

## INTRODUCTION

The book of Galatians has six chapters and they are easily divided into three themes. The first two chapters are doctrinal. Paul reminded the believers the Gospel of grace is the only true Gospel. The two middle chapters are personal, and the last two chapters are practical. We’re in the middle of this personal section where the Apostle revealed he was frustrated and perplexed that these believers had turned back from the grace way to pursue religion. He wrote this letter because some false Jewish teachers had infiltrated the churches and demanded that all the Christians had to become good Jews before they could truly be saved. That meant, “No more pork for you!” That meant no work could be performed on Saturday. That meant the men had to be circumcised, whatever their age. And these baby Christians were being misled to go back to old religious rules and rituals. Paul was so upset that he wrote this harsh letter trying to knock some sense into their legalistic-leaning minds.

Galatians 4:8-11. “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”

Legalism is a real temptation for us because we’re wired to DO something. We have learned all of our lives that we earn our bread by the sweat of our brow and we can’t help but apply that to our spiritual life. When I was a boy, I turned in my Sunday School envelope every Sunday. I got to check certain boxes that showed how good I was. “Present” Check! “On Time” Check! “Giving an offering” Check! “Bible read daily” Oops, doggone it, I didn’t read my Bible on Tuesday. Sorry, God, I know You can’t be happy. I’ll do better, I promise! “Attending worship” Check! Let’s see four out of five isn’t too bad.” I was like this nursery rhyme: “Little Jack Horner sat in the Sunday School corner. Holding his church envelope. He stuck in a dime, filled out every line and said, ‘What a good boy am I!’”

There’s something in us that likes to check boxes, and fill in blanks (you’re doing that this morning). Truth be told, we like having a spiritual check list to be able to say, “If I do these seven things today, I can cross them off and be right with God. Grace has nothing to do with my goodness, it’s all about the goodness and grace of God who has chosen to save sinners. In this passage we uncover three great truths.

### **1. A PERSON’S GREATEST DISCOVERY: God wants to know me**

Paul wrote, “Now that you know God—or rather are known by God.” The word “now” indicates that these people had not always known God. There were two kinds of Christians in Galatia. Some had come from a Jewish religion, and the Gentiles had come out of a Greek religious background. Greek and Roman religion had an entire pantheon of gods and goddesses. Zeus, Neptune, Mercury, Aphrodite, and Bacchus were just a few of these many gods. Statues and icons of these deities could be found in the temples throughout the Roman Empire. These mythological gods lived in their own world and seldom interacted with inferior human beings. When they did intervene in human affairs, the results were usually not in the humans’ favor. So

people feared these capricious gods and constantly sacrificed to them to keep them happy. They didn't want a relationship with these gods; in fact, they hoped their offerings and sacrifices would make the gods ignore them. But Paul wrote that these gods were NOT gods at all: They were just dead, deaf, blind, and dumb, statues. The idea that God would know you intimately and that you could know Him was totally unheard of.

After Paul preached the good news to these people, they made the greatest discovery that a person can ever make. It is this: the One True God, the Living God, created YOU for a purpose. He made you so that you could have a personal relationship with Him. He wants to know you! This message was totally revolutionary compared to the Greek and Roman religions.

We toss around the term "eternal life" a lot, but we think it means, "living forever." It includes that, but eternal life isn't about a length of your life; it's about a relationship. Jesus defined eternal life in His prayer the night before He was crucified. He prayed, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3)

Do you know Jesus? I'm not asking if you know *about* Jesus. I'm asking if you *know* Him. You can know all the facts about the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus without ever truly knowing Him.

In Holly Springs, Mississippi, there's a man who claims to be the world's greatest Elvis fan. Paul McCloud attended 120 Elvis concerts, and has collected hundreds of scrapbooks that contain over a million references to Elvis. He owns 55,000 records and CDs of Elvis. He named his only son Elvis. He has renamed his home in Graceland Too, and has opened it to the public (for a price) as a shrine to Elvis. It's the #1 tourist attraction for Japanese tourists in Holly Springs. Paul McCloud is obsessed with Elvis and knows every detail about his life. But if you ask him if he ever met Elvis, he'll say that the greatest regret of his life is that he never met Elvis. Paul McCloud is an Elvis expert, but He doesn't know Elvis.

He reminds me of some people who are Jesus-experts, but they don't know Jesus. They may own a lot of Bibles, books and pictures about Jesus; and they may have the walls of their home decorated with crosses. But that's not the same as knowing Jesus.

In Matthew 7 Jesus talked about judgment day when many people will say, "Lord I know you! Lord, Lord in your name I did many wonderful religious acts." But Jesus will say, "Depart from me. I never KNEW you." (Matthew 7:23) A lot of people claim to know "the good Lord" or the "Man upstairs." He has a name. His name is Jesus. Do you know Him? Does He know you?

I'm not boasting, but I know Jesus, and I know that I know Jesus. You may be thinking, "How do you know that you know Jesus?" I want you to know why I know that I know Jesus: It's as plain as the "knows" in that last sentence. He's real to me, and I talked to Him a few minutes ago. Do you have that sense of Jesus being real to you right now? Not a historical character, but a real friend? That's the greatest discovery you'll ever make—that God wants to know you personally.

## **2. A CHRISTIAN'S GREATEST MISTAKE: Going back to religious rules and rituals**

“How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?” He mentioned that they had gone back to observing a special day (Sabbath), special months, seasons and years. This referred to the Jewish festivals of Yom Kippur, Passover, Tabernacles, and Rosh Hashanah, and the year of Jubilee. Those were all important to the Jews, but Paul called them “miserable principles” that enslave Christians. They’re miserable principles because you’ll be miserable trying to keep them all. Because when it comes down to it you can’t perfectly obey all the rules and observe all the rituals.

What does it mean today? There are a few groups calling themselves Christians who have reverted to observing the Jewish laws and days and festivals. Our Seventh Day Adventist friends worship on Saturday and refrain from eating food that is forbidden in the Old Testament. Other groups still observe the Jewish festivals like Passover, Tabernacles and Yom Kippur. The Alert Academy in Big Sandy is where Ambassador College used to be. It was the center for a group of sincere people who believed that we should observe the Jewish festivals. When I visited the campus I was surprised to see hundreds of little eight-foot-by-eight-foot metal buildings. They look like oversized portable toilets, but they aren’t. Those were the “tabernacles” that families lived in for the eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was probably a lot of fun – like a combination camp meeting/family reunion time. I’ve met some of these folks and they are sincere in their belief. But are we required to follow those Jewish customs and rules?

Here’s what the Bible says: “Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross...Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” (Colossians 2:14, 16-17)

All the rules and regulations of the Old Testament are only shadows of the real thing and Jesus is the real thing. If Jesus walked up to you to shake your hand would you ignore Him and try to shake hands with His shadow? That’s legalism.

Now you are probably pretty comfortable with me talking about the Jewish festivals and the Seventh Adventists, because chances are none of you are into either of those groups. But let’s get personal for a minute. Even Christians can fall into the trap of having special days and holidays and seasons. If you’ve read my book on the Ten Commandments called Ten Requirements for America’s Survival, you’ll know the answer to this question: What day is the Sabbath for Christians? What’s your answer? If you said, “Sunday” you aren’t wrong, but you aren’t completely right. If you said, “Saturday,” you aren’t wrong, but you aren’t completely right. Here’s the answer: For a Christian EVERY DAY is the Sabbath. We are resting in the finished work of Christ seven days a week. We don’t recognize a special day. If you do, then you may be leaning toward legalism.

There’s a line from an old Amy Grant song about a grown-up spiritual baby. She sings, “His spiritual tummy can’t take too much; one day a week he gets his spiritual lunch. On Sunday he puts on his spiritual best; and gives his language a spiritual rest.” I worship seven days a week, don’t you? We gather on the first day of the week like the earliest Christians did because that was the day of the resurrection, but Sunday never became the Christian Sabbath.

What about "holidays?" I know I'm going to ruffle some feathers here. Why do you think it is that some people flock to church on Easter or Christmas Eve, but then they are pretty much AWOL the other 50 weeks of the year? I call them Chreasters—Christmas and Easter Christians. Maybe they consider themselves a Christian, but not a very good one; so to make up for it they'll make sure they show up for the special times. But frankly, we don't have any Sunday that's more special than another. We celebrate the resurrection *every* Lord's Day. They hope by showing up on a "Special Day" that they'll gain a little better standing with God. Besides it makes them feel better about themselves and makes their mother happy. Remember, legalism is the belief that you can improve your standing before God through religious performance.

"Wait a minute, pastor! Are you telling me that I shouldn't attend church on Easter?" Nope, I'm saying come on Easter, and the Sunday after, and the Sunday after that! We don't have any special Sundays. And we have something going on here 7 days a week—we don't have a special day!

You probably won't like what I have to say, but I love you enough to challenge you to examine your faith to see if there is any legalism creeping in. While I don't have any problem with special days like Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday, when you participate in those special holiday services, make sure you aren't doing it to make yourself feel better because of your piety.

Forty Days of Lent leading up to Easter can truly prepare your heart to celebrate the resurrection, but if you have a smidgen of legalism there, it can turn into a religious reason to lose weight, or a chance to let others know how spiritual you are by what you're giving up. Jesus said that when you fast, don't let anyone know you're fasting.

I heard a true story about a Catholic school in New Orleans. One of the students was the son of a professor at New Orleans Baptist Seminary. It was during Lent and the teacher asked the students to tell what they were giving up. One boy said, "I'm Catholic and I'm giving up comic books for Lent." The next student said, "I'm a Methodist and I'm giving up soft drinks for Lent." The third said, "I'm Episcopal and I'm giving up desserts for Lent." Then they came to the Baptist professor's son. He said, "I'm a Baptist and we don't give up nothing for nobody!"

I think a lot of us would benefit from giving up some indulgences in our lives. Here's the bottom line: If you choose to participate in any of these "Christian holidays" make sure your motives are pure. Are you doing this to feel better about yourself, or to hoping to earn a few more brownie points with God? Or are you going into it with the pure motive of simply wanting to enter into a deeper intimacy with your Savior? Just remember that no religious observance, whether it's baptism, Communion, fasting, or Lent will improve your standing before God. Why? That's easy; you can't improve on grace. You are already a blood-bought child of God saved by grace and grace alone.

### **3. A PASTOR'S GREATEST FEAR: Wasted efforts**

Paul expressed his personal concern when he wrote, "I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you."

When you read the book of Acts you discover that Paul had invested a great deal of blood, sweat, and tears in starting these churches; literal blood; literal sweat; and literal tears. When he heard that these churches were sliding back into legalism he feared that all his efforts had been wasted. He feared that one day he would stand before God and would discover that his labor had been wasted. I didn't start Green Acres Baptist Church, but God has allowed me to serve here for over two decades and, like every pastor, I can relate to Paul's frustration. I know that one day I will stand before God and give an account to Him of how I pastored this church. And all pastors feel a sense of fear that much of what we've done will be burned up as wood, hay, and stubble at the Judgment seat of Christ.

Because Paul had "birthed" these congregations he felt as if he was their spiritual parent and they were his spiritual children. But instead of calling himself their spiritual father, Paul writes that, like a mother, he had given birth to the churches. His original pain of "birthing" them had returned. Moms, you know it's painful to give birth—but even when those kids grow up they can still cause you pain by their poor choices. That's the exact image Paul used a few verses later. "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!" (Galatians 4:19-20)

Like a frustrated parent of a teenager, Paul is scratching his head saying, "I have no clue why you are acting the way you do. What happened to that sweet little kid that used to live here?"

Paul said he was in the pains of childbirth until Christ was formed in them. That's what I desire for you—that Christ will be formed in you. My desire for our church isn't that we'll have a lot of people present, or give a lot of money for missions, or build a bunch of buildings, or feed a lot of hungry people. My desire for each of you is that on every day and in every way you are becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. And it's not you trying to imitate Jesus; it's the personality and passion of Jesus being formed in your life. Starting Memorial Day weekend I'll teach a nine-week series within-in-a-series about the fruit of the Spirit. The series is called Grace Fruit. It's not our job to generate or manufacture love, joy, peace or any of the other fruit of the Spirit. When Christ is formed in you, the Fruit of the Spirit of Jesus is your normal response.

I can only imagine Paul's frustration and heartbreak as he heard the reports of these believers sliding back into legalism. He had preached the gospel of God's grace, and they started growing toward maturity in Christ. But now they had stopped short of the goal and had turned back to rules and rituals.

I suppose since mankind first looked at a mountain something inside him made him want to climb it. Mt. Everest is the tallest mountain on the planet soaring to almost six miles in height. In 1924 a British expedition team set out to scale it. They nearly reached the summit when the Sherpa porters refused to go any further. They got within 900 feet of the top, and then had to turn back.

It wasn't until 1953 that Sir Edmund Hillary finally reached the peak. Sixty years later, thousands of people have made it to the top. This spring there will be another traffic jam of

climbers. Today you can even download a National Geographic App and watch the progress of one of the teams!

Can you imagine the frustration of the first climbers who got close to the summit and then had to turn back? That's what Paul is writing about. There is a grace-way that can take you to the summit of having Christ formed in you. Don't turn back until you reach the summit!

## CONCLUSION

I had one of the most interesting travel experiences of my life these past few days. Dale Pond and I traveled to Havana, Cuba so I could speak at the annual meeting of the Western Baptist Convention of Cuba. By the way, there is a spiritual awakening is sweeping the population of Cuba. Thousands are coming to Christ in this communist controlled, repressive society only 100 miles from the U.S. My prayer is that as the relations improve that the #1 export from Cuba to the U.S. will be revival.

But our interesting experience happened at the Havana Airport before we even met up with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Baylor University Baseball team traveled to Cuba in 2010 and played against the Cuban National Team. They love baseball in Cuba, and their national team would be like the New York Yankees. But they have old, poor equipment and seldom even have new baseballs. So the Baylor athletic department got together and packed 60 pair of new baseball shoes, over 100 new baseballs, 120 pairs of socks, shirts, and some bats. They also sent 60 Spanish Bibles with the names of each member of the Cuban team embossed on the front. They put them in six huge duffle bags and they asked Dale and I to deliver them to the Cuban baseball team. You can just imagine Dale and I loaded down with these six huge duffle bags of baseball equipment!

We were told that arrangements had been made with Cuban customs for us to bring this equipment into the country. Well, someone didn't get the memo, because the Cuban customs agents said, "no way." They thought we were bringing all this equipment in to re-sell which is against the law. We explained over and over that these were gifts (regalo). But the customs agents kept asking, "Who will pay?" Or "You will sell?" We kept repeating that these were free gifts from Texas Baptists and Baylor University.

They never understood, so we were retained for five hours in customs waiting for the issue to be resolved. We were asked to unpack and display all the equipment to make sure we weren't bringing in anything illegal. We had to count every item. As I was counting socks. I thought, "I've never counted socks on a mission trip, but I'll do anything for the glory of God!" After seeing all the equipment, they still refused to let us carry it into the country so they kept it in customs, and we have been told that the Cuban baseball authorities will come and claim their "gifts" this next week.

As I thought about these five hours of explaining, I came to realize that these people live in a restrictive system of control. There is a price for everything, and that price must be paid, no questions asked. They couldn't get their minds around the idea that anyone would be willing to bring in several thousand dollars' worth of athletic equipment and just GIVE to someone in the

name of Jesus. Sell it, yes. But give it away? No way. They needed a place to write it down on their customs form and there wasn’t a place on the customs form for grace.

That’s why some people have a problem with grace. It goes against human nature. In his book *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* Philip Yancey wrote: “By instinct, I feel I must do something for God in order to be accepted.” The notion of God’s love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path to Nirvana; the Hindu doctrine of karma; the Jewish covenant; and the Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to EARN approval. Ask people what they must do to get to heaven, and most reply, ‘Be good.’ Only Christianity says that all we must do is cry, “Help!”

Galatians in a nutshell is: don’t turn back to religious legalism; instead embrace God’s grace—or be embraced by His grace. We used to sing a simple praise song that said, “I have decided to follow Jesus (3 times).” The final part of each verse said it all: “No turning back; no turning back.”

## OUTLINE

### 1. A PERSON'S GREATEST DISCOVERY: God wants to know me

"Now that you know God—or rather are known by God." v. 9

Jesus prayed, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." *John 17:3*

### 2. A CHRISTIAN'S GREATEST MISTAKE: Going back to religious rules and rituals

"How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?" v. 9

"Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross... Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." *Colossians 2:14, 16-17*

### 3. A PASTOR'S GREATEST FEAR: Wasted efforts

"I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you." v. 11

"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!" *Galatians 4:19-20*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes