

Galatians, Part 1

A 50-minute teaching script for Galatians 1-2 and Acts 15

BIG IDEA The gospel comes from God and declares sinners right with him through faith in Jesus Christ - not through works of the law or added requirements.

BEFORE CLASS Write on the board: What happens to the gospel when someone says, 'Christ is necessary - but not enough'?

0:00-3:00 | Welcome and opening prayer

Good morning. Today we begin Galatians, the first letter in our series after learning how Paul was called and sent. Galatians is not a calm theological essay. Paul is writing to churches he loves because the gospel itself is being distorted.

Let's pray. Father, send your Holy Spirit to guide us and teach us. Guard us from adding to the finished work of Christ. Help us hear your Word, trust your grace, and receive one another as Christ has received us. In Jesus' name, amen.

3:00-7:00 | Recap Lesson 3 and orient to Galatians

Last week we saw Saul's redirected zeal become witness and suffering. Christ called him. The church received and protected him. Barnabas advocated for him. The Holy Spirit sent Barnabas and Saul through the worshiping church at Antioch, and Paul later described the whole mission as what Christ accomplished through him by the Spirit and through partnering churches.

That mission produced churches among Gentiles. But a crisis soon followed. Some teachers were telling Gentile Christians that faith in Jesus was not enough. They also needed circumcision and observance of the law of Moses in order to stand fully among God's people.

This is why our board question matters: What happens to the gospel when someone says, 'Christ is necessary - but not enough'?

Galatians teaches us to read a letter as a whole. Paul states the crisis in chapters 1-2, explains the gospel through promise, law, and faith in chapters 3-4, and then shows the freedom and Spirit-shaped life produced by grace in chapters 5-6. Today we will stay mainly in chapters 1-2.

7:00-10:00 | Read Galatians 1:6-10

Ask one reader to read Galatians 1:6-10. Ask everyone to listen for what astonishes Paul, what is happening to the gospel, and how seriously Paul treats it.

10:00-16:00 | There is no other gospel

Paul normally begins his letters with thanksgiving for the church. Galatians does not. He moves from greeting to astonishment: 'I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ.'

Notice that turning to a different gospel is not merely choosing the wrong teaching program. Paul says they are deserting God, the one who called them by grace. A distorted gospel misrepresents both God's action and Christ's sufficiency.

The pressure involved circumcision and Torah observance. Circumcision was not an absurd or obviously pagan demand. It came from the Old Testament and marked God's covenant people. That made the distortion more persuasive. A biblical practice was being placed in the wrong location: it was made an entrance requirement alongside Christ.

Paul first calls the message a 'different gospel' and then says it is really no gospel at all. There are not several equally valid gospels. A gospel that says 'Christ plus this requirement' is not a stronger gospel. It says Christ is not enough.

Paul even says that if he or an angel preached a contrary gospel, that messenger should fall under God's curse. Paul is not guarding his reputation. He places himself under the same standard. The message judges the messenger; the messenger does not control the message.

ASK Why does Paul treat this as a gospel issue rather than a harmless difference in practice?

16:00-19:00 | Read selected verses from Galatians 1:11-24

Ask the reader to read Galatians 1:11-12, 15-18, and 22-24. Ask the class to notice where Paul's gospel and commission came from, and how the churches responded to his changed life.

19:00-25:00 | Revealed by Christ, not invented by Paul

Paul insists that his gospel is not of human origin. He did not receive it as a secondhand theory or create a message designed to please Gentiles. The risen Christ revealed himself and commissioned Paul.

Paul's own story is evidence of grace. The persecutor did not climb a religious ladder until he qualified to become an apostle. God set him apart, called him by grace, revealed his Son, and sent him to preach among the Gentiles.

This continues the lesson we learned from Saul's conversion. Grace did not merely improve his old confidence. Grace overturned it. His new calling did not originate in his achievement, and neither does our justification.

Paul's independence matters because opponents could accuse him of inventing a watered-down, Gentile-friendly gospel. But independence does not mean isolation. Paul meets Peter and James. He is known by the Judean churches, and they praise God because the former persecutor now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy.

A reading guardrail: Galatians says Paul's gospel and commission came through Christ. It does not mean he refused to learn historical details about Jesus or listen to other believers. The source and authority of the gospel are divine; Christian growth still happens within Christ's church.

25:00-28:00 | Summarize Galatians 2:1-10

Say: Paul later went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. Titus was a Gentile believer. Some false believers tried to compel him to be circumcised. Paul refused because the truth of the gospel and the freedom of Gentile Christians were at stake.

The recognized Jerusalem leaders added nothing to Paul's gospel. Instead, they recognized the grace God had given him, saw that God was working through different ministries, and extended the right hand of fellowship.

28:00-34:00 | Recognized, not revised - with Acts 15

Open Acts 15 and summarize the presenting question from verse 1: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' This is not merely a disagreement over worship style. It is a claim about what is required for salvation.

In Acts 15:7-11, Peter reminds the church that God gave the Holy Spirit to Gentile believers and purified their hearts by faith. Then he asks why anyone would place a yoke upon the Gentiles that Israel itself could not bear. His conclusion is wonderfully direct: Jews and Gentiles alike are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

James agrees that the church must not make it difficult for Gentiles who are turning to God. His pastoral instructions help Jewish and Gentile Christians share fellowship; they are not extra works that complete Christ's saving work.

Here is the important combination. Paul's gospel came from Christ, so Jerusalem did not create or revise it. Yet Paul did not treat himself as an isolated authority. The church recognized the same grace and the same gospel at work in different ministries.

A brief chronology note: our working view is that Galatians was written to the South Galatian churches before the Jerusalem Council. On that reading, Galatians 2 likely describes an earlier Jerusalem visit, and Acts 15 shows the controversy later resolved publicly. Other faithful interpreters identify Galatians 2 with Acts 15. We do not need to solve that today. Both passages agree on the gospel at stake.

34:00-37:00 | Read Galatians 2:11-21

Ask one reader to read Galatians 2:11-21. Ask the class to notice what Peter did, who followed him, why Paul confronted him, and what Paul says about justification.

37:00-42:00 | The truth of the gospel at one table

Peter had been eating with Gentile Christians. But when certain men associated with James arrived, Peter pulled back because he feared the circumcision group. Other Jewish Christians followed, and even Barnabas was led astray.

Paul does not say Peter formally announced a new doctrine. Peter's table behavior preached one. His withdrawal communicated that Gentile Christians were not fully acceptable unless they first adopted Jewish identity markers.

Peter's choice of lunch companions preached a message. Christian conduct can deny in practice the gospel we confess with our mouths.

That is why Paul moves immediately to justification. To justify means to declare someone right before God. Paul says a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. No human obedience establishes that verdict. Our confidence rests in Christ.

This does not make obedience unimportant. Galatians 2:20 says the believer has been crucified with Christ and now lives by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. Grace gives a new life. But that life is the fruit of acceptance, not the price paid for it.

Paul ends the section with a devastating conclusion. If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing. Adding a requirement to grace does not make the gospel safer. It empties the cross of its necessity.

42:00-47:00 | The Gospel Then and Now

Return to the board question: What happens to the gospel when someone says, 'Christ is necessary - but not enough'?

In Galatia, the added requirements were circumcision and Torah identity markers. Our additions may look different. Churches can make correct doctrine, moral reform, political identity, worship preferences, family background, or denominational tradition function as unofficial entrance requirements.

These may include good things. The question is where we place them. Do they flow from grace as part of Christian growth, or do we use them to decide whether someone is fully acceptable to God and fully welcome among us?

DISCUSS What good Christian practices are most likely to become unofficial entrance requirements today?

Follow-up: How can a church distinguish the fruit of grace from an addition to grace?

A gospel-shaped church guards the gospel, receives those Christ receives, and teaches obedience as the fruit of grace rather than the price of belonging.

47:00-50:00 | Summary, homework, and prayer

Today we saw why Paul speaks with such urgency. The Galatians were not merely considering another religious practice. They were being told that Christ was not enough. Paul answered that the gospel came from God, was revealed through Christ, was recognized by the church, and declares sinners right through faith in Christ rather than works of the law.

And the doctrine reached the dinner table. If God justifies Jew and Gentile through faith in the same Christ, the church must not rebuild barriers that grace has removed.

Before next week, read Galatians 3-6. Mark references to promise, law, faith, Spirit, flesh, freedom, and love. Ask how grace produces obedience without returning believers to slavery.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for the one gospel of your grace. Thank you that Christ loved us and gave himself for us. Keep us from adding to his finished work. Teach us to receive those you receive and to live obediently, not to earn your verdict, but because we belong to Christ. In his name, amen.

FINAL LINE The gospel came from God. Christ is enough. God justifies through faith. Therefore, the church must not rebuild barriers that grace has removed.