



## Scotts Hill Baptist Church

LIVING IN FREEDOM • AUTHORITY AND AUTHENTICITY • GALATIANS 1:1-10 •

### MAIN POINT

The gospel grants believers confidence by rooting their identity, authority, and ambition in Christ.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What is “ambition?” What have been your life’s greatest ambitions? Why?**

**Think of a group of people with unusually high ambitions. How would you describe their lifestyle?**

Ambition is the desire for personal achievement. It is a self-focused pursuit. It drives people to do great things but can also drive people to do horrible things. People with high ambitions are often self-indulgent. They want what is best for themselves and do not care about how it may affect others. But once our identity is rooted in Christ, our ambitions and our authority are all about Him.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 1:1-5.

**Why was Paul writing to “churches” and not a “church”? What does that tell you about his message?**

**What does Paul’s introduction say about his identity? With what authority was he writing?**

Paul identified himself as an apostle, an authoritative position and calling of God. He identified himself as an apostle because of his understanding that it was only through God's power and authority that he could accomplish the purposes of God. No other aspect of Paul's life was as significant as who he was because of Jesus.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 1:6-9.

**How do you think the Galatian believers felt when they read this section?**

**How would you respond if someone was "astonished" that you had drifted in your faith?**

**Why did Paul hate false gospels? What makes them so dangerous?**

Paul was shocked that these Christians were so quickly and easily turning away from the One who called them in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—a gospel of an all-together different sort. Judging by the false teachings that Paul refuted, we can surmise that they were Judaizers—strict Jews who professed to be Christians. These false teachers had infiltrated the Galatian churches soon after Paul and Barnabas had left the area. Paul brought two charges against them. First, they were throwing the Galatians into confusion. In other words, they were agitators stirring up trouble. The cause of this agitation involved Paul's second charge. The false teachers' intent (they were trying) was to pervert the gospel of Christ.

| HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 1:10.

**Is personal ambition bad? Why or why not? How should your identity in Christ affect your ambition? Do you have any ambitions in your life that do not fit with your identity in Christ?**

**How would you describe Paul's ambition? How is his ambition different from the ambition of the world?**

**How did Paul's identity affect his ambition?**

**What does it mean for you to be a slave of Christ? Why is slavery to Christ an identity that sets you free?**

Paul's ambition was not for personal gain but for God's gain. He had an audience of one, God. Too often ambition seeks to impress a large audience. Paul shifted ambition to

pleasing God alone. Paul's identity as a slave, a servant of God, clarified his ambition. It wasn't an ambition for himself but for God.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How does understanding your ambition and identity give you confidence?**

**What is something you need to approach with confidence this week?**

**How can our church be prepared to guard against false gospels?**

**How have you seen selfish ambition harm the church? What steps should be taken when selfish ambition comes to light?**

**How can you use ambition to serve others? How can you use ambition to serve the church?**

## PRAYER

Finish your time in prayer asking that God would be a constant source of confidence. Pray that our identity in Christ would drive us to live for Him. Pray that God would give us a holy ambition for His name and His cause. Pray that the church would continually serve and focus on God and stay far from false gospels.

## COMMENTARY

### | GALATIANS 1:1-10

1:1. Jews simultaneously living in both Greek and Jewish cultures commonly held two names, one Jewish and one Greek or Gentile. It is likely that the apostle used his Gentile name Paul in greeting the Galatians instead of his Jewish name Saul because his targeted readers were primarily Gentiles. Saul is first called Paul in Acts 13:9 when he preached the gospel to the Roman governor of Cyprus on his first missionary journey.

As an apostle, Paul claimed the authority to declare and to defend the true gospel. No human being had asked Paul to be an apostle or assigned this task to him. His appointment and commission had come not from any individual but from Jesus Christ and God the Father. These words provide a firm foundation for Paul's message to the Galatians.

1:2. The churches in Galatia were local congregations at Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. Paul had founded these churches during his first missionary journey (Acts 13:14–14:24). These believers would have been familiar with Paul's major theme of justification by faith (13:38-39), miraculous signs and wonders that had confirmed his message (14:3), and persecution that Paul had suffered (v. 19). Though Paul and Barnabas had invested time in strengthening and encouraging these believers and appointing elders in each church (vv. 21-23), the Galatian believers were still new converts who could be easily swayed by false teaching. As Paul did, we also need to speak up for the truth of the gospel as we help guide new believers. New converts are vulnerable because they are not yet firmly established in the basics of Christian doctrine. As a result, they may easily succumb to false teachings.

1:3. The word translated grace is related closely to a common Greek word of greeting. The term peace is a standard Hebrew greeting. The blessing of grace and peace is not only rooted in the Old Testament (Num. 6:24-26) but also summarizes the Christian message. Grace refers to God's unmerited favor freely given to us through the saving work of Jesus Christ. Peace designates the state of wholeness and freedom that is produced by God's grace at work in our lives. The source of both grace and peace is God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The preposition translated from links the phrase grace and peace to the words God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, thus pointing to the equality and deity of both God the Father and God the Son. Such grace and peace cannot be attained through the legalistic keeping religious rituals or rules. Instead, we experience grace and peace when we receive God's gift of salvation.

1:4-5. At the heart of the gospel is the reality that Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins. The preposition translated for means "on our behalf" or "for our benefit." Paul clearly and unmistakably linked our sins with Christ's death. Thus, the cross is much more than a symbol, and Christ's death is far more than an example. On the cross Jesus died in our place. Why? Entering into a personal relationship with a holy God requires that the sin problem first be addressed because our sins separate us from God. Paul reminded his readers that Calvary is the place where the sin problem was resolved. The sin problem could never be dealt with by our own efforts, no matter how sincere or sacrificial, but only through Christ's death on our behalf. Jesus Christ Himself spoke of His divine mission of substitutionary death to atone for our sins when He said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The benefits of Christ's sacrifice include rescuing us from the present evil age. Paul used this phrase to contrast the present time to the future eternal age when God's creation will be purged of all that defiles it. While the present evil age is characterized by sin and deterioration, the future eternal age is depicted as one of blessing and peace. Jesus' death and resurrection radically punctuated this time line. Believers live in tension between these two ages. Christ has rescued us from this present evil age through justifying us by faith and through putting His Spirit in us. However, He has not yet removed us from this present evil age.

1:6. When Paul described himself as astonished, he used a word that could indicate irritation as well as surprise. Paul was shocked to learn that the Galatians were turning to another gospel which was in reality no gospel at all. To describe what the Galatians had done in returning to legalism, Paul used the word translated deserting, a strong Greek term with a root meaning "to transplant" or "to change." The verb was employed to describe those who changed political allegiance from one country to another. In other words, Paul was accusing the Galatians of being spiritual turncoats or traitors. The form of the Greek verb indicates the Galatians were in the process of deserting the true gospel but had not yet completely done so. Moreover, their desertion was occurring quickly. Though we do not know exactly how much time had passed since Paul had been with the Galatians, the apostle probably wrote this letter shortly after he returned from his first missionary journey and prior to the meeting of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Therefore, probably only months had elapsed rather than years since Paul's visit to Galatia.

1:7. Paul never specifically identified by name those whom he referred to as some people, nor did he address them directly. Judging by the false teachings that Paul refuted, we can surmise that they were Judaizers (JOO day ighz uhrr)—strict Jews who professed to be Christians. These false teachers had infiltrated the Galatian churches soon after Paul and Barnabas had left the area. Paul brought two charges against them. First, they were throwing the Galatians into confusion. In other words, they were agitators stirring up trouble. The Greek verb translated "to throw into confusion" conveys the idea of agitating to the point of causing perplexity and fear. The cause of this agitation involved Paul's second charge. The false teachers' intent (they were trying) was to pervert the gospel of Christ. They were taking the genuine gospel and twisting it into something completely different. Instead of accepting that salvation is received solely by grace through faith in Christ, these people wanted to add requirements of the law such as circumcision.

We are not sure why the Galatians were so easily swayed by the false teachers. Why did these recent converts fail to stand up for the gospel? Since most of the Galatian believers

had a Gentile background with exposure to locally popular mystery religions, perhaps the false idea that they could achieve a more elevated spiritual status by adhering to certain laws and rites appealed to them. Furthermore, as new Christians, they were not yet deeply established in the Christian faith. Whatever the reason, the “different gospel” (v. 6) had just enough truth to seem acceptable to these new Christians. The false teachers still focused on Christ in their messages, but only as a supplement to the law.

1:8-9. Paul’s concern was the integrity of the gospel, that is, the unchangeable message of who Jesus Christ is and what He did to bring us salvation. Using the strongest language possible, Paul declared a curse on anyone, including himself, who might proclaim a counterfeit gospel. Why Paul chose to refer to an angel from heaven is not clear. In their attempts to enhance their legalistic demands, perhaps the Galatian agitators had cited the role of angels in delivering the law (Gal. 4:19; see Deut. 33:2). Perhaps the kind of angelic worship Paul confronted at Colossae was included in the false teachers’ message to the Galatians. Whatever the reason, Paul unleashed one of the harshest statements in the New Testament, a pronouncement that is difficult to imagine in our age of tolerance.

Yet, a subtle difference characterizes the way Paul wrote the curse each time in the Greek language. In the first expression of the curse (v. 8), Paul constructed the sentence in such a way as to suggest that the preaching of another gospel was so unthinkable, it was highly improbable, though possible. The way Paul worded the second expression (v. 9) indicated that the preaching of another gospel was not only possible but also was occurring in Galatia. Paul did not hesitate to unleash such a severe expression of judgment when he believed the integrity of the gospel was at stake. Paul knew that he had laid a solid foundation when he and Barnabas had preached the gospel to the Galatians on the first missionary journey. Paul wanted the Galatian believers to hold firm to that foundation. Therefore when Paul wrote to them, the apostle emphasized that any concept of salvation that adds to the gospel of grace through Jesus Christ is a perversion.

1:10. In the face of personal attacks from the false teachers, Paul defended his motives. Was he a flatterer, trying to win the approval of men? Evidently his accusers claimed that Paul was self-serving and insincere. Paul declared such accusations nonsense. Rather, the apostle was a servant of Christ. He had surrendered personal ambition in favor of pleasing Christ. In seeking to win the approval . . . of God, Paul did not mean that a relationship with God can be won by human efforts. Instead, he referred to a desire to please Christ that grew out of his relationship with God, a relationship granted through grace, God’s unmerited favor. The apostle rejected unworthy motivations for ministry.