

How a Church Almost Lost the Gospel

THE GOSPEL, PART 1 · GALATIANS INTRODUCTION · BIBLE STUDY

Galatians (Introduction) | Arvin Assembly of God | Pastor Brian Overturf | Teaching Notes

The Big Question (from Sunday's sermon)

The Question: What would you fight to protect?

The Answer (the three points): The gospel of grace. Paul shows us a church that had it **PLANTED**, preached free and received by faith; then had it **THREATENED**, "Jesus... plus" circumcision and law; and then had it **DEFENDED**, by a man who would sooner curse an angel than watch grace get traded away.

This is the first of two introductory studies before we begin verse-by-verse. These notes are foundational: the history, the occasion, and the scholars who help us understand.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this study, you will be able to...

- 1 Explain how Paul and James are in harmony rather than in conflict: that they answer different questions and use "faith," "works," and "justify" in different senses, so that we are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that stays alone.
- 2 Recount how and when Paul planted the Galatian churches (the first missionary journey through South Galatia, Acts 13-14), and the gospel he preached there: justified by faith, not by the law.
- 3 Explain that the coming of the Gentiles was not "plan B," but the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:3) finally kept; God always meant to have one multiethnic family through faith.
- 4 Identify the exact teaching that threatened the churches, "Jesus plus" circumcision and the law (Acts 15:1), and say why adding to grace makes it a different gospel, not a stronger one.
- 5 Explain from Galatians 5:4 what it means to "fall from grace," and describe how this can happen by quiet addition rather than open denial.
- 6 Describe the lengths Paul went to in defending the gospel (the missing thanksgiving, the double curse, confronting Peter), and why he refused to give an inch (Gal. 2:21, "Christ died in vain").
- 7 Name one place in your own walk where a "mortgage" has crept back onto grace, and commit to guarding the gospel there this week.

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Setting the Stage (Context is King)

Galatians is most likely the first letter Paul ever wrote, around AD 48, to the churches of South Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe) that he and Barnabas founded on the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). He preached one thing there: you are justified by faith in Christ, not by the works of the law. Then he left. And while he was gone, teachers came in behind him and added a requirement: faith in Christ, plus circumcision, plus the law of Moses. That one little concept “plus” is the whole fight. When Paul found out the churches he planted were signing back up for slavery, he skipped his usual thanksgiving and wrote the sharpest letter in the New Testament.

Insight: Notice how the sermon frames it: James showed us the fruit (faith and works); Paul shows us the root (faith and grace). Same gospel, two sides of one coin. Paul and James are not at war: one says faith proves itself by works, the other says faith receives what only grace can give.

FROM THE SERMON

Most of us understand the concept of earning. Nobody hands you a paycheck for work you did not do. You have to show up, you have to put in the hours, you have to do the job, and you earn what you take home. That is good. That is how a job is supposed to work.

But when it comes to Christianity, there is one thing in your life that you did not earn, and you can never earn it. No matter how many hours you put in, you could not pay for this if you worked a hundred lifetimes: it is the grace of God that has been offered to you. Jesus went to the cross for you while you were yet a sinner, and He handed you a righteousness that you did not lift a single finger to deserve. The moment you start trying to earn your relationship with God, you have traded grace for a paycheck. And a gospel that you have to earn is no gospel whatsoever.

Goes Deeper: Paul and James Are Not at War

Because we just finished James, it is worth settling this before we start, because it is not a new question and it is not a small one. James says faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:26); Paul says a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law (Rom. 3:28). Put side by side they sound like a contradiction, and the church has felt the tension for centuries. Voltaire seized on it to sneer that the Scriptures contradict themselves. Luther felt the difficulty so sharply that early on he doubted whether James even belonged in the Bible, though he later changed his mind. So this is worth slowing down for.

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Here is the key to understand it: Paul and James are not answering the same question, and they are not even using the same words in the same way. James asks, “What does living faith look like?” Paul asks, “How does a sinner get in in the first place?” Paul is standing at the front door of the Christian life; James is standing at the back, looking at the fruit. When you see that, the war disappears.

They were fighting opposite problems

Paul is up against people trying to earn their way in by works of the law; James is up against people who claimed faith but lived like the world and called it Christianity. Same coin, two opposite edges. Both men are defending the very same faith, from two different attacks.

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Matthew Henry Commentary, on James 2	“Both are concerned to magnify the faith of the gospel, as that which alone could save us and justify us; but Paul magnifies it by showing the insufficiency of any works of the law before faith, or in opposition to the doctrine of justification by Jesus Christ; James magnifies the same faith, by showing what are the genuine and necessary products and operations of it.”
Moo (PNTC) The Letter of James, on 2:14-26	“Against an overemphasis on works, Paul highlights faith as the sole instrument of justification. James, on the other hand, is combating an underemphasis on works, a quietistic attitude that turned faith into mere doctrinal orthodoxy. Against this perversion of faith, James is forced to assert the importance of works.”

They use the same words in different senses (“works,” “justify,” even the little word “by”)

This is where most of the confusion clears. When Paul says “works” he means anything a person does to earn standing with God before conversion; when James says “works” he means the fruit that a real faith produces after conversion. And when Paul says “justify” he means God declaring a sinner right the moment he believes; when James says “justify” he means a person’s life is vindicated as genuine on the final day of judgment. Same vocabulary, different dictionaries.

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Moo (PNTC) The Letter of James, on “works”	“Thus it would seem that both Paul and James are operating with an understanding of ‘works’ that is basically similar: anything done that is in obedience to God and in the service of God. The difference between Paul and James consists in the sequence of works and conversion: Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works.”

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Moo (PNTC)The Letter of James, on
“justify”

“Paul, for instance, in contrast to Judaism (and to James), often insists that a person can be justified before God the moment that he or she believes. James, on the other hand, focuses on what we might call ‘final’ justification, God’s vindication of a person on the day of judgment.”

Dowd (via Moo)

on James and Paul

“James is using Paul’s vocabulary, but not his dictionary.”

So they are complementary, not contradictory

Put it all together and the two are not enemies but partners. Faith alone brings you in; but the faith that brings you in is never alone, it always goes to work. That is the whole point: we are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that stays alone.

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Moo (PNTC) The Letter of James, conclusion	“At the theological level, then, we think that Paul and James are complementary rather than contradictory. Faith alone brings one into relationship with God in Christ—but true faith inevitably generates the works that God will take into account in his final decision about the fate of men and women.”
Moo (BECNT) Galatians, on faith & works	“On this point Paul and James are in total agreement. True faith and works cannot be separated; but they also must be distinguished from one another. Faith is the disposition of the will necessary for works to be done in a way pleasing to God; but faith does not include those works in itself.”

Insight: Here is the simple answer: Paul and James are not two witnesses giving conflicting testimony; they are one gospel seen from two ends. Paul guards the door (you get in by grace through faith, nothing added). James guards the house (the faith that got you in will show up in how you live). Deny either one and you lose the gospel, either to legalism or to a dead, do-nothing “faith.”

FROM THE SERMON

James was all about what happens after you are saved. The apostle Paul is all about how you get into the family of God in the first place. James was showing us the fruit of a life that is saved; Paul is going to show us the root. James shows us what faith looks like once you are in. Paul is going to say, this is how you get in, this is how you become born again. And the answer is grace.

No matter which way we look at it, there is no fight between Paul and the book of James. They are standing on the same ground, looking at the same gospel. They are just pointing at two different things. James says faith proves itself by works, and Paul says faith receives what only grace can give. It is the same message. It is the same gospel. It is two sides of the same coin.

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Goes Deeper: North or South Galatia? (Why We Land on South)

A quick transparency note, because good study discloses the debate instead of hiding it. When Paul writes to “the churches of Galatia,” scholars are not fully agreed on which Galatia he means, and it is worth knowing why. In Paul’s day the word “Galatia” could point to two different things. It could mean an ethnic region in the north-central part of Asia Minor, settled centuries earlier by Celtic tribes (the Gauls), with cities like Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium. Or it could mean the larger Roman province of Galatia, which by the first century also swept south to include the cities Paul evangelized on his first missionary journey: Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

Those two meanings give us two hypotheses. The North Galatian view (the older view, defended by J. B. Lightfoot) says Paul wrote to churches among the ethnic Gauls in the north, which pushes the letter later, to the third missionary journey, around AD 55–56. The South Galatian view (defended by William Ramsay and popularized by F. F. Bruce) says Paul wrote to the churches of Acts 13–14 in the southern part of the province, which allows the early date of about AD 48, possibly making Galatians the first letter Paul ever wrote. We land with the South, and so do our sources, but the debate is real and the terms themselves do not settle it.

The two hypotheses, in the scholars’ words

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Moo (BECNT) Introduction, “Destination”	“The name Galatai (Galatians) originally referred to a group of Celtic people from Gaul who migrated into Anatolia in central Asia Minor in the third century BC. ... In Paul’s day, then, ‘Galatia’ had both an ethnic/geographical and a political/geographical referent.”
Moo (BECNT) Introduction, the North theory	“The classic ‘North Galatian’ theory holds that Paul wrote to ethnic Galatia, with its key cities Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium, sometime during the third missionary journey (perhaps around AD 55–56). This North Galatian view was defended by Lightfoot in his classic commentary and is still widely held, especially by German scholars.”
Moo (BECNT) Introduction, the South theory	“Because the churches of the first missionary journey are located in the southern part of provincial Galatia, this view of the destination and date of Galatians has become known as the ‘South Galatian’ theory. This understanding of the destination and date of Galatians was vigorously defended by William Ramsay and popularized by F. F. Bruce.”

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Why we side with South

Three things tip it for us. First, Acts plainly narrates Paul planting the southern churches (Acts 13–14), while any mission to the ethnic north is only inferred from two vague travel notes (Acts 16:6; 18:23). Second, Paul talks about Barnabas as someone the readers know, and Barnabas was with him on the southern journey, not on any supposed northern trip. Third, the South reading gives us the early date that fits Paul's timeline in Galatians 1–2. None of this is airtight, and Moo is careful to say so, but the weight of the evidence leans south.

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Moo (BECNT) Introduction, on the evidence	“It appears, then, that evidence for a Pauline mission in South Galatia is explicit and unquestioned; evidence for such a mission in North Galatia is uncertain.”
Moo (BECNT) Introduction (on Barnabas)	“The references to Barnabas in Galatians make best sense if they know him; and though Barnabas was with Paul when he evangelized the South Galatian cities, he was apparently not with Paul on the alleged visits to North Galatia.”
Moo (BECNT) Introduction, conclusion	“While, then, arguments about the meaning of ‘Galatia/Galatians’ are inconclusive, the probable movements of Paul and his companions slightly favor a South Galatian destination of the letter.”
Fire Bible (AG) “Background”	“Some believe that the Galatians were the Gauls in north-central Asia Minor (descended from those who invaded the area in the third century B.C.). But it is far more likely that Paul wrote this letter to churches in the southern region of the Roman province of Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe) that he and Barnabas had founded during their first missionary journey.”

Insight: Why this matters for us: the South reading is what lets us date Galatians around AD 48 and tie it straight to the church-planting story in Acts 13–14, which is the foundation of our whole first point (“The Gospel Planted”). But notice the good news even here: the message does not hang on winning this debate. Whether Paul wrote north or south, early or late, the gospel he defends is identical, grace through faith, apart from the works of the law. The address on the envelope may be debated; the letter inside is not.

Goes Deeper: The Occasion of the Letter

Every scholar agrees on the basic situation: Paul planted these churches on grace, agitators came in demanding circumcision and law, and Paul wrote to pull his converts back before it was too late.

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SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Moo (BECNT) Introduction, "Occasion"	"Omitting any thanksgiving for the Galatians, Paul immediately decries their flirtation with 'another gospel' (1:6–10). This counterfeit gospel is being propagated by false teachers who are 'confusing' the Gentile Galatians by insisting that their faith in Christ be supplemented by submission to circumcision and other elements of the Mosaic law."
Fire Bible (AG) "Purpose"	"Paul had learned that certain Jewish teachers were confusing and unsettling his new Christian converts in Galatia... by trying to impose on them the restrictions and requirements of the Mosaic law... The false teachers said that following such laws was a necessary requirement to be spiritually saved and included in the church."
Moo (BECNT) Introduction, "Date"	"Galatians, we conclude, was probably written in AD 48 just before the Apostolic Conference of Acts 15. It is the earliest extant letter of Paul."

1. The Gospel Planted

- ◆ **Objective 2:** Recount how and when Paul planted the Galatian churches (the first missionary journey through South Galatia, Acts 13–14), and the gospel he preached there: justified by faith, not by the law.
- ◆ **Objective 3:** Explain that the coming of the Gentiles was not "plan B," but the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:3) finally kept; God always meant to have one multiethnic family through faith.

Acts 13:38–39 (NKJV)

³⁸ Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; ³⁹ and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Years before this letter, Paul walked into Galatia a stranger and preached. And the very first time the gospel is heard in Galatia, the message is grace: everyone who believes is justified, not by the law of Moses, but by faith. That is the seed. It is the exact gospel Paul will spend six chapters defending. And it wasn't new; it was the oldest promise in the Bible made to Abraham, finally breaking open in their own town.

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FROM THE SERMON

I want you to really sit on this for a moment. The first time the gospel is preached in Galatia, Paul says that you are justified. Now that is a big word. It simply means that you have been made right with God, that God now looks at you just as if you had never sinned in the first place. It is being washed in the blood of the Lamb.

And Paul says you are justified by what? By believing. Not by the law of Moses, not by earning it. It is by faith, and faith alone, to everyone who believes. Now that is grace. That is the seed. And Paul planted this gospel message in Galatia, and he is going to spend six chapters defending it.

The scholars: where and when the churches were planted

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Fire Bible (AG) “Background”	“Paul wrote this letter to churches in the southern region of the Roman province of Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe) that he and Barnabas had founded during their first missionary journey (Ac 13–14)... written shortly after Paul finished that journey and returned to the church that commissioned him in Antioch of Syria.”
Moo (BECNT) Introduction	“The earliest that we find Paul in provincial Galatia is during the first missionary journey of Acts 13–14... the cities where Paul planted churches on this first missionary journey (Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, Derbe).”
BibleProject Overview	“Galatians was addressed to a number of churches in the region of Galatia, where Paul had traveled on one of his missionary journeys (Acts 13–14). He wrote this important letter from a place of deep passion as well as frustration.”

The scholars: the seed that was planted (justified by faith)

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
BibleProject on Gal. 2:16	“People are justified only through trusting what God did for them through Jesus — not by what they do for themselves... When God declares that someone is in a right relationship with him, it means that they’re forgiven, given a place in God’s family, and in the process of being transformed by God’s grace.”
Moo (BECNT) Introduction	“Paul argues that the justification that accompanies belonging to the ‘seed’ of Abraham is by faith, apart from torah observance.”
Fire Bible (AG) “Theme”	“Spiritual Salvation and Freedom by Grace Through Faith.”

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Goes Deeper: The Promise to Abraham (Not Plan B)

Watch what Paul does in that synagogue: when the door gets slammed, he reaches back and quotes Isaiah, “a light to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:47, quoting Isa. 49:6). The Gentiles coming in was never an improvisation. It was promised to Abraham two thousand years earlier (Gen. 12:3), written into the Servant’s mission in Isaiah, and preached to Abraham in advance in the gospel itself (Gal. 3:8). It is the destination of the whole Bible.

SCRIPTURE	THE PROMISE AND ITS FULFILLMENT
Genesis 12:3	...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.
Isaiah 49:6	...I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.
Acts 13:47	For so the Lord has commanded us: “I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.”
Galatians 3:8	And the Scripture... preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”
Acts 14:27	...they reported... that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

The scholars: the promise to Abraham

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Moo (BECNT) Galatians, Introduction	“Both letters give pride of place to Abraham in their portrayal of salvation history, focusing on his faith, his inclusive significance, and the contrast between the promise God gave him and the Mosaic law... God promised to bless the nations ‘in’ Abraham (3:8), and that blessing is now given to all who belong to Christ (3:14).”
BibleProject on Gal. 3	“Paul turns back to the stories about Abraham, recalling how he was justified... for simply having faith and trusting in God’s promise that one day all nations would find God’s blessing through him and his offspring (Gen. 15:6). God’s purpose was always to have one large, multiethnic family of people who relate to him on the basis of faith.”

The scholars: the Isaiah fulfillment (the Gentile mission was the plan)

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Schnabel (ZECNT) Acts, on 13:47	“Their proclamation of good news among the Gentiles fulfills God’s commission to his Servant in Isa 49:6, who was expected to restore Israel, to return the exiles to Israel, and to bring salvation to the nations... The missionary work of the followers of Jesus is a fulfillment of Scripture, particularly of Isa 49:6.”

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Schnabel (ZECNT)Acts, Theology in
Application

“The Gentile mission was not grounded in the rejection of the gospel by the Jews but in God’s plan, announced in Scripture, to bring salvation to the Gentiles (v. 47; 1:8).”

Bock (BECNT)

Acts, on 13:47

“One can compare the use of ‘servant’ in Luke-Acts to the use of ‘seed’ in Gen. 12:3 and Gal. 3, where it is about both Jesus and those incorporated into him... The goal of God’s plan of salvation is to take the message to the end of the earth, to extend it to all nations in every part of the world.”

Insight: This is the sermon’s “not plan B” in the scholars’ own words: the door to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27) was not opened because the Jews said no; it was opened because God said so (**a very important distinction**), back in Genesis 12 and Isaiah 49. And it cost Paul his own physical health to walk through it (stoned at Lystra, Acts 14:19).

FROM THE SERMON

I do not want you to hear this as something brand new that Paul thought up while he was on the road one day. This was not some invention. This was God’s plan from the very beginning. We have to go back to the very first book of the Bible, Genesis chapter 12, two thousand years before Paul ever set foot in Galatia. God made a promise to Abraham: in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

All of the families of the earth. Not just Israel. God said it to Abraham before there was ever a nation, before there was a temple, before there was a single commandment written in stone: the whole world was meant to be part of the family of God. Is that not what John saw in the book of Revelation? Every tribe and every tongue worshiping at the throne. The Bible begins with this truth, and it ends with this truth.

2. The Gospel Threatened

- ◆ **Objective 4:** Identify the exact teaching that threatened the churches, “Jesus plus” circumcision and the law (Acts 15:1), and say why adding to grace makes it a different gospel, not a stronger one.
- ◆ **Objective 5:** Explain from Galatians 5:4 what it means to “fall from grace,” and describe how the drift happens by quiet addition rather than open denial.

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Acts 15:1 (NKJV)

¹And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Paul moved on to other towns, and other men came in behind him with a different message. They didn't deny Jesus. They said Jesus... plus. Faith is fine, but it's not enough; you also need circumcision, you also need the law. And that one little concept, plus, is the whole fight, because the moment you add a requirement to grace, it stops being grace.

FROM THE SERMON

Notice what they did not say. They did not come in saying this whole Jesus thing is a fraud. They did not tell them to throw out anything with a cross on it. They said, Jesus plus. Jesus is good, Jesus is fine, you can follow Him. But that is not enough. You need Jesus and circumcision. You need Jesus and the law of Moses. You need grace and the works of the law.

This one little word, Jesus plus, is the whole fight behind the book of Galatians. The moment you add any requirement to God's grace, by definition it cannot be grace. A gospel that you have to earn is not the gospel Paul planted; it is a different gospel entirely. Adding to the gospel does not make it stronger, and it does not make you safer. It cuts you off from the very thing you were trusting in.

The scholars: who they were and what they demanded

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Fire Bible (AG) “Purpose”	“One of the main laws they were attempting to force upon the new believers was the practice of circumcision... The false teachers said that following such laws was a necessary requirement to be spiritually saved and included in the church.”
BibleProject Background	“Some of these Jewish Christians had come to the Galatian churches and began undermining Paul, demanding the circumcision of all male Christians. When Paul found out, he was both heartbroken and angry.”
Dunn (via Moo) Introduction	“The letter makes clearest and fullest sense if we see it as a response to a challenge from Christian-Jewish missionaries who had come to Galatia to improve or correct Paul's gospel and to ‘complete’ his converts by integrating them fully into the heirs of Abraham through circumcision and by thus bringing them ‘under the law.’”
Bruce (Acts) on 15:1	“But those Gentiles should be admitted on terms similar to those required of proselytes to Judaism: they must be circumcised and assume the obligation to observe the Mosaic law.”

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Schnabel (Acts)

on 15:1

“These Judean Christians teach that a Gentile must be circumcised and keep the stipulations of the Mosaic law in order to ‘be saved.’ The passive voice of the verb denotes God as the author of salvation.”

The scholars: why “Jesus plus” is a different gospel, not a stronger one

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Moo (BECNT) Introduction	“One could almost say that ‘the grace of Christ’ summarizes the argument of the letter. God has decisively manifested himself in Christ... and his saving work in Christ is completely a matter of grace, to which humans can respond only with faith, not with works of any kind.”
Fire Bible (AG) “Survey”	“[The opponents] bring confusion and misrepresent the message (1:7); their teaching puts obstacles in the path of the believers (5:7)... they are people-pleasers (1:10), false brothers (2:4), the circumcision group (2:12) and manipulators (3:1).”
Osborne (Acts) on 15:1	“Either Paul is right and Gentiles can come freely by faith and accept Christ, or these strict Jewish Christians are right and Gentiles must become Jewish proselytes before they can turn to Christ.”
Schnabel (Acts) on 15:1	“This position assumes that the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and Savior, affects the quality of what constitutes the life of the people of God (full forgiveness of all sins through faith in Jesus), but not the quantity of what constitutes the boundaries of the elect people of God (full membership through circumcision and obedience to the Law).”

Insight: This is the whole “plus” in one line. The Judaizers were not denying faith in Christ; Schnabel’s point is that they kept the “quality” (forgiveness through faith) and simply added a “quantity” requirement for membership (circumcision and law). But Osborne shows there is no middle ground: either a Gentile comes freely by faith, or he must first become a Jewish proselyte to be saved. Add the requirement and you have not strengthened the gospel; you have replaced it with another way in.

Goes Deeper: “Fallen From Grace” (The Watershed Moment)

This is the sharpest warning in the whole letter (Gal. 5:4), so it is worth slowing all the way down. Here is where we land. The Galatians are not yet fully apostate. Paul does not say they HAVE fallen; he warns them what WILL be true if they finish the turn to the law. They are one step away from losing it. The entire letter is Paul’s urgent plea to turn back before they cross the line. Paul is not describing people who slipped up one bad Tuesday; he is describing people at the edge of trading grace for law, and telling them exactly what that trade would cost.

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Galatians 5:4 (NKJV)

⁴You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

The exegesis everyone agrees on

Three things are settled across all the commentaries, whatever their tradition. First, “attempt to be justified” describes an effort or attempt to gain justification: they are trying it, not achieving it, because the law cannot justify anyone (3:11). Second, “estranged from Christ” uses the exact verb-and-preposition Paul uses in Romans 7:6 for being released from the law. So the Galatians are reversing the transfer: unbinding from Christ to re-bind themselves to the law. Third, the past-tense verbs are gnomic (a settled truth stated as fact), not a verdict already handed down. Paul paints the cliff precisely so they will step back from it.

SCRIPTURE	THE REVERSAL (SAME VERB, OPPOSITE DIRECTION)
Galatians 5:4	You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.
Romans 7:6	But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit...

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Bruce (NIGTC) on 5:4	“You have become estranged from Christ; your association with Christ has been nullified... God has called the Galatians in grace (1:6); to forsake his call for the way of law involved self-expulsion from his grace, because they no longer relied on it.”
Moo (BECNT) on 5:4	“In Rom. 7:1–6, Paul employs the marriage relationship as an analogy for the believer’s transfer from one binding relationship to another... Tragically, the Galatians are flirting with the possibility of reversing this situation: binding themselves to the law and becoming alienated from Christ.”
Schreiner (ZECNT) on 5:4	“The aorist verbs ‘severed’ and ‘have fallen’ have a gnomic sense. Therefore, Paul does not declare here that the Galatians have definitively fallen from grace... Paul asserts what will be the case if the Galatians revert to the law.”
deSilva (NICNT) on 5:4	“The aorist tense is chosen, not to be temporally precise, but rhetorically effective. Paul makes the consequences more vivid... “you stepped off the cliff, so turn around and grab on to what you once had as fast as you can!””

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Two readings: a “method,” or a real danger to salvation?

Here the commentaries divide on what “fallen from grace” means for salvation itself. One camp says grace here names a method (the grace-system versus the law-system), so the verse is not about losing salvation. The other says it is a real severing that genuinely endangers salvation. There are strong voices on both sides.

Reading A: grace as a method, not salvation itself

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
BKC (Walvoord/Zuck) on 5:4	“The issue here is not the possible loss of salvation, for ‘grace’ is referred to not as salvation itself but as a method of salvation... they would be leaving the grace system for the Mosaic Law system.”
Barton (LABC) on 5:4	“Thus Paul’s words “you have fallen away from grace” should not be taken out of context to mean that salvation can be lost. Grace did not mean salvation, but refers to the means of salvation.”

Reading B: a real severing that endangers salvation

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Keener on 5:4	“It would seem special pleading to take Paul’s warnings of apostasy as something less than a real possibility... Paul certainly did not teach the popular doctrine today of ‘once saved, always saved’; a convert who deconverts is again a nonbeliever.”
Fire Bible (AG) on 5:4	“They have cut themselves off from a personal relationship with Jesus (cf. Jn 15:4–6) and abandoned the principle of God’s grace... which is the only thing that can bring true life and spiritual salvation (2 Pe 2:15, 20–22)... Only by faith in Christ can a person enter and maintain a right relationship with God.”
Schreiner (ZECNT) on 5:4	“Those who attempt to derive their justification from the law are severed from Christ and cut off from grace, for they are attempting to accomplish their own salvation instead of trusting in the grace and mercy of Christ.”
deSilva (NICNT) on 5:2–4	“Paul’s statements in 5:2–4 cumulatively place the hearers in a very unwelcome situation, with 5:4 stating the danger most starkly, with the absolute loss of that which initially attracted them to the Christian movement to begin with.”

How a Church Almost Lost the Gospel

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Where we land (Assemblies of God)

With our Fellowship, we take the warning as real: salvation itself is at stake here, not merely a “method.” To trade grace for law is to begin unbinding from the very Christ who saves. That is Reading B, and the Fire Bible, Keener, Schreiner, and deSilva all support it. But two guardrails keep this from becoming a whip. First, Paul does not say they have already fallen, only that they will if they complete the turn (Schreiner: he “does not declare here that the Galatians have definitively fallen”). Second, the whole letter assumes they can still come back. So Galatians 5:4 is not a sentence already passed; it is a warning. They are not fully apostate. They are one step away. And a warning is a mercy: it is spoken precisely so the fall does not happen.

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
deSilva (NICNT) on 5:4 (note)	“It remains possible, even probable, that Paul would not regard this as an irreversible loss for those who came back around to his way of thinking.”
Keener on 5:4 (note)	“One should distinguish this popular formulation of eternal security from the more typical Reformed view of perseverance of the elect, an approach that, like the Arminian one, retains the connection between salvation and perseverance.”
Moo (BECNT) on 5:4	“The pursuit of the law as a means of justification involves an attempt to find security with God by means of human effort... a nexus of obligation that is incompatible with the nature of our gracious God.”

Insight: Keener’s distinction is worth keeping in your back pocket when someone pushes the “once saved, always saved” slogan. The real question is not “can it be lost?” versus “it can’t.” Both the Reformed and the Arminian view tie final salvation to persevering in faith. What Paul rules out on every side is a grace you can bolt the law onto and still call grace.

Holding the warning and the assurance together

Because these are private notes, keep both sets of texts in front of you; they are not enemies. The warning passages are real, and so are the assurance passages. The same God who warns you off the cliff (5:4) is the God strong enough to keep you from it. He called you in grace (1:6), and He is able to keep you there.

SCRIPTURE	TWO SETS OF TEXTS, ONE GOD
Warning	John 15:6 · Romans 11:20-22 · 2 Peter 2:20-22 · Hebrews 10:26-29
Assurance	John 10:28-29 · Romans 8:38-39 · Philippians 1:6 · Jude 24

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Insight: This is the warning, and the best news is simply that Paul wrote the letter at all. A man does not plead this hard with people already lost. The door back to grace stands open the whole time he is writing, which is exactly why the warning is worth sounding so loudly.

FROM THE SERMON

Imagine that somebody handed you the keys to a brand new house, and this house is paid off. It is free and clear. You have no mortgage, no payment, nothing you owe. It is a free gift. Then you move in, and one day there is a knock at the door. It is a scammer, but you do not know that yet. A man is standing there with paperwork, and he tells you, I am afraid to break the bad news, but there is actually a payment due on this house. There is a mortgage you did not realize, and you are going to have to pay every month for the rest of your life, or you are going to lose it.

And so you begin to pay for it. And it is in that moment that you have lost your freedom. It is in that moment that you lie awake at night figuring out how you are going to pay the bills, afraid that if you do not pay enough you will lose what was given to you. This is exactly what these teachers were doing to the churches in Galatia. They took the free gift of God's grace and turned it into a debt the people would have to pay.

3. The Gospel Defended

◆ **Objective 6:** Describe the lengths Paul went to in defending the gospel (the missing thanksgiving, the double curse, confronting Peter), and why he refused to give an inch (Gal. 2:21, "Christ died in vain").

Galatians 1:6-8 (NKJV)

⁶I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But 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.

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FROM THE SERMON

The very first thing Paul does tells you how serious this is, because he breaks his own habit. Paul had a way of starting his letters, and almost every one opens the same way: he gives thanks for the people. He says it to the Romans, to the Corinthians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians. Every single time there is thanks.

But when you open the letter to the Galatians and go looking for a thank you, it is not there. There is no thanksgiving. It is the only church he does not thank. He skips right past the hellos, and the first thing from his pen is, I marvel. I am astonished. How are you already turning away? That missing I thank God for you tells us how much danger they were truly in. This is a red alert situation.

The scholars: the missing thanksgiving signals alarm

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Osborne on 1:1–5	“One critical aspect of this greeting is the absence of the customary thanksgiving and prayer, which are replaced here by Paul’s rebuke of the Galatians for being taken in by the false arguments of the Judaizers... the situation in Galatia was so fraught with danger that there was not much for which Paul could be thankful.”
Fire Bible (AG) “Special Features”	“The tone of this letter is sharp, serious and urgent, as Paul deals boldly and firmly with his opponents (e.g., 1:8–9; 5:12) and rebukes the Galatians for allowing themselves to be so open and accepting of such false teaching.”

The scholars: the gospel came from Christ, not from men**Galatians 1:11-12 (NKJV)**

¹¹But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹²For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
BibleProject on Gal. 1	“Paul defends the authenticity of his message and authority as an apostle, reminding them that he was commissioned by the risen Jesus himself to go into the non-Jewish world.”
Fire Bible (AG) “Survey”	“[Paul] defended his authority as an apostle — a pioneer messenger — of Jesus Christ, which came by direct revelation from the Lord and was supported by James, Peter and John.”

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The scholars: how far he'd go (he'd confront even Peter)**Galatians 2:11 (NKJV)**

¹¹Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed.

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
BibleProject on Gal. 2:11-14	"When some of the Jerusalem opposition group showed up in town, Peter caved under the pressure... Paul confronted and accused Peter of hypocrisy as well as 'not staying true to the Gospel' (Gal. 2:14)."
Smiles (via Moo) Introduction	"The Galatian crisis was the cauldron in which Paul's arguments were formed, but the guiding principle in these arguments is the supreme authority of the gospel."

Goes Deeper: Why He Won't Give an Inch ("Christ Died in Vain")

Here is the heart of the whole thing. Why the missing thank-you, the curse on an angel, the confrontation with Peter? Because to add to the gospel is to empty the cross. If you could earn your way to God by keeping the law, then Christ died for nothing.

SCRIPTURE	THE HEART OF THE MATTER
Galatians 2:21	I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Moo (BECNT) on 2:21	"If right standing with God could come by means of the torah, Christ need not have died at all (v. 21)."
BibleProject on Torah observance	"[Requiring it] is acting as if Jesus didn't fulfill God's promise or deal with our sins. It neglects the new freedom gained through Jesus' resurrection and the gift of the Spirit."

FROM THE SERMON

Here is the whole heart of it, chapter 2 verse 21. Paul says, I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. There it is. If you could earn your way to God by keeping the works of the law, Paul is saying, if that is true, then Christ died for nothing.

This is what is at stake. This is why Paul will not budge, not even an inch. Because every time somebody says that grace is not enough, that you have to add something to it, they are standing at the foot of a cross, looking up at the bleeding Savior, and saying, that was not enough. And Paul refuses to stay quiet in the face of that.

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Pastoral Takeaways

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|----------|---|
| 1 | You didn't earn your seat. The gospel was planted in Galatia, and in you, as a free gift, received by faith. You were justified from all things the law could never touch. Sit in that before you do anything for God. |
| 2 | The threat rarely denies Jesus; it adds to Him. Almost nobody drifts by walking away from Christ. We drift by bolting an "unless" onto grace. Watch for the "plus." |
| 3 | Adding to grace doesn't make you safer; it cuts you off. "Fallen from grace" is not Paul exaggerating. Trade the free gift for a mortgage and you don't get grace and law; you lose grace. |
| 4 | Guard the gospel like Paul did. He skipped the thank-you, cursed an angel, and got in Peter's face, because the message outranks every messenger. Test your favorite voices by the gospel, not the gospel by them. |
| 5 | To add to the cross is to empty it. If you could earn it, Christ died in vain. Lay down the mortgage. You don't have to clean yourself up first. There is nothing to add. |

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Discussion Questions (At Home or in a Group)

- 1** Observation: In Acts 13:38–39, underline “everyone who believes is justified.” What is Paul saying is the basis of being made right with God, and what is he ruling out?
- 2** Interpretation: Why does it matter that the Gentiles coming in was promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:3), not invented by Paul? How does that add weight to the gospel?
- 3** Observation: In Acts 15:1, circle the word “unless.” What is the one word the false teachers added to Jesus, and why is that a different gospel and not just a stricter one?
- 4** Interpretation: What does “fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4) mean, and what does it not mean? How does the drift usually happen: loudly, or by quiet addition?
- 5** Interpretation: Why did Paul skip his usual thank-you, and why would he curse even an angel (Gal. 1:8)? What does that tell you about how much was at stake?
- 6** Application: Where has a “mortgage” crept back onto your grace: believing God likes you more on the weeks you perform, or that you must clean yourself up before you come back?
- 7** Application: Galatians 2:21 says if righteousness came by law, “Christ died in vain.” How does that verse expose the “plus” in our own hearts?
- 8** Application: What is one gospel truth you would “fight to protect” this week, in your own heart, or for someone you love who’s slipping into earning?

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Quick Review (You Know More Than You Think)

This isn't a test; it's a chance to see how much of Sunday's truth is already yours. The answers are at the bottom. Take it as encouragement.

1	Where and when did Paul plant the Galatian churches? (a) Rome, late in life (b) South Galatia, on the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) (c) Jerusalem, before his conversion
2	Fill in the blank: In Acts 13:39, everyone who _____ is justified, not by the law of Moses.
3	True or False: The Gentiles coming in was a brand-new idea Paul invented on the road.
4	What single word did the false teachers add to Jesus (Acts 15:1)? And what did it do to the gospel?
5	According to Galatians 5:4, what happens when you try to be justified by law?
6	Finish the verse: "...if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in _____" (Gal. 2:21).
7	In your own words, what would you fight to protect?

Answer Key: 1) b · 2) believes · 3) False; it was the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3), kept at last · 4) "unless" (circumcision/law); it turned a free gift into a debt and made it a different gospel · 5) you become estranged from Christ and fall from grace · 6) vain · 7) The gospel of grace.

If these came easily, you've grasped the very thing this whole book is fighting for. Grace plus nothing. Now go guard it.

FROM THE SERMON

The same gospel has been planted in you. If you are in Christ this morning, you were justified by faith. You did not earn your salvation. And today we are living in a time where the threat they had is the same threat we face. It is not to make you deny Jesus, just to get you to add a little bit to Him, a little work over here, jump through this hoop over there, until one day you find yourself lying awake at night wondering, have I done enough?

Some of you have been carrying that mortgage paperwork for years, trying to pay for something that has already been given to you, that free gift of salvation. I want to encourage you today to lay it down. Get out of the mode of performance and get into the mode of resting before God. Grace has set you free.