

The Ingredients of the Gospel Galatians 1:1-10

Slide 1

You can't read the first ten verses of Paul's letter to the Galatians without feeling that something's important at stake.

The early church father, Jerome, once said when he read the letters of Paul, he could hear thunder and nowhere, in all of Paul's writings, do you hear the storm better than in Galatians.

This letter to the Galatians has also been described as a "*lion turned loosed*" because there's a tremendous amount of emotional intensity being released.

Throughout these 6 chapters, you can sense Paul's passion, sarcasm, and anger. Someone compared this emotional intensity as holding a "*live coal with your bare hands.*"

So, what was happening go cause Paul all this emotion and passion?

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Paul was intense because the Galatian Christians had turned away from the Good News to "*a different gospel.*" In Galatians 1:7a he described it as "*no gospel at all.*"

Now, you must understand that Paul had spent about four years in this and surrounding areas spreading the Gospel and planting churches.

Ironically, he had also gone throughout this same region, before his conversion, to sniff out Christians for persecution.

Then, after his conversion, he came back to this same region in order to share the Gospel with those same people.

But, after Paul left to spread the Good News in neighboring areas, these embryonic churches began to move away from his teachings and the understanding of the Gospel.

Galatians 1:6, *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.”*

Part of his emotional intensity was focused on how *“quickly”* these followers of Christ turned from the Gospel.

The word *“deserting”* in this verse is a Greek word used to describe a soldier who rebelled of his command and abandoned his post.

These new Christian converts had become religious turncoats or spiritual deserters. Paul was concerned that they were committing spiritual suicide, so he was sounding a spiritual tornado warning.

Throughout this series we’ve seen how the Bible consistently puts its cards on the table by its denial that all roads lead to heaven.

This is why, as believers, we can’t be hazy and imprecise in what we believe about the Gospel; we must have clarity!

This is what Paul was trying to get the Galatians to understand by being very direct. In fact, I’d say he was quite upset with them.

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Galatians 1:9, *“As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”*

His emotional intensity is something we’re not used to. If he were on a talk show at this point, we’d ask him to be rational and calm down.

We'd whisper in his ear, "*Why are you so angry?*" If we were his public relations agent, we'd tell him to apologize for being so agitated.

Yet, what's important for us to ponder is this: The people to whom this letter was written hadn't turned to Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam; they had only added one small thing to the Gospel.

They were requiring every person, who wanted to become a Christian and who hadn't been circumcised, to be circumcised. Some would say they had slightly turned to another emphasis.

If you're new to the Bible, then you might find the Bible's way of thinking as foreign.

One important aspect of the Bible is that the Bible doesn't present itself as one color among a rainbow of colors. Nor is the Bible's tune open to be "remixed."

When you enter into God's Word, there's a sign above that entrance which says: "*If this is true, then the opposite is false.*" The Bible presents its teaching as right versus wrong, or true versus false.

This is different from the mindset of many in America today where they conclude, "*You have some good points and so do you...*"

The Bible is not another Seven Habits of Highly Effective People book where the ideal life is a win-win scenario! Since the Bible is Truth, the opposite is lies.

To use a sports analogy, most people see the various religions to be playing for the same team. I didn't say denominations, but religions. Yet, Jesus Himself sees these others in terms of the opposing team.

Had we been there when the Gospel opponents showed up in Galatia, we might've heard them say, *"Look, I'm not asking you to reject Paul's message entirely. I'm not asking you to reject grace. You just need the law of Moses and to be circumcised as well."*

This wasn't just a slight difference of opinion, as Paul explained later in his letter.

Galatians 5:2-3, "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law."

Paul was telling the people that if you turn away from the Gospel of grace to be circumcised, you must now keep the whole law. In other words, you must be perfect.

This group didn't deny you must believe Jesus for salvation, they just stressed that you must also be circumcised and keep the law.

This meant a new Christian would need Moses to finish what Christ begun. But Jesus doesn't need anyone to finish His work. If you turn away from the cross, you turn toward your ability to keep the law.

Think of it this way: If good deeds represent money and you need to earn so much money to get into heaven, you're going to have to work hard to build up enough money to get into heaven.

Yet, there's a problem with this kind of thinking. You have no idea of how much money is required or how long and hard you'll have to work.

But, if you turn to the cross of Christ alone, and the keyword here is alone, then you're relying only on Jesus to deposit the money you need in the bank. Jesus has already paid the price.

This is what Paul was trying to tell the people about being circumcised. Galatians 5:4, *“You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”*

These are two very different paths. One is called grace and the other I’m calling *“Jesus Plus.”* In essence, it comes down to this: Is Jesus’ death on the cross enough?

Some people want to add to or subtract from the cross. Yet, the Bible presents the Gospel as saying that the cross is just the right size.

The Bible presents the Gospel as the cross weighing just the right amount. No need to shave off a few pounds or tack on a couple of ounces.

If you add anything to the cross, you might as well believe Muhammad is the prophet and Allah is God. If you add anything to the cross, you might as well be an atheist.

Many people want to live as hyphenated Christians – “I’m a Mormon-Christian,” “I’m a Buddhist-Christian,” or “I’m a Jehovah’s Witness-Christian.” This isn’t going to work.

An outsider overhearing Christians discussing this topic might be tempted to conclude, *“It’s just a disagreement over non-essentials.”*

Paul anticipated this very thing as he told one church in Acts before he left to start other churches.

Acts 20:29-30, *“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”*

We have a natural tendency to soft-pedal the Bible. Yet, if we do “soft-pedal” God’s Word, we “soft-pedal” it to our peril. Which is why Paul’s warning us of this danger.

Galatians 1:9, *“As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”*

This word “curse,” here in verse nine, deserves our attention. It means final destruction – condemnation.

Preaching a different message isn’t a minor defect. It’s not a trivial matter. Paul said if you alter the engine of the Gospel, then you’ll go to hell at the end of time.

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We can’t relax our hold on the Gospel. We must tighten our mental grip on this Truth.

Millions of people, both inside and outside the church, believe that the essential message of Christianity is, *“If you behave, then you belong.”*

This is the gospel of *“My Moral Performance Where I Shine.”* This gospel says, *“Look at me. Look how good I am. Shine the spotlight on me!”*

The *Jesus Plus*” crowd was leading the church into a joyless life. That’s the reason Paul’s so intense.

If you alter the Gospel, you’ll end up being like the elder brother in Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son.

Luke 15:28-29a, *“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.’”*

Instead of that feeling of contentment knowing that Christ has done all of the heavy lifting for you, you’re left with a Gospel of *“Do more, try harder.”*

When we reject the Gospel of grace for the Gospel of *“Do More, Try Harder,”* we’re handcuffed to yesterday’s sins. We must reject the gospel of moral performance.

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Conclusion

The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ died so that anyone who trusts in Him is saved from God’s anger for their sin. The only thing we need to bring to Jesus is our sin.

Christianity isn’t a crutch for the weak; it’s a stretcher for the dead. The Gospel is Jesus plus nothing. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, without adding any human works to it.

Let me give this warning to those who haven’t accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

If you’re just sitting there saying, *“I’m not that bad,”* you’re just shooting yourself in the foot. Tony Soprano of HBO fame said, *“I may kills lots of people... but I’m a good son.”*

The Gospel isn’t a diving board where you jump into Christianity. The Gospel isn’t the first ‘step’ in a ‘stairway of truths,’ rather it’s the ‘hub’ in the ‘wheel’ of truth.

The Gospel isn't the A-B-C's of Christianity but the A to Z of Christianity.

The Gospel isn't just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom of God, but the only way we will enter His kingdom.