

The introductory first five verses tells of the good news of the grace and peace that are ours because Jesus gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age. We often think of salvation as kind of a ticket to heaven. While it does assure us of heaven, but it is much more than that. It is Jesus with us now. It is His life in us to empower us to live godly lives, lives that glorify God, and serve others like He did, which makes us aliens to this present evil age (Matthew 20:28aⁱ, 1 Peter 2:11ⁱⁱ).

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— Galatians 1:6 This is the only letter from Paul which begins without prayer, praise, or thanks to God. Paul is shocked at how effective the Judaizers were to quickly undermine his teaching throughout the Galatian churches. It threatened to destroy all that the Lord had done through Paul in that region.

Maybe you have been the Lord's instrument to see someone come to faith. You encouraged them to come to a Bible study, met with them regularly, answered their questions, and watched them grow in the Lord. Imagine that a few months later you hear that the person now believes he or she has to eat kosher and keep the Jewish laws to be acceptable to God? Now multiply that by a whole region of churches. That is why Paul is astonished. It was hard to believe they all could be so quickly led astray.

This is why it is important to disciple new believers in the truth of God's Word. Evangelism is wonderful and we are commanded to share the good news. But we are also commanded to make disciples and teach them all that Jesus taught (Mark 16:15ⁱⁱⁱ; Matthew 28:19,20^{iv}). A new believer is the target of Satan because he or she has so much potential and yet knows so little. A subtle shift in belief can take them down the wrong road and make them ineffective for the kingdom of God or even worse become divisive or spreading false teaching. The Bible calls new believers babes for a reason. They need the sincere milk of the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2^v).

The Galatians had welcomed the gospel of grace and churches were planted and elders appointed. A move of God was sweeping the region; but when Judaizers came telling them they had to keep the law, they accepted that teaching of works being necessary to be saved.

This verse addresses two issues that astonished Paul: deserting the One who called them and turning to another gospel. They quickly deserted - a term used at the time of soldiers or politicians who switch to the opposing side. Pharisees were known to try to convert Gentiles, circumcise them, and teach them the law. Jesus didn't mince words when He said they were making them twice the child of hell as themselves (Matthew 23:15^{vi}). These false teachers may have been Pharisees who accepted Jesus as the Messiah but pridefully clung to keeping the law as something that made them acceptable to God. (See Acts 15 for how this grace versus works issue was finally resolved. Acts 15:1-2^{vii} gives the background for the letter to the Galatians.)

Paul does not say whom they were deserting. Some think he was referring to himself, while others believe Paul meant Jesus. However, in Paul's letters, the One who calls us always refers to God (Romans 4:17^{viii}; 9:12^{ix}; 1 Thessalonians 2:12^x; 5:24^{xi}). They were deserting God who sent His Son to save them through His sacrifice on the cross. That contradicts God's answer to our sins, the death of Jesus to save us.

Today's Christians sometimes desert God in a similar way. They believe in Jesus but think they must then do good works to stay saved. Good works flow out of our relationship with Jesus, but they have nothing to do with saving us. Good deeds don't erase bad deeds. Only the blood of Christ could pay our sin debt. To trust in our works is to desert God and reject His grace. That is how serious the issue is. **The gospel proclaims that faith in the One who did it all is our only way to receive the grace of Christ.** Paul did not just casually mention the grace of Christ in verse 6. This is what the whole letter is about. This is what the Galatians were abandoning. To trust in your good works even to be just a part of what saves you is to believe Satan's lie, "You shall be like God!" You can't save yourself (Genesis 3:5^{xii}) Pride seems to be at the core of most temptations.

They had turned to a different gospel, yet *7a not that there is another one.* Galatians 1:7a Works based salvation is an entirely different message, not another source of good news. It is bad news, for as Paul wrote, *by the works of the Law shall no one be justified* (Romans 3:20^{xiii}). While the word gospel was used for various kinds of good news, the Apostle Paul uses the term sixty times in his letters referring to the incarnation of Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection. **To the apostle, that is the ultimate meaning of "gospel!"**

By grace are we saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9^{xiv}), which was made possible through Jesus' offering Himself in our place. It has always been the case. King David was saved by faith. Abraham was saved by faith! Faith trusts God to do what we cannot do for ourselves. That is why keeping the law to be saved is another gospel that isn't really good news at all. In fact, its bad news, because you can't keep all the laws. That was the story of the Old Testament. You can't be good enough for God. If you could, Jesus didn't need to die for our sins. Didn't Jesus ask if there was some other way (Mark 14:35,36^{xv})?

7b but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:7b Works is not "good news". There is no other good news than Jesus! Those Judaizers wanted respect from the unconverted Jews for making Gentiles act like Jews. They turned the Galatians from the gospel of Christ into their pride in their works. The false teachers troubled the Galatians -the same expression used about them in Acts 15:24^{xvi}. False doctrines create doubts, factions, and disunity in the church.

Paul said that they distorted the gospel. That word can also be translated "reverse". **They turned it 180 degrees, from Jesus paid it all to you must pay some too. That is the opposite. That means they were committing apostacy.** It was turning away from the faith.

Luther masterfully captured the genius of their appeal in his summary of their message: "‘Christ’s a fine master. He makes the beginning, but Moses must complete the structure.’ The devil’s nature shows itself therein: if he cannot ruin people by wronging and persecuting them, he will do it by improving them."^{xvii}

One of the important messages of the New Testament is that our faith must endure to the end (Matthew 10:22^{xviii}). That verifies its authenticity. Any of us can walk away from our faith. You probably know people who have. It is so sad to see. Ask them about Jesus and they will change the subject. It can happen to any of us. That is why Paul said, *"Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12^{xix}) Apostacy is not just turning to pleasure. It can be turning to faith in oneself which is more subtle. It can be adding anything else to the Good News that "Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe." It is to abandon the grace of God and say, "Thanks Jesus, but I got this." Grace is

humbling. Grace reminds us how indebted we are. **Grace trades our debt of sin for a debt of gratitude for what Jesus has done.**

Why would anyone who has experienced grace do such a thing? Why would Eve listen to the serpent (Genesis 3:1,2^{xx})? Why would the Jews in the wilderness build a golden calf (Exodus 32:8^{xxi})? Why would Israel turn from God to idols? Why would any Christian abandon the gospel of grace for faith in oneself? It can come from feeling God has failed us. But the root of that idea is pride. We think we know what God should have done or that we can understand the mind of God. Pride says, "I know better than God! God sent Jesus as the solution to my sin debt, but I need to do this to please God."

God can't be any more pleased with you than He is the moment you received the forgiveness made possible at the cross. You can't add anything to that. You can lay up treasure in heaven by cooperating with the Spirit, but that is very different from making yourself acceptable to God (Matthew 6:20^{xxii}). It has nothing to do with being worthy of being in His holy, glorious presence. Only Jesus can make you worthy.

When someone tells you that they are glad you received Jesus, but now you *must* _____, join a certain denomination, be baptized, street witness, vote a certain way, speak in tongues, observe the Jewish feasts, etc. they are inviting you to commit apostasy. Any of those may be good things, things we should do, things Jesus asked us to do. The Spirit may lead you to do all of them. But when they say it is mandatory for your salvation, they are enticing you to apostasy, to abandon faith in Jesus' sufficient work on the cross by adding to it faith in your good deeds. Paul follows this description with a curse upon all who proclaim similar messages that distort the gospel.

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.* Galatians 1:8 In one of the harshest statements in the New Testament Paul asks for divine judgment to fall on those who would distort the gospel. *This same word for "curse" appears in the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 13, where false prophets and those who listened to them were to be destroyed.*^{xxiii} It is not just to be troubled but to be under the wrath of God forever. Paul would have never said this lightly. He knew the essence of the gospel was at stake.

It does not set well on modern ears accustomed to tolerance at any price and a doctrine of God devoid of the notions of judgment and wrath. Yet here it stands, stubbornly and ominously, at the forefront of Paul's concern.^{xxiv}

I know a man who swears an angel spoke to him about the errors of the church (which he claims are not saying the name of Jesus correctly and that there is no eternal punishment for the lost). While that is not contradicting the gospel and doesn't fall under this curse, it does fall under James 3:1^{xxv} about being held accountable for what we teach. One error leads to another. If all will be saved why repent and change?

Paul writes that this curse applies to anyone, even himself (by using "we,") should they teach another gospel. False teaching is not just a difference in the interpretation of a minor doctrine, but regarding the gospel of salvation through the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross.

By including his ministry team in the curse should they preach a different gospel, Paul was emphasizing that it isn't about the preacher, but about the message of what Jesus accomplished for us. If we trust in works, we will be under condemnation until the day we die! But faith in the accomplished work of Jesus gives us joy and assurance.

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.* Galatians 1:9 In the Scriptures repetition means importance. The only difference from verse 8 is that in verse 8 we have the future possibility of someone preaching works whereas in verse 9 the preaching is present tense. In other words, those presently preaching the false teaching when they received the letter. That should have put the fear of God in them!

We are to love one another, but we can pray that wolves and those who would invade the flock with poison of another gospel be accursed. The role of deciding who is crossing that line is given to the elders. Peter tells the elders to shepherd the flock exercising oversight (1 Peter 5:2^{xxvi}). Shepherding includes protecting and feeding. Shepherds spot poisonous plants and keep their sheep away from them.

We can guard ourselves from vulnerability to the pride in our old nature by our consistent and careful study of God's Word. We need to be aware of the enemy's schemes, such as the one mentioned here, especially when we are discouraged or disappointed. Just as Satan sought an opportune moment to attack Jesus (Luke 4:13^{xxvii}), he does the same with us. He hits us when we are down. So, when we are downcast, we should make every effort to fix our eyes on what is eternal, listen to praise music, stay in fellowship, and be in God's Word.

Another point I would like to make comes from the final chapter in this letter. When we see a brother or sister who is starting to slide in this direction of reversing the gospel of grace, gently remind them of the wonder of God's grace (Galatians 6:1^{xxviii}). Encourage them with passages from this letter. Invite them to fellowship and into your home.

And finally, to who are young in the Lord and may be fearful that you will be led astray, let me remind you from Scripture that *By his own power God will guard us "through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5^{xxix}). He is more than "able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy" (Jude 24^{xxx}). He who "called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (1 Peter 5:10^{xxxi}). He "will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:8^{xxxii}). Indeed Paul says, "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6^{xxxiii}). "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24^{xxxiv}).^{xxxv}*

¹⁰ *For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.* Galatians 1:10 Ministers must set the example of seeking God's approval rather than man's especially when it comes to doctrine. In this regard we only have an audience of one, the Holy One. People pleasing comes from wanting to be respected. **We should always be more concerned about what God thinks of us than what people think.** Speak the truth in love and let the chips fall where they may. Speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11^{xxxvi}). The gospel will always be counter-cultural because the world is fallen. The temptation is to conform to the world to be approved by the world, even lauded. When that happens, you know you have missed the mark somewhere. We try to be as inoffensive as possible, but the truth will always offend or convict sinners (John 7:43^{xxxvii}).

One of the unenviable tasks of the elders is to confront those who distort the biblical message. None of us enjoys confrontation. Shepherds don't enjoy confronting

wolves, but it must be done for the sake of the sheep. That not only draws the ire of the wolf but also of those who fell under his spell.

Adding anything to the gospel of grace is to say Jesus' work on the cross was insufficient. The glory of Christ Jesus is at stake. This is why Paul is so adamant (Galatians 2:21^{xxxviii}). Man's eternal destiny is on the line with this doctrine. To teach another way of salvation is to lead people to hell (Mark 9:42^{xxxix})! That is how serious the issue is and why Paul is being so stern.

The Judaizers were trying to make Christians acceptable to Jews because they were people pleasers (Galatians 6:12,13^{xl}). It would have been tempting to the Christians because the Jews had special rights under Rome to worship YHWH instead of the emperor. Christians' lives were at risk when they would say that Jesus is Lord. Lump them together with Jews and they would be safe. All you have to do is obey the Laws of Moses. The tension with the Jews dies down and the threat of execution is gone.

For us today in the USA, the threat is not yet so severe, but the old nature still wants man's approval. Today's Christian will compromise for a lot less. One way we do it is by being silent. Another is by watering down the truth or refusing to be clear about what the Bible says. The hot button issues of the day come up in conversation and we want to hide. Instead, we should study how to answer in an intelligible way that makes people think. There are reasons God tells us not to do certain things, and it is often because they are harmful to us physically, spiritually, or both. Instead of wagging a finger of superiority, include yourself as a sinner when discussing what Christians call sin. The only difference between us and the unbeliever is that we went to God to receive His gracious forgiveness which is available to all who seek it from Him. Use it as a chance to show off the love of God. That isn't pleasing man, but rather using wisdom as a servant of Christ.

Paul never tried to change the message to fit in with the Jews (Galatians 2:5^{xli}). He preached their own Scriptures in their synagogues, but every time he was eventually thrown out because he would not compromise the message of grace. In confronting the doctrine of Jesus plus works equals salvation, he wasn't trying to please the Judaizers or the Galatians. He was being a servant of God declaring as an oracle of God the very truth of the gospel. Jesus plus nothing equals salvation! Salvation will result in a transformed life (James 2:26^{xliii}).

"People-pleaser or servant of Christ? Which are we? People-pleasers have an inordinate desire to please other people; servants of Christ have an all-consuming passion to please God. People-pleasers are motivated by the fear of man; servants of Christ are inspired by the fear of God. People-pleasers pretend to serve God when they really intend to serve themselves; servants of Christ actually intend to serve God by meeting the needs of other people. People-pleasers are anxious for approval from others and distraught when they don't get it; servants of Christ simply love others and leave approval or disapproval to the judgment of God." ^{xliii} May God help us be servants of Christ who present the amazing gospel of the grace of Christ. Amen?

Benediction from Galatians 1: 4,5 and 6:20: To Him who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to Him be the glory forever and ever. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen!

Questions:

- 1 What is unique about the beginning of this letter? Why?
- 2 Why is it important to disciple new believers? 3 What is the only way to receive grace?
- 4 How did Paul use the word gospel?
- 5 How do we know there is no other way of salvation?
- 6 What is apostasy?
- 7 Why would any Christian abandon the gospel of grace for faith in oneself?
- 8 What was the source of Paul's use of "curse"?
- 9 Why was Paul so upset? What was at stake?
- 10 Why is it so tempting to please people?

ⁱ **Matthew 20:28a (ESV)**

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,"

ⁱⁱ **1 Peter 2:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Mark 16:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

^{iv} **Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

^v **1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)**

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

^{vi} **Matthew 23:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

^{vii} **Acts 15:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

^{viii} **Romans 4:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

^{ix} **Romans 9:12 (ESV)**

¹² she was told, "The older will serve the younger." (told= called in Greek)

^x **1 Thessalonians 2:12 (ESV)**

¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

^{xi} **1 Thessalonians 5:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

^{xii} **Genesis 3:5 (ESV)**

⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

^{xiii} **Romans 3:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

^{xiv} **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

^{xv} **Mark 14:35-36 (ESV)**

³⁵ And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

^{xvi} **Acts 15:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,

^{xvii} as quoted in NAC commentary on Galatians

^{xviii} **Matthew 10:22 (ESV)**

²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

^{xix} **1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV)**

¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

^{xx} **Genesis 3:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,

^{xxi} **Exodus 32:8 (ESV)**

⁸ They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'"

^{xxii} **Matthew 6:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

^{xxiii} Bible Background Commentary - New Testament.

^{xxiv} NAC - Galatians

^{xxv} **James 3:1 (ESV)**

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

^{xxvi} **1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)**

² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

^{xxvii} **Luke 4:13 (ESV)**

¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

^{xxviii} **Galatians 6:1 (ESV)**

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

^{xxix} **1 Peter 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

^{xxx} **Jude 1:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,

^{xxxi} **1 Peter 5:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

^{xxxii} **1 Corinthians 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

^{xxxiii} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xxxiv} **1 Thessalonians 5:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

^{xxxv} Todd Wilson, *Preaching the Word - Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*.

^{xxxvi} **1 Peter 4:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

^{xxxvii} **John 7:43 (ESV)**

⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him.

^{xxxviii} **Galatians 2:21 (ESV)**

²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

^{xxxix} **Mark 9:42 (ESV)**

⁴² “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

^{xi} **Galatians 6:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

^{xli} **Galatians 2:5 (ESV)**

⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

^{xlii} **James 2:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

^{xliii} Todd Wilson, *Preaching the Word - Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*.