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*“Here the Holy Spirit talks to us about our day’s subtle temptations to abandon the unique Gospel of grace for the same old, weary religion of works which wants us to give a yank now and again at our bootstraps to bring us safely home.”*

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The heading says this is the “introduction.” It’s really like a warning, a happy warning to let you know you’re in for an exciting experience. It’s like someone squealing “watch out” just as the roller coaster grinds to the top of the track and the plunge is about to begin. The roller coaster analogy is an apt one, for in this brief letter we are pulled and plummeted from one extreme to another; from anger, rage, and even fury on the part of the apostle-author to the ultimate in compassion and gentle care; from the breathtaking righteous anger of a protective mother to the sternness and soberness of a father setting the offspring straight and pointing them, like a wise, old pedagogue, in the right direction.

It’s a happy experience, the epistle to the churches in Galatia, if you’re one of the “good guys.” The “good guys” are the “little children” of chapter 4:19. It’s not such a happy experience for the “bad guys.” You can recognize them by the excess of upset which Paul evidences with them (2:4; 6:13). When all is said and done, what lies before us is a trip through one of the most outstanding lessons in Christian truth and one of the deepest excursions into Christian doctrine in literature. Only don’t expect a lecture. This is more like Dad at his best behind the woodshed. You’ll get the point by the time it’s over. And even if the experience is reminiscent of a tornado passing through, you’ll be ever so grateful for having gone to school with the volatile apostle.

The letter, the epistle, was written to the few churches scattered through the province called Galatia. Maybe scholars have a good time debating whether the “churches of Galatia” (1:2) are the few in the north or the many in the south. Are the members of these churches relatives, several times removed,

of the settlers of France (Gaul) “fickle, boastful, quarrelsome, immoral, lovable, exasperating,” or content for the moment to keep the peace for Rome in a miserable but strategic outback province which is part of modern Turkey?

It doesn't help much to come down on either side of the debate. What does help to get us started is a grasp of the circumstances which had Paul flinging things off the desk trying to find pen and papyrus so he can dash off a letter to the folks in the churches of Galatia to set both hearts and record straight. Paul was not one to “sleep on it” for a day or two. So what we have here is as much heart and heat as it is mind. In Paul's case, the content, structure and style don't suffer in the least. What a masterpiece tumbles out onto the page! No wonder the letters were so “large” (6:11). Who's concerned with penmanship when there's so much which needs to be said, and so much which needs to be said so emphatically?

For, you see, after all the elementary, the basic, the fundamental doctrine Paul had provided, simple and uncluttered, when he had made his sweep (or was it sweeps?) through the province (Acts 14) and gotten those little “synagogue style” churches underway, (or at the least had firmly fixed the faith in churches which had earlier been planted), some “know-it-alls” from Jerusalem arrived upon the scene to insinuate a little improvement upon Paul's teaching. They said, “Paul says our eternal future is assured because it was won for us by Jesus. You needn't, Paul says, you can't, do anything to contribute to your eternal hope and life. There is an element of truth in that. Yet it does play fast and loose with some rather obvious factors. Take circumcision as an example. Or consider the observation of special days, holy years and sanctified times. You can't say that's all bad. If you can be a good Christian without these, you could certainly be a better one with them. But

don't be too hard on your friend Paul. After all, he isn't a normally trained and properly certified clergyman, not like the others, so you might reasonably expect his points of view would call for a little refining.”

And those lovable oafs there in Galatia were falling for it. Paul responds: “Good grief! Tell the postman I'll be down in a minute. Don't let him leave without this. I've got to get this in the mail for Galatia tonight. Nobody is going to pull legalistic wool over the eyes of my beloved. Take a letter, Miss Bluhm. Get out pen and parchment, Mark. Put this down.”

Basically, Paul had three things to say: 1) The Judaizers are right. I'm not an apostle like the others. My credentials are better, as a matter of fact, than anyone else's. It was a personal defense, but with a purpose. There was no legitimate basis to undermine his ministry. 2) The Gospel, the heart and soul of the true Gospel, is the freedom it provides from any kind of contribution (and any kind of enslaving worry about inadequate contributions) on our part to hope and life and victory. God and God only, is the active agent of our salvation and even in and of our Christian lives. That's the doctrine. 3) All this has practical implications and produces specific results in your life and in mine. One, two, three. A personal section. A doctrinal section. A practical section. And each section handily covers two chapters. That, then, is our outline (*OUTLINE WORKSHEET*, page 4).

It isn't only Paul who is furious about “Judaizers from Jerusalem” fouling the Christian nest. And it isn't simply those folks in Galatia who are naively turned to “another gospel” which is no gospel at all but a people-centered, work-oriented, humanistic substitute for the Gospel. Let's not forget that the Bible, and that includes the six chapters of



**WORKSHEET**

*OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE GALATIANS*

Begin to construct the outline of Paul's epistle to the Galatians on the basis of what we have learned so far. The outline will be filled in from time to time as the study proceeds.

*THIS BOOK DECLARES OUR INDEPENDENCE*

**KEY** *THE KEY VERSE RUNS LIKE A RIVER THROUGH THE ENTIRE BOOK*

*IDENTIFY THREE SECTIONS*

		<i>CHAPTERS</i>			
		<i>THEME</i>			
		<i>THEME</i>			

## PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 1:1-5

*Where my heart is shackled, dear Lord, set me free. Where my spirit is dulled and my life is covered with guilt and a desperate sense of my inadequacy, lift me, teach me and turn me loose. Let me know the Joy of Your salvation. Amen.*

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1. The word “apostle” means “commissioned messenger.” The early church recognized several “ranks” of apostleship. Rank #1. Read Luke 22:14; Matthew 10:2-4, 27:3-5; Acts 1:25-26. List the first rank apostles by name.
 

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  2. Read John 3:11; Acts 1:21-23 and 1 Corinthians 9:1. What was distinctive about the first rank apostles and who was the appointing agent for these apostles?
 

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  3. Read Acts 5:13. The first rank apostles were highly regarded. What word or phrase would you use to describe what you would suppose to be the common attitude of the early church for what the apostles said?
 

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  4. Rank #2 apostles. Read 2 Corinthians 8:23 and Philippians 2:25. By whose appointment did apostles of the second rank serve?
 

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  5. Ministers today receive their commission by the “laying on of hands.” Through whom do they receive their authority to serve?
 

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  6. Compare Acts 9:1-9 with Galatians 1:1. Paul claims a uniqueness with reference to his commission beyond that of the twelve. What is it?
 

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  7. Read Galatians 1:1-12. Why is it so important to Paul to establish his unique commission and rank?
 

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  8. Why is Paul’s commission and rank important to you?
 

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  9. Look up the word “grace” in a dictionary. Of all the meanings listed, which do you think Paul had in mind in Galatians 1:3?
 

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10. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Would you characterize the Christian religion as a religion based on the action of man or of God? Explain.

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11. What, in your perception, is the basic difference between the Christian religion and other religions?

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12. Name some religions which make their goals dependent on "works."

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13. Mark True (T) or False (F) in front of each of the following statements and explain the reason for your answer. You may use the reference suggested or one of your own choice.

\_\_\_ God gives grace to those who deserve it (Romans 3:24).

\_\_\_ God's grace and man's works combine to effect his salvation (Romans 11:6).

\_\_\_ A person is forgiven in direct proportion to his efforts to do good (Ephesians 1:7).

\_\_\_ There is comfort in the knowledge that one is not totally bad, better at least than many (Romans 3:23).

\_\_\_ We know that we are washed clean and renewed by God's mercy and the Holy Spirit's action (Titus 3:5).

14. Establish the connection between "grace" and "peace" in verse 3.

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15. With what action is the will of God identified in verse 4?

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16. Explain how if one works to accomplish his own salvation he robs God of His glory (1:5).

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