

## ***The False Gospel that the Apostle Paul Condemned***

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The Apostle Paul in his missionary journeys established Christian churches by teaching the gospel of Christ in heathen cities. No sooner had he done this that evil men from inside the new Christian church followed him and began to distort the truth and teach a false gospel. These men, whom Paul calls Judaizers, false brothers with false pretences (Gal 2:4), were hypocrites, unholy and corrupt in life, came from Jerusalem. At that time James the Lord's brother, was the leader of the early church in Jerusalem. These men sent themselves with no authority from James or the apostles (Acts 15:24) and spread confusion in the churches. So here we have a situation where heresy came from the highest governing body of the church. This piece of history serves as a warning to all Christians not to accept doctrines and practices just because they come from the heart of the church. We are to be on our guard and test everything from the bible. In those days of revelation from God the Old covenant was ending and the New covenant was beginning so there was bound to be problems. Paul had to confront this false gospel taught by these Jewish/Christian men that had poisoned the minds of the people in the churches of the province of Galatia.

### **The Council in Jerusalem**

**Acts 15:1-2; 4-5** "Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had a heated argument and debate with them, the brothers determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue... When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. **5** But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to keep the Law of Moses." NASB

The false gospel being taught by the 'believing Pharisees' who had joined the church was a belief that God's mercy and salvation could be bought by the observance of the law of God. The law being advocated was the ceremony of Circumcision and the Law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas were so opposed to this that it caused a heated argument and debate. So much so that they journeyed to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders.

**Acts 15:6-9** "The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. **8** And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; **9** and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith." NASB

The outcome of the heated debate was that salvation cannot be bought by our observance of the law but by believing the gospel and being transformed by the Holy Spirit. The result of the work of the Spirit of God is the cleansing of the heart or mind of the believer from sin.

Peter continues:

**Acts 15:11-12** "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." **12** All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles." NASB

Writing to the Galatian church the Apostle Paul says:

### **Perversion of the Gospel**

**Galatians 1:6-9** "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel— 7 not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. **8** But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell! **9** As we have said before, and now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell!" NET

Paul is strong in his condemnation of these false teachers and also of the false gospel they taught. Even if an angel from heaven preaches a different gospel from the one that Paul taught you then let him be condemned to hell. This false gospel must have enraged Paul significantly for him to use such strong emotional language and repeat himself twice.

### **Paul Defends His Ministry**

**Galatians 1:11-12** “Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ” NET

Paul establishes his credentials here. He did not learn the gospel that he taught the Galatians from any man. He was taught it by a direct revelation by Jesus Christ himself. There is no higher authority than this.

**Galatians 3:1-3** “You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you? Before your eyes Jesus Christ was vividly portrayed as crucified! 2 The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? Although you began with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort?” NET

So what is this false gospel Paul is condemning and how does it compare to the true gospel Paul received from Christ himself? A comparison is made regarding the Spirit of God and human effort. The Greek word for “human effort” here is “Flesh” and is used here as a metaphor to describe the natural nature of man that fights against the Spirit of God. The Galatians began with believing that the Spirit of God alone can fulfil the promises of God and yet these people later became deceived into believing that those same gospel promises could be fulfilled by human effort by obeying religious ceremonies and the law in the place of the Holy Spirit.

**Galatians 3:4-5** “Have you suffered so many things for nothing?—if indeed it was for nothing. 5 Does God then give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard?” NET

It seems clear that the difference between the true gospel and the false gospel is that in the true gospel is this:

1. True Gospel = God's promises given in mercy fulfilled by the Spirit of God.
2. False Gospel = God's promises bought by our obedience to the Law of God, without the Spirit of God.

The Apostle Paul gives a clear outline of what the gospel promises are in his letter to Titus.

**Titus 2:11-14** “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good deeds.” NASB

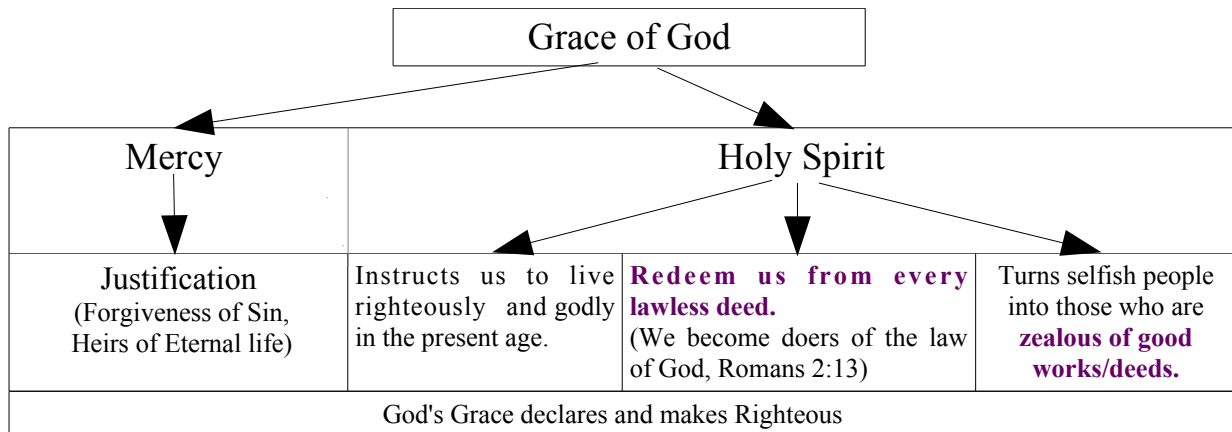
By redeeming us from every lawless deed the grace of God is transforming us into people who obey the law of God.

**Titus 3:3-7** “For we too were once foolish, disobedient, misled, enslaved to various passions and desires, spending our lives in evil and envy, hateful and hating one another. 4 But “when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, 5 he saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior. 7 And so, since we have been justified by his grace, we become heirs with the confident expectation of eternal life.” NET

We are Justified (have our sins forgiven) by Grace alone but it can be seen that the Holy Spirit of God and Grace are inseparable. The regeneration and renewing of the mind of man by the Holy Spirit is always blended with the Grace of God. Paul's understanding of the true gospel can be illustrated the following way.

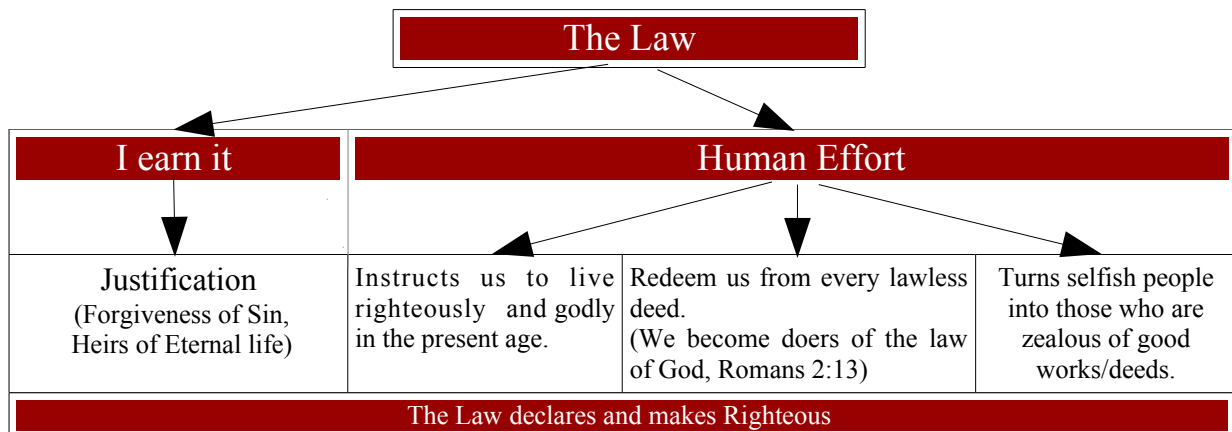
## *Another Gospel*

### True Gospel



The true gospel of Grace that Paul taught was that the mercy of God blended with the Holy Spirit removes the record of our sins, causes us to live righteously in the present world, redeems us from transgressing the law and transforms us from being selfish into people who are zealous of good works.

### False Gospel



It can be seen that the promises of God given to us are the same in both the true and false gospels. The difference being the way in which those promises are fulfilled. Satan does not want us to inherit eternal life so he has devised a deception which if believed will cause us to miss out on the fulfilled promises and eternal life.

The particular work of the law that these false teachers were advocating was the ceremony of circumcision. By performing this ceremony, they taught, a person would receive God's mercy and be granted eternal life. Paul calls these men the "circumcision group, dogs, and evil workers" Religious ceremonies even if commanded by God are not able to save from sin. It is worship by the Spirit and exulting in Christ Jesus that grants us eternal life.

**Galatians 2:15** "We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, **16** yet we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified." NET

**Galatians 2:21** "I do not set aside God's grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing!" NET

**Galatians 3:11** "Now it is clear no one is justified before God by the law, because *the righteous one will live by faith.*" NET

**Galatians 3:18** "For if the inheritance is based on the law, it is no longer based on the promise, but God graciously gave it to Abraham through the promise." NET

**Galatians 3:21**...”For if a law had been given that was able to give life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.” NET

**Romans 3:20** “For *no one is declared righteous before him* by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” NET.

**Romans 3:28** “For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law.” NET.

**Romans 9:30** “What shall we say then?—that the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness obtained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith, **31** but Israel even though pursuing a law of righteousness did not attain it. **32** Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but (as if it were possible) by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,” NET.

If any law was capable of imparting life to people then God's law certainly could. But not even God's law is capable so how much more man's law incapable of imparting life to us. The inheritance and Justification granting eternal life are all a result of God's grace and promises. Bear in mind that not one of the above verses says that the law of God does not have to be obeyed. These verses simply tell us that the law of God cannot save us from sin. The law of God only tells us what sin is. The law of God cannot fulfil God's covenant promises for us. Only the Grace of God can fulfil God's promises.

In the days of Jesus the Jews had been deceived into believing that God's mercy could be earned by doing good works. This misunderstanding was shown by the Jews in the city of Capernaum when Jesus healed the Roman Centurion's slave.

#### **Jesus Heals a Centurion's Slave**

**Luke 7:1-10** “When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. **2** And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. **3** When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. **4** When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, “He is worthy for You to grant this to him; 5 for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue.” **6** Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, “Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; **7** for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. **8** For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.” **9** Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.” **10** When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.” NASB

“The Jewish elders who recommended the centurion to Christ had shown how far they were from possessing the spirit of the gospel. They did not recognize that our great need is our only claim on God's mercy. In their self-righteousness they commended the centurion because of the favor he had shown to “our nation.” But the centurion said of himself, “I am not worthy.” His heart had been touched by the grace of Christ. He saw his own unworthiness; yet he feared not to ask help. He trusted not to his own goodness; his argument was his great need. His faith took hold upon Christ in His true character. He did not believe in Him merely as a worker of miracles, but as the friend and Saviour of mankind. It is thus that every sinner may come to Christ. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.” Titus 3:5. When Satan tells you that you are a sinner, and cannot hope to receive blessing from God, tell him that Christ came into the world to save sinners. We have nothing to recommend us to God; but the plea that we may urge now and ever is our utterly helpless condition that makes His redeeming power a necessity. Renouncing all self-dependence, we may look to the cross of Calvary and say,—

“In my hand no price I bring;  
Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

The Jews had been instructed from childhood concerning the work of the Messiah. The inspired utterances of patriarchs and prophets and the symbolic teaching of the sacrificial service had been theirs. But they had disregarded the light; and now they saw in Jesus nothing to be desired. But the centurion, born in heathenism, educated in the idolatry of imperial Rome, trained as a soldier, seemingly cut off from spiritual life by his

education and surroundings, and still further shut out by the bigotry of the Jews, and by the contempt of his own countrymen for the people of Israel,—this man perceived the truth to which the children of Abraham were blinded. He did not wait to see whether the Jews themselves would receive the One who claimed to be their Messiah. As the “light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9) had shone upon him, he had, though afar off, discerned the glory of the Son of God. To Jesus this was an earnest of the work which the gospel was to accomplish among the Gentiles. With joy He looked forward to the gathering of souls from all nations to His kingdom. With deep sadness He pictured to the Jews the result of their rejection of His grace: “I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Alas, how many are still preparing for the same fatal disappointment! While souls in heathen darkness accept His grace, how many there are in Christian lands upon whom the light shines only to be disregarded.” *The Desire of Ages pp 316-317. E.G.White. Pacific Press Publishing Association Mountain View California. Copyright 1940.*

Paul was warning the Christian churches at the cities of Galatia and Phillipi of the false “Christian” teachers whom he calls dogs, evil workers and the circumcision group. This strong language is highly emotive and shows Paul's utter contempt for these false “Christian” teachers. Paul was so disgusted with the false belief that salvation can be bought by the performance of religious ceremonies and laws, circumcision in this case, without the Spirit of God, that he wrote this:

**Galatians 5:12** “I wish those agitators would go so far as to castrate themselves!”  
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**Philippians 3:2-11** “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! 3 For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials 4 —though mine too are significant. If someone thinks he has good reasons to put confidence in human credentials, I have more: 5 I was circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. I lived according to the law as a Pharisee. 6 In my zeal for God I persecuted the church. According to the righteousness stipulated in the law I was blameless. 7 But these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ. 8 More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!—that I may gain Christ, 9 and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness—a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ's faithfulness. 10 My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” NET

Paul regarded his ancestry from the tribe of Benjamin from Israel, his education as a Pharisee, the honour given to him by the Jewish authorities and his blameless zeal for his religion, as nothing more than dung in comparison with the righteousness that is given us by Christ. Paul tells the people that his former way of life he tried, as a pharisee, to live a godly life without the Spirit of God and found that it was futile. His misguided zeal even caused him to persecute the church. As to the outward observance of the letter of the law of God he was blameless. But he discovered that law, any law, is incapable of transforming the mind of sinful man into a godly mind. He learned that it is only by the transforming grace of God that a person can become holy, and that without the holy spirit it is impossible to obtain salvation and serve God.

Salvation promises as Paul wrote in his letter to Titus consists of these four things. According to Paul they can only be fulfilled by the Grace/Spirit of God.

1. Grace teaches us to live a godly life in the present age
2. Grace redeems us from being law breakers
3. Grace makes us zealous of good deeds
4. Grace Justifies us. Meaning that it declares us innocent in the sight of God and grants us the right to eternal life.

Do we have to obey the law of God? Absolutely we do. Obeying the law of God is not the false gospel. Obeying the law of God is a central part of the redeeming grace of God which redeems us from all lawlessness. The false gospel Paul condemned is one that says we rely on the law instead of the spirit of God to fulfil God's covenant promises. The law of God teaches us what sin is teaches us what salvation is but the law cannot save anyone. However being made a law keeper by the grace of God is one of the central themes of the salvation offered by Christ.

Abraham was given a Covenant promise by God that he would become a father through his wife Sarah. But the problem was that Sarah was barren and ninety yrs old at the time. Abraham lost his faith in God and decided to fulfil the promise himself. He used his wife's handmaid Hagar to become the mother and the child Ishmael was born. This attempt by Abraham to fulfil God's promise on his own is the deception. God refused to accept Ishmael as the fulfilment of His promise. God later fulfilled the promise Himself through Abrahams barren wife Sarah and the child Isaac was born. This child became the child of faith and is used to illustrate the Covenant promises of God fulfilled by the Spirit of God and not by human effort. So it is with us. God's promises are only fulfilled by the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit has caused the epistle of Galatians to be preserved for the church to teach us that Law, religious ceremonies and human effort cannot save us.

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