

The Book of Galatians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: No Other Gospel

Galatians 1:1–10

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This opening passage sets the doctrinal foundation for the entire letter, and what is at stake is nothing less than the gospel itself. Paul argues that there is one gospel, given by God and not invented by men, and that any teaching which adds human requirements as the ground of acceptance with God is not a fuller gospel but a counterfeit that nullifies grace. The specific error in Galatia was the demand that Gentile believers take on the works of the law of Moses, especially circumcision, in order to be justified. Your aim this week is to help students see that the gospel is a fixed deposit received from Christ through his apostles, not a message the church is free to revise.

At the same time, this passage is not merely a defense of correct doctrine. Paul is fighting for the freedom and joy of people he loves, and the fight is also a fight for their hearts. Notice that the deepest issue in the chapter surfaces in verse 10: whose approval are we living for? The pull toward a law-keeping gospel was, at root, a pull toward earning, performing, and pleasing people, and that pull is alive in every congregation. Help students feel that guarding the gospel is not cold theological policing but the way we protect a treasure that sets us free.

So aim at both targets. Send students home more certain of what the gospel is and is not, and more honest about the places in their own lives where they are quietly trying to add to the finished work of Christ. The right response to this lesson is not only sharper conviction but deeper rest in the grace that rescued them from the present evil age.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul insists that his apostleship is “not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (1:1). Why does Paul ground both his authority and his message in the direct call of Christ and the resurrection, and what does this tell us about where the gospel comes from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul fires his opening shot in the very first line. Ordinarily he simply calls himself an apostle, but here he piles up a denial and an affirmation: his apostleship is not from men, not through any man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father. The troublers in Galatia were evidently arguing that Paul was a second-hand apostle, dependent on Jerusalem, while their own teaching

carried fuller authority. Paul cuts that off at once. His commission, and therefore his gospel, came straight from the risen Lord.

Notice how quickly Paul reaches for the resurrection. God the Father is identified as the one “who raised him from the dead.” The gospel is not a set of timeless ideas that a clever teacher might improve upon. It is the announcement of something God actually did in history, raising the crucified Jesus, and the authority of the message rests on that event. You cannot edit the gospel any more than you can edit the empty tomb.

This matters enormously for how we think about authority today. If the gospel comes from God through Christ and his appointed apostles, then no later teacher, council, or movement has the right to overturn it. The same point will anchor our convictions about Scripture: the complete New Testament, given through the apostles, is our authority, and claims of fresh revelation that contradict it must be rejected (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Help students feel the steadiness of standing on a gospel that does not shift with the times.

Press gently on the personal payoff. Because the gospel is God’s and not ours, we do not have to carry the weight of inventing or defending a message we made up. We receive it, we trust it, and we rest in it. A gospel we engineered could never save us. A gospel God gave can.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The divine origin of the gospel, given through Jesus Christ and not invented by human beings
- Apostolic authority as the channel through which Christ delivered his message to the church
- The bodily resurrection of Jesus as the historical ground of the gospel’s authority
- The complete New Testament as our standard, against any claim of new revelation that contradicts it (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- The unchanging nature of the gospel across every age and culture

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter, practically, that the gospel came from God rather than from the church?
- How does grounding our faith in the resurrection guard us against treating the gospel as mere opinion?
- Where do you see pressure today to let new ideas overrule the apostolic message?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul says that Christ “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” (1:4). Name one specific way the present evil age still pulls on your heart. What would being delivered from its grip actually look like in your week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 4 is easy to read past, but it carries the whole gospel in a single sentence. Christ “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” Salvation is first of all a rescue, and it cost the Lord himself. Before Paul says a word about the law, he reminds the Galatians what the gospel actually accomplished, so that adding law-keeping to it will look as foolish as it is.

Notice the phrase “the present evil age.” Paul is not only talking about personal sins but about a whole world system, a way of living organized around self, status, and the approval of others, the very things that made the Judaizers’ message attractive. Christ did not die merely to forgive us and leave us in that age. He died to pull us out of it and into a new way of living under his reign.

This is a self-examining question, so the goal is honesty, not theory. Help students name specific ways the present evil age still tugs at them: the craving for approval, the fear of missing out, the quiet idolatries of money, comfort, image, and control. The point is not shame but clarity. We cannot be delivered from a grip we will not admit we are in.

Then turn toward the good news embedded in the verb. Christ “gave himself.” Deliverance is not something we achieve by trying harder to escape the age. It is something Christ accomplished and now works out in us as we walk with him. Invite students to imagine one ordinary moment this week where living as a rescued person would look different.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The substitutionary self-giving of Christ for our sins
- Salvation as rescue from the present evil age, not only forgiveness of isolated sins
- The will of the Father as the source of our redemption
- The Christian life as ongoing deliverance worked out under Christ’s reign

Discussion Prompts

- What does the phrase “the present evil age” describe in your daily world?
- How is being delivered from the age different from simply being forgiven?
- What would it look like to live one ordinary day as a rescued person?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul is “astonished” that the Galatians are “so quickly deserting him who called you” and “turning to a different gospel” (1:6). Why does Paul describe abandoning the true gospel as deserting God himself, rather than merely changing one’s opinion about doctrine?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's astonishment is genuine and pointed. He marvels that the Galatians are "so quickly" deserting, and the speed is part of the tragedy. The gospel had taken root, lives had changed, and now, in a remarkably short time, they were drifting. Drift is rarely dramatic. It happens by small, reasonable-sounding steps, which is exactly why Paul sounds the alarm so loudly.

Look closely at the object of the desertion. Paul does not first say they are deserting a doctrine or a teaching. He says they are deserting "him who called you in the grace of Christ." To abandon the true gospel is to turn away from God himself, because the gospel is how God gives himself to us. This is why the matter is so serious. It is personal and relational, not merely intellectual.

Help students feel the difference between changing an opinion and committing desertion. We can revise our view of a secondary matter without abandoning the Lord. But the gospel is not a secondary matter. To add a different ground of acceptance with God, whether law-keeping then or performance and self-justification now, is to walk away from grace toward a god of our own making.

End on the word "grace." The Galatians were called "in the grace of Christ." Every counterfeit gospel, in the end, trades grace for something we can boast about. Keeping the gospel pure is simply refusing to let go of grace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Apostasy as a real and present danger, even for those who once received the gospel
- Deserting the gospel as deserting God himself, not merely changing an opinion
- The gospel as the means by which God gives himself to us in grace
- The subtlety and speed of spiritual drift

Discussion Prompts

- Why is drift usually quiet rather than dramatic?
- What is the difference between revising a secondary opinion and deserting the gospel?
- What practices help a congregation stay anchored in grace over time?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul says the gospel is something the Galatians "received," a fixed deposit, not a draft to be edited. Where have you been tempted to trim the gospel to make it more comfortable, or to add to it to make it more impressive?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the truth of the passage into the student's own heart. Paul treats the gospel as something "received," a fixed deposit handed down, not a personal draft each of us is

free to edit. The Galatians were tempted to add to it. We are often tempted in two directions at once, to add requirements that make us feel worthy and to trim demands that make us uncomfortable.

Adding to the gospel usually looks like seriousness. We attach our own rules, traditions, or performances and quietly begin to rest our standing with God on them. Trimming the gospel usually looks like kindness. We soften the call to repentance, confession, and obedient faith so the message will go down easier. Both are edits, and both replace God's gospel with ours.

Invite specific honesty here. Where does a student feel they must perform to be accepted, by God or by the church? Where are they tempted to leave out the parts of the gospel that cost something? The aim is not to manufacture guilt but to expose the places where grace has not yet been allowed to do its full work.

Close by returning to rest. Because the gospel is received and not invented, we can stop managing our standing with God and start trusting it. The cure for both adding and trimming is the same: come back to the finished work of Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as a received deposit, not a message we are free to revise
- The twin temptations of adding to and trimming the gospel
- Self-justification by performance as a counterfeit of grace
- Repentance and obedient faith as part of the gospel, not additions to it

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to base your standing with God on your own performance?
- Which parts of the gospel are you most tempted to soften or leave out?
- How does returning to the finished work of Christ cure both adding and trimming?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul warns that some are “troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (1:7). What were these teachers adding to the gospel, and why does adding requirements for salvation actually destroy the good news rather than enrich it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul names the problem plainly: certain people are “troubling” the Galatians and want to “distort the gospel of Christ.” The word picture is of stirring up settled water or unsettling a settled mind. These teachers were not openly denying Christ. They were adding to him, insisting that faith in Jesus plus the works of the law was the path to acceptance with God.

Here the teacher must define the “works of the law” carefully, because this theme runs through the whole letter. Paul is not condemning obedience itself, nor the godly response of faith. He is condemning the attempt to be justified by keeping the law of Moses, especially the badges of Jewish identity like circumcision, as the ground of standing before God and as something in which a person could boast. Law-keeping done to earn and to boast is the target, not the obedience that flows from faith.

Explain why adding to the gospel destroys it rather than enriching it. The gospel announces that we are accepted on the basis of what Christ has done. The moment we make acceptance depend on what we do to supplement Christ, we have changed the basis entirely, and grace is no longer grace (Galatians 5:2–4; Romans 11:6). A little addition does not make the gospel bigger. It makes it a different gospel.

Guard against a false conclusion. This passage is not teaching that saving faith is passive or that obedience does not matter. Paul will spend chapters five and six calling Christians to walk by the Spirit. The point is that we are justified by grace through a living, obedient faith in Christ, not by law-keeping performed to earn a standing we could brag about.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The meaning of the “works of the law,” the works of the Mosaic law done to earn and to boast
- Why adding requirements to the gospel changes its basis and nullifies grace (Romans 11:6)
- Justification by grace through a living, obedient faith, against faith only and against legalism
- The difference between law-keeping for merit and the obedience that flows from faith
- The seriousness of distorting the gospel even with sincere intentions

Discussion Prompts

- What exactly were the troublemakers adding, and why was it so appealing?
- How can a teaching be sincere and still distort the gospel?
- How do we hold together “not by works of the law” and “faith without works is dead”?

Question 6

Student Question:

Think of a time you felt the pressure to please people more than to please God. How did it shape what you said, what you stayed silent about, or how you lived? What did that cost you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the spotlight inward, toward the fear of people. The crisis in Galatia was not only doctrinal; it was driven by the very human desire to be accepted, to belong, to satisfy the

more demanding crowd. Most of us know that pull from the inside, and naming it honestly is the beginning of freedom.

Help students see how the fear of man shapes behavior in quiet ways. It edits our words, it chooses our silences, it makes us perform for an audience whose approval we crave. Over time it can reshape what we believe, because it is easier to adjust our convictions than to disappoint the people we are trying to please.

Let the cost surface. People-pleasing promises belonging but delivers bondage, because the audience can never be fully satisfied and the approval must constantly be renewed. The Galatians were trading the freedom of grace for the exhausting treadmill of measuring up. Many students are on that same treadmill in some corner of their lives.

Point forward to the cure, which Paul gives in verse 10. The servant of Christ lives before an audience of One. When God's approval, already given to us in Christ, becomes the approval that matters most, the grip of every other audience begins to loosen.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of man as a driving force behind compromise
- How people-pleasing can quietly reshape our convictions
- The bondage of living for approval that must be constantly re-earned
- Living before an audience of One as the path to freedom

Discussion Prompts

- Whose approval are you most tempted to live for right now?
- How has the fear of disappointing people shaped your words or silences?
- What changes when God's approval in Christ becomes the approval that matters most?

Question 7

Student Question:

Twice Paul pronounces a curse: "let him be accursed" on anyone, even an angel from heaven, who preaches a gospel contrary to the one they received (1:8-9). Why does Paul use such severe language, and what does this teach us about the authority and finality of the apostolic gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul now does something startling. He pronounces a curse, an anathema, on anyone who preaches a gospel contrary to the one the Galatians received, and he repeats it for emphasis. He even includes himself and the angels in the warning. No messenger, however exalted, has the authority to alter the message. The gospel outranks the preacher.

Feel the weight of the repetition. Paul says it twice, in verses 8 and 9, because he wants no misunderstanding. This is not the irritation of a man whose pride was wounded. It is the alarm of a shepherd who sees a deadly poison being served as medicine. When souls are at stake, soft words about a false gospel are not kindness.

Draw out the doctrine of the gospel's finality. Because the gospel comes from God through the apostles, it is fixed and complete, and later claims to supersede it are ruled out in advance. This is why the church does not need, and must not accept, new revelations, continuing apostleship, or modern messages that contradict the apostolic word (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 1:13–14). The standard was delivered once for all.

Help students hold severity and love together. Paul's harshness here flows from love, not from the absence of it. The most loving thing he can do for people being led toward a Christless religion is to tell them the truth plainly. We guard the gospel fiercely precisely because we love the people who could lose it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The finality and completeness of the apostolic gospel
- The gospel as outranking every messenger, including apostles and angels
- The rejection of new revelation and continuing apostleship that contradict the apostolic word (Jude 3)
- Severity toward false teaching as an expression of love for souls
- The seriousness of leading others toward a false gospel

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul include even himself and angels in the warning?
- How can firm opposition to false teaching be an act of love?
- What does the finality of the gospel mean for claims of new revelation today?

Question 8

Student Question:

The Galatians were drawn to teachers who seemed more advanced and more demanding. What makes a “more, better, deeper” message so attractive to us, and how can you tell the difference between genuine maturity and a counterfeit gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question explores why a “more, better, deeper” message is so seductive. The Judaizers offered what looked like advancement: a richer spirituality, a more demanding discipleship, a fuller membership. To people who wanted to grow, that was appealing. The trouble was that the “more” they offered actually subtracted Christ.

Help students see the counterfeit clearly. Genuine maturity always moves us deeper into Christ and into grace, producing humility, love, and dependence. A counterfeit gospel moves us toward self, toward measuring, ranking, and boasting, even when it uses spiritual language. The fruit reveals the root.

Offer some tests of discernment. Does this teaching make much of Christ or much of my performance? Does it lead to freedom and love or to anxiety and superiority? Does it rest my acceptance on what Christ has done or on what I add to it? These questions help students tell the difference between real growth and an attractive substitute.

Reassure them that the desire to grow is good and God-given. The answer to a counterfeit “more” is not spiritual laziness but true maturity, going further up and further in to the same grace that saved us. The deepest Christian is not the one who has moved past the gospel but the one who has moved further into it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The seduction of teaching that promises more while subtracting Christ
- The marks of genuine maturity: humility, love, and dependence on grace
- Discernment by the fruit and the object of a teaching
- True growth as going deeper into the gospel, not beyond it

Discussion Prompts

- Why is a more demanding message often more attractive than a gracious one?
- What are some tests for telling genuine maturity from a counterfeit?
- How can a church pursue real growth without drifting from the gospel?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul asks, “Am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? ... If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (1:10). How does this verse expose the heart of the whole crisis in Galatia, and why can the gospel never be revised to suit human preferences, new claims of revelation, or the spirit of the age?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 10 is the hinge of the whole passage, and it carries the heaviest doctrinal weight. Paul asks whether he is seeking the approval of man or of God, and answers with a line that should be framed over every pulpit: “If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” The reason a gospel cannot be revised to suit people is that the gospel’s purpose is to please God, not us.

Tie this back to the source of authority established in verse 1. The gospel came from God through Christ. Therefore it is not the church's property to amend, not the culture's to update, and not the individual's to customize. Every pressure to change the gospel, whether from tradition, from the spirit of the age, or from a claim of new revelation, runs aground on this rock: a servant does not rewrite his Master's message.

Apply this to the doctrinal boundaries the whole letter defends. The plan of salvation is not ours to renegotiate. We do not get to substitute a sinner's prayer of our own design for the response Scripture actually calls for, hearing, believing, repenting, confessing Christ, and being baptized into him. We do not get to promise a security that ignores the call to remain faithful. To do so would be to please people by softening God's word, and Paul says that is the opposite of serving Christ.

Bring it home tenderly. The freedom in this verse is enormous. When we stop trying to please everyone, we are finally free to please the One whose approval we already have in Christ. The servant of Christ can stand calm in any room, because the verdict that matters has already been spoken at the cross.

Watch for the misreading that pleasing God means earning his favor. It does not. We serve God's approval as those already accepted in Christ. The point is whose word governs our message and our lives, not whether we can win a love that is already freely given.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as unrevisable because it exists to please God, not human preferences
- God, not the church, the culture, or the individual, as the owner of the gospel
- The plan of salvation as God's to define: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4)
- Rejection of teaching that softens God's word to please people, including false assurance and new revelation
- Serving God's approval from a place of acceptance already given in Christ, not to earn his love

Discussion Prompts

- How does verse 10 expose the real motive behind the Galatian error?
- Why is the gospel not ours to revise, even with good intentions?
- How does living for God's approval actually set us free from the fear of man?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Paul will not let the gospel be touched because he knows it is the only thing that can truly set us free. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you, this week, to treasure and guard the one true gospel in your own heart and home.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question looks back across the whole passage and turns conviction into formation. Paul has defended the one true gospel with everything he has. The point of all that defending is not to win an argument but to protect a treasure that sets people free. The right ending for the lesson is not merely agreement but devotion.

Help students move from the general to the specific. It is easy to say we treasure the gospel. It is harder, and far more transforming, to name one concrete way we will guard it this week, in our own hearts, in our homes, in our conversations, in what we read and believe and pass on to our children.

Listen for both halves of the gospel's freedom. Guarding the gospel means refusing to add to it, laying down the performances by which we try to earn God's favor, and refusing to subtract from it, holding firmly to the call to obedient, faithful discipleship. A heart anchored in grace is free to obey without fear and to rest without drifting.

Close in worship. The aim of the lesson is a people who marvel that God gave them a gospel they could never have invented and could never improve, and who therefore hold it, and him, with deep and grateful joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as a treasure to be guarded, not merely a position to be defended
- Guarding the gospel by refusing both to add to it and to subtract from it
- Grace as the source of freedom both to obey and to rest
- Worship and gratitude as the proper response to the gospel

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific way you will guard the gospel in your heart this week?
- How can your home or family become a place where the true gospel is treasured?
- What would it look like for gratitude, not fear, to drive your obedience?