



When Addition is Subtraction

Galatians - Part 1

In the next few weeks we are going to be looking into the Epistle to the Galatians. I want to encourage you to begin reading this brief but powerful book on your own. You can read the six chapters in just a few minutes, perhaps three chapters at a time if your time is limited. I am going to try to unwrap some of the key truths in this book in the next few weeks.

Galatians 1:1-2 *¹Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—²and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: (NIV)*

Jerome, a 4th century Bible Scholar, once said that when he read the letters of the apostle Paul he could hear thunder - in a way that was absent from all Paul's other letters.

- Philippians - Though written from prison, is a love letter on the theme of joy.
- Romans is a theologians masterpiece reveling in the doctrines of grace.
- Ephesians is an uplifting commentary on the body of Christ.
- Even Corinthians, though obviously written out of great personal anguish and pain, revolves around the great triad of *faith, hope, and love*.

But Galatians is different. From beginning to end its six chapters of 149 verses bristle with passion,

sarcasm, and fury. True, there is a touch of tenderness as well; once in the midst of the letter Paul referred to the Galatians as his "dear children" (4:19). But even here the context reveals, Paul is anguishing for them like a mother over a sick child, because he knew they were in danger of committing spiritual suicide.

Why was Paul so worked up? That's where we must begin today. (I feel certain that if the Apostle Paul were to write a letter today, he would write something similar to the modern Christian church.)

Galatia is the name of an area of Asia Minor that the apostle Paul had gone under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and established church-plants in various towns and cities. He traveled there, and told these mostly Gentiles people, about the birth, life and death of Jesus Christ. God wonderfully worked and people in these towns put their faith in Jesus, and Christian churches had sprung up all through Galatia.

But Paul, who was on a mission to spread the good news of Jesus to as many as possible, eventually moved on to other areas. He prayed for them. He inquired of travelers for any word about their progress. And soon devastating news came to him. After he departed, false teachers had followed in his footsteps and were tearing apart what God had done.

Paul quickly shot off this epistle, this letter to them. It would be the first of all of the Pauline epistles that we have in our Bible. Let's read:

Galatians 1:3-9.

The reason Paul was irate was not because he was mad at the Galatians, no it was an anger that stemmed from his love for them. But he knew that something deadly was occurring.

Paul's real struggle was with certain people, who would call themselves "Christian" for sure, but who had failed to discern the radical character of Christ's salvation work.

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They were religious people. They were not atheists or agnostics, they were not even proponents of one of the mystery religions rampant in the Roman world.

No, they would agree with Paul that Jesus is the Messiah. They would agree that we must believe in him. However, they insisted that in order for Gentiles to become Christians they first of all had to become like Jews in their practice. Their understanding of salvation was that a person must believe in Jesus Christ, and also submit themselves to the Jewish law, especially to circumcision, and thus complete by this act of obedience what Christ had begun through his life and work on earth.

Paul, as we have read, did not see this as even an option. In fact, he understood it the other way around: Christ did not begin something that we must finish with some sort of religious action. No, it was the complete and finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross that is our only hope of salvation!

Anything more than that is less than that, because of the supreme pricelessness of Christ.

Please note in v.7, that Paul says, without equivocation, that a “gospel” that is built on Jesus AND religious works is really no gospel at all.

Now, as you read this book over this week, and I hope you will, you will see that, over and over, Paul drives this home -- he pleads, he gives example after example to them that trusting in Jesus Christ plus anything is to NOT trust Christ and so miss the grace of God entirely!

EXAMPLES in Galatians:

In **Gal. 2**, he uses himself and other Jews by birth as an illustration.

Galatians 2:15-16 ¹⁵“*We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’* ¹⁶*know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.* (NIV)

Then look at **Galatians 5:2** ²*Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.* (NIV)

It’s crystal clear that Paul would say the very same thing no matter what the “religious mark or good work was.”

- If you get circumcised to become saved, *then Christ is of no value to you.*
- If you get baptized to be saved.. *then Christ is of no value to you.*
- If you become a church member to be saved... *then Christ is of no value to you.*
- If you follow the ordinances or sacraments of the church to be saved... *then Christ is of no value to you.*

The Jewish Law, the Jewish rituals - these are things which God clearly gave. They are not bad things - they come from God himself. So obedience to them cannot be a bad thing. However Paul is unequivocal that ADDING them to Jesus as a basis for salvation is a sign that you do not have God’s salvation at all!

Galatians 5:4 ⁴*You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.* (NIV)

This is the strongest form of the argument that Paul could make, but I’m sure you can see that if adding onto Christ, God-given things like his law, results in catastrophe, *then it must certainly be true that adding any other thing*, such as our personal goodness or our good works will have the same result. Therefore, if we think that somehow our well-meaning human acts of service will make us fit for heaven, *then Christ is of no value to you.*

Let’s stop and think about this. Do you understand why I said earlier that, if the apostle Paul lived today, he would write a similar letter to the modern church? How many today, who consider themselves Christians, and go to Christian churches, have the same understanding of salvation?

I grew up in a Christian denomination who’s focus is almost entirely on religious duties. Sunday was called a “holy day of obligation.” Was baptized as an infant (similar to OT circumcision) to forgive original sin. .. And those who are very this denomination, the very first words of the rite of burial refer back to that baptism as the justification for getting into heaven.

Now that denomination does do not hold a CORNER on this false teaching. Many other Christians I have met from many different Protestant denominations, *including our own*, have described

to me a brand of salvation-belief very much like what Paul was so jazzed about here. *“I believe in Jesus, I always have.... And I believe that I have lived a good life and I am not perfect but have done my best, so I am convinced that God will accept me into heaven.”*

Paul says this is NOT the Christian Gospel, no matter who taught it to you, even a pastor or a priest. Paul says. **Galatians 1:8** *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (NIV)*

WHY?

The question I’d like to try to answer is WHY? Why is it spiritually deadly to ADD to a belief in Jesus Christ with religious or personal good works as a basis for our hope for salvation?

- 53% contend that if a person is good enough, or does enough good things for other people, they will earn their way into Heaven.

One-third of all born again Christians (34%) accept this notion as well.

QUESTION -

- What’s wrong with relying on Christ *AND* relying on our religious acts of obedience, even ones God gives us, like baptism or circumcision?
- What’s wrong with offering up our good intentions and good works that we do, even in God’s name, as a part of our basis for the hope of eternal life? “I mean, we believe in Christ too?”

What’s really wrong with that?

ANSWER - Because you cannot add anything more to what Jesus Christ has done and if you think you can then you really don’t understand Him and what he has done.

Anything *more* than Christ is *less* than Christ.

Usually we think that adding one thing to another results in more. One plus one equals two. Nothing is diminished. The sum is bigger than its parts. But that is not always the case. Did you know that in some cases, “Adding is Subtracting”?

- $10 + (-5) = 5$

Whenever you *AND* something to the salvation-work of Jesus Christ, you are similarly taking away from what he has done for you.

- When the songwriter wrote, “The Solid Rock”, he wrote *“My Hope is Built on nothing LESS than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”* Why didn’t he write “my hope is built on nothing MORE than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

Because there is nothing more. Think about it...

- When God thought it was necessary to send his one and only Son, when God himself took on human flesh to live a sinless life so as to be a sinless sacrifice. When God thought it essential to DIE IN OUR PLACE to atone for sin.
 - What kind of audacity is it to think that me setting my alarm and coming to church every Sunday for an hour or two is compared to that?
- When the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the Lilly of the Valley the Bright and Mornig Star, the Alpha and Omega, the first and last says “I died for your sins” I sacrificed my life to secure your eternity”
 - Then how can we think “my good works, my baptism, my religiosity, my going out and collecting food and my caring about those less fortunate than me somehow ADDs something missing from Jesus?”

In a buffet line - they always put the most expensive food items at the very end. Why? (because they would rather you fill your plate with a less expensive things - so you end up taking less of that which is most precious)

- When you or anyone places reliance on religious practices or good works, what happens is they stop placing their reliance fully on Jesus Christ. Instantly what Jesus has done for you becomes less precious and incomplete -- because now it’s up to you to do the rest.

Imagine that you are out in the middle of a lake and there are two rowboats and you are standing with one foot in each boat. One boat, however, is filled with holes and is sinking. It is obvious that unless you do something you will soon be in the lake.

The boat with the holes represents our good works combined with our sin. The boat without holes represents Christ. It should be obvious that with one foot in each boat

we shall end up in the same place that we would have ended up in we had had both feet in the boat with holes.

The only safe place to be is to have both feet firmly planted in the boat marked Christ.

*I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust in Jesus' Name.
On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.*

The biblical definition of faith is incompatible with the type of problem Paul attacks here: **Faith is Relying on what Christ has done rather than on one's own efforts.**

LAST QUESTION if obedience to the law and good works cannot contribute to our salvation, where do they fit in?

Galatians 5:6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (NIV)*

Listen to how Martin Luther asked and explained it:

"The question is asked: how can justification take place without the works of the law (Gal. 2:16), even though James says: "Faith without works is dead"?"

In answer, the apostle Paul distinguishes between the law and faith, the letter and grace. The 'works of the law' are works done without faith and grace, *by the law*, which forces them to be done through fear or the enticing promise of temporal advantages.

But 'works of faith' are those done in the spirit of liberty, purely out of love to God. And they can be done only by those who are justified by faith.

CONCLUSION:

What should you do?

Faith is not faith (saving) unless it is in Christ alone...*Forsaking All Others, I Trust Him* = FAITH

Faith is Relying on what Christ has done rather than on one's own efforts.

AND THEN...

- Be baptized not to save you but to declare your faith in Jesus alone.
- Join a local church, again not to save you like to live out your life as a Christian.
- Serve God wholeheartedly, not to earn his way for but because you now love Him.