

No Substitute for the Gospel

LESSON 1

Topic

The true gospel

Theme

Salvation by grace makes up the heart of the gospel.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will appreciate, defend, and share the gospel with conviction.

Materials

- Slips of paper and pencils
- Resources 1-3
- Glass of water
- Laundry detergent

Scripture Focus

Galatians 1:1–10

Summary

Paul wrote the book of Galatians to churches that had been infiltrated by legalists. The legalists taught that to be saved, Gentiles must not only believe on Christ but also keep the law of Moses. Paul emphasized the good news that Christ died to deliver us from our sins and to provide salvation as a gift. Paul urged the Galatian churches to reject any “gospel” that denied the doctrine of salvation by grace.

Outline

I. Paul Established His Authority (Gal. 1:1–5)

- A. His personal credentials (1:1, 2)
- B. His powerful message (1:3–5)

II. Paul Exercised His Authority (Gal. 1:6–10)

- A. Called the new gospel perverted (1:6, 7)
- B. Commanded new gospels be prohibited (1:8, 9)
- C. Communicated the gospel preacher’s purpose (1:10)

Memory Verse

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

GETTING STARTED

Defining the Gospel

ASK: How would you define the gospel?

ASK: What would you say to anyone who tried to tweak it?

ASK: What “additions” to the gospel have you heard about?

Galatians begins with Paul’s strict warning about those who try to tweak the gospel. His warning should help deepen our loyalty to the true gospel of Christ.

New and Improved?

In 1985, Coke changed its formula to mimic Pepsi. They came out with New Coke, but the public soundly rejected it. As the original formula began to disappear, people bought it up like it was gold. Before long, Coke brought the original formula back as Coca-Cola Classic. Eventually, the company dropped “classic” from their original cola. In the end, Coke fans became even more ardent and loyal to the old, familiar formula.

ASK: What new product or products have you tried that you found to be inferior to the original? (Q1)

ASK: What requirements for salvation have you known people to add to the gospel? (Q2)

Galatians begins with Paul’s strict warning about those who try to tweak the gospel. His warning should deepen our loyalty to the true gospel of Christ.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Religious people throughout history have devised all sorts of ways to try to please God apart from trusting in Christ as Savior. However, the Bible emphatically teaches that only one road leads to Heaven. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

ASK: Why do so many people refuse to come to the Father through Jesus Christ? (Q3) *They want to maintain control over how they are saved. They are proud and accepting the gospel takes humility.*

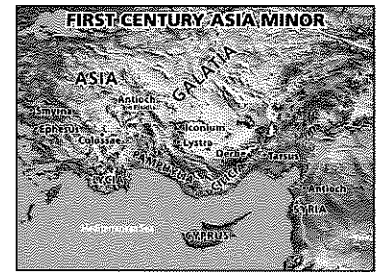
I. Paul Established His Authority (Gal. 1:1–5)

It seems that Paul wrote the book of Galatians in a hurry. Instead of taking the time to dictate it to a secretary, he wrote it by hand (Gal. 6:11). Likely he was preparing to leave for the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) when he heard a disappointing report concerning the churches in Galatia. Since he couldn’t go to Galatia to deal

with the problem, he did the next best thing—he wrote to the Galatian churches.

RESOURCE: Display resource 2 to show the major cities in Galatia (in red).

Paul and Barnabas founded the churches in Galatia (Acts 14). Later Paul returned to the region with Silas to strengthen and encourage the believers there (Acts 16:1–8). He could not ignore the report that they were detouring into disaster. He understood that the spread of legalism would destroy the churches if he failed to oppose it.



A. His personal credentials (1:1, 2)

Bible commentators often call the false teachers in Galatia “Judaizers” because they advocated living the Christian life in submission to the Old Testament law. The Judaizers rejected Paul’s message about salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Therefore, they tried to undermine Paul’s authority by charging that he was not an apostle.

The word “apostle” means “a sent one.” To qualify as an official apostle, an individual must have been one of Jesus’ original disciples; he must have seen the risen Christ; and he must have received a commission from Christ. The twelve disciples, except for Judas Iscariot, became the apostles. Matthias replaced Judas (Acts 1:20–26).

Paul’s opponents charged that he had not witnessed Jesus’ earthly ministry, so he was inferior to the official apostles. Furthermore, the original group of the apostles had not appointed him. Given these issues, the Judaizers concluded Paul was a fake apostle with a false message.

READ: Galatians 1:1.

Paul held valid apostolic credentials. Christ appeared to him and specially called him to be an apostle (Acts 9). Paul could indeed speak authoritatively as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:6–11).

The validity of Paul’s apostleship provided the foundation for his instructions to the Galatian churches. He did not express his personal opinions or ideas but proclaimed God’s message under God’s direction and authority. Those who rejected Paul’s God-given message rejected God.

Although Paul had not received his apostolic credentials from any human source, he concurred with all who taught the truth. As he addressed the churches in Galatia, he mentioned that other Christians were with him (Gal. 1:2). Their endorsement affirmed the truth that Paul was preaching the same gospel cherished by the other Christians.

B. His powerful message (1:3–5)

Paul immediately introduced his theme: The gospel declares salvation by grace (1:3). Greek-speaking people typically used the word “grace” when they began letters or met a friend. “Peace” was the customary greeting in the Hebrew language. These two words took on a deeper significance in the New Testament. “Grace” refers to God’s free, undeserved kindness toward sinners. It points especially to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

ASK: What significance do you see in the fact that “grace” precedes “peace” in Paul’s greeting? (Q3) *True peace comes only to those who have first experienced God’s grace.*

“Peace” identifies a state of well-being or wholeness, a restored relationship. Sin produced a state of hostility between the holy God and an unholy human race. Jesus died in our place, enduring God’s wrath against sin. Because Jesus shed His blood for our sins, we can have peace with God (Col. 1:19–22).

Paul’s mention of the Lord Jesus Christ in Galatians 1:3 launched his description of the extent of God’s salvation of sinners.

READ: Galatians 1:4, 5. **ASK:** What key word demonstrates that salvation cannot be by works? (Q4) *Gave.*

Paul presented three facts about the good news in verse 4. First, Christ “gave himself for our sins.” We all have a sin nature from the time of conception. In addition, we all repeatedly commit acts of sin. As sinners, we deserve death, meaning eternal separation from God and His goodness (Rom. 6:23). Christ gave Himself on the cross as our substitute.

ASK: If salvation could be attained by works, then why would Jesus go to the cross? (Q5) *There is no good explanation for the cross in a works salvation theology.*

Second, Paul stated that the purpose of Christ’s substitutionary death was to “deliver us from this present evil world [age]” (Gal. 1:4). Satan blankets the minds of human beings in spiritual darkness (2 Cor. 4:4) and exercises control over their lives in this present age (1 John 5:19). Believers do not live under the domination of sin, as they did before salvation. Christ has rescued believers from spiritual bondage.

Third, this deliverance was “according to the will of God and our Father.” Paul didn’t invent the gospel of grace; God did. It was God’s purpose from eternity past to save sinners. Therefore, Paul exclaimed that God deserves glory forever and ever (Gal. 1:5).

READ: Ephesians 2:8, 9. **ASK:** What did Paul say people would do if their good works earned salvation? (Q6) *Boast about their worthiness to be saved.*

ASK: How should we respond to the fact that God saves sinners entirely by His grace? (Q7) *We glorify God, giving Him the credit and praise for our salvation.*

II. Paul Exercised His Authority (Gal. 1:6–10)

In his other letters, Paul complimented his readers on their faith in the Lord or their love for one another. In Galatians he criticized his readers. He loved them deeply and sincerely (Gal. 4:19, 20), but his concern for their spiritual well-being caused him to address their spiritual failure head-on.

“To deliver” means “to rescue out of a desperate situation.”

A. Called the new gospel perverted (1:6, 7)

Even though false teachers had lured the Galatians away from the gospel, Paul held the Galatians responsible for abandoning the gospel. In place of the good news (gospel) of grace, the Galatian believers turned to a totally different kind of “gospel” that taught salvation by works instead of grace.

READ: Galatians 1:6. **ASK:** What are some practical ramifications of trying to earn God’s grace for salvation? (Q8) *People become performance focused; people compare themselves to others; people give up trying to be good and resign themselves to being failures; people don’t get saved.*

READ: Galatians 1:7.

The false teachers in Galatia believed they figured out the true gospel, but Paul charged that their new ideas based on an old law weren’t the gospel, or good news, at all (1:7). The Judaizers promoted a system of religion that demanded people keep the Jewish law for salvation. That belief sends people to Hell. Obviously, that’s not good news!

OBJECT LESSON: Show a glass of water. Mention that drinking several glasses a day is good for one’s health. Suggest that the water represents the gospel. Add laundry detergent to the glass of water. Explain that adding works and religious deeds to the “pure water of life” is injurious to the water. It becomes something different and harmful if swallowed.

ASK: Against what contaminations must believers defend the gospel? (Q9) *Infant baptism, baptismal regeneration, keeping the Mosaic Law, confirmation, church membership, rote prayers.*

When teachers pervert the gospel, they disrupt the church. The false teachers in Galatia were turning the gospel of Christ upside down. What they taught was not Christianity but a fraudulent gospel of their own design. Their perversion of the gospel confused the Galatian churches and pushed them toward an outright rejection of the truth.

ASK: What are the usual missions of today’s liberal, gospel-abandoning churches? (Q10) *Their mission includes meeting people’s physical needs (humanitarianism) and fighting for social justice. They strive to make people as comfortable, happy, and welcome as possible.*

As in Paul’s day, churches that pervert the gospel only make the road to Hell a little more pleasant.

B. Commanded new gospels be prohibited (1:8, 9)

READ: Galatians 1:8.

Paul condemned the false teacher’s heresy in the strongest terms: “Let him be accursed,” meaning “set aside for destruction.” The accursed person would come

under the judgment of God. The Judaizers' teaching contradicted the gospel of grace and therefore merited God's punishment.

When Paul first introduced the good news of the gospel to the Galatians, he preached Christ to them. Only the message of Christ truly represented the salvation that God had provided by His grace. Any other "gospel" was spurious and deserved to be rejected. Paul urged the Galatians to look beyond the persuasive personalities of the Judaizers, see the error in their message, and reject it. Even if Paul himself or an angel from Heaven were to preach another message, the Galatians were to reject it.

READ: Galatians 1:9. **ASK:** Why might people invent new gospels? (Q11) *To fit their misunderstanding of Scripture; to make the gospel palatable; to gain power or control over people; to gain financially; to gain fame.*

C. Communicated the gospel preacher's purpose (1:10)

READ: Galatians 1:10.

Paul continued his counterattack on the false teachers in verse 10 by asking in effect, "Who am I trying to please?" There were only two alternatives: he could seek to please people or God. If he had been trying to please people, he certainly would not have written as harshly as he had in the previous verse.

Paul's claim to please God rather than people was not a self-righteous boast. When he wrote, "If I yet pleased men," he admitted that before becoming a Christian, he lived to impress others. In those days his ambitious commitment to Judaism had put him on a fast track to success in the Jewish community (Gal. 1:14).

The Judaizers were messengers of another gospel. They changed God's truth to please people. Therefore, they did not serve the Lord; they served their own interests.

ASK: If the Galatian believers had continued to follow the messengers of another gospel, what would have been the repercussions? (Q12) *Their spiritual lives would have been anemic, the spread of the true gospel would have ceased, the church would turn into a club with people competing to be the top dog.*

READ: Matthew 23:25–28. **ASK:** How does Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees relate to Paul's statement, "I . . . pleased men" (Gal. 1:10)? (Q13) *Paul's statement reflects the true nature of Pharisees—living to please men—that Christ exposed in his condemnation of the Pharisees.*

Paul warned the Galatians not to dilute the gospel to make it appealing to people. No one can improve the gospel, because it is a perfect message, having originated with God. It points sinners to Christ, magnifies the grace of God, and causes Christians to glorify their Heavenly Father.

ASK: As we share the gospel, what are the necessary components to include? (Q14) *All people are sinners; God demands payment for sin; no one can save him- or herself; Christ is fully God and fully man; Christ's death satisfied*

Philippians 3:4–6 lists Paul's outstanding credentials as a Jew and a Pharisee in his pre-Christian years.

God's demand; Christ rose from the dead, victorious over sin and death; salvation is freely offered to all people; salvation is appropriated through faith in Christ's substitutionary death.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Use the following activities to help each learner express his gratitude for the gospel and to be able to share it well with others.

Sentence Completion

Have several volunteers complete the following sentence: "I am grateful for the gospel because . . ." (Q15)

In Defense of the Gospel

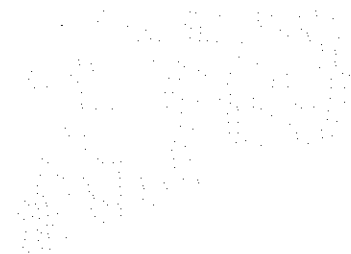
RESOURCE: Display resource 3. **ASK:** What precautions could we take to make sure the gospel will always be taught and preached in our church? (Q16) (Reveal answers after learners have had opportunities to share their ideas.) *Call pastors with uncompromising stands on the gospel; preach the gospel regularly; use Sunday School material that is strong on the gospel and theologically sound; give people opportunities to share their salvation testimonies.*

ASK: How would you defend the gospel to a critic who insists it is too exclusive? (Q17)

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to record a summary for this lesson: Appreciate, defend, and share the gospel.

Encourage your learners to memorize Galatians 1:8. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.



GALATIANS

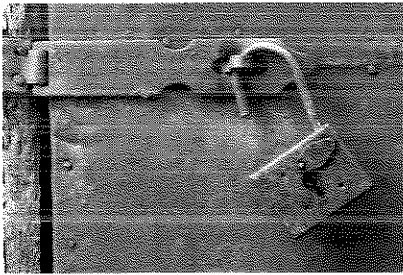
Defending the Gospel

- Call pastors who take uncompromising stands on the gospel.
- Choose theologically sound curriculum.
- Require potential members to share their salvation testimony.
- Preach the gospel regularly.
- Support gospel-believing missionaries.
- Train members how to share the gospel.
- Address current variations of or attacks on the gospel in the evangelical world.

GALATIANS

Living by Faith

1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.
7.	



Genuine Good News

Topic

The gospel's genuineness

Theme

We can know the gospel is genuine because it fits God's revelation, brings transformation to the sinner, and results in God's glorification.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will share the gospel with confidence in its genuineness.

Materials

- Resources 1, 2, and 4

Scripture Focus

Galatians 1:11–24

Summary

Paul proved the genuineness of the gospel as he continued his letter to the Galatians. He shared with the Galatian churches that he received the gospel as part of God's special revelation, testified to its transforming power, learned how it fit in the context of Scripture, and witnessed its purpose to glorify God.

Outline

- I. The Gospel Has a Divine Origination (Gal. 1:11, 12)
- II. The Gospel Causes Life Transformation (Gal. 1:13, 14)
- III. The Gospel Fits in God's Revelation (Gal. 1:15–20)
- IV. The Gospel Brings God's Glorification (Gal. 1:21–24)

Memory Verse

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man" (Galatians 1:11).