



*January 31, 2010*

*Galatians 1 – 3*

*“Jesus Only”*

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Some scholars believe Galatians is the first of Paul’s epistles. It’s thought this letter was written in 49AD, not long after his First Missionary Journey, when he visited the province of Galatia. Four cities Paul visited are mentioned in Scripture: Psidian Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra. It’s important to note that Galatia is a province<sup>1</sup> or region in Asia Minor, located in what is present-day Turkey.

Paul planted churches in these cities, but then, almost immediately after he left, he started to hear that the churches had problems. Most often it was the case that certain people would infiltrate the church espousing some really bad doctrine or theology. The problem was serious enough that Paul says the ones who are doing this should be *“eternally condemned.”*

It wasn’t unusual for Paul to plant a church, leave to go somewhere else, only to find out that the church was moving into some kind of error or sin. In fact, Paul wrote some of his epistles to correct and admonish them. One example would be the church at Corinth, where there were divisions, sexual sin, drunkenness, etc. The church at Thessalonica is another example. In Paul’s first letter, he wrote about the Second Coming of Christ, which caused some of the Thessalonians to quit their jobs so they could stare up into the sky and await the Lord’s return. Paul wrote his second letter to instruct them to get back to work! ([2 Thessalonians 3:10](#))

Paul started churches in Galatia, only to have Judaizers come into the church and stir up trouble. The Judaizers were Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but they also believed that you were required to observe all of the Old Testament, including all of the laws of the Jews, in order to be saved. This caused Paul to warn them about those who were *“throwing [them] into confusion”* and *“perverting”* the gospel. His point was that the gospel is perverted whenever **anything** is added to the simple message of salvation through faith in Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> It’s helpful to think of a province being similar to what we would know as a county.

The Judaizers were making it Jesus plus circumcision or Jesus plus the feasts or Jesus plus kosher foods. This kind of thing is still found in some circles of Christianity, except it's now Jesus plus water baptism or Jesus plus the baptism of the Holy Spirit or Jesus plus good works or Jesus plus Holy Communion or Jesus and penance.

It's worth saying again: It's not Jesus PLUS anything; it's Jesus ONLY!

If you add ANYTHING to JESUS ONLY, then you've just made it a salvation of works. There is never something you have to do in addition to believing Jesus. And, if that's the case, then the gospel has been perverted because it's been made a man-made effort.

Paul even wrote about the apostle Peter falling into this trap in [Galatians 2:11–14](#). At first Peter was doing pretty well when it came to hanging out with Gentiles. However, things took a turn for the worse when some fellow Jews came from the church in Jerusalem. Once they were on the scene, Peter started avoiding the Gentiles, and he even reverted back to following the traditions and customs of the Jews. He even went one step further when he told the Gentiles that they too needed to follow the Jewish laws and customs.

Paul, never one to shy away from a conflict, challenged Peter's hypocrisy. In [Galatians 2:15–16](#), Paul wrote in very clear language that, *“man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.”* The word justified is best understood when it's broken down into a phrase: When we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by faith, God forgives us and this is how he sees each of us – it's *“just as if I'd never sinned.”* Again, it's not about what we do; it's about whom we believe!

Paul drills down a little further in [Galatians 3:1–5](#). He writes about being saved, not by observing the law (works), but by believing what you've heard (faith), and the wonder of God's gift of the Holy Spirit. He also states that God did not give the Spirit or work miracles because they observed the law (works), but because they believed what they heard (faith).

Why is this important today? Look at the surveys that indicate most people believe in God (82% of Americans in a 2009 Harris interactive poll), not to mention that it's a commonly held belief that God exists. It's also a commonly held belief for everyone who believes in God that there is a distance between each of us and God. There are really only two approaches regarding ways to bridge that gap, and all religious systems fall into one of these two categories – it's either faith-based or works-based.<sup>2</sup>

A works-based theology acknowledges a distance between each of us and God, and states that it's up to us to do something to bridge the gap, so we can be pleasing and close to God. There is much in our culture, traditions, and religious history that leads many to conclude that when “there is something wrong with us, **we** need to find a remedy so **we** can fix it. This breeds the idea that we can fix ourselves and we can improve ourselves. Self is not only the source of the problem, but self is also the source of the resolution and the remedy to the problem. This kind of thinking is very evident in the self-esteem, self-actualization, self-improvement and self-help world we live in. Nothing could be further from what the Bible teaches.

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<sup>2</sup> Both categories are completely antithetical and no attempt should ever be made to blend them.

A faith-based theology rightly understands that we cannot fix ourselves or make ourselves acceptable to God. The only thing to do is – trust the works of Jesus and not in anything we can do – rest in the goodness of Jesus and not in any goodness we may have. It’s not what we can do, but what Jesus has done that counts!

Well, if that’s the case, why does the Bible include all of the Old Testament books that describe the laws, commandments, regulations, etc.? In this study we’ll look at three reasons: to explain what sin is; to expose sin in us; and to express our need for a Savior.

### To Explain What Sin Is

1. **Romans 7:7** – *“...I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’”*
  - a. Covetousness is one that is very clear in our culture, especially considering of the vast number of people who aren’t satisfied or frustrated because of what they **don’t** have!
2. The Ten Commandments explain what sin is.
  - a. How would we know what speeding is if there wasn’t a sign to define it?
  - b. The first nine deal with behavior and the tenth deals with the heart.
3. God judges behavior as well as the heart.

### To Expose Sin In Us

4. **1 John 1:8** – *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*
5. **James 2:10** – *“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”*
  - a. The law is like a seamless garment; when you pull one thread the whole thing unravels!

### To Express Our Need For A Savior

6. **Galatians 3:23–25** – *“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”*
7. Paul uses language for a Greek pedagogue when he says the law was *“put in charge to lead us to Christ...”*
  - a. A pedagogue was a servant who escorted a child to and from school, so the child could be handed off to the teacher; so the Law hands us off to the Savior.
8. Once we become aware of what sin is, and of how sinful we are, it’s too overwhelming to ever think that we could possibly undo the damage by being a good person.

9. After all...
  - a. How good is good enough?
  - b. How moral is moral enough?
  - c. Do good days compensate for the bad days?
  - d. Who determines what “good” is anyway?

### Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Galatians 1:1–9** to provide an overview for this study.
3. Do you think the Ten Commandments are thought to be relevant or antiquated in our culture?
  - a. Read and discuss this quote from Ted Koppel’s<sup>3</sup> commencement address at Duke University in 1987.
    - i. “We have actually convinced ourselves that slogans will save us. Shoot up if you must, but use a clean needle. Enjoy sex whenever and with whomever you wish, but wear a condom. No! The answer is no... What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions.”
4. Read and discuss **1 John 1:8** and **James 2:10**.
5. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences concerning the time when they first recognized sin in their lives.
  - a. What “instrument” did the Holy Spirit use to bring conviction?
    - i. Was it a friend, the Bible, etc.?
    - ii. Read and discuss this quote from Oswald Chambers.<sup>4</sup>
      1. "Conviction of sin is one of the rarest things that ever strikes a man. It is the threshold of an understanding of God. Jesus Christ said that when the Holy Spirit came He would convict of sin, and when the Holy Spirit rouses the conscience and brings him into the presence of God, it is not his relationship with men that bothers him, but his relationship with God."
6. Spend time talking about examples or personal experiences with individuals, churches or denominations that have a “Jesus plus...” theology.
7. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences concerning the time when they first sensed their need for a Savior.

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<sup>3</sup> Ted Koppel was the moderator for Nightline on ABC from March 1980 to April 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Use this link to read a short biography of Oswald Chambers, the writer of one of the most well known Christian devotional books, *My Utmost for His Highest*. <http://www.rbc.org/devotionals/my-utmost-for-his-highest/oswald-chambers-bio/his-story.aspx>

- a. Prior to received Christ as Lord and Savior, did you think of yourself as being a “good and moral person”?
  - b. Did you believe in the idea that “everything balances out in the end”?
8. Read and discuss the quote from *It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life*, Lance Armstrong's book, published in 2000 by G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- a. *It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life*<sup>5</sup> (Emphasis added) – The night before brain surgery, I thought about death. I searched out my larger values, and I asked myself, if I was going to die, did I want to do it fighting and clawing or in peaceful surrender? Was I content with myself and what I had done with my life so far? I decided that I was essentially a good person, although I could have been better.

I asked myself what I **believed**. I had never prayed a lot. I hoped hard, I wished hard, but I didn't pray. I had developed a certain distrust of organized religion growing up, but I felt I had the capacity to be a spiritual person, and to hold some fervent beliefs. Quite simply, I **believed** I had a responsibility to be a good person, and that meant fair, honest, hardworking, and honorable. If I did that, **if I was good to my family**, true to my friends, if I gave back to my community or to some cause, **if I wasn't a liar, a cheat, or a thief**, then I **believed** that should be enough. At the end of the day, if there was indeed some Body or presence standing there to judge me, **I hoped I would be judged on whether I had lived a true life**, not on whether I **believed** in a certain book, or whether I'd been baptized. If there was indeed a God at the end of my days, I hoped he didn't say, "But you were never a Christian, so you're going the other way from heaven." If so, I was going to reply, "You know what? You're right. Fine."

9. Close your time in prayer by: thanking the Lord for his patience, mercy and grace, that allowed the opportunity to hear the Holy Spirit's voice, that was calling them to repentance and the forgiveness of sins; asking the Holy Spirit to convince and convict regarding sin in their lives, for the purpose of moving toward repentance and asking God's forgiveness; ask the Lord to help them be a witness to a JESUS ONLY Gospel!

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<sup>5</sup> [http://books.google.com/books?id=k16cS5-yuAQC&pg=PA112&lpg=PA112&dq=lance+armstrong+The+night+before+brain+surgery,+I+thought+about+death.&source=bl&ots=frH-cwpMG1&sig=nly0-71zuzP5cZBOYMGEDGD-GDY&hl=en&ei=tvtpS-yzMsaulAe8qoGYAg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CAoQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=k16cS5-yuAQC&pg=PA112&lpg=PA112&dq=lance+armstrong+The+night+before+brain+surgery,+I+thought+about+death.&source=bl&ots=frH-cwpMG1&sig=nly0-71zuzP5cZBOYMGEDGD-GDY&hl=en&ei=tvtpS-yzMsaulAe8qoGYAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CAoQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=&f=false)