

No Other Gospel: A Study Through Galatians
Pt. 1: The Greatest Threat to the Christian Faith
Jeff Kennedy / Feb. 5, 2017

Introduction: In High School, my friend **Mike** was (as we used to say in the awesome 80's) **Sold Out and Radical for Jesus.**

I met him as I was walking down the hall at school. He was a jock and **had the most glorious mullet you've ever seen.** Monday morning in the front and Friday Night in the back. I stopped him and told him the Gospel. Man, Jesus loves you and died for your sins and if you believe on him you'll be saved from certain wrath.

His immediate response was like, "Dude. Whoah. That's heavy man."

A few days later he found me, and told me he was interested in hearing more. He came to faith and served the Lord with zeal.

But when I got home after my first year of college, I went to visit Mike and he had gotten sucked into a freaky cult that taught him that in addition to believing in Jesus, he had to walk the line of religion. As he explained that in addition to Jesus "Dude, there are like all these things we have to do also to be accepted by God." I said, **Mike**, that is a false gospel.

We opened the Bible right here—to Galatians 1. And I remember the sense of urgency I had to rescue him from this "other" gospel that he had embraced.

That is essentially what is going on in the book of Galatians. Paul has discovered that the converts he made there have been deceived.

Agitators—a Jewish faction from Jerusalem has followed him and perverted/distorted his Gospel of grace. They've changed his message and the believers have willingly become enslaved once again to false religion. A religion of works based on ethnic identity markers in Judaism.

Big Idea: The greatest threat to the Christian faith we face today is morphing the gospel of Jesus into a message of performance and perfectionism.

Scripture: Galatians 1:1-10. Let's read together.

1. A Dense Introduction

There are essentially 3 questions that Paul has to address here in this book: 1.) Is Paul a **legit apostle**? 2.) Are the Galatians really **the people of God**? 3.) Is the gospel **all-sufficient** or does the gospel of grace lack anything?

Question 1: Is Paul's apostleship legit? “Paul, an apostle, not from human origin” (1:1)

What is an apostle?

Generic usage of *apostolos*. *Messenger, one sent with a commission.* A very generic term in 1st century. Its more generic usage would apply to anyone sent with a commission to reach foreign cultures with the Gospel. The generic usage of the term stresses its missional function. That is to say, Why doesn't the Bible ever use the word "missionary"? Why don't the authors of the Bible ever command the church to send "missionaries" to foreign cultures with the Gospel. Because their word for missionary was "apostle" in a generic sense.

Specialized/proprietary usage of the Word with "the 12 disciples" of Jesus—that inner circle of men who comprised Christ's followers—those men specially chosen by Christ to preach his Gospel to the nations (Mark 3:16–19; Matt 10:2–4; Luke 6:14–16; and Acts 1:13). It is the second more specialized usage of this term in the NT that causes evangelicals to shy away from it. The term just carries too much freight.

Paul states that the criteria for his own and I think by extension other apostles:

- **Criteria 1: Commissioned by Christ himself.** "Not sent (commissioned) from men nor through human agency. But through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead."
- **Criteria 2: Confirmed by the community of apostles. (v.2a)** "And all the brothers who are with me." Both this book and Luke make it clear (we'll say more about this next week) that Paul's apostleship—while it was not commissioned by men, it was reaffirmed and confirmed by the Apostles.

Same Gospel, Same Jesus who revealed that Gospel to both Paul and the Apostles.

Why don't we believe in Apostolic succession? We do. **Ephesians 2:19, 20**

Paul intends to show that his apostleship is legit. It is equal to the authority of the 12.

Question 2: Are the Galatian believers really the people of God? (1:2b) “To the churches in Galatia”.

This is the second issue in the book of Galatians. Who are God’s people? It’s apparent that the Galatians had received certain preachers—a Jewish faction from Jerusalem who were attempting to convert them to Judaism in addition to their belief in Christ. The Galatian Christians were being told that they had to convert to a Judaic way of life that included the distinctive identity markers of Judaism and the attending laws and matters of Jewish jurisprudence.

- **Departure 1: The fallacy of ethnocentrism (2:12; 4:10; 5:2).**
 - **Dietary restrictions** of the Jewish faith (2:12). **Peter’s refusal to eat with the Antioch Christians who were gentiles** while hob knobbing with the Jewish faction who segregated themselves. Paul called him out publically for this.
 - **Sabbath and Festival observance (4:10 “you observe days, months, seasons and years:).** This is a clear description of the sabbath days, the special months, festival seasons, and jubilee cycles.
 - **Circumcision (5:2 “Look, I Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you”).** Circumcision here is referring to both the act of circumcision to set male children apart as God’s people—and it is also referred to as “the covenant of circumcision”—that is, it is shorthand for the Mosaic covenant itself.

While none of these things are harmful in of themselves, and all of them may freely be practiced by the believer if they so choose, none of them are necessary for salvation. One does not have to be converted to Judaism in addition to be converted to Christ Jesus our Lord. These are the works of Torah—the distinguishing marks of being Jewish. One is free to observe them but never obligated to.

- **Departure 2: The futility of legalism (5:3) “I testify that every man who accepts circumcision (the obligation of the Judaic covenant in addition to Christ) is also obligated to observe or keep the entirety of the law.”** Legalism is the attempt to earn God’s favor through effort, and the attempt to stay in good standing through perfectionistic determination. This is what Paul calls the gospel of works. Which is a false gospel.

It is an attempt to earn and keep salvation by through a system of spiritual sweat equity.

Illus. The story of Melissa Rae illustrates the futility of legalism so well—friends call her missy. Melissa Rae was raised in an extremely religious home environment **Parents with exacting standards**, always requiring more from her—and never a word of encouragement or praise.

It was a home where she never heard her parents fuss, **no deceitfulness or guile**—but also a home without a **bit of grace**.

To please her parents she worked hard to bring home straight A's. **But the A's she brought home were never quite straight enough.** Her achievements in **sports, band** and **choir**—were never quite up to snuff for a fastidious and demanding mom and dad.

And Missy thought about taking her own life at times. What's the point of living anyway, she thought. I can never measure up. Never meet the standard.

And on the day she graduated top of her class, giving the valedictorian speech—she came home to find a disapproving mother who launched into a critique of her posture, her word choices, her demeanor.

And that's when Melissa Rae lost it. All that pent up frustration of trying please and overachieve for two impossible people—she let em have it! Bubbling up she told them both that she only ever tried to please them and meet their impossible standards and how she had longed to see just one look, one glance of kindness, grace, acceptance. But she never did.

Slap—as her mother's hand cracked across her face, Missy heard the last words she would ever hear from her mother, “Some day you'll thank me. Some day, you'll understand what a privilege it is to serve such high standards.” And Missy left and never returned and never spoke to them again.

Grace is not “the gift” of high standards. Grace is NOT the privilege of having to earn God's love or acceptance. It's not the gift of the opportunity to work hard and demonstrate your worth to God. No. That is a false Gospel.

Question 3: Is the Gospel sufficient or is it incomplete? (1:3-5)

- Distinctive 1: The gospel of grace and peace (Rom 5:1). Grace is the word “*xaris*” and it means favor—devoid of merit. It means unsolicited benevolence. Grace, as Paul defines it is a free gift and cannot be earned. When a person receives this grace they experience peace in relationship with God.
- Distinctive 2: The gospel received by faith (2:15-16). Paul is clear, no one will be justified by observing the Jewish law—either the identity markers of kosher, circumcision, and calendar—or all the particular laws that govern that identity. Only by faith in Christ alone is a person saved. Faith here means **obedient trust**.
- Distinctive 3: The gospel evidenced by the Spirit (3:2-3). This is a big idea for Paul. The badge of identity for the people of God is the presence of the Spirit not the works of the flesh.
 - The miracle of rebirth (3:5; 6:15).
 - The “fruit” of the Spirit (5:22). Grace is transforming—has the power to transform the believer into the image of Christ Jesus.

Summary: This salutation is a compressed introduction for Paul’s concerns throughout the book. Paul defends his Gospel as complete and sufficient, his apostleship as true and authoritative, the Galatians are already God’s people through the Gospel by faith not by works.

A Disturbing Development in Galatia

1:6 **The Galatians desert the faith.** “I am astonished that you have so quickly deserted Christ”

- The one who called you by grace
- Abandoned for another (*heteros*: another of a different kind) *Gospel*
- (v.7) Which is really not another (*allos* another of the same kind) but a false Gospel.

1:8 **Agitators deceive the Galatians.** “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you another Gospel”

- That is “other” (*para in the accusative: closely alongside of*) to the one you already received
- The Gospel that borrows from our semantic range.
- The Gospel that is buttoned up, outwardly religious, has the external form of godliness but denies the power thereof—the Power of the Spirit to set the captive free from sin’s grip.

1:9 **False prophets are denounced.** “As we have said before so now again...”

- If any man is preaching to you a contrary Gospel
- That messenger is to be accursed! *Anathema* = to *herem* “ban” or devoted to destruction.

1:10 For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or striving to please men?

- If I were I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.
- If I were I would not be preaching the cross.

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Yancey's parable—Jenny in Traverse City, MI.

Rebellious girl who runs away from home. Bus ticket from traverse city MI to Detroit.

At the bus terminal in Detroit, she meets a man who takes her in. He's kind at first, but after a couple of weeks he pressures her to sell her body for rent.

After two years of doing unimaginable, unspeakable acts to just survive—Jenny decides to leave that life and go home.

She picks up the phone to call home and leaves a message.

On the bus all the way she has hours to think about her life. To wonder how it is that she has fallen so far from the safety and love of the home she grew up in.

She panics when the bus pulls into the Traverse City terminal. “What if they didn’t get the message. What if they have disowned me and no one is there?”

She walks in and finds a crowd of family, friends, and in front her parents. With a big goofy banner on the wall that reads, “Welcome Home Jenny!”

She falls into her mother and father’s arms and they weep. The daughter who was lost is found. The repentant child has found prodigal grace at last.

And you change that gospel. And you don’t have a gospel. And no way of being saved.

Todd and Summer:

Approximately 2 years ago Todd and Summer read a resignation letter to our church.

When I arrived a year and half ago, they were busy looking for employment opportunities.

I asked Todd for a longer commitment and he and Summer conferred and gave me an 18 month commitment.

That 18 months is coming to a close this June 1st.

Todd is, right now, in a second round of interviews with a couple of Ev Free churches in Minneapolis. In fact he’s preaching 3 services this morning. Would you join me in praying for him.

God’s direction and clarity. If not Minneapolis, Lord we pray for your guidance for this family.

Joel...