

The Judaizers demand – all Christians should keep the total law of Moses

The 'Judaizers' in Galatia were saying that it was not really possible to be blessed by God unless the would-be Christian totally embraced the law of Moses. By 'Judaizers' I mean the people who wanted all the Christians to become Jewish Christians. True salvation, they said, means being part of the seed of Abraham. But this, they said, was a very physical and cultural matter. Being a member of the 'seed of Abraham' involved circumcision and the keeping of the total Mosaic law. So these 'Judaizers' wanted to come into Paul's churches and persuade all the believers to be circumcised and to adopt Jewish ways. The Mosaic law made obligatory certain festival days, and so these had to be kept, with everything else that was to be found in the Mosaic law. The Judaizers criticized Paul and said he did not have anything like the authority of the Jerusalem church-leaders, who, they said, supported their teaching. Paul could be allowed perhaps to be a junior worker in the Jerusalem-controlled church at Antioch but he had developed some ideas of his own and was corrupting the true gospel from Jerusalem! So they said! Paul was preaching a kind of 'easy believism', they claimed, which avoided the Mosaic law and made the gospel too easy.

1. The appeal of legalism to true Christians

1. True Christian people are often tempted to listen when someone tries to impose what seems to be a higher kind of holiness. Paul says, *'I am amazed that you are so quickly moving away from him who called you in grace¹ and you are turning to a different so-called "gospel"². This so-called "gospel" is not another gospel at all, but there are some people who are confusing you, and want to pervert the gospel of Christ².* The Judaizers were very convincing. Christians fall into legalism quite easily! So the Judaizers were having a strong impact upon the churches in Galatia. The reason why we fall into legalism easily is because the true Christian is very interested in living a godly life. When something comes along and seems to offer a higher kind of holiness, we are easily drawn to it.

☞¹ 1:6

☞² 1:7

2. The Judaizers' so called gospel denounced

2. But any gospel other than the gospel of God's grace is under a curse. Paul will not tolerate the Judaizers. He is an inspired apostle. The gospel of Jesus is a matter of salvation by faith in Jesus; it does not require anyone to become Jewish. The Mosaic law was a temporary measure in the preparation of the gospel. Its shadows have passed away. Its morality has been outclassed and overtaken by the much superior commands of Jesus and His apostles.

• **The worst kind of false teaching**

A so-called gospel that wants to teach salvation or sanctification by the Mosaic law is simply the worst kind of false teaching, and is not the gospel at all. Paul proceeds to denounce any such 'gospel' altogether. So serious is this matter, Paul curses any message that takes a different approach at this point. *'Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any gospel other than that which we did preach to you, let him be accursed!¹. As we have said before, so say I now again, if any person is preaching to you any gospel other than the one you received, let him be accursed'².* Paul will not regard this as a small matter. It is not the kind of disagreement where he will say 'Let everyone be convinced in his own mind' (as he does with a less important matter in Romans 14:5). It is not some small kind of doctrinal weakness. Salvation and sanctification by grace, only through faith in Jesus, is the essence of the gospel. Mosaic law-keeping does not come into it at all.

☞¹ 1:8

☞² 1:9

• **Salvation & sanctification by grace and only through faith in Jesus**

• **Anything that twists the gospel must come under God's judgement**

Paul pronounces God's judgement upon any false teaching and upon the messenger who brings it! It is not that Paul is being vindictive or hateful to his enemies in Galatia. It is simply that anything that twists the gospel must come under the judgement of God. Paul includes himself. He includes the

angels. If somehow the time could come when he himself would be preaching something different from the gospel of God's grace, then he curses himself! If it were somehow possible for an angel to preach a gospel, different from the gracious gospel Paul has preached, then Paul curses the angel! He is not losing his temper or speaking impatiently. He has said it before; he says it again. A gospel that brings in Mosaic legalism or anything like it is under the curse of God.

3. The gospel of grace must mean more to us than our reputation

• **Paul's strong language - to persuade people – not to bribe God**

• **“Softening the message to please the gentiles” – Paul answers his accusers**

• **Pleasing God is the most important thing**

• **Loyalty to the gospel is pleasing to God**

3. The gospel of grace must mean more to us than our reputation.

Paul's next words look back on what he has just said. 'Am I now trying to persuade other people or am I trying to persuade God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I should not be a servant of Christ' ¹. He has been speaking very forcefully. But why has he spoken in such a way? Is it just for reasons of persuasion? Or is he using strong language to persuade God? Sometimes people try to be spiritually impressive so as to persuade God of their spirituality! Is Paul doing that? Actually the Greek word here at times almost means 'bribe' (see its use in Acts 12:20 where 'having persuaded Blastus' refers to bribery; and note Matthew 28:14 where 'we will persuade him' refers again to bribery). Is Paul using strong talk as a kind of super-spiritual language that will impress – or even bribe – God? Or is he really wanting to persuade people? Is he boosting his reputation?

Or does he have his eye on what people think of him? It seems that Paul's enemies accused him of trying to soften the gospel in order to win gentiles. They said: 'He preaches an easy gospel, leaving out the tough bits in order to please the gentiles.' But Paul deliberately calls attention to the severity of his words in 1:8–9. The way in which he has spoken shows that Paul is not so interested in making friends and influencing people that he would avoid anything that displeased them. Not at all! If any person is preaching any other gospel, let such a person be accursed! Paul says, 'Surely the fact that I should speak in such a way ought to convince you that I am not so eager to please people that I will change the gospel to please them.' He wants to convince them to take action against the Judaizers. He is not trying to bribe God; he does not need to! Faith is sufficient to please God. It does not require super- spiritual language! And he is not trying to please anyone or make the gospel easier. If he did that God would be vexed with Paul. He is not bribing God; he is not trying to please other people. He is trying to persuade other people of the truth of the one-and-only gospel. And he is wanting to please God. Some things are more important than what people think of us. Loyalty to the gospel is one of them.

Note 1. Some manuscripts have 'grace of Christ', others have 'of Jesus Christ'; others have 'of God'. The original seems to have been simply 'in grace' (as in other manuscripts), but scribes added some words of their own.

1:10

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