

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

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

Who were these people that Paul denounced so strongly? And what was the essence of their “gospel” that made it a distortion of the true gospel? First of all Paul says that the Galatians, in accepting this false teaching, were deserting the God who called them by the grace of Christ (*Gal 1:6*). Grace is unmerited favor. The favor of God towards us cannot be merited by anything we can do. The true gospel is in its essence “the gospel of the grace of God” (*Acts 20:24*). Nothing is due to our efforts, merits, or works; everything in salvation is due to the grace of God—“And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (*Rom 11:6*).

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

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

As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature (*Gal 6:12-15*).

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain (*Gal 4:9-11*).

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

The false teachers did not deny that you must believe in Jesus for salvation, but they stressed that you must be circumcised and keep the law as well. In other words, you must let Moses finish what Christ has begun. You must add your works to Christ, and thus finish Christ’s unfinished work. But Paul denounces this in no uncertain terms because it is adding human merit to the merit of Christ. It is faith in Christ plus human works. Paul says this is perverting the gospel of the grace of God.

The Greek word translated “pervert” or “distort” can mean “reverse” (*1:7*). These false teachers were reversing the gospel by radically changing its character. They were presenting a totally different gospel from that which God had given; and if a person believed this false gospel he would believe a lie and would perish eternally.

Consequently a divine curse, an anathema, was called down upon these Judaizers and their teaching. By contrast, the true gospel is the gospel of the grace of God, whereby a man is justified before God and accepted by him solely on the merits of the life and death of Jesus Christ, apart from any human works of merit; and this is received by faith alone.

Paul sets forth the truth of the gospel in Galatians 2:11-16. What is this truth? It is the good news that sinners, guilty and under the judgment of God, may be pardoned and accepted by his grace alone, his free and unmerited favor, on the basis of the death of Christ, and not for any works or merits of their own. The Judaizers, however, were totally perverting this teaching of grace by adding human works.

They were teaching Jesus plus Judaism, not Jesus alone. The Judaizers could not accept the principle of “faith alone.” They were insisting that we must contribute something to our salvation. They were adding “the works of the law” to faith in Christ as necessary for our acceptance with God. They were teaching basically that we must become a Jew, be circumcised, and obey the law of Moses.

To fully understand how the Judaizers’ teachings perverted the gospel, and how these teachings specifically relate to the teachings of Roman Catholicism, it is essential that we understand some of the details of the Temple worship of the Jewish religion. The Temple was an exact replica of the Tabernacle the Jews used for worship in the wilderness except that the Temple was stationary and exactly double the size of the Tabernacle. Exodus chapters

26 to 30 give a detailed description of the Tabernacle, of the articles it contained, and of the worship conducted by the priests and high priest. The Book of Leviticus and Hebrews 9:1-9 also give further details of the Tabernacle worship and all that it involved.

The Tabernacle was an oblong rectangular structure...divided internally into two apartments. One was the Holy of Holies into which no one entered, not even the priest except on very extraordinary occasions...In this was the ark of the covenant containing the tables of the law on which was placed the mercy seat, surmounted by the cherubim. In front of these was an outer chamber called the Holy Place...appropriated to the use of the priests. In it were the golden candlestick on one side, the table of shewbread opposite and between them in the center the altar of incense.

The court of the Tabernacle was surrounded by canvas screens...In the outer half was placed the altar of burnt offering and between it and the tabernacle the laver at which the priests washed their hands and feet on entering the Tabernacle (*Smith’s Bible Dictionary*).

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

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

In his *Question and Answer Catholic Catechism*, John Hardon S.J. teaches on the nature of salvation:

412. Is the Church necessary for salvation?

Yes, the Church is necessary for salvation.

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

No, we must also keep his Commandments. As Christ himself told us, “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments” (*Mat 19:17*).

493. How do we keep the Commandments of God?

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

1119. Are the sacraments necessary for salvation?

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

1074. What is habitual or sanctifying grace?

Habitual or sanctifying grace is a supernatural quality that dwells in the human soul, by which a person shares in the divine nature, becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, a friend of God, his adopted child, an heir to the glory of heaven and *able to perform actions meriting eternal life* [emphasis added].

1179. Is baptism of water necessary for salvation?

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

1217. Is the Eucharist necessary for salvation?

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

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

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

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

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

Did Paul consider the Judaisers true Christians? Absolutely not! They were perverting the gospel and leading men into perdition. Is Roman Catholicism truly Christian? On the basis of all that it teaches contrary to the Bible, and in view of the fact that it is in effect a modern-day Judaizing system, the answer is absolutely not! Catholicism's teaching on salvation, and therefore its gospel, is essentially what Paul condemns and upon which he pronounces a curse!

The apostle said those who received the teaching of the Judaisers deserted the gospel, even so do those who adhere to Roman Catholic teaching. Paul said that even if an angel from heaven were to preach the gospel of the Judaisers he should be rejected and accursed. These are severe words, but it is God the Holy Spirit who has inspired them!

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

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

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

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

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

Yet the scribes and Pharisees were not insincere. They were zealous about their religious and moral life. But their worship was in vain. It profited them nothing. It did not bring them to God. Why? They elevated the teachings of men above the truth of God's Word. They distorted and misinterpreted what God had said.

Roman Catholicism's teaching on salvation contradicts the Bible. It elevates the traditions of men to a position above the Word of God. To adhere to such teaching is to come under the judgment which Jesus spoke against the scribes and Pharisees. It is to worship God in vain.

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

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

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

—Adapted from the writings of William Webster

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

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

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

Although the Scriptures are so clear on this subject, it is a stumbling-block and foolishness to the great body of those who hear the gospel. It offends their pride to be put upon a level with the outcasts of society; surely, they think, some difference will be made; but they err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor understanding the malignity of sin or the grace of God.

They view salvation as a kind of bargain which God proposes to make with his creatures, that on certain conditions he will accept them; while in fact it is the message of reconciliation, equally addressed to all mankind, declaring that a full atonement for sin has been made upon the cross, and inviting every sinner of Adam's race instantly to approach God through Christ.

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

While the gospel is preached freely to all, it is "the power of God unto salvation" only to those who believe (*Rom 1:16*). But it is vain to talk of being justified by Christ's righteousness, unless our hearts are "purified by faith" (*Acts 15:9*). We may profess faith in Jesus while we are slaves to sin; we may deceive ourselves, and affirm that we are trusting in Christ while we are living after the flesh; but every branch in the vine that beareth not fruit shall be cast into the fire (*Matt 3:10; John 15:2*).

If we believe Christ's gospel, it will effectually work in our hearts (*1 Thess 2:13*), and teach us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (*Titus 2:11-12*); and if what we believe does not produce this effect, it is not the true grace of God in which we stand. We are deceived. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (*Gal 5:24*). □

ROMAN CATHOLICISM, the JUDAISERS, and the BOOK OF GALATIANS

The Roman Catholic Church teachings on the Mass, the Priesthood, Confession, Penance, the Eucharist, and Baptism all combine to form a system of salvation. The church claims that if men and woman will be baptized in the Catholic Church and adhere to its teachings in these areas, it can lead them in the path of salvation.

In Roman Catholic teaching, Baptism, the Mass, the Priesthood, Confession, Penance, and the Eucharist are all necessary for salvation.

However, there is a huge contrast between the teaching of the Roman Church and the teaching of the Bible. This alone is enough to disqualify the Roman Catholic Church from being a truly Christian church able to direct men in the path of salvation, for the prophet Isaiah says, "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (*Isaiah 8:20*).

Because the teaching of Rome contradicts the teaching of the Word of God on the true way of salvation, we can say conclusively that the Roman Catholic Church teaches a false gospel and a false way of salvation. This can be clearly seen from Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Galatians contains some very strong language. It is a letter of warning and of judgment. Its main theme is the gospel of Christ; its main intent is to defend that gospel from the perversions of false teachers.

Certain men who came into the life of the Galatian church had begun to teach errors about the way of salvation, and to spread a false gospel. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and with intense emotion and indignation, Paul writes a letter in which he defends the true gospel, exposes the error of the false teachers, and utters a divine curse against anyone who distorts the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel which these false teachers espoused is essentially identical which the Roman Catholic teaching on salvation. How can this be demonstrated? Paul begins his letter by clearly defining his concern:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which