

distortion of the true gospel? First of all, Paul says that the Galatians, in accepting this false teaching, were deserting the God who called them by the grace of Christ (v6). “**Grace**” is *unmerited* favor. The favor of God towards us cannot be merited by anything we can do. The true gospel is in its essence “the gospel of **the grace of God**” (Acts 20:24). Nothing is due to our efforts, merits, or works; everything in salvation is due to the grace of God—“And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom 11:6).

The false teachers who had invaded this church were a group of **Judaizers** whose teaching involved an attempt to *combine* Christianity with the essential elements of the Jewish religion. They taught that a man must believe in Jesus, but in addition they taught that he *also* had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. Hear what Paul says to the Galatians concerning such teaching:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified...I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. (2:16,21)

...how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. (4:9-11)

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing...Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace...For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. (5:2,4,6)

The false teachers did not deny that you must believe in Jesus for salvation, but they stressed that you must be circumcised and keep the law, as well. In other words, you must let Moses finish what Christ has begun. You must *add* your works to Christ, and thus *finish* Christ's *unfinished* work. But Paul denounces this in no uncertain terms because it is adding human merit to the merit of Christ. It is faith in Christ *plus* human works. Paul says this is “perverting” the gospel of the grace of God (Gal 1:7). The Greek word translated “pervert” or “distort” can mean

reverse. These false teachers were reversing the gospel by radically changing its character. They were presenting a totally different *gospel* from that which God had given; and if a person believed this false gospel he would believe a lie and thus perish eternally.

Consequently a divine curse, an anathema, was called down upon these Judaizers and their teaching. By contrast, the true gospel is the gospel of *the grace of God*, whereby a man is justified before God and accepted by him solely on the merits of the life and death of Jesus Christ, apart from any human works of merit; and this is received only by trusting in Christ, that is, by “**faith**” alone—“man is not justified by the works of the law, but by *faith in Jesus Christ*” (2:16 NKJV). This is the “good news” of the gospel. Sinners, guilty and under the judgment of God, are pardoned and accepted by his grace alone, his free and unmerited favor, on the basis of the death of Christ, and not for any works or merits of their own.

The Judaizers, however, totally *perverted* this teaching of “grace”—by *adding* human works. They were teaching Jesus **plus** Judaism, not Jesus alone. The Judaizers could not accept the principle of “**faith alone**.” They insisted that we must contribute something to our salvation. They added “the works of the law” to faith in Christ as *necessary* for our acceptance with God. Basically they were teaching that we must become a Jew, be circumcised, and obey the law of Moses.

To fully understand how the Judaizers' teachings perverted the gospel, and how these teachings specifically relate to the teachings of Roman Catholicism, it is essential that we understand some of the details of the Temple worship of the Jewish religion. The Temple was an exact replica of the Tabernacle the Jews used for worship in the wilderness except that the Temple was stationary and exactly double the size of the Tabernacle. Exodus chapters 26 to 30 give a detailed description of the Tabernacle, of the articles it contained, and of the worship conducted by the priests and high priest. The Book of Leviticus and Hebrews 9:1-9 also give further details of the Tabernacle worship and all that it involved.

The Tabernacle was an oblong rectangular structure...divided internally into two apartments. One was the Holy of Holies into which no one entered, not even the priest except on very extraordinary occasions...In this was the ark of the covenant containing the tables of the law on which was placed the mercy seat, surmounted

by the cherubim. In front of these was an outer chamber called the Holy Place...appropriated to the use of the priests. In it were the golden candlestick on one side, the table of shewbread opposite and between them in the center the altar of incense. The court of the Tabernacle was surrounded by canvas screens...In the outer half was placed the altar of burnt offering and between it and the tabernacle the laver at which the priests washed their hands and feet on entering the Tabernacle (Smith's Bible Dictionary).

The ceremonial worship of the Jews would, therefore, include the following elements: an altar, daily sacrifices, a laver of water, priests, a high priest, special priestly and high priestly vestments and robes (Exod 28), candles, incense, and shewbread. Then, in the routine religious life of the average Jew there would be feast days, the giving of alms, prayers, fastings, and adherence to certain dietary laws.

All of these things would be involved in the Judaizers' teaching. It was Jesus *plus* the Jewish system. But how does all this relate to Roman Catholicism? The essence of what the Judaizers taught is merely clothed in a different garment. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that salvation is achieved by believing in Jesus as the Son of God who died for our sins, by striving to keep the Ten Commandments, and by partaking of the Sacraments which involves a sacrificial system, altars, priests, a high priest, and the exercise of good works such as prayers, fastings, alms giving, penances, and (until recently) adherence to certain dietary restrictions.

In his **Question and Answer Catholic Catechism**, John Hardon S.J. teaches on the nature of salvation: (All underlining is added)

412. Is the Church necessary for salvation?

Yes, the Church is necessary for salvation.

492. Is faith in what God revealed sufficient for salvation?

No, we must also keep his Commandments.

493. How do we keep the Commandments of God?

We keep the Commandments of God by living a good moral life.

1119. Are the sacraments necessary for salvation?

According to the way God has willed that we be saved, the sacraments are necessary for salvation.

1074. What is habitual or sanctifying grace?

Habitual or sanctifying grace is a supernatural

quality that dwells in the human soul, by which a person shares in the divine nature, becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, a friend of God, his adopted child, an heir to the glory of heaven and able to perform actions meriting eternal life.

1179. Is baptism of water necessary for salvation?

It is commonly taught by the church that baptism of water is necessary for salvation for those who have not reached the use of reason.

1217. Is the Eucharist necessary for salvation?

The Eucharist is necessary for salvation, to be received either sacramentally or in desire.

It is quite clear from this that in Roman Catholicism **faith in Christ alone** is *not* sufficient for salvation. It is also “**necessary**” that one keep the Ten Commandments, be baptized, become a member of the Catholic Church, and partake regularly of the sacraments. It is not **Jesus alone**, but Jesus *plus* all these other things. Significantly, all these other things are practically identical to the Judaizers system and teachings. Note the striking parallels between Roman Catholicism and the Judaizers:

JUDAISERS

- (1) Belief in Jesus, the Messiah & Son of God
- (2) Circumcision
- (3) Become a Jew
- (4) Sacrificial System
- (5) Priests
- (6) High Priests
- (7) Altars
- (8) Laver of Water
- (9) Dietary Regulations
- (10) Feast Days
- (11) Candles
- (12) Incense
- (13) Shewbread
- (14) Keep the Ten Commandments
- (15) Traditions of the Elders

CATHOLICISM

- (1) Belief in Jesus, the Messiah & Son of God
- (2) Baptism
- (3) Become a Catholic
- (4) Sacrificial System
- (5) Priests
- (6) Popes
- (7) Altars
- (8) Font of Holy Water
- (9) Dietary Regulations (until recently)
- (10) Feast Days
- (11) Candles
- (12) Incense
- (13) Eucharistic Wafer
- (14) Keep the Ten Commandments
- (15) Traditions of the Church Fathers

The parallel is quite clear. The same charge that Paul leveled against the Judaizers can be leveled against the Roman Catholic Church. The message of Galatians applies directly to Roman Catholicism because its gospel is the same as that of the Judaizers. This is the reason why there can be *no unity* between the Roman Catholic Church and true Christians. Is it not plain to see that Paul certainly saw no grounds for unity between himself and the Judaizers? As one has rightfully said,

When the issue between us is trivial, we must be as pliable as possible. But when the truth of the gospel is at stake, we must stand our ground. If men oppose the truth of the gospel, we must not hesitate to oppose them.

Did Paul consider the Judaisers true Christians? **Absolutely not!** They were perverting the gospel and leading men into perdition. Is Roman Catholicism truly Christian? On the basis of all that it teaches contrary to the Bible, and in view of the fact that it is in effect a modern-day Judaizing system, the answer is **absolutely not!** Catholicism's teaching on salvation, and therefore its gospel, is essentially what Paul condemns and upon which he pronounces a curse! He said those who received the teaching of the Judaisers deserted the gospel, even so do those who adhere to Catholic teaching. Paul said even if an angel from heaven were to preach the gospel of the Judaisers he should be rejected and accursed. These are severe words, but it is God the Holy Spirit who inspired them!

On the basis of their own official, authoritative statements of doctrine it is clear that the Roman Catholic Church and the Word of God are diametrically opposed. To accept the one you must reject the other. To adhere to the teaching of the Catholic Church on salvation is to accept the teaching of a Judaizing system which is denounced by God as **"a false gospel."** It deceives men into thinking that they are walking in the truth when in fact they have departed from it.

This does not mean that those who teach Roman Catholic doctrine are insincere or purposely deceptive people. The Judaisers were sincere, moral, and extremely religious. But they were terribly deceived. When it comes to the gospel, its truth must be maintained in purity, without any subtractions or additions, and loyalty to that gospel must take precedence over loyalty to people, to family, or to a church. To be disloyal to that gospel is to be disloyal to God. Sincerity is never to be the ultimate test by which we measure a spiritual teacher or an organization. The ultimate test is always consistency with the revealed truth of God's Word. Religious leaders and teachers can be sincere and yet be sincerely wrong.

Something we learn from Christ's dealings with the scribes and Pharisees is that it is possible for us to give ourselves devotedly to a system of religion which calls itself "Christian," but when it is tested by Scripture, it can prove not to be true Christianity at all. If we adhere to the teachings of men

which are opposed to the Word of God, then our worship and all our religious life is **in vain**, no matter how sincere we may be. Our worship must be based on the truth: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Christ said of the religious leaders of his day:

This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men. (Mark 7:6-8)

Yet the scribes and Pharisees were not insincere. They were zealous about their religious and moral life. But their worship was in vain. It profited them nothing. It did not bring them to God. Why? They elevated the teachings of men above the truth of God's Word. They distorted and misinterpreted what God had said. Roman Catholicism's teaching on salvation contradicts the Bible. It elevates the traditions of men to a position above the Word of God. To adhere to such teaching is to come under the judgment which Jesus spoke against the scribes and Pharisees. It is to worship God **in vain**.

No one is saved by trying to *merit* God's favor. No one is saved who *adds anything* to faith in Christ for justification and acceptance with God. No one is saved who depends on what they do to be saved—whether it be baptism, receiving sacraments, tithing, self-righteousness, giving to the poor, church attendance, indulgences, or any other religious duty.

God's Word reveals that sinners are "justified freely by his grace"—the unmerited and undeserved gift of God (Rom 3:24). "If by grace, then is it **no more of works**: otherwise grace is no more grace" (Rom 11:6). "**Not by works** of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). If we are saved, we are saved not by our works, but by God's grace and mercy alone. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **not of works**, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8-9). This gift is received only by trusting in Christ, as we forsake all of our own efforts to save ourselves, and cease to trust in anything that we could ever do to make ourselves right with God (see Luke 18:9-14).

Turn from your sin and every other confidence, and rest in the finished work of Christ which provides a perfect salvation for all who put their trust in him. □

— Bill Webster

the gospel

The gospel of Christ is good news of pardon to the guilty, addressing all as equally guilty before God. It reveals an atonement sufficient for all; and everyone is commanded to receive it as a faithful saying, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15). The gospel is addressed to those who are "far from righteousness" (Isaiah 46:12); who are poor, and blind, and naked; who have no money to purchase salvation, no merit to recommend them to the favor of God (Isaiah 55:1; Luke 7:42).

Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matt 9:13). If we are not sinners, we have nothing to do with the gospel; and if we are sinners, let us not reject the counsel of God against ourselves, by vainly supposing that anything about us gives us a peculiar claim to his favor, or by imagining that our sins are too great to be forgiven. The thief upon the cross was saved by faith in Jesus, and none shall enter heaven in any other way. Our only plea is this—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

Although the Scriptures are so clear on this subject, it is a stumbling-block and foolishness to the great body of those who hear the gospel. It offends their pride to be put upon a level with the outcasts of society; surely, they think, some difference will be made; but they err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor understanding the malignity of sin or the grace of God. They view salvation as a kind of *bargain* which God proposes to make with his creatures, that on certain conditions he will accept them; while in fact it is the message of reconciliation, equally addressed to all mankind, declaring that a full atonement for sin has been made upon the cross, and inviting every sinner of Adam's race instantly to approach God through Christ.

When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, it was a remedy equally adapted for all who had been bitten (Num 21:8; John 3:14-15). By looking to the serpent the patient was healed; and in reference to this emblem, Christ, indiscriminately addressing all mankind, says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else"—"a just God and a Savior" (Isaiah 45:21-22). □

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST VS. Roman Catholicism

The Roman Catholic Church teachings on the Mass, the Priesthood, Confession, Penance, the Eucharist, and Baptism all combine to form a system of salvation. The church asserts that these things are all *necessary* for a person to be saved. They claim that being baptized in the Catholic Church and following their teachings in these areas can lead one in the path of salvation. The Bible, however, presents a completely *different* way of being saved. This can be clearly seen from the apostle Paul's **letter to the Galatians**. This epistle contains some very strong language. It's a letter of warning and of judgment. Its main theme is the gospel of Christ; its main intent is to defend that gospel from the perversions of false teachers.

Certain men who came into the life of the Galatian church had begun to teach errors about the way of salvation, and to spread a false gospel. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and with intense emotion and indignation, Paul writes a letter in which he defends the true gospel, exposes the error of the false teachers, and utters a divine curse against anyone who distorts the gospel of Christ. The gospel which these false teachers espoused is essentially *identical* with that of the Roman Catholic Church. How can this be demonstrated? Paul begins his letter by clearly defining his concern:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6-9)

Strong words indeed. A divine curse was pronounced upon these false teachers. Why such severity? because the issues at stake in the purity of the gospel have to do with the glory of God and the eternal destinies of men. If that gospel is in any way distorted or perverted, it results in men being eternally damned and it robs God of his glory.

Who were these people that Paul denounced so strongly? And what was the essence of their "gospel" that made it a