gospel- this simple, pure and only true gospel? All other gospels lead to “anathema”- eternal condemnation, for they don’t provide for justification of our sins before a holy God.

### **Galatians 2:18-21**

*For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.*

Paul refused to build again the false gospel of salvation by works of the law. Rather, he destroyed it. To build again this false gospel would make Paul (and all who adhered to his message) a transgressor of the law and doomed to condemnation for not keeping the law. When we place our trust in Christ, we die to the law and to sin through faith and live to a new life of faith through grace. Christ died to set us free from the law.

### **Galatians 3:1-4**

*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain--if indeed it was in vain?*

The Galatians were bewitched (charmed or misled by flattery and false promises)<sup>3</sup> not to focus any longer on the simple gift of the gospel: that is: Christ was clearly and publicly portrayed as crucified for their sins- that salvation is a gift through Christ’s shed blood for our sins.

Paul challenged them by questioning how they received the Holy Spirit into their hearts: was it by faith or by adherence to works? They had become twisted into believing they could receive God’s favor by working for it, yet (v. 3) this is foolish. We were saved by the gift of God (the Holy Spirit) and we must be made complete by the Holy Spirit- our flesh can never be made right with God by seeking to obey God’s law.

### **Galatians 3:5-9**

*Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?-- just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are*

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<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, p 1792

*of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.*

Abraham was saved by faith, before getting circumcised and he foresaw the justification of the Gentiles when he was promised, "in you all the nations are blessed." (*Gen 12:3*) Throughout the Old Testament God used His law to demonstrate that man couldn't live up to God's laws and thus throughout the Old Testament God prophesied a future new covenant that would be founded upon salvation by the sacrifice of the Servant- the Messiah, Jesus Christ whose blood was shed in our place. (*Psalm 22, Isa 52:13-53:12, Gen 3:15, Zech 12:10-13:1*) The miracles that are done by God in our lives are done by the Spirit, not because of our obedience to the law. The miracle of salvation is a gift and every blessing in our lives is a gift from God, not to be earned, but rather received (*John 1:12-13, Eph 1:3-14, 2:1-9*).

### **Galatians 3:10-13**

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),*

The Judaizers sought to be justified by the law, but the problem with that is that whoever is under the law is under a curse because anyone who didn't keep the whole law was cursed, as quoted in the Old Testament. The law can't justify us. The law is the opposite of faith, because to be justified by the law requires works. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law. He lived the law perfectly and became a curse for us by dying on the cross- He took God's entire curse for our disobedience upon Himself.

### **Galatians 3:14-18**

*That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

Thus we receive as Gentiles (non-Jews) the blessings promised to Abraham- the promise of the Spirit by faith. God's promise of salvation by faith given to Abraham couldn't be

annulled by the Law of Moses given 430 years after Abraham. The Old Testament tracks this new covenant from its beginning in the Garden of Eden where it is promised that the Seed born of Eve would reverse the curse of sin (condemnation) and crush the head of Satan (*Gen 3:15*), to the promise to Abraham in *Gen. 12:3* that all nations would be blessed through him, to the promise of a new covenant that would be implemented through the Servant-Messiah who would bring all of mankind who would receive Him the forgiveness of sins and a personal relationship with God (*Jer 31:31-34, Isa 42:6, 49:8, Ezek 16:60*) through His blood shed in our place (*Isa 52:13-53:12*) to justify us.

### **Galatians 3:19-24**

*What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*

The purpose of the law in all its perfection and brilliance was to reveal sin, not to provide a way to give life through obedience to the law. Through the law we see that we are confined, enclosed on all sides, hopelessly trapped by our sin- like a fish in a net. The law is a tutor- it shows us our complete need for Christ to save us. The law guards us- like a jailer of guilty, condemned prisoners. The law is like a bright spotlight shining in our hearts with a magnifying glass, revealing every defect. Through Christ we are saved by faith and no longer have need of the law to tutor us.

### **Galatians 3:26-29**

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

We become sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Before we come to faith in Christ, we're sons of the devil and children of wrath (*Eph 2:1-4*). God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile, or any other distinction. When we belong to Christ, we become Abraham's seed and heirs of the promised blessings of Abraham.

### **Galatians 4:1-10**

*Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the*

*father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"*

*Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years.*

Before we came into a relationship with Christ, we were under a tutor, a guardian, a steward, and a schoolmaster: the law. It held us in slavery. Christ Jesus came into the world, fully God and fully man, lived the perfect law and offered Himself to redeem all of us who were held captive to the law. He did this at the “fullness of time” when political and religious climates were ripe for the spread of the gospel. Thus, through faith, we have been called into a relationship with God, initiated by Him, and into an inheritance, born in the Holy Spirit. We go from slaves to the law to heirs of the Father, no longer in bondage to the law. We must never go back to those “weak and beggarly elements” that would only bring us back into bondage of seeking to please God through obedience to a set of laws that we couldn’t keep.

### **Galatians 4:11-20**

*I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain. Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all. You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.*

When the Galatians first heard Paul preach the gospel, they received it with joy and would have gladly done anything for him; their gratitude was so great. They put up with Paul’s sickness without despising him and were zealously pursuing the gospel. Then Judaizers stepped in and some of the Galatians were so influenced by them that they now viewed Paul, the very person who brought them the gospel, as an enemy. The Judaizers had selfish motives, seeking to win disciples after themselves by adherence to laws instead of growing the disciples in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Legalism always takes the focus off of Jesus Christ and onto people and their performance- it thus ends up glorifying man and not God.

## **Galatians 4:21-31**

*Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar-- For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children-- But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband." Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.*

*But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.*

The two main covenants of the Bible (the Law of Moses and the New Covenant of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ) are contrasted by illustrating them through the son of Hagar (Ishmael) and the son of Sarah (Isaac). Abraham was given a promise that even in his and Sarah's old age that a child of promise would be born to reverse the curse of sin and be a blessing to all people (*Gen 21:12*). This son was Isaac, and through Isaac's lineage came Jesus Christ, who provided us the new covenant of salvation by faith through His blood shed for us.

However, Abraham and Sarah had many doubts about God fulfilling His promise when many years went by and Sarah didn't get pregnant. They decided to try to "help" God fulfill His promise by their own effort. Sarah offered her maidservant Hagar to Abraham as a wife to "help" God fulfill His promise. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael and then Hagar despised Sarah for her barrenness. Later God fulfilled His promise and Sarah conceived and gave birth to the child of promise: Isaac. Ishmael persecuted Isaac and Hagar and Ishmael were cast out. Paul reminded the Galatians that likewise, "we, brethren, as Isaac was are children of promise." We don't add our own works to the gospel of grace- God needs no help from us in saving our souls- His promises and His provision through Jesus' blood shed on the cross are complete and sufficient. Those who preach that salvation is faith plus works are "birthing" an Ishmael, seeking to add works to God's promises. This is not faith at all, but rather it is consistent with works of the law for salvation. The end of such lack of faith is condemnation. Paul stated it this way, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." (v. 30) Throughout the world, false religions and false "Christian" teachers, preachers and priests persecute the true church of God by condemning their message of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. They are insistent to add works to the equation of salvation.

## **Galatians 5:1-6**

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.*

The Judaizers taught that the non-Jews had to both believe in Christ and then get circumcised and follow the Law of Moses to be saved. Paul countered that anyone who sought to be justified by works, such as circumcision, was severed and separated from God's grace. They would then be required to perfectly keep all of God's commandments, yet only Jesus Christ had ever done that. Paul challenged all believers to continually stand fast in the liberty and freedom of the gospel of grace, recognizing that nothing we can do can save us. Thus we eagerly await the day of Christ's return when our righteousness by faith will be perfected.

## **Galatians 5:7-15**

*You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off! For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!*

The Judaizers, in their zeal to promote circumcision and win over disciples to themselves, even said that Paul promoted circumcision for Gentiles. Paul challenged the Galatians not to listen to these Judaizers who hinder them from following the gospel. They are like a little yeast that quickly works its way all through the dough- their false doctrine spreads like wild fire. Surely they would be judged with condemnation (v. 10). Paul reminded the Galatians that if he supported circumcision for justification, then why were the Judaizers persecuting him? In the strongest language possible, Paul told the Judaizers that if they are so proud of their circumcision for their justification, why don't they go all the way and cut off their private parts! Such language is not name calling or throwing stones. We must recognize how critical it is to defend the gospel of grace against the majority of "churches" and world religions which zealously teach that salvation requires works and eagerly persecute those who preach the true gospel, of which there is nothing- not a single thing, that we can add to. God has done all the work of our salvation for us- our "work" is simply to believe God.

There were people that came to Jesus seeking salvation by works. They asked Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus replied, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” (*John 6:28-29*)

The human heart is so deceitful and prone to pride. The worst kind of pride is spiritual pride. Paul reminded the Ephesians that even their faith was something they couldn't boast about as a “work” of their own- rather, it was a gift of God: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (*Ephesians 2:8-9*) Indeed, Jesus is the “Author and Finisher of our faith.” (*Hebrews 12:2*) Our faith originated in Him and our faith will be strengthened and completed by Him until that glorious day that we will see Him face to face.

This doesn't mean that faith is passive and that we don't have responsibility to grow in our faith- it does mean that we realize humbly where the origin and power comes from to perfect our faith- it doesn't come from ourselves.

### **Galatians 5:16-26**

*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

Where does the power come from to live this life of faith? Paul wrote, “I say then: walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh...if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” (v. 16-17) We see from the entire book of Galatians how easily we can be tempted away from reliance on the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work in perfecting us to going back to relying on ourselves to keep a list of do's and don'ts. We'll never succeed when we rely on the law- we're doomed to failure. Moment by moment we must learn, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (v. 25) This is completely foreign to our “old way” of living prior to being born again in the Spirit. Our flesh will rebel against it. In brokenness, humility, meekness and hunger (Matt 5:3-6) we cry out for God to change us from the inside out- give us new hearts, new desires and new power to follow after His Spirit as He guides us in all truth. As He does so, God's “fruit” will bear from these previously “barren” trees. The Spirit will

produce love, joy, peace... It isn't our effort, but rather our cooperation to His leading and call in our lives. He leads and we follow. We give up the self-reliant approach of saying to God, "Just give me the rule book- I'm good, I can handle it on my own." That's the voice of our flesh- relying on ourselves. The meek, broken, humble person realizes his moral bankruptcy and cries out to the only One who can change him- Jesus Christ, working through the Holy Spirit.

## **Galatians 6:1-16**

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

*But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load. Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

*See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*

Paul again warned us of our natural, fleshly tendencies, "Do not be deceived...he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." (v. 7-8) How easily we are deceived into thinking that on our own power we can keep God's laws. How desperately we need instead to be led by the Spirit throughout the day that we don't end up falling into sin. How desperately we need the Holy Spirit to continually renew us, from our initial spiritual birth, "the new creation" (v. 15, cf. John 3:3) to our continued growth in the Spirit.

Paul ended the letter of Galatians by first summarizing the motives of the Judaizers (which equally applies to all "churches" and world religions today that seek justification by adding works to salvation), "As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh,

these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.” (v. 12-13) When we stand before God’s holiness and His perfect law which we have miserably failed to keep, and then cling to His awesome grace revealed in Christ’s blood shed on our behalf, do we have anything to boast of? Paul wrote, “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.” (v. 13-14).

Have you noticed individuals, churches and other world religions boasting of things they have done- works done in the flesh to complete their salvation? These works are all like circumcision. We could replace the word “circumcision” with so many other works that people add to the gospel. Fill in the blank: “For in Christ Jesus neither \_\_\_\_\_ nor \_\_\_\_\_ avails anything.”

Baptism,  
Communion,  
the Eucharist,  
Church Attendance,  
Prayer,  
Confession,  
Speaking in Tongues,  
Witnessing Door to Door,  
Pilgrimages (Hajj),  
Giving Alms,  
Abstaining from Certain Foods,  
Celebrating or Abstaining from Celebrating Certain Holidays or Holy Days ,  
Dress Codes.

The list goes on and on of things man seeks to use for spiritual pride before a Holy God to justify himself.

Many of these “works” are good in and of themselves when led by the Holy Spirit- as long as we recognize them for what they are and what they aren’t. None of these works aid us in obtaining our salvation, which is completely a work of God by grace that we respond to by faith.

Is your religion a religion that adds works as a requirement for salvation? If so,

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” (5:9)

This false doctrine is very destructive. Remove it from your life! Take drastic measures! If it has crept into your church, if it can be confronted, confront it with love and with boldness. Paul wrote,

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such one in a spirit of gentleness.” (v. 1)

Such a leaven at times will not be moved. Such a leaven may persecute the truth. Paul warned,

“Considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” (v.1)

Consider my friends that the spiritual man Peter was tempted and for a time compromised before the Judaizers (2:11-12) the truth of the gospel of grace. Thus we must beware as well and guard the gospel carefully in our hearts from those who would oppose it. It is natural for us to return to “weak and beggarly elements” (4:9)- to trusting in ourselves to be able to please God and keep His laws. We’re not able. We must ask the Lord’s help continually to open our eyes to our great need, and that He would humble us, that we would be meek. We need continually to recognize our continual assistance from God as our Shepherd to lead us in paths of righteousness and abandon all pride of our own abilities to do anything right on our own strength. This is a life-long learning process, Amen?

### **Galatians 6:17-18**

Paul ended the letter of Galatians acknowledging his many persecutions for the gospel of grace and blessing us with the grace of the Lord Jesus,

“From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Paul urged us to become like him (4:12) that as we zealously pursue the gospel of grace in our lives and zealously share it with others, we will, like Paul, receive persecution, but the grace of Christ not only saves us but also will keep us strong until the Day Jesus Christ is revealed. Let us glory in God’s grace!

In Christ’s Love,

Mike Porter