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*“Our religion is the invention of God and is ours through the revelation of His Word.”*  
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#### *GALATIANS 1:6-9*

“It’s a puzzlement,” the King of Siam tells Anna. There is, perhaps, an explanation, but if there is it escapes me; if there is it fails to satisfy me. That’s what Paul, gentler now, tells his Galatian converts. “I am astonished.” I’m hurt, disappointed and, above all, confused. It just doesn’t make sense to tamper with the Gospel of grace, to water it down, to abandon it at last and to turn your back on the God who has chosen you and redeemed you. Logic alone reveals the foolishness of listening to the Judaizers from Jerusalem.

And so quickly (v.6). This is the age old complaint of parents, pastors, educators, mentors. Why is it that convictions and commitments which require the investment of years of patient instruction and example to forge, can be displaced so quickly and so easily at the first challenge from the lips of a veritable stranger? The precious and profound treasure which is ours in the unique understanding we have of the Gospel of free forgiveness, for one thing, and the power of the Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, for another. These convictions which give us a special place in the panorama of Christendom; these we ought to cherish and defend, and maintain for them our deep loyalty, and not sniff every passing aroma which offers itself on the breezes of current church history.

They had said it is another gospel, containing all the elements of the gospel taught by the apostle Paul, and a little bit more (v.6). But there is no other Gospel (v.7). Either it’s Gospel or it’s not. Either it’s grace or it’s law. Either it’s freedom or it’s bondage. Either it’s sonship or it’s slavery. Either it’s faith or it’s works. Don’t make with this “another” talk. Another gospel is patently not another gospel. Another gospel is bad news, miserable tidings. The insinuation of law and works and “by deeds of ours” into a religion of salvation perverts the Good News into announcements about quotas, discussions of inadequacy, pronouncements of judgments and suggestions of uncertainty, even despair.

Before the Holy Spirit burst into the cubbyhole where Martin Luther poured over the book of Romans, and exploded in front of Luther's mind's eye the revelation that God in Jesus is the active agent, he couldn't sleep nights agonizing over his eternal fate. God in Jesus is the sole active agent of our hope, our eternal inheritance and our daily walk with God. The work oriented religion he was exposed to 'til then was hardly good news. Not "another gospel," at all, as far removed from the real Gospel as Beethoven is from punk rock.

While the experience of Luther is still fresh in our minds, it's interesting to note how he translates the words which follow in verse 7: "There are some who trouble your conscience." The Judaizers had been saying one has to keep the requirements of Old Testament and moral laws to be saved, at least to play safe. That was a major disturbance to the consciences of the Galatians. And to ours. Grace equals peace; peace of conscience and heart (1:3). The requirements of the law, rules and regulations, standards and codes of conduct, equal troubled consciences.

Paul is not one to go about taking the glory of the Gospel of grace for granted. There is nothing "ho-hum" about his grasp of the religion of Christ. He recognizes and basks continually in the benefits which attend the unique way of salvation invested by the living God. There is no other religion like the Christian religion. Its genius consists of this that it does for man what man cannot do for himself. And that spells peace. That provides confidence. That produces freedom. That gives one the stature of the sons and daughters of God. It's a source for powerful living. It is strength and confidence in death. It is a "citadel within," "a mighty rock in a weary land."

Paul was conscious of all that, always. No one could take that from him. He is tireless in his defense and promotion of the Gospel of grace. We

want to be too. It starts with continual gratitude for and amazement about the mercy of our God. "While we were still sinners," He gave His Son for us (Romans 5:8). If we are conscious of that, we will not take it lightly or give it up easily, certainly not in exchange for a faith which puts us in the middle, where Christ ought to be.

#### *GALATIANS 1:10-12*

"For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." That makes a difference, a considerable difference. The carefully devised hypotheses of men are just that, no matter now intelligently crafted or how scholarly researched or how agreeably received they have been, a hypothesis is a hypothesis.

But God KNOWS. He doesn't reckon. He authors. He doesn't reflect. His is the last and final word. All the sublime calculations of an Einstein or the deductions of a Freud or Kant must give way when God speaks. He does not suppose. When His decrees challenge the inclinations of the best guesses of humankind, it is man who must give way. Before all the mysteries still hidden in this universe, man's best guess is still conjecture. But for God there are no mysteries. He is the God of mysteries.

The claim of Paul in 1:10-11 knocks the pins right out from under his opponents. Before their "wouldn't you think" and "isn't it reasonable to suppose" phrases, the apostle here insists, "Thus says the Lord."

This world of ours, particularly in the last 50 years, has impressed itself with its accumulated knowledge. Granted that knowledge has come by way of discovery rather than invention, still it isn't

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hard to see why people presume themselves to be the last word about almost everything. Given that setting in the realm of religion, and there seems to be a new one or a new twist to the old ones every day, it is crucial to be able to say with assurance: This is the truth of God.

Paul, of course, had that startling experience to hark back to. The noon-time appearance of the ascended Christ on the road to Damascus was a telling point in favor of his teaching. The direct preparatory training for his ministry, with no human involvement, went a long way to establish that his was not just another meticulously studied philosophy evolving out of the mind of some especially gifted rabbi or the school of philosophy at some synagogue.

And it makes sense. No man would ever have dreamt up the Gospel of grace. Send 10 men into the Arabian Desert for three years to develop a new and refreshing religious system, and not one would have come up with the remission of sins by way of the death of God's Son. Not in a million years! It's not a human-type idea at all. Left to our own devices, we would, as many have, devised a process in which we are front and center, and we work out the rescue, and we are the heroes, and we get the credit. It can't work, of course, because of who and what we are – and aren't. Elsewhere, Paul talks about the mysteries of God. The whole idea of free grace is foreign and mysterious to people. No, "not from men, nor through man."

There is a growing temptation for Christians to regard, secretly, their religion as one, albeit a particularly fine one, among many. There is, after all, a lot of good in almost all religions. Who's to say our point of view is an improvement on another? Well, God, that's Who. Our religion is the invention of God and is ours through the revelation of His Word. In Christianity you aren't dealing with another "cunningly devised fable." This is the truth. He (Jesus) is the truth. Because of it we have the assurance that His is the way. And that spells life, now and forever.

There is a dwindling remnant ready to say ours is a religion "not from men, nor through man." The written words of our faith are subjected to the same type of scrutiny as other words. The claims of our faith are suspect if they strain the natural rules by which we are used to living. The great deeds of biblical heroes are questioned if they cannot be duplicated by the likes of us. But hope and certainty, confidence and power rest in the conviction that ours is a religion not from men, nor through man but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. So it is immensely meaningful, not just to the Judaizers pitted against Paul, or the Galatians dependent upon Paul, but to us, in most practical terms, to have the apostle assure us, "For I did not receive it [the Gospel of grace] from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (v.12).

## PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 1:13-2:14

*My heart, dear Savior, stands in constant need of Your instruction. Teach me the errors of my way and assure me of the love by which You receive me and renew me in spite of all my sins. Amen.*

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1. Read Galatians 1:13-17 and relate Paul's background.

a. On whose experience does Paul call to make his point?

b. In Luke 24:48, what is it called when a person reports his own experience?

c. What is the role of a witness at a trial? (Acts 22:15)

d. What is the role of a defense attorney at a trial? (1 John 2:1)

e. Who is to be revealed and lifted up by the report of our experiences? (Acts 18)

f. Write a personal experience which elevates Christ.

2. Read 1:13; Acts 9:1-3 and 22:4. What counsel do these passages give as far as the 'target' of our evangelism efforts are concerned?

3. Discuss the difficulties which confront the newly converted with reference to their acceptance. (Acts 9:26)

4. From Acts 22:3, 23:6, 26:5; Matthew 6:2, 5, 16, 12:2, 23:4, 13, 23 & 27, list some words which describe pharisaism.

How does Paul's background in pharisaism give credence to his doctrine of grace?

List and discuss attitudes which can pervert Christian life until it becomes pharisaism.

5. Discuss the value of meditation from 1:16, 17; Psalm 19; 1 Timothy 4:15.

Share your method for “pondering the Word of God.

6. In Galatians 1:18 -19, Paul is making the point that his Gospel comes from God, not men. Verse 18 is no help to that argument, but fair is fair. Paul’s vigorous sense of honesty insists that he report his visit with Peter even if it might seem damaging to the case he is making. Paul does the same thing and exhibits the same meticulous honesty in 1 Corinthians 1:13-17.

What point is Paul making?

Why does Paul add the information about baptizing the Stephanas household?

7. What could Peter provide which was lacking to Paul? (v.18)
8. If you had the opportunity to spend “fifteen days” with Peter, what would be your two priority questions of him?
9. Read Acts 9:26-27. In the light of Galatians 1:18-19, with which disciples did Paul make contact?
10. Give two reasons why Paul inserts the oath in verse 20.
11. Read 1:22-24.
- Describe the original relationship of Paul to the early Christians.
  - Whom did the early Christians credit for Paul’s Gospel preaching?
12. Read 2:1-14
- In later years, what was Paul’s attitude toward those who suggested his assistants be circumcised as a religious nicety?
  - What attitude does the action of Peter, James and John suggest with reference to Paul’s claim in 1:1?
  - Who did Paul regard as the authoritative voice in the clash recorded here?
13. Does Paul contend that under the Gospel one is not free to practice circumcision?

14. What does "freedom of the Gospel" imply to you?

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15. Circle the words and phrases which express the Christian way.

want to      joy      compulsion      constraint  
freedom      must      should      independence