

## Introduction to the letter

Galatia was a region rather than a single church, made up of several congregations that Paul himself had planted. After Paul moved on, other teachers arrived who claimed to be offering a fuller or more complete version of the Christian message. While being sympathetic to faith in Jesus, they insisted that it was not enough on its own and needed to be supplemented by observing parts of the Jewish law, especially circumcision. Importantly, these teachers were not rejecting Jesus outright; instead, they were adding extra requirements.



This situation explains why Paul's tone in Galatians is so intense. The letter is his most urgent and confrontational, and strikingly it contains no opening note of thanksgiving, which is common in his other letters. Instead, Paul moves immediately to the problem. For him, what is at stake is far more than a disagreement about church practice or cultural customs. The issue goes to the very heart of the Christian faith and the nature of salvation itself.

At the centre of the letter is a clear and uncompromising theme: the gospel is God's rescue in Christ alone. It is received by faith, not achieved through human effort, and it is not something that can be improved or completed by religious performance.

*Adding to the gospel doesn't strengthen it; it replaces it.*

Read **Galatians 1:1–10** slowly

## Read again vv.1–5 — *The Gospel Originates with God, Not People*

Paul begins by defending the source of his authority, rooting both his apostleship and the gospel itself in God's action rather than human approval. The summary of the gospel in verse 4 is dense and deliberate.

## Discussion questions

- How does Paul describe the source of the gospel in this passage, and why do you think that matters so much to him?
- How does “rescue” differ from how people often talk about faith today?

## You might want to comment on the following

- “Gave himself” — voluntary, costly, intentional.
- “Rescue” — not advice, not assistance, not needing improvement.
- “Present evil age” — not just personal guilt, but a whole broken system.

## Read vv.6–7 — *How the Gospel Gets Distorted*

Paul is not shocked by outright rebellion, but by the subtle drift of the Galatians. They are being “turned” toward something that is not simply another aspect of the gospel, but a completely different message that is no gospel at all.

## Discussion questions

- Why do you think additions to the gospel are so attractive?
- What kinds of “grace-plus” messages exist in churches today?

## Personal reflection

- Where do you feel pressure (spoken or unspoken) to *add something* to be fully accepted by God?

## Finally read vv.8–9 — *Why Distortion Is Spiritually Deadly*

Paul emphasizes his point by repeating himself almost word for word, deliberately including both himself and even angels under the same warning. He wants to show that his concern is not about his own personality, reputation, or authority, but about defending the truth of the gospel itself and the eternal consequences of allowing it to be distorted.

## Discussion questions

- Why do you think Paul is willing to sound harsh here?
- What happens spiritually when assurance is tied to performance?

Final thoughts,

Verse 10 reminds us that what we truly live by is revealed in our deepest motivation; whether we are living to please people or to serve Christ. False gospels often succeed because they flatter cultural expectations, reward outward accomplishment, and protect reputation, but the gospel of grace calls us to a higher allegiance: one that honours God above approval, obedience above applause, and faithfulness above fame.

*“A performance-based ‘gospel’ always needs an audience”*

## Quiet reflection

- Who do I most feel pressure to impress spiritually?
- In what ways can “Christian service or behaviour” become about approval rather than faith?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to trust fully in your finished work on the cross and to let go of performance-based religiosity. Open my eyes to the subtle distortions of the gospel in my heart, and give me the freedom to live wholeheartedly, not to impress others or earn approval, but to make known your power and mercy. May my life reflect your grace, and may my joy and identity be found in you alone. Amen.

## Big Idea Reminder

The gospel is not self-improvement or religious performance — it is God’s rescue mission in Christ.

You might end with **Galatians 2:20** read aloud.