

# Galatians 1

## Sustaining Freedom in an Enslaved World

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Paul, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, is undoubtedly one of the most prominent figureheads of the Christian faith. He is speculated to have authored 13 books in the New Testament including his letter to the churches of Galatia - a region in Asia minor. These letters were often written to encourage and equip the churches to continue on in their faith despite hardship, persecution, and rejection of this new movement called Christianity. Whether he was writing from a prison cell in Rome or before setting sail on a missionary journey over troubled waters, there is one thing for certain: Paul lived his life in service to a God who had radically rescued and transformed him. He had met the risen Messiah and he made it his mission to make sure everyone knew of the grace through faith that was available in Jesus Christ. The only problem? Some of his early converts were deserting this faith entirely. Believing the lie that their works could earn them favor with God, these early Christians were replacing Christ's finished work on the cross by what they could do to try and earn salvation, specifically circumcision - a ritualistic practice common to Jewish males that distinguished them as God's chosen people. As you study Paul's letter to the Galatians, try to put yourself in the shoes of the original recipients. Envision the parallels between our world today and the world centuries ago. Prepare your heart to hear from God, and ask Him to help you take an honest look at your faith today.

### ***Who is Paul?***

To get a better idea of who Paul is, let's begin by taking a look at his past. Read Acts 8:3 and Acts 9:1-2.

1. What do these passages tell us about Saul's (later to become Paul) life before he met Jesus?
2. What are some words you could use to describe Saul's character in these passages?
3. Do you identify with any of these characteristics? Explain.
4. Why do you think Saul hated followers of "the Way" (NASB description of Jesus' disciples) so much?

Saul, being well versed in Jewish law and the writings of Moses, was zealous to follow his ancestor's traditions. Studying under the feet of Gamaliel (a Pharisee), Saul lived and breathed the law. Like many Jews during this time period, Saul did not believe Jesus Christ was the son of God. Therefore, it's no surprise that Saul stopped at nothing to thwart this early movement known as Christianity. In good conscience, Saul was doing what he knew to be right in

his own eyes to eliminate the threat of, *what he thought to be*, a blasphemous operation. It wasn't until he came face to face with the Messiah Himself that Paul's eyes were truly opened.

Read Acts 9:1-31 to learn about Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

5. From Acts 9:13 to Acts 9:15 we see a dialogue between Ananias and God. In this brief exchange, we read about authority being transferred. Who *had* authority and what did he *have* the authority to do (v. 14), and who ended up claiming authority (v. 15)?
6. In Acts 9:15 the Lord tells Ananias who Paul is and how He is going to use him. Who was Paul and how did the Lord use Him according to this verse?
7. Imagine this experience happening to you. What are some of the thoughts that would be going through your head?

When the Lord reveals Himself to us, in His own way and in His own time, it doesn't matter what authority we've been given or how much of that authority we think we have over our lives; we quickly realize Who's actually in control. Joyful surrender becomes the only option. Instead of living *your* way, you begin to live God's way. We see this happening in real time as Paul is met with his Creator, and in a moment, the trajectory of his life is forever changed. This spark would soon ignite a flame that would set ablaze an entire movement that continues today. Have you ever had an encounter with the Living God similar to Paul's? If so, how did it affect your view of control over your life? Did anything change in your life as a result of this experience? Explain.

I didn't see a bright light like Paul did, nor was I actively on my way to persecute Christians when I had an encounter with Jesus. I was, however, well on my way to destroying myself and my family. Passed out at 11am in a drunken slumber while my four year old, my three year old, and my 18 month old tried to make themselves waffles in our kitchen; I was confronted with something that still makes me sit a little straighter in my chair when I think of it. Right in between that subconscious state of waking and hungover sleep, a voice struck in my head like lightning on an otherwise peaceful morning:

*When are you going to follow me?* He asked.

I shot up out of my bed as my eyes fixated on the blood at the end of our bed. Mike and I had gone out partying the night before while our kids stayed at home with a babysitter. As it

typically happened when we would go out for a night of drinking, Mike and I had gotten into an explosive argument that ended in him running home barefoot and me catching a ride home while I threw up on the side of my ride's truck. As I sat there confused, scared, shocked, and *slightly* hungover staring at the blood from my husband's feet on our bedspread, I tried to process what I just heard. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that what I had just heard was the voice of God, and He was not happy. Unfortunately (and unlike Paul), I continued to live the whole next year by choosing *not* to follow Jesus. And it went from bad to worse...

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Read Acts 20:21 to gain more specific insight on Paul's mission.

8. What was Paul's main message? What was he on mission to do?

***Paul's opening to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:1-5)***

9. How does Galatians 1:1 (Paul's opening line) compare with what God told Ananias in Acts 9:15?

10. Who is Paul writing this letter to? Are these believers or non-believers?

11. Fill in the blank (Galatians 1:3 NKJV). \_\_\_\_\_ to you and \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_... (other versions should have these same words).

12. Although customary at the time, why do you think grace and peace may have been mentioned by Paul in the opening greeting of this letter?

13. In Galatians 1:4, Paul denotes an act that has *previously* happened but holds eternal significance. What was that act, why was it done, and by whom was it accomplished?

What:  
Why:  
Who:

14. Why would someone need to be rescued? Think of an example of someone needing rescue and jot it down below:

*Ex. A child in a house fire.*

15. If the child (from example above) remained in the house without a parent coming to their rescue, what would eventually happen?

16. If said child was screaming out of a two-story window as flames engulfed the house, what would be her father's response? (If you are a parent, what would *you* do?)

As much as I'd like to think otherwise, you and I are the child in the house fire. We just are. Whether we want to admit it or not, we were all born as sinners (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12) and headed for certain disaster as children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Since Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden (Genesis 3), mankind has lived in opposition to God ever since. Just take a gander through some Old Testament scriptures and you'll learn just how rebellious we really are - and the chances...oh my gosh...the *chances* that God gave His people to turn back to Him! You'll find that the same patient God in the Old Testament that relentlessly pursued a rebellious people, is the same God that pursues us now. He *hasn't stopped* pursuing us; and like a loving father who would unhesitatingly brave the house fire for his little girl while the flames licked at his back and smoke penetrated his lungs, our Heavenly Father sent Jesus to battle the flames for us and swoop us out of danger by taking the penalty of our sins on the cross.

Willing to die without a second's hesitation, Jesus surrendered His life so that sinners like you and I could be free from that sin and live life abundantly in Him. With His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus redeemed us back to God and rescued us from the literal fires of an eternity spent in hell and the figurative fires that we'll undoubtedly battle on this side of eternity. What should have been our penalty to pay, God sent a perfect and blameless substitute in our place as a propitiation. We are children rescued (from something much worse than a house fire) through the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

17. Using 2-3 sentences, describe why this is good news for you, personally.

18. In the above paragraphs, find and underline all the instances where you were required to do something in the rescue mission.

19. I hope you didn't underline anything because guess what? You weren't and aren't required to do anything because *you can't*. After thousands of years trying to earn God's favor by following the Mosaic law, God's people continued to fail. He knew we couldn't measure up to His perfect and holy standards, so He sent someone who could: Jesus. He did it for us. Think about this for a minute...you didn't have to do *anything* for Jesus to die for you. Nothing. Zero. Zilch. Now, how is this good news for you? Close your eyes and take a minute (or the remainder of your life) to thank Him.

Flip a few pages over in your bible to Ephesians 1:7 and write it here:

20. Above, underline the two things that we are guaranteed through Jesus's sacrifice.

21. What words come to mind as you read what you've been promised in Christ?

Read Romans 10:9-10. These verses will dictate *our responsibility* in the acceptance of the rescue mission of Christ.

22. What two actions are required, by us, to accept the rescue and ensure salvation?

Remember, Paul is speaking to *believers* in the churches of Galatia. These people had already put their faith in Jesus Christ and accepted Him as the risen Messiah. They had already *accepted* His offer of grace through faith in Him.

*"...according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen."*  
(Galatians 1:4-5 NASB)

23. According to what were we rescued?

24. Describe what this and what you learned from pg. 3-4 tells you about God's sovereignty and love:

### ***Paul's beginning exhortation to the church of Galatia (Galatians 1:6-12)***

The NASB uses the word "deserting" in Galatians 1:6 to describe how these early Jewish Christians were abandoning their faith. The NLT uses the word "turning away". Your version might say something else. Paul would have originally written "metatitheste" (greek for deserting), which means - "to transfer, change" (Blue Letter Bible). A change was indeed happening, and a transfer was being made. Like a caterpillar metamorphosis into a butterfly, these early christians had shed their ugly cocoons and grown their beautiful wings by placing faith in Jesus Christ - only to revert back to the adolescent caterpillars they were before by listening and believing the false message being conveyed through these deceitful "brothers".

25. What were these early christians turning away from?

Read Acts 15:1 to gain insight on the "different gospel" being preached.

26. Paul uses a certain adjective for *how* they were deserting their faith. Write it here:

\_\_\_\_\_.

27. Why do you think the Galatians would be so quick to turn from something they had once believed in to something else?

28. Have you ever been quick to turn away from something that you once believed in? What was it and what made you turn away? What were some of the outcomes of your decision?

It is clear that the Galatians, to whom Paul was writing, had heard and believed the gospel of Jesus. This completely new way of life for them was a stark contrast to the Jewish law they had been trained to adhere to before. Instead of trying to hit a mark they could never attain by living up to the law and its requirements, they now had freedom through God's gift: Jesus. Some of these Jewish Christians (commonly referred to as *Judaizers* and *false brethren*), however, had a hard time accepting this reality. In their effort to maintain familiarity and hold-on to old covenant traditions and practices, they taught a different version of the gospel. They taught that faith alone wasn't enough. God's grace must be *earned*, and in order to be granted salvation, one must have faith + works (specifically circumcision). While Paul preached faith alone, it was fairly common for these Judaizers to come in after him (and the other apostles) and distort this message of truth (Acts 15:1-2).

29. In Galatians 1:7, Paul uses a word to describe what's happening to the recipients of this "different gospel". Write that word here: \_\_\_\_\_.
30. Refer back to Galatians 1:3. How is this word in complete opposition to the words Paul used in the opening blessing of this letter?
31. Is there an area of your life where you are experiencing one of these ways, or both? List them here:
32. Based on Galatians 1:3 and 1:7, which way (or ideology) is of God and which way is not of God?
33. Do these false brethren know what they are doing? Provide key words from v.7 to support your answer.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:12-15.

34. What does this passage of scripture tell you about these false teachers who were *wanting* to distort the gospel of Christ?
35. Why do you think they did this?

We can infer that these early Judaizers came from within - they were people pretending to be brothers of the christian faith (hence, “false brethren”). They had most likely *heard* the good news, but chose to go a different way. A rescuer had redeemed them by paying their penalty for sin on the cross and they ignored it. The things of this world: Recognition, power, control, fame, greed, familiarity, etc. might have all become too great a temptation to choose a way less traveled - the way of Jesus (Matthew 7:13-14). Perhaps they saw the attention Paul and the other apostles were receiving and in an effort to receive the same following and admiration, they altered the truth.

36. Do you think this situation only affected this church? Why or why not?

37. What are some ways in present times that we may subconsciously exchange the truth of God’s word for a distorted message of the truth? Give specific examples.

38. Do you have a hard time recognizing truths from “almost truths” (a lie)? Explain.

Read the following scriptures and next to each write the characteristics of our enemy, the devil:

1 Peter 5:8-9

John 8:44

2 Corinthians 11:3

Ephesians 6:11

2 Peter 2:1-3

2 Corinthians 4:4

John 10:10

As a former collegiate volleyball player and coach, I spent massive amounts of time studying scouting reports for upcoming games. These scouting reports usually entailed the entire team (and coaches), with notepads open, sitting in a dark room while game tape played. We would watch our opponent’s every movement and memorize their tendencies. Afterwards, we would take that information and discuss the things that might work against them and what wouldn’t. Our goal was to win, and if we didn’t *know* who we were up against, certain defeat was imminent. This is what any effective “team” does. Nobody goes into a battle blind, and neither should the church.

As Christ followers, it's crucial that we understand this. Knowing our enemy - his motives, the ways in which he operates, his weapons, and his tendencies - are imperative to winning the battles we will fight in this enslaved world. The writers of the epistles, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, understood this well. This is why Paul, in his letter to the church of Ephesus in 6:12 tells us that we're not fighting who we think we're fighting - flesh and blood. We're fighting rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil. The same evil that caused man to fall in the beginning of time is who you and I are up against today. If we don't study him (by reading the word of God) and understand the tactics he's actively using to destroy us, we will live a life meant for freedom...enslaved by the snares of the devil.

It's clear from our brief character sketch above, Satan is a master manipulator and liar. His mission, among killing and destroying, is to steal your allegiance from God and divert it to the things of this world (him). We read earlier, in 2 Corinthians 11:14, that he doesn't do this *obviously*. Rather, he'll disguise himself as an angel of light in order to deceive and he'll use *people* to accomplish his desires (Luke 22:3; 1 Sam. 16:14; Matthew 16:22-23). This is exactly what we see these false teachers doing in the church of Galatia! We must learn from this and realize this hasn't stopped happening. I'd suggest it will only intensify as we get closer to Jesus' return, and it is essential that we do our scouting reports. So let's break this down real quick...

39. What do you think Satan (and his agents) dressed up as an "angel of light" would say? How would they act? What kind of following might they receive?

40. What are some things he could say or do to an unsuspecting *you* in order to lead you astray?

Let's get more specific. We will touch on this next week, but...

41. In an age where christian podcasts, books, seminars, devotionals, and conferences abound (all seemingly *good* things, right?), do you find yourself in the bible and prayer as much as you're enamored with extra-biblical material?

42. If not, how can you be sure what you're hearing, reading, watching, believing, and possibly repeating is in line and *in context* with the truth of God's word?

43. Do things like effective communication, powerful speech, charisma, and dynamic personality cause you to place people (namely popular teachers) on a pedestal?

44. Are you currently following harder after a famous teacher, media outlet, celebrity, talking head, or news program more than you are Jesus Christ?



45. Is there a tendency in your own walk right now to be more inward and self focused than you are Kingdom and other focused? If so, why do you think this is?

Please understand that I am not saying you need to throw away all of your books, videos, devo's by famous christian authors and go into hiding with your bible (actually, that *would* be a good thing...). But, here's what I am saying: Just be careful. Be careful not to get caught up into all the hype of what our western culture has labeled as "christianity" and just plain truth, and read the bible for yourself. We have a way of twisting God's word to accommodate our views based on popular culture instead of using God's word to shape them. I say this because this is what I did, and I wish I would have paid more attention to the words in my bible than I did to the words on the page of a book that was categorized as a *New York Times Best-Seller* by a "christian" author. It wasn't until the Holy Spirit gently nudged me to spend more time in His word than in the devo's and books I was reading, that I was able to discern truth from the "almost truth's" I'd been believing. And the truth truly has set me free (John 8:32), and it continues to. That is what I want for you.

I'm sorry (not sorry) if these questions made you uncomfortable, but we're just getting started. It's important that we evaluate what we've been led to believe by people who spend more time trying to get you to follow *them* than they do getting you to follow *Him*. We are no different than the Galatians being swept away by false teaching if we are believing what we are told rather than reading the Book for ourselves. In Ephesians chapter six, Paul tells us that the word of God is our sword (v. 17) - one of the offensive weapons we are given to fight the enemy. But how can you fight and even stand a chance at winning if you don't pick it up and use it?

Read Ephesians 6:17-18.

46. In light of the passage above, how can we gain clarity when evaluating the truth from a lie?
47. What are some habits you can commit to making, right now, to incorporate time in God's word and prayer into your day?

Now that we know better who we're up against, let's get back on track...

48. What is the warning Paul gives to anyone who preaches a different gospel than the simple good news (Galatians 1:9)?

Paul uses this word twice in the span of two verses (in NKJV). This is because there is a serious punishment for anyone who distorts the message of truth. The apostle James said it best when he said, "*not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly*" (James 3:1 NIV). Being accursed is one of the worst punishments one could receive. Romans 9:3 tells us that being accursed means separated from Christ.

49. What can we infer about the message these false teachers were giving the people compared to Paul's message based on Galatians 1:10?
50. Explain why some people, especially people with a platform and audience, may become susceptible to "twisting" the truth in order to please people?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:4

51. Based on this verse, who is Paul set out to please?
52. Who should we be set out to please? Is this hard for you? Why or why not?

We see over and over again, throughout the pages of scripture, the downfall that can come to man when he/she seeks to please people rather than God. Just look at the example in 1 and 2 Samuel of King Saul who sought the glory and the praise people could offer rather than obeying God. The Lord, who had given Saul a great honor to be Israel's first King, tore the kingdom away from him because he feared the people more than he feared Him (1 Samuel 15:26-28). When we please people with our words, actions, and behavior *over* obeying God and His commands, we can find ourselves in the same trouble as King Saul. At the end of the day, we must remember we have an audience of One. It is *His* opinion that matters most, and *He* will be the one that executes our judgement in the last hour.

53. What factors make it hard for you to distinguish whether you're pleasing God, people, or both?
54. According to Galatians 1:11-12, is the gospel Paul preached one that was meant to "please" man? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

***Paul's testimony and what we can learn (Galatians 1:13-24)***

We conclude the study of chapter one by Paul sharing his testimony with the believers in Galatia. By doing this, he lets them know the authority in which he had been given and who had given it - reiterating the power of the gospel. Our testimonies are instrumental in sharing our faith with outsiders. It not only reminds us of where we came from and how God has rescued us, but it also offers a non-believer, or a "lukewarm" believer, insight on God's grace, mercy, and love. It tells them that no matter where they are, what they've done, or where they've come from God can redeem them through Jesus and completely transform their lives to be used by Him. While each person's testimony is powerful and unique, the way in which we live - by the power

of God's Holy Spirit - is equally telling. Let's learn from the example Paul set as we conclude this week's study.

55. We know from Paul's conversion in Acts 8 and 9 that he zealously persecuted the church. If you can recall, what was Paul on his way to do when he had a revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus?
56. While Paul was doing what was right in his own eyes (Galatians 1:14), God chose to use him for His glory and purposes. What does this tell you about God *and you*?
57. What other bible characters can you think of that didn't always exhibit great behavior but were ultimately chosen by God to fulfill His plans and purposes?

By sharing his past, Paul is proving the exact opposite of what these false brethren were teaching. While they were teaching that you had to have faith + circumcision to earn salvation, Paul is showing them (and us) that God chooses people according to His own will - *not* based on ours. It has nothing to do with what we've done or haven't done! Is anyone but me taking a huge sigh of relief right now?

Paul was actively persecuting Jesus when he was met with the light of the risen Messiah and called to serve God with his life (Acts 9:4).

Moses killed a man before he was commissioned by God to lead the people out of Egypt (Exodus 2:12).

Jonah ran away from God after God commanded him to go to Ninevah (Jonah 1:1-3), but God gave him another chance.

David committed adultery and then had a man killed (2 Samuel 11), but yet he was called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

It's a common thread in God's book: **GOD USES PEOPLE WHO DO/SAY BAD THINGS**. He does this for His purposes. And while the Judaizers continually sought to lure the crowds with their messages of salvation through perfection, God tells us over and over again that He uses the bruised, bullied, shamed, unqualified, zealous, and oppressed because of one common denominator: Faith (Hebrews 11).

58. Paul says in Galatians 1:16 that he didn't immediately consult with flesh and blood after his conversion. We know that there was a period of several years before Paul consulted with the other apostles. Why do you think this was and who do you think he may have been consulting with?

59. What caused word to be spreading about Paul to the other churches of Judea?
60. Can people easily tell from looking at your life - your decisions, actions, words, temperament, etc. - that you've been transformed by Christ? Explain.
61. Although they'd already heard how God transformed his life, Paul shared with the church of Galatia again. How has God transformed *your* life? Write your story here:

Because of the miraculous ways in which God changed Paul and turned his life around completely, God was glorified. Like Paul's, our stories of transformation are never about us. They may feel *very* about us, especially at the time, but it is through God's will and sovereign grace that we've been changed. Our lives should reflect that change so that when people see us - when they hear our story, when they watch how we live our lives - they will see Jesus. And this will cause them to glorify God!

