**Read Your Bible with Understanding**

**Trouble in the Galatian Churches - Judaizers**

**A word from your pastor**

So now we move on, with the help of an article from “GotQuestions?” to study the impact of the Judaizers on the churches of Galatia. These people were Jews who initially embraced the church but then over time sought to burden the freedoms of genuine believers in Jesus with the law and traditions of the Fathers. Please read the following article and test your understanding by answering the comprehension questions which follow.

**The article**

There have always been those who balk at the idea of God’s salvation being offered freely to those who believe. They reason that such a grand gift as forgiveness from such a holy God *must* require some kind of payment from us. We thank God for His grace, but we understand that He expects us to somehow *earn* that grace—in other words, there must be *something* that we can do to pay off the debt we owe to God.

In the early church, those who taught a combination of God’s grace and human effort were called “Judaizers.” The word *Judaizer* comes from a Greek verb meaning “to live according to Jewish customs.” The word appears in [Galatians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%202.14) where Paul describes how he confronted Peter for forcing Gentile Christians to “Judaize.”

A Judaizer taught that, in order for a Christian to truly be right with God, he must conform to the Mosaic Law. Circumcision, especially, was promoted as necessary for salvation. Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes *first*, and *then* they could come to Christ. The doctrine of the Judaizers was a mixture of grace (through Christ) and works (through the keeping of the Law). This false doctrine was dealt with in [Acts 15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015) and strongly condemned in the book of Galatians.

At the Jerusalem Council in [Acts 15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015), a group of Judaizers opposed Paul and Barnabas. Some men who belonged to the party of the Pharisees insisted that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were first circumcised and obeyed the Law of Moses. Paul made the case that, in Christ, there was no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile, for God had purified the hearts of the Gentiles by faith ([Acts 15:8–9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015.8%E2%80%939)). He said it plainly in [Galatians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%202.16): “A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”

To add anything to the work that Christ did for salvation is to negate God’s grace. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, not by returning to the Law. “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing” ([Galatians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%202.21)).

There are many groups today with beliefs/practices very similar to those of the Judaizers of the New Testament. The two most prominent would be the [Hebrew Roots Movement](https://www.gotquestions.org/Hebrew-roots.html) and the [Roman Catholic Church](https://www.gotquestions.org/Roman-Catholicism.html). The teachings of the Hebrew Roots Movement are virtually identical to those of the Judaizers whom Paul rebuked in Galatians. A primary focus of the Hebrew Roots Movement is to put followers of Christ back under the bondage of the Old Testament Law.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches a doctrine similar to that of the Judaizers of the New Testament in this way: its doctrine is a mixture of law and grace. At the Council of Trent in the 16th century, the Catholic Church explicitly denied the idea of salvation by faith alone. Catholics have always held that certain sacraments are necessary for salvation. The issues for the 1st-century Judaizers were circumcision and Sabbath-keeping. The issues for modern-day Catholics are baptism, confession, etc. The works considered necessary may have changed, but both Judaizers and Catholics attempt to merit God’s grace through the performance of ritualistic acts.

[First Timothy 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Tim%204.3) says that, in later times, false teachers will “forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.” This sounds suspiciously close to some of the teachings of Roman Catholicism, which requires priests to be [celibate](https://www.gotquestions.org/celibacy-priests.html) (“forbidding to marry”) and proclaims some food to be off-limits during [Lent](https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-Lent.html) (“abstaining from certain foods”).The Judaizers upheld the Mosaic Law as necessary for salvation; Catholics uphold man-made tradition as necessary; both view Christ’s death as being insufficient *without the active and continued cooperation of the one being saved*.

The Bible is clear that the attempt to add human works to God’s grace overlooks the very meaning of *grace*, which is “undeserved blessing.” As Paul says, “If by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace” ([Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%2011.6)). Praise the Lord, “Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” ([Galatians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%205.1)).

**Comprehension Questions**

1. The fundamental objection of the Judaizers to salvation by grace can be summed up in the following statement: “there must be ………………………. that we can do to pay off the debt we owe to God.”
2. What two requirements did the Judaizers demand for salvation?
3. The word *Judaizer* comes from a Greek verb meaning “to ………………………………………………….”
4. Which of the Apostles was guilty of being a Judaizer? …………………………………………………..
5. The Judaizers taught that gentiles first had to become………………………………………….., and *then* they could come to Christ.
6. What definite, non-negotiable statement did Paul make in Galatians 2.16 about salvation and the law?”
7. In [Galatians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%202.21) Paul has said: “for if righteousness could be gained through the law, ……………………………………………………………………………………………….”
8. At the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic church explicitly denied what about salvation?
9. How are the Judaizers of the first century and the Roman Catholic church of today similar?
10. How is a person who teaches that one can lose their salvation practicing the principles of a Judaizer?