

A GALATIANS DOCTRINAL LIBRARY

No Other Gospel

What Happens When Something Is Added to Christ

Galatians 1:1–10

by Pastor Dan Crespo

2026

A Galatians Doctrinal Library

Booklet One — No Other Gospel

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The Series

These nine booklets are one argument from Paul's letter to the Galatians. Each volume takes a stretch of the letter and stays with one doctrine so the later books can build instead of repeat. You can read this booklet by itself. The series is designed to be read in order.

The tone is help, not a contest with other teachers. Galatians was first a letter to people who had believed Christ and then been pulled toward a yoke that promised maturity while it stole peace. Many readers already know that wound. You were measured. You were managed. You watched a church keep Jesus in the vocabulary while defection from His sufficiency became the operating gospel.

Paul looks at that defection without cruelty toward the flock and without softness toward the message that entangled them. Severe where the Gospel is being changed. Patient where a believer is still learning. Always returning to one claim: Christ is enough.

These booklets are not a recruitment for a school. They are a reading of Galatians. The claim is not Reformed, Arminian, or dispensational. The claim is Paul's:

CHRIST IS ENOUGH.

Most volumes are broken into six parts; Booklet Eight has five. Scripture is quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted. Where a booklet distinguishes the text of Galatians from an inference drawn from it, that distinction is intentional. Keep the text first.

The Nine Booklets

This volume is the first of nine. Each booklet covers a section of Galatians and focuses on one central doctrine. The later books build on the truths established here rather than explaining them all over again. The series is designed to be read in order.

- **Booklet One — No Other Gospel (Galatians 1:1–10)**
The Gospel, and what happens when something is added to Christ.
- **Booklet Two — Not from Men (Galatians 1:11–2:10)**
The source of Paul's Gospel. No human being owns your access to God.
- **Booklet Three — The Truth of the Gospel (Galatians 2:11–19)**
Justification by faith and death to Law.
- **Booklet Four — Christ Lives in Me (Galatians 2:20–21)**
Union with Christ as the source of Christian Life.
- **Booklet Five — Why Then the Law? (Galatians 3:1–25)**
The purpose and duration of the Law. The tutor and its end.
- **Booklet Six — No Longer a Slave (Galatians 3:26–4:7)**
Sonship, adoption, Abba, and inheritance
- **Booklet Seven — Known by God (Galatians 4:8–31)**
Knowing God, and the pull of religious bondage
- **Booklet Eight — Stand Fast (Galatians 5:1–13)**
Liberty, circumcision, and the law obligation
- **Booklet Nine — Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:14–6:18)**
The Spirit, the fruit, and practical Christian life

This Booklet

Booklet One opens the letter and the library. The text is *Galatians 1:1–10*. The question is simple and severe: What is the Gospel—and what happens when something is added to Christ?

Paul does not begin with manners. He begins with the message. A different gospel is not a smaller gospel. It is another one. This volume names the addition—the “unless”—and distinguishes incomplete understanding from a message that contradicts grace. The author’s testimony belongs here and only here, in full. Later booklets assume what is established in these pages. They should not rebuild it.

Read this booklet if you have ever been told that Jesus is necessary but not sufficient. Read it if a church kept His name and moved the basis. Read it first if you plan to read the nine.

When this volume ends, one question remains: if this Gospel is that guarded, where did Paul get it? That is Booklet Two.

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A Word to the Wounded

This booklet is written as help. Not as a contest with other teachers. Not as a system for winning arguments. Galatians was first a letter to people who had believed Christ and then been pulled toward a yoke that promised maturity while it stole peace.

Many readers already know that wound. You were measured. You were managed. You were told you were immature for trusting grace. You watched a church keep Jesus in the vocabulary while defection from His sufficiency became the operating gospel. You learned to live for acceptance instead of from it. You may still love the people who taught you that. Love does not require you to call bondage freedom.

Paul looks at that defection without cruelty toward the flock and without softness toward the message that entangled them. That is the tone of this volume. Severe where the Gospel is being changed. Patient where a believer is still learning. Always returning to one claim:

CHRIST IS ENOUGH.

If you are tired, begin here. The investigation is not meant to make you suspicious of every pastor, church, discipline, or practice. It asks whether anything has been allowed to occupy a place that belongs only to Christ.

Part One — The Word That Changes Everything

One word can change the Gospel.

UNLESS.

That word stands at the beginning of one of the most important conflicts recorded in the early church:

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Acts 15:1, NKJV

Read their statement carefully. They did not deny Jesus. They did not say He was not the Messiah. They did not reject the Cross. They did not deny the resurrection. They did not tell the believers to stop believing in Christ.

They added something.

JESUS—AND CIRCUMCISION.

Christ remained in the message. Faith remained in the message. The Bible remained in the message. Moses certainly came from God. Circumcision certainly appeared in Scripture. The addition could therefore sound deeply biblical—serious, devout, and obedient. That was precisely what made it so dangerous.

Necessary, But Not Sufficient

The most obvious false gospel says Jesus is not necessary. That one is easy to recognize. The more dangerous message says Jesus is necessary—but not sufficient.

Yes, Jesus died for you—but something else must still be done. Yes, salvation is by grace—but something must now be added to keep the relationship intact. Yes, Christ is your Mediator—but another mediator is functionally necessary when you fail. Yes, Jesus finished the work—but not quite. Not until you do your part.

The addition can take many forms: a ritual, a prayer, a religious requirement, a confession, a promise, a rule, a church procedure, a standard of behavior, or a human authority. Some of those things may have a proper place in Christian life. The issue is not simply whether the practice is good or bad. The deeper question is what the practice is being made to accomplish.

Does it flow from a relationship Christ already secured? Or is it required to obtain, maintain, restore, or reactivate that relationship? That difference is the difference between response and condition. And one condition can change everything.

The Modern “Unless”

Most churches today are not telling Gentile Christian men, “*Unless you are circumcised according to Moses, you cannot be saved.*” But unless has not disappeared.

Unless you confess correctly. Unless you repent enough. Unless you get the sin out of your life. Unless you demonstrate sufficient sorrow. Unless you follow the proper spiritual disciplines. Unless you submit to the right religious authority. Unless you come forward, rededicate, recommit, or perform whatever step is supposedly necessary to restore what your latest failure caused God to withdraw.

Jesus remains in the vocabulary. Grace remains in the vocabulary. The Cross remains in the vocabulary. But the believer begins living as though God’s disposition must continually be managed. Failure creates distance. Religious performance restores favor. The system provides the procedure. A minister may become the person who determines when the relationship has been repaired.

Christ is still praised. But His work is no longer treated as sufficient for the present moment. That is not a small difference. It changes whether a believer lives in peace or in fear; from acceptance or for acceptance; from forgiveness or in the continual attempt to obtain forgiveness; knowing Jesus or continually trying to satisfy a religious system. It changes whether the Gospel is actually good news.

A Message Can Be Almost Right

The men in *Acts 15* were not preaching paganism. They were quoting from a religious world God Himself had established for Israel. Circumcision came from God. Moses came from God. The Law came from God. That should make every church careful.

A command can be biblical and still be applied to a person in a relationship God did not give that command to govern. A verse can be quoted accurately and still be used in a way that contradicts what Christ accomplished. The question therefore cannot merely be whether a requirement is found somewhere in the Bible. The question must also be: What does this requirement do to the sufficiency of Christ?

Does it make something besides Christ necessary for salvation, forgiveness, acceptance, fellowship, spiritual standing, blessing, or access to God? If it does, the Gospel has changed. People may still sing about Jesus, preach the cross, and speak about grace. But the operating message has become Jesus—and. And the addition changes the Gospel.

Paul Heard The Addition

Paul and Barnabas did not treat the teaching in *Acts 15* as a harmless difference of emphasis. Luke says there was, “*no small dissension and dispute*” (*Acts 15:2*). The requirement did not merely change a church practice. It changed the basis upon which people were being told they could be saved.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.

Galatians 1:6, NKJV

Paul does not merely say they changed doctrines. He says they are turning from Him. Gospel distortion changes the practical relationship a person believes he has with God.

If forgiveness depends upon my repeated performance, my attention continually returns to me. If God's acceptance depends upon my success, fear replaces peace. If a minister controls restored access, dependence shifts from Jesus toward that minister. If external regulation is made the source of Christian maturity, I begin asking flesh to produce what only God's Life can produce. The addition promises deeper devotion. Paul says it can actually turn people away from the One who called them in grace.

The Investigation

This booklet asks one controlling question: What is the Gospel—and what happens when something is added to Christ?

Before we move into Paul's full argument in Galatians, several distinctions must be clear: sin and death; forgiveness and salvation; the Cross and the resurrection; religious performance and restored Life; incomplete understanding and another gospel; pastoral service and religious mediation; obedience that grows from acceptance and obedience performed to obtain acceptance.

The purpose of this booklet is not to make Christians suspicious of every pastor, church, tradition, discipline, or practice. It is to ask whether anything has been allowed to occupy a place that belongs only to Christ. The investigation begins where the controversy began. With one word.

UNLESS.

Part Two — When Believing the Truth Costs Too Much

Truth Is Not Examined in a Vacuum

We often imagine that if someone is presented with enough biblical evidence, the conclusion will become automatic. Show the verses. Explain the argument. Answer the objections. Problem solved. But human beings do not examine truth in an emotional vacuum. Sometimes the greatest obstacle is not the evidence. It is the consequence of believing it.

What will happen to my relationships, my religious identity, my church, my reputation, my ministry? What will I have to admit about something I have believed and taught for years? Sometimes the hardest words to say are not complicated theological words. They are: I was wrong. That human reality matters as we enter Galatians.

The Early Church Had to Learn What Christ Had Accomplished

Jesus came. He died. He rose from the dead. The Holy Spirit was given. Gentiles began believing. And immediately difficult questions appeared. What did all of this mean for circumcision, for Moses, for Jewish and Gentile fellowship, for the way God's people now related to Him?

Acts does not portray every believer as understanding every implication of Christ's work immediately. Peter himself had to be dramatically prepared before entering the house of Cornelius. When he finally went, something remarkable happened: *"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word" (Acts 10:44)*. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were astonished, *"because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also" (Acts 10:45)*.

God acted before anyone could impose circumcision upon Cornelius. God gave His Spirit. Peter saw it. Yet when Peter returned to Jerusalem, *"those of the circumcision contended with him" (Acts 11:2)*. Peter explained what God had done and concluded, *"If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17)*.

Real believers were learning. God's actions were forcing them to rethink assumptions they had carried for years. Believing in Jesus did not mean every implication of His death, resurrection, and the coming of the Spirit had already been worked out in everyone's thinking.

Then The Crisis Became Explicit

Acts 15 brings the issue into the open: *"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."* Paul and Barnabas strongly opposed that teaching. Then, in Jerusalem, *"some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses'" (Acts 15:5)*.

PHARISEES WHO BELIEVED.

These were not people who had simply rejected Jesus. They believed. Yet they also believed it is necessary—necessary to circumcise Gentile believers, necessary to command them to keep the law of Moses. The issue was not whether Jesus had done something important. The issue was whether Jesus had done enough.

Text And Inference

THE TEXT SAYS

Men came from Judea. They taught circumcision as necessary for salvation. Paul and Barnabas disputed with them. The matter was taken to Jerusalem. Believing Pharisees argued that Gentile believers must be circumcised and commanded to keep the law of Moses. The apostles and elders gathered to consider the question.

A REASONABLE INFERENCE

Those pushing the dispute toward Jerusalem expected Jerusalem's leadership to carry meaningful authority in the controversy and may have expected support for their position.

THE TEXT DOES NOT SAY

Acts does not tell us every person's expectation. Later booklets will examine Jerusalem more closely. We do not need to settle that entire historical question here. For now, the text establishes enough: the addition of Moses to Christ arose among people who believed. That should humble us.

Sincere Believers Can Be Wrong

We do not need to turn the believing Pharisees into cartoon villains. Their reasoning had a logic. Moses came from God. Circumcision came from God. The Scriptures commanded obedience. Jesus Himself had lived as a Jew under the Law before His death. The Holy Spirit had now been given. It was therefore possible for someone to reason: perhaps the Spirit now gives us the power to become truly obedient to what God commanded through Moses.

From within that framework, Paul's message could sound dangerous. Freedom from Law could sound like freedom to sin. Complete forgiveness could sound like the removal of motivation. Gentiles coming directly to Christ without becoming Jewish could feel like the loss of something sacred. The argument could sound reasonable. It was still wrong. Sincerity cannot turn contradiction into truth.

The Cost of Reconsidering What We Have Been Taught

Imagine a pastor who has spent thirty years teaching that every individual sin must be confessed in order for God to forgive it. Then he begins to see Scripture differently. He is not merely changing one sentence in a sermon. He may have thirty years of teaching behind him, a congregation shaped by that teaching, counseling methods built around it, religious systems built upon it, and his reputation tied to it. What happens if he says, "I was wrong"? That may cost something.

The same is true of institutions. If believers discover that Christ Himself is their Mediator, what happens to a ministry model that has taught them they need a minister to maintain access? If believers

discover that Christ completely dealt with sin, what happens to a system centered on repeatedly repairing a sin barrier? If believers discover that God gives His Spirit to lead His children, what happens to a system that depends upon controlling every spiritual decision through human authority?

These questions can make truth feel dangerous. That does not mean every pastor is protecting money or power, or that every religious leader has impure motives. God knows hearts. But human systems create pressure. Reputation creates pressure. Belonging creates pressure. Fear creates pressure. We should recognize that pressure in others—and in ourselves.

Love Does Not Require Silence

Patience matters. We cannot argue someone into being willing to bear the cost of truth. We explain. We answer questions. We open Scripture. We remain available. We trust God to give courage. But patience does not require us to call contradictory things identical. Paul did not surrender the Gospel merely because the believing Pharisees had reasons they thought were biblical. Love respects people enough to tell them the truth.

The question beneath *Acts 15* was not merely whether Gentiles must be circumcised. It was whether Christ is sufficient—or whether religious obligation must complete what He accomplished. That question reaches far beyond the first century. And sometimes the greatest obstacle is not weak evidence. It is the cost of admitting that the truth changes everything.

Part Three — The Gospel Paul Protects

Where The Letter Begins

Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead).

Galatians 1:1, NKJV

Paul will later spend a chapter and a half proving that his Gospel did not come from Jerusalem. That investigation belongs to Booklet Two. What we need here is simpler. Before Paul names the different gospel, he locates the true one.

An apostle is one who is sent. His authority is real, but derived. He does not own the Gospel. He has been entrusted with it. A messenger cannot change his message because the audience finds it uncomfortable. That is why Paul will later say that even if he himself were to preach another gospel, the Galatians were not to receive it. Paul is not above the Gospel. Paul is bound to it.

Human religious authority does not create the Gospel. Credentials cannot make error true. Teachers matter—the church needs faithful teachers—but a teacher should lead people into the text and toward Jesus. He should not become the reason the teaching is considered true. If a minister's declaration is required before God can accept a believer again, the minister has become more than a teacher. He has become a functional mediator. Jesus did not give that role away.

Grace And Peace from a Living Christ

Resurrection appears in Paul's first sentence: God the Father, "*raised Him from the dead.*" The Gospel is not merely about a death in the past. It concerns a living Christ. Human institutions can grant titles. They cannot raise the dead. Councils can make decisions. They cannot give spiritual Life.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

Galatians 1:3–4, NKJV

If my acceptance depends upon my success, peace will fluctuate. Good day: God is pleased. Bad day: God is disappointed. Paul locates grace and peace in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The source matters. If grace comes through Christ, no religious institution has authority to take ownership of it.

Jesus gave Himself. The initiative begins with God. The Gospel begins with what He did—not what we did, promised, performed, or persuaded God to do. Christ gave Himself. God raised Him. Grace and peace come from God. Deliverance is according to the Father's will. Before Paul confronts the different gospel, he reminds us where the true one begins: God acted first.

The Bad News Has Two Parts

Before we can identify another gospel, we need to know the Gospel Paul is protecting. That requires us to understand the human problem correctly. The problem is larger than individual bad behavior. The Gospel answers two connected problems with two great acts of God.

SIN AND DEATH. COMPLETE FORGIVENESS AND RESTORED LIFE.

Human beings sin. We lie, lust, hate, manipulate, use one another, become proud, and rebel against God. Those sins matter. But our problem goes deeper than the individual acts we commit. Humanity is also spiritually dead.

Genesis takes us back to the beginning. *“The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7)*. Adam did not generate life from himself. Life came from God. Then God warned, *“for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17)*. Adam ate. He did not physically collapse that afternoon. His body continued living. So, what died?

INTERPRETIVE CONCLUSION

I believe Adam experienced spiritual death: separation from the divine Life that came from God. Genesis does not explicitly say, “The Holy Spirit departed from Adam.” That is an interpretive conclusion, and we should say so. But it fits the warning that death would occur that day and the later biblical description of humanity as, *“dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1)*.

Paul writes, *“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men...” (Romans 5:12)*. Sin entered. Death followed. Therefore, humanity needs more than a cleared record. Humanity needs Life.

God’s Answer Has Two Great Movements

The crucifixion addresses sin. The resurrection addresses death. We should not separate them. And we should not reduce the Gospel to only the Cross. Paul writes, *“And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:17)*. The resurrection is not simply spectacular proof that Jesus was who He claimed to be. Without the resurrection there is no living Christ to give Life. The Cross removes the barrier. The resurrection brings Life.

Jesus Resolved The Sin Issue

John the Baptist looked at Jesus and declared, *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)*. At the Cross Jesus said, *“It is finished!” (John 19:30)*. Finished. Not partially finished. Not temporarily finished. Not finished until the next human failure. Jesus dealt with sin.

Paul writes, *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them...” (2 Corinthians 5:19)*. The writer of Hebrews says, *“But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12)*. One sacrifice. For sins. Forever. Then He sat down. Christ is not returning to the Cross every time humanity commits another

sin. His sacrifice did not expire. It did not need human confession to become complete. It did not need religious merit to add effectiveness to His blood. Jesus resolved the sin issue.

God Is No Longer Holding Sin Against Humanity

This conclusion makes many people uncomfortable. If Christ took away the sin of the world—if God was in Christ not imputing trespasses—if one sacrifice was offered for sins forever—then I believe we must allow the conclusion to stand:

GOD IS NO LONGER HOLDING THE SINS OF HUMANITY AGAINST THEM.

Immediately someone asks: Then is everyone saved? No. Because forgiveness is not the whole Gospel. Humanity has another problem. Death.

Forgiveness Is Not Salvation

Forgiveness is essential. Without the sin issue being resolved, there could be no restored relationship with God. But forgiveness itself is not spiritual Life. Imagine a dead prisoner. Every debt is canceled. Every legal charge is dismissed. The prison door opens. Nothing remains to keep him incarcerated. But the prisoner is dead. What does he need? Life.

That is the distinction. Christ dealt with sin. But spiritually dead humanity still needs Life. Therefore, complete forgiveness does not equal universal salvation. Jesus dealt with the sins of the world. Not everyone has received spiritual Life. The difference is not that Christ's blood dealt more effectively with the sins of one group than another. The difference is Life. Those who refuse Christ refuse the only Life available to them.

The Resurrection Restores Life

After Jesus rose, John records, *“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22)*. That language should remind us of Genesis. God breathed into Adam. Life. The risen Christ breathes upon His disciples: Receive the Holy Spirit.

INTERPRETIVE CONCLUSION

I believe this was the moment the disciples received restored spiritual Life. They already believed Jesus was Messiah. They had followed Him. They loved Him. But the Cross had to occur. The resurrection had to occur. The sin barrier had to be removed. Death had to be defeated. Then the risen Christ could give the Life humanity had lost.

Jesus said, *“He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24)*. Salvation is not merely, “Your record was cleared.” It is, “You were dead and have received Life.”

Why Eternal Life Is Eternal

If the Holy Spirit entered and departed every time a believer sinned, then eternal Life would depend upon the believer's ability to maintain the conditions for God's presence. The Christian life would

become: Spirit in, sin, Spirit out, confess, Spirit back, fail, Spirit out again. That would place the believer's security not ultimately in Christ, but in his ability to remember, confess, and manage sin correctly. But the Cross has settled the sin issue. The Life the risen Christ gives is eternal Life. The believer receives the Eternal One.

What About Those Who Do Not Believe?

The categories must remain clear. Christ dealt with the sins of humanity. Not everyone possesses eternal Life. Forgiveness is universal in its reach because Christ dealt with the sin of the world. Salvation is personally received because spiritual Life is found only in Christ.

This does not mean belief is unnecessary, or that everyone is a child of God, or that everyone has eternal Life. It means the sin barrier is not the unresolved issue preventing humanity from approaching God. Jesus said to unbelieving men, *"But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life"* (John 5:40). The tragedy is not that the Father refuses to forgive you. The tragedy is that you refuse the One in whom Life is found.

Two Different Gospel Frameworks

One message says: You are a sinner. God is holding your sins against you. If you believe correctly, repent correctly, and perform the necessary response, God will forgive you. Then, after salvation, every new failure creates another barrier that must again be dealt with. That message keeps the believer occupied with sin management.

The true Gospel says: Christ gave Himself for your sins. He took away the sin of the world. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The barrier has been removed. But you are spiritually dead. Come to the risen Christ. Receive His Life. Pass from death into Life.

One message keeps people trying to resolve sin. The other announces that Jesus already resolved it. One makes forgiveness the whole meaning of salvation. The other says forgiveness made restored Life possible. One focuses almost entirely on reaching heaven after death. The other says eternal Life begins now. One can create ongoing dependence upon religious systems. The other creates dependence upon Jesus.

What Happens to Ministry When the Sin Issue Is Settled?

Some may fear that if forgiveness is complete, pastors become unnecessary. Not at all. Pastors teach, shepherd, encourage, correct, warn, pray, help believers understand Scripture, and protect congregations from destructive teaching. What pastors do not do is mediate the believer's acceptance before God.

A pastor does not make Christ's sacrifice effective. A pastor does not reopen access to God. A pastor does not restore forgiveness that God withdrew. Jesus is the Mediator. Jesus is the High Priest. Jesus completed the sacrifice. Jesus gives the Spirit. A healthy pastor continually points people away from himself and toward Christ.

The Question This Gospel Creates

Once a believer understands complete forgiveness, a natural question follows: Then how do I live? If God is not holding my sins against me, why obey? If acceptance does not depend upon Law, what guides Christian life? If the pastor is not my mediator, what is his role? If forgiveness is complete, what does confession mean?

Paul will answer those questions throughout Galatians—Christ living in us, sons instead of slaves, faith working through love, walking in the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit. The alternative to Law is not lawlessness. The alternative to Law is Life. We must not rush ahead. Booklet Four will take up union with Christ. Booklet Five will explain the Law. Booklet Nine will develop walking in the Spirit.

For now, Booklet One establishes the foundation: the sin issue has been resolved; forgiveness is complete; forgiveness is not salvation; spiritually dead humanity needs Life; the risen Christ gives Life. Now we have a Gospel by which every competing message can be measured.

Part Four — Modern “Gospels”

Paul does not leave room for several equally valid gospels.

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another...”

Galatians 1:6–7, NKJV

There Is One Gospel

There may be many messages called “gospel.” There may be many churches using the name of Jesus. There may be sincere teachers preaching things they genuinely believe are biblical. But sincerity does not determine whether a message is the Gospel.

Paul gives us another test: **What has been placed beside Christ?**

The problem in Galatia was not that Jesus disappeared. Jesus remained in the vocabulary. Faith remained. Scripture remained. The Cross remained. Something was added.

Jesus and circumcision. Jesus and Moses. Jesus and religious obligation. That addition changed the Gospel.

This is why the danger can be difficult to recognize. A different gospel does not always walk into the church announcing that Jesus is unnecessary. Sometimes it speaks highly of Jesus. It sings about Him. It preaches the Cross. It quotes Scripture. Then it quietly places something beside Him. The addition changes. The principle does not.

Is Christ enough—or must something else complete what he began? That question helps us recognize several messages commonly heard in American Christianity.

The Prosperity Gospel

The prosperity gospel can make Jesus the means to health, wealth, success, promotion, material blessing, or simply the life I want. Faith becomes a mechanism for obtaining something from God.

There is nothing wrong with believing God provides. He does. There is nothing wrong with receiving material blessing with gratitude. The problem begins when the good news quietly becomes, **come to Jesus so your circumstances will become successful.**

Now Christ has become the means while prosperity has become the prize. That is a significant change.

The Gospel does not promise that everyone who believes will become wealthy, healthy, admired, promoted, or comfortable. Paul’s Gospel gives us something greater.

CHRIST HIMSELF IS THE TREASURE.

The good news is not finally that Jesus will give me the life I have always wanted. The good news is that God has given us His Son.

The Therapeutic Gospel

Another message makes the central purpose of Jesus emotional comfort, improved self-esteem, personal fulfillment, healing from pain, or becoming the best version of yourself.

God cares about wounded people. He comforts. He restores. He knows our pain better than we do. There is nothing wrong with receiving emotional healing from God. But the Gospel is larger than feeling better about ourselves. Humanity's deepest problem is not low self-esteem. **It is sin and death.**

Christ did not merely come to make Adam emotionally healthier. Humanity was dead. The Cross dealt with the sin issue. The risen Christ gives Life.

The Gospel is not simply: **Jesus will help me feel better about me.** Through Jesus Christ we have been brought from death into Life with God.

If therapy becomes the center, Jesus can slowly become a tool for personal improvement rather than the Savior who dealt with sin and gives Life. Jesus remains. But the center has moved.

The Political Gospel

Politics can become another addition. A political movement, national identity, party, candidate, ideology, cultural cause, or political outcome can gradually move beside Christ. Jesus remains in the vocabulary, but agreement on political questions begins functioning as a test of spiritual faithfulness.

Christians can have strong political convictions. We can vote. We can participate in public life. We can disagree over government, economics, justice, education, war, immigration, and any number of public questions. Those disagreements do not create another Savior.

No political party died for our sins. No government rose from the dead. No election gives spiritual Life. And this danger is not confined to one political side. The political right can do it. The political left can do it.

Whenever political allegiance begins functioning as part of the basis by which Christians measure spiritual acceptance, something has moved into a place that belongs to Christ.

THE GOSPEL IS NOT JESUS—AND MY POLITICAL SIDE WINNING.

The church may speak into public life. Christians may hold convictions about public issues. But politics cannot become the good news. Christ is.

The Social Gospel

Another message can reduce the Gospel to changing society: feeding the poor, confronting injustice, improving communities, correcting oppressive systems, or building a more just society.

Those can all involve good and loving work. Christians should care about suffering. Love serves people. Paul himself told believers to remember the poor. But doing good in society is not the same thing as the Gospel that gives Life.

SOCIAL ACTION CAN BE FRUIT. IT CANNOT BECOME THE SOURCE.

A person can feed the hungry and still need Christ. A community can become safer and still need Christ. A society can become more just and still contain spiritually dead human beings. We can replace terrible social conditions with better ones and still not have announced the Gospel.

Some forms of liberation theology have emphasized Israel's deliverance from Egypt as a pattern for understanding liberation from political, economic, or social oppression. Exodus certainly shows us a God who hears suffering and delivers the oppressed.

But Israel leaving Egypt cannot replace Christ crucified and risen as the center of the Gospel. Humanity's deepest bondage is not merely political, economic, or social. **It is sin and death.**

The Gospel does not merely announce a better society. It announces Christ crucified and risen, giving Life to those who believe.

Justice matters. Mercy matters. Love matters. But the fruit must never replace the Gospel that produces it.

The Religious-Performance Gospel

This one may be the hardest to recognize because nearly every word in it can sound Christian.

Jesus died for you. Jesus saved you. Jesus forgave you. But now you must maintain the relationship. Confess correctly. Repent sufficiently. Keep the rules. Submit to the right authority. Perform the right ritual. Attend enough. Serve enough. Meet the standard. Remain worthy. Jesus begins the relationship. Human performance supposedly keeps it alive.

This is remarkably close to the problem Paul confronted in Galatia. The particular requirement may be different. The principle is not. It may be sacramental. It may be legalistic. It may be institutional. It may be Catholic. It may be Protestant. It may exist inside an independent Bible church. The label is not the issue.

The question is: **Has something been made necessary to obtain, maintain, restore, complete, or reactivate what Christ accomplished?** If so, we are back to the word that began this investigation.

UNLESS.

Jesus saves you—unless. Jesus forgives you—unless. Jesus accepts you—unless. Jesus keeps you—unless. Jesus gives you access to God—unless. Jesus is your Mediator—unless someone else must restore that access after you fail.

The requirement changes. The function remains the same. Something has been placed beside Christ as necessary and that is exactly what Paul refuses.

The Test Is Still the Same

These messages look very different from one another. One promises prosperity. Another promises emotional fulfillment. Another places its hope in political victory. Another emphasizes social transformation. Another promises religious security through performance. But Paul's test remains the same: **Does the message leave Christ sufficient?**

Did He completely deal with sin? Did He rise to give Life? Is righteousness received through faith in Him? Has the believer been brought into relationship with the Father through the Son and the indwelling Spirit? Or does something else eventually have to finish what Jesus began?

Paul gives us no category called, "almost the Gospel." A message may contain enormous amounts of truth and still move the basis. That is what makes Galatians so important.

The question is not simply: **Is Jesus mentioned?** The question is: **Is Jesus sufficient?**

We Could Keep Going

These five are not the only competing messages preached under the name of the "gospel." We could keep going. There are many others in American Christianity and throughout the world. The names change from generation to generation. Sometimes several are blended together.

We could talk about what might be called the consumer gospel. Christian life can gradually become centered around Christian products and experiences—cafés, restaurants, bookstores, conferences, expensive teaching series, videos, audio programs, merchandise, retreats, subscriptions, and an entire Christian marketplace promising to help believers grow, mature, succeed, or become more spiritual.

None of those things is automatically wrong. A bookstore can help someone understand Scripture. A teaching series can be useful. A café can create fellowship. A conference can encourage believers. The problem is not the product. The question is what we ask the product to do.

Christianity can become something we continually purchase, consume, attend, collect, and acquire while waiting for the next resource to make us complete.

The shelves stay full. The conferences keep coming. The next teaching series promises another breakthrough. And the Christian can slowly become a consumer of spirituality instead of a person learning to know and depend upon Christ. Almost without anyone noticing, Christ Himself can stop being treated as sufficient.

We could examine nationalism wrapped in Christian vocabulary. Revolutionary forms of Christianity. Self-help Christianity. Success Christianity. Celebrity Christianity. Institutional Christianity. Political forms from the right and from the left.

We could examine systems where the pastor becomes functionally necessary for access to God. We could examine churches where belonging to the institution gradually becomes almost indistinguishable from belonging to Christ. We could continue for pages. But we do not need to identify every counterfeit in order to understand Paul's test.

The names are not the controlling issue. The question remains: **What has been placed beside Christ?**

Does the message announce what God has accomplished completely in His Son? Or has something else become necessary to complete, maintain, restore, improve, or activate what Jesus accomplished? The forms may be many.

THE GOSPEL IS ONE.

Paul says there are people who:

“...trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

Galatians 1:7, NKJV

That word matters. **Pervert.** The rival message does not necessarily have to eliminate Christ. It only has to change the Gospel. And one addition can do it.

We have now seen the standard and several modern ways that standard can be moved. The next question is how this happens? Churches rarely wake up one morning and decide to preach another gospel. Something usually happens more slowly.

A legitimate concern becomes a requirement. A helpful practice becomes a condition. A leader becomes a mediator. A response to grace becomes a means of maintaining grace. **That is how another gospel is born.**

Part Five — How Another Gospel Is Born

Turning From Him

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:6–7, NKJV

Paul is astonished. The Galatians had heard Christ. They had believed. They had received the Spirit. And now they were turning away. But they were not merely turning away from a theological formula. Paul says they were turning from Him. The Gospel is personal. Change the Gospel and you change the way people believe God relates to them.

God called them, “*in the grace of Christ.*” Grace means the decisive work was accomplished by Another. Christ gave Himself. Christ dealt with sin. Christ rose. Christ gives Life. Grace means we receive what we cannot produce through human performance. Yet another message had entered Galatia. It did not necessarily say, stop believing in Jesus. It said Jesus—and circumcision. Jesus—and Moses. Jesus—and religious obligation. Circumcision was biblical. Moses came from God. It sounded like greater obedience. Paul called it a different gospel.

Jesus Necessary—But Not Sufficient

The modern counterfeit follows the same pattern. Jesus died for all your sins—but today’s sin remains between you and God until you perform the proper response. Jesus saved you by grace—but your ongoing acceptance depends upon performance. Jesus is the Mediator—but you still need a minister to restore your standing. The Spirit lives in you—but human religious authority must function as your spiritual governor. Christ finished the work—but the latest failure suspended its benefits.

The message does not need to deny Jesus. It simply needs to say Christ is necessary—but something else is also necessary. That is Jesus—and... And the addition changes the Gospel.

Which Is Not Another

Paul calls it, “*a different gospel,*” then immediately, “*which is not another.*” There are not several contradictory saving gospels. One gospel cannot say God no longer holds sin against you, while another equally valid gospel says God begins holding your sins against you again every time you fail. One cannot say Life comes through the risen Christ, while another says religious obedience creates spiritual Life. One cannot say Jesus is the Mediator, while another makes a human minister functionally necessary to maintain access to God. Contradictory messages cannot all be good news.

Counterfeit Gospels Contain Truth

A counterfeit must resemble the thing it imitates. It may affirm that Jesus is Messiah, that Jesus died and rose, that the Bible is God's Word, that Christians should obey God, and that sin is destructive. All of those statements may be true. The distortion enters in the relationship established between them.

Why do I obey? What happens when I fail? Is God still holding sin against me? Does behavior determine whether He accepts me? Do I live from God's love—or for it? That is where the practical Gospel becomes visible.

Changed By Addition

Acts 15 gives the clearest example: *“Unless you are circumcised...you cannot be saved.”* Christ had done something. But supposedly not enough. The human being had to complete the arrangement.

Modern additions differ: repeated confession treated as the means of receiving renewed forgiveness; a particular formula of repentance; a ceremony made necessary to complete salvation; church membership treated as the basis of spiritual standing; submission to a particular pastor; a required amount of giving; a required day; a particular religious practice.

The practice itself may have a legitimate place. Baptism can testify to faith. Confession can be an honest conversation with God. Repentance can describe a real change of mind. Pastors can serve. Giving can express generosity. Gathering can strengthen believers. The issue is what the practice is made to accomplish. If any of these becomes necessary to obtain or maintain what Christ accomplished, its function has changed.

Changed By Negation

A message can affirm something true and then deny its consequence. For example: Jesus died for all your sins. Then: but if you fail to confess today's sin, God will hold it against you. Those two statements cannot govern the same relationship.

If Christ dealt with all sin, then today's sin was included. If, *“God was in Christ not imputing trespasses,”* a new religious procedure is not required to make God stop imputing them again. If Christ, *“offered one sacrifice for sins forever,”* the believer does not need a new forgiveness transaction every time flesh fails. To say Jesus died for all sins, but God continues holding some sins against you, is not a small qualification. It negates the finality of the first statement. The Cross remains in the theology. Its sufficiency disappears from daily life. That is how another gospel can hide inside familiar Christian words.

The Gospel We Actually Practice

A church's written doctrinal statement may say salvation is by grace, Christ finished the work, Jesus is the Mediator, and the Spirit indwells believers. Yet the practical Gospel can look different. You discover it after someone fails: What must happen before God will accept him again? You discover it when someone questions a leader: Is that person directed back to Scripture and Christ—or threatened with the loss of divine protection? You discover it when someone suffers: Is he reminded of God's love—

or told to search for the hidden sin that caused God to withdraw? You discover it in discipleship and in prayer: Are believers taught to know Jesus personally, and do they approach as people already welcomed through Christ?

THE GOSPEL WE PRACTICE IS THE GOSPEL UPON WHICH WE ACTUALLY DEPEND.

Why Complete Forgiveness Frightens Religious Systems

Many Christians will say Jesus died for all our sins—past, present, and future. Agreement often disappears when we state the implication: then God is not holding any of those sins against you. Immediately the fears appear. Then people will sin. Then no one will repent. Then nobody will need accountability. Then what will motivate obedience? Then what will pastors do?

Those fears reveal how easily religious systems depend upon an unresolved sin problem. If fear is removed, some fear that holiness will disappear. If ministerial mediation is removed, some fear that ministry will disappear. If believers know they are accepted, some fear they will stop pursuing growth. But Law and condemnation cannot produce Life, love, intimate knowledge of God, or the fruit of the Spirit. Keeping sin unresolved may preserve control. It cannot create Life.

Four Questions That Expose the Operating Gospel

When evaluating a message, ask:

1. **What happened to sin?** Was the sin issue resolved at the Cross, or does God repeatedly begin holding sin against the believer again?
2. **What is salvation?** Is forgiveness treated as the whole meaning of salvation, or is salvation restored spiritual Life through the risen Christ?
3. **How does the believer now live?** From Christ and the Spirit—or under a religious system designed to maintain acceptance?
4. **Upon whom does the believer depend?** Jesus—or the institution, pastor, ceremony, or religious mechanism that supposedly manages his relationship with God?

Those questions move beyond slogans. They expose the gospel we live by. But one important question remains. What about sincere believers whose understanding is still incomplete?

Part Six — When Incomplete Becomes Different

A Real Boundary

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:8, NKJV

Paul draws a real boundary. There is a true Gospel. And there are messages that contradict it. But if we are careless, we can misuse Paul's severity. How much must a person understand? Can someone genuinely belong to Jesus while still carrying serious confusion about forgiveness, Law, or Christian life? Is incomplete understanding identical to another gospel?

No. But incomplete understanding must be allowed to move toward Christ's sufficiency. It must not be preserved and imposed upon others as though the confusion itself were the Gospel. That distinction protects both grace and truth.

No One Begins with Complete Understanding

Spiritual birth is not instant theological maturity. A person may trust Christ without understanding every implication of the Cross, the resurrection, complete forgiveness, sonship, Law and grace, union with Christ, or life in the Spirit. The basis of salvation is not the perfection of our theology. The basis is Christ.

A newborn child is fully alive while still being immature. Likewise, a believer may genuinely possess Life while still needing years of growth in understanding what Christ has accomplished. The answer is not contempt. The answer is teaching, growth, patience, Scripture, and knowing Jesus.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

A story from my own life helps illustrate this distinction.

I was raised in a deeply devoted Catholic home. Both of my parents were serious Catholics who instilled their faith into family life from the beginning. I was baptized as an infant. Church was woven into the rhythm of the home. The family attended Mass at least weekly and often more. I attended private Catholic schools through junior high, received religious instruction, went through the sacraments, studied catechism, and heard more sermons and homilies than I could count—well over a thousand, I estimate.

Yet in my own experience, I never understood the Gospel clearly. Religion surrounded me. But the good news of what Jesus had actually accomplished was never explained in a way that became clear to me. By sixteen I had largely lost interest in church and God, and by my early twenties I had stopped attending.

Some family members later began attending Protestant churches, and I joined them from time to time. Yet after hearing many more sermons, I still felt that something essential remained missing. Then,

in my mid-twenties, my brother and sister came to my home and shared Christ with me personally. That encounter was different. I genuinely came to Christ. I became a Christian.

I began attending a Protestant church regularly and, for the first time, personally reading and studying Scripture. God's Word came alive to me. Yet I still did not understand it. I had a library of commentaries I would labor in to help guide me through the Scriptures. My faith grew. I began serving in my Protestant church. I later became a deacon, then an elder. I started a home Bible study that eventually grew into a church. I pursued more formal Bible training. I attended well over a hundred pastoral conferences and seminars. Eventually I was ordained as a pastor and planted a church.

I knew Jesus. I loved Jesus. I sincerely served Jesus and led many to Christ. And yet, remarkably, I still did not fully understand the Gospel. My salvation was real. My understanding was still growing.

Then one day I heard a pastor teaching from a different Protestant church on the radio—a man I had never met, never heard of. As I listened, something finally became clear. The Gospel was not merely that Jesus had done something wonderful and now Christians had to spend the rest of their lives maintaining the relationship through religious performance. I saw that through Christ's death the sin issue had been dealt with; through His burial the old life had been brought to its end; through His resurrection Christ had risen to give new Life.

The truth of complete forgiveness through the crucifixion—and that salvation comes through receiving the risen Christ—was not something I had taught as a pastor. I had taught that sins still needed to be confessed in order to be forgiven and that salvation simply meant believing in Jesus. Nor had I ever heard another pastor publicly express what I now clearly understood. Every pastor I knew taught some basic version of what I had taught. I had never heard anyone teach that the sin issue for the entire world had already been resolved through the death of Christ. I struggled with this truth for years—not because I was struggling with the Lord, but because I was struggling with what I had been taught by godly men I respected. I prayed, searched the Scriptures, and wrestled honestly with the implications. Yet the more I studied, the more the Lord continually confirmed this Gospel to me. The change was not that I became saved a second time. I was already a Christian pastor. The change was in my understanding of why I was saved and what Jesus had actually accomplished. Religion had given me Jesus and duty. The Gospel gave me freedom.

Today I can look back and recognize that God was faithfully leading me throughout the process. My testimony is not an argument that every Catholic parish or every Protestant church teaches the same thing. It is my story. It shows that a person can sincerely know Christ while still carrying an incomplete understanding of the Gospel. And it shows why we must distinguish spiritual Life from theological maturity.

Four Categories We Must Not Confuse

1. **Incomplete understanding.** A person may believe in Jesus while understanding only part of what He accomplished. That person needs truth, patience, and room to learn. Incomplete

understanding is not something to preserve. But neither is it proof that the believer consciously rejected Christ.

2. **Immature Christian living.** A born-again believer may know salvation is by grace yet instinctively return to rules, fear, self-effort, and church expectations. Old patterns of thought remain powerful. Under pressure, the believer may try to earn what God already gave. The answer is not condemnation. The answer is growth in Christ.
3. **Another gospel.** A message becomes another gospel when it makes a religious condition necessary to obtain or maintain what Christ accomplished. For Galatia: circumcision and Moses. For a modern believer: repeated acts required to regain forgiveness, human mediation, religious merit, performance required to maintain acceptance. Whatever form it takes, the message says Christ is necessary—but not sufficient. That is no longer merely incomplete understanding. It contradicts grace.
4. **Unbelief.** Unbelief refuses Christ and the Life found in Him. But we should remain humble concerning individuals. We cannot always see the heart, the degree of understanding, every motive, or the precise point at which God recognizes spiritual birth. Salvation judgment belongs to God. We evaluate the message by the Gospel. We entrust the person to God.

When Is the Line Crossed?

A believer may struggle to understand complete forgiveness. A teacher crosses the line when he teaches, “You must perform this act so God will forgive you again.” A believer may return instinctively to rules because he is afraid. A system crosses the line when Law or religious performance becomes the governing basis of Christian standing. A believer may ask his pastor for help. A church crosses the line when the pastor becomes the functional mediator necessary to restore access to God.

A believer may not understand the distinction between forgiveness and salvation. A message remains seriously incomplete when it never announces restored Life through the risen Christ and leaves people with only a cleared record and no understanding of new birth.

The issue is not perfect theological vocabulary. The issue is whether Christ’s work is treated as sufficient. Jesus plus anything required to complete, maintain, or reactivate His accomplishment is not an improved Gospel. It is a different one.

Patience With Learners—Resistance Toward Bondage

Grace teaches us how to treat people. We should not shame believers because they are still untangling years of religious teaching. We answer. We listen. We remain available. We do not demand that someone understand in one week what took us years to understand.

But patience with learners does not require silence toward teachers who impose bondage. There is a difference between, “I am trying to understand,” and “You must do this or God will not accept you.” There is a difference between someone falling back into fear and a system deliberately using fear to keep people dependent. Paul’s severe warning is directed toward the distortion of the Gospel. Teachers

carry responsibility because teaching shapes how people believe God relates to them. Love for people requires clarity about the message.

The Direction of Maturity

Maturity does not simply mean more religious information. A person can memorize the procedures of a church and know Jesus no better. A believer can master denominational vocabulary while remaining terrified of God.

True Gospel growth moves toward greater confidence in Christ: from fear toward peace; from repeated attempts to obtain forgiveness toward rest in complete forgiveness; from external religious dependence toward the Life God supplies; from dependence upon human mediation toward direct reliance upon Jesus; from merely knowing facts about God toward knowing Him.

This does not produce indifference toward sin. The Spirit does not lead us into sin. But transformation happens within a relationship Christ already secured—not through the continual threat of rejection. Grace gives people room to grow. But grace never gives us permission to make Christ insufficient.

Part Seven — The Weight of the Addition

Why The Language Is This Severe

Paul has already called the message a different gospel. Now his language becomes stronger. He repeats the warning: “*even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than the one you received, let him be accursed*” (Galatians 1:8–9).

Even Paul himself could not change the Gospel. Even an angel from heaven could not authorize another one. Position cannot change truth. Spiritual experience cannot change truth. Popularity cannot change truth. Sincerity cannot change truth. No teacher gets permission to make Christ insufficient.

The word *accursed* must retain its severity. Paul places the proclamation of *another gospel* beneath divine judgment. We should not reduce that to, “Paul strongly disagreed.” But neither should we carelessly pronounce final eternal judgment on every confused person. God knows individual hearts. Paul’s warning nevertheless stands objectively: a message that contradicts the Gospel is not harmless.

Why Adding Law Is Not a Small Adjustment

The full argument about the purpose, curse, and duration of the Law belongs to Booklet Five. We need only enough here to see why the addition is not harmless.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”

Galatians 3:10, NKJV

Law does not establish righteousness through sincere effort, majority obedience, progress, or being better than someone else. It demands obedience. If Law becomes the basis of standing, humanity cannot rewrite the standard into a manageable list. People often reduce religious performance to the areas in which they think they can succeed—attendance, giving, clothing, diet, days, disciplines, approved behaviors. Then spirituality becomes measurable. The instrument that reveals human need cannot be turned into the system by which believers are expected to create Life after receiving Christ.

We do not send people into slavery so they can learn how beautiful freedom is. We proclaim Christ. And we do not treat the Spirit as mere power for the old project—as though Jesus, the Cross, and the Spirit were given so flesh could finally succeed under Moses. Booklet Five and Booklet Nine will carry that argument. The point here is simpler. The addition points people backward. Performance religion tends to produce pride or condemnation. Both remain focused on self. Christ redeems from the curse. The different gospel moves people back toward it. That is why Paul’s language is severe.

Can You Persuade God?

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

Galatians 1:10, NKJV

TEXT AND APPLICATION

Paul's direct point concerns human approval. He will not change the Gospel to please people. The wording also gives us a useful pastoral question: Have we turned our relationship with God into an attempt to persuade Him? That is an application of Paul's wording—not the exclusive lexical meaning of the verse—and we should keep that distinction clear.

Kindness is not compromise. Listening is not weakness. Pursuing peace is not cowardice. But when human approval requires changing the Gospel, a servant of Christ cannot let approval govern the message.

What Do You Do After Failure?

What happens when I believe God still holds my sins against me? I fail. Now I need God's attitude toward me to change. So, I confess, promise, pray harder, fast, give, serve, feel guilty, perhaps punish myself emotionally, perhaps seek a pastor. The activities may appear spiritual. The underlying belief may be: I need to make God favorable again. That is negotiation. The Gospel sets us free from living that way. You do not need to persuade the God who gave His Son.

This question exposes our practical theology: After I fail, what do I believe must happen before God will again receive me favorably? Do I need to remember every sin, produce sufficient sorrow, make a promise, get pastoral prayer, perform good works to compensate, wait until I feel forgiven?

Those actions may have healthy forms. Confession can be honesty with our Father. Repentance can mean a genuine change of mind. Pastors can pray and counsel. Serving is good. Generosity is good. The question is whether these are expressions within a secure relationship—or payments offered to restore it. The outward activity can look identical. The Gospel underneath can be completely different.

Prayer Is Not Leverage

Prayer is conversation with God. We bring Him needs, pain, fear, questions, desires. We ask Him to act. There is nothing wrong with asking. But prayer becomes distorted when it is treated as leverage: I need to get spiritually clean before God will hear me; I need more people praying so God will become more willing; I need greater intensity, more fasting, a larger sacrifice, a special formula.

Sometimes Christians say, "We need to move the hand of God." That phrase can suggest a reluctant God whose disposition must be overcome. But the Father acted before we persuaded Him. The Cross was His idea. Relational prayer does not purchase God's attention. It speaks honestly to the Father whose heart toward us was already demonstrated in Christ.

Obedience Is Not Payment

Performance religion can create a subtle debt system. If I obey, God should bless me. If I give, God should provide more. If I serve, God should protect me. If I clean up, God should answer my prayer. Obedience becomes currency. But obedience is not payment for love. Repentance is not payment for acceptance. Service is not payment for significance. Giving is not payment for favor. Prayer is not payment for divine intervention.

Grace is not “Do as much as you can, and Jesus makes up the difference.” That still leaves human effort as the foundation. Maturity is not becoming so successful that we need less grace. Maturity is growing in our understanding of how completely we depend upon Christ.

Live From Acceptance

The Gospel reverses the direction. We do not obey so God will love us. We obey because He loves us. We do not confess so the Cross becomes effective again. We speak honestly because the relationship is secure. We do not pray to overcome divine reluctance. We pray to the Father who gave His Son. We do not serve in order to become significant. We serve from the Life we received. We do not submit to a pastor so he can maintain our access to God. We receive pastoral help while depending upon Jesus.

This does not reduce obedience. It changes its source. Fear can produce behavior. Shame can pressure conformity. Human approval can manufacture impressive religion. None of those can produce the Life of Christ. After I understood the finished work more clearly, that was my discovery—not that I now had nothing to do, but that I no longer had to do things in order to persuade God to accept me.

Pastors Are Servants, Not Mediators

A pastor should teach, pray, encourage, warn, correct, comfort, and walk with suffering people. Those are sacred acts of service. But a pastor does not restore the believer’s acceptance with God. He cannot reopen forgiveness. He cannot make God listen. He cannot repair Christ’s mediation. Jesus is the Mediator. A healthy pastor asks: Am I helping this person depend more fully upon Jesus—or making this person dependent upon me?

You Are Free to Know Him

People may misunderstand complete forgiveness. They may think you are soft on sin, that you do not believe obedience matters, that you are promoting carelessness. Do not answer misunderstanding with pride. Do not imagine rejection proves you are right. Do not despise believers whose understanding is still developing. Tell the truth. Love people. Pursue fellowship where truth permits it. But do not surrender Christ’s sufficiency to regain approval.

The Gospel frees us from continually managing God’s disposition. You do not have to persuade Him to forgive what Christ already carried. You do not need to make yourself worthy before you pray. You do not need a minister to reopen a door Jesus opened. You do not need to perform for love. You are free to know Him, trust Him, receive from Him, and walk with Him. That is where the other gospel fails most deeply. It keeps people occupied with managing God when Christ has invited them to know God.

Conclusion — Christ Is Enough

One Word Exposed the Crisis

Unless you do something. Unless you become something. Unless you maintain something. Unless you submit to something. Unless you complete, what Christ began. The different gospel does not usually remove Jesus. It adds something.

JESUS—AND.

Jesus and religious merit. Jesus and Law. Jesus and repeated forgiveness. Jesus and a human mediator. Jesus and a system that controls your access to God. The addition may sound biblical. It may be defended by sincere people. It may appear serious. But if something else becomes necessary to complete, maintain, restore, or reactivate what Christ accomplished, the message has said, Jesus is necessary—but not sufficient. That is not Paul's Gospel.

What Christ Finished

Humanity faced sin and death. Christ answered both. The Cross resolved the sin issue. The resurrection made possible restored Life. The Spirit brings the Life of Christ to those who believe. Complete forgiveness does not mean universal salvation. Forgiveness removes the sin barrier. Salvation is receiving the Life of the risen Christ.

The Gospel therefore cannot stop with, “Jesus died.” Christ rose. And because He lives, we may live. Everything necessary for spiritually dead humanity to receive His Life was accomplished through Christ. Nothing remains for Law to complete. Nothing remains for human merit to purchase. Nothing remains for a pastor to activate. Jesus is not merely necessary. Jesus is sufficient.

Stop Rebuilding the Barrier

Religion continually rebuilds what Christ removed. You sinned—now God is distant again. You failed—now fellowship is broken. You stumbled—now divine acceptance has weakened. Perform the proper act—and God may receive you again. That creates an endless spiritual cycle.

But Christ does not return to the Cross every time you fail. God does not alternate between imputing and not imputing your sins according to today's performance. The sacrifice stands complete. That changes the meaning of spiritual practices. Prayer is no longer leverage. It is conversation. Confession is not payment for forgiveness. It is honesty. Repentance is not payment for acceptance. It is turning from what is destructive. Obedience is not performed so God will love us. It grows from the knowledge that He already does.

No Other Mediator

A church building can be useful. A platform is not an altar in the former sense. A pastor can shepherd faithfully. He is not the believer's mediator. An institution can organize fellowship, teaching, mission,

and service. It cannot complete Christ. All these things may have a proper place. They cannot take His place. Jesus is the Mediator. Jesus brought us near. Jesus gives Life. Jesus is enough.

Freedom For Relationship

The goal is not merely freedom from Law, from religious pressure, or from controlling systems. The goal is knowing Jesus. You are free to believe His work is sufficient. Free to receive the Life of the risen Christ. Free to rest in complete forgiveness. Free to approach God without trying to earn access. Free to know His love. Free to grow. Free to serve. Free to obey from a new source.

Rest does not mean passivity. It means active trust. Grace should never make us proud that we understand something another believer does not. If Christ accomplished everything necessary, there is no room for boasting. Grace produces gratitude toward God, patience toward growing believers, courage toward false teaching, and dependence upon Christ. Jesus remains the hero.

The Question That Opens Booklet Two

The Gospel does not invite you to spend your Christian life completing what Jesus left unfinished. It announces that He finished the work necessary for you to receive His Life, know His Father, rest in His love, and walk with Him personally. You do not have to persuade the God who gave His Son. You do not have to keep the sin issue alive. You may come through Christ.

CHRIST IS ENOUGH.

But now a new question becomes unavoidable. If Paul's Gospel differed from the religious messages being promoted by respected leaders—where did Paul receive it?

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:11–12, NKJV

That is where Booklet Two begins. Not from men.