



The Life
**We Now
Live**

A Study of Grace
in Galatians

The Life We Now Live: A Study of Grace in Galatians Teacher's Manual

by C. J. Harris

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To the Teacher

I first studied through the Epistle to the Galatians over fifteen years ago, as a college student preparing for the ministry. Like most at that age, I wrestled with my impending adulthood and all it would entail—ministry, marriage, family, everything. How should I meet these challenges? How should I live as a child of God?

Not all of my questions have disappeared over time, but in those years God used Galatians to begin molding me beyond my knowledge. He showed me that, impossibly, I was crucified with Christ (2:20), and that the grace which saved me now also sanctifies me (3:2–3). I learned of the liberty the Spirit gives me as I walk with Him—the liberty to love, the liberty to serve, the liberty to know my majestic God (chapter 5). Soon, I learned that I could trust Christ’s work through me—that I could reflect, however imperfectly, God’s grace to my wife, my two sons, and whomever else I was called to serve.

Since college, I’ve been privileged to teach through this powerful letter several times, and I still see new wonders every time I gaze with my students through this window of God’s grace. I offer here a summary of our observations, trusting God to draw your gaze to Himself.

As you examine the life we now live in Christ, may He bless you with all the fruit of His grace.

By His grace alone,

CJ Harris

Titus 2:11–15

About This Study

We produced *The Life We Now Live* to help teachers and students explore the theme of grace as presented in the Epistle to the Galatians. With this study, you can see how the Holy Spirit used Paul to show the importance of God's grace to our salvation and sanctification.

While grace might seem like an ethereal doctrine, it has immediate implications for every Christian. Our view of God's grace influences how we understand our faith, how we pursue our relationship with God, and how we interact with other people. If we ignore or even misunderstand grace, we can distort our gospel until it becomes self-focused, prideful, or even abusive.

Paul challenges us to place our hope in God, because only through His grace can we enter and live the Christian life. And only He can help us understand concepts like love, unity, holiness, and liberty—because He demonstrated them perfectly in His Son, Jesus Christ.

We at Positive Action pray that God will use this material to show you His majesty. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to us by email (info@positiveaction.org) or phone (800-688-3008). We'd love to hear from you.

Components

Teacher's Manual

This book contains 15 lessons that lead verse-by-verse through the Epistle to the Galatians. Each lecture is preceded by a set of objectives and a selection of Scripture from Galatians. In addition to the core expository material, you will also find notes on context and application, as well as discussion prompts.

Student Manual

The workbook includes fill-in-the-blank outlines for each of the lectures in the Teacher's Manual, as well as devotional readings and questions that explore grace elsewhere in Scripture. Each lesson features three assignments, which students can complete in the week following the lecture.

Slide Presentation

Available free at positiveaction.org, this editable teaching aid features lesson outlines that match the Student Manual, with fill-in-the-blank answers highlighted.

Quizzes

Each lesson includes a quiz with four questions on the lecture material and one question on the student reading. Quizzes can serve as a review of the prior week's lesson and reading.

Teaching with a God-Focus

At Positive Action, we believe that the Bible is God’s self-revelation, the Word He gave to reveal His glory, grace, and love. Therefore, we write our studies to magnify His majesty, His works, and His nature. In each passage of the Bible, we look for how God reveals Himself, then how His message can shine through context, culture, language, and application. We challenge students first to stand in awe of God, to know and love Him, for that is the first step of any true change of character.

A God-Focus is seeking God’s glory and grace through all things.

With this perspective, all of life, creation, and Scripture becomes a window through which we can see the light of God’s goodness, power, and love. As His grace draws our gaze to Himself, we learn to rejoice in Him. Only then, standing before His holiness, will we repent, submit, and worship. He becomes the center of all thought, desire, and action—the focus of our love and hope.

If We Lose Focus	If We Maintain Focus
Scripture becomes a how-to manual for life, a book of arbitrary do’s and don’ts.	We see Scripture as more than just a map or rulebook—it is the story of God’s glory.
We learn only Bible history, Bible stories, Bible facts. We see only heroes and villains, not the God that guided them for His glory.	As we teach of Moses, Ruth, and David, we magnify the God that uses imperfect men and women to reflect His glory.
We mimic holiness out of obligation. We do not ask God to give us grace to reflect His love.	Before we teach of holiness and love, we point to the perfection and sacrifice of Christ.
Sin becomes a personal failure, a trip and a fall outside the fold. We consider our obedience an example of our strength.	When we sin, we do not simply break God’s law—we betray Christ’s love. And when we, by His grace, reflect His holiness, we do not just obey Him—we abide in Him.

About Positive Action for Christ

Positive Action is a nonprofit publishing ministry specializing in Bible studies and curriculum for churches, as well as traditional and home schools. We exist to help Bible teachers magnify the majesty of God.

To learn more about our mission, history, philosophy, and doctrine, visit our website at

positiveaction.org

LESSON ONE

Introduction to the Epistle

Objectives

- Note the historical and theological context of the epistle to the churches in Galatia
- Introduce a basic outline of the epistle
- Discuss the central theme of the epistle

Text

Selections from Galatians

Teacher's Lesson

The Epistle to the Galatians stands as a defense of grace. The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, argues that all of the Christian life—including salvation, sanctification, and glorification—is a work of grace by God the Father, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by the indwelling Holy Spirit. We cannot add to or take away from this simple gospel. It is a pure doctrine, one we cannot change or qualify without denying its essential truth. Only God could save us, and only God can sustain us. By grace were we saved; by grace we live in Christ; and by grace will we one day be glorified with Him.

Introduction to the Book of Galatians

Before we go through this important work verse-by-verse, we'll look at the book's context, author, and message.

The Book Is Actually a Letter

Galatians is a letter—an epistle from the apostle Paul to the believers in Galatia. Like much of the rest of the New Testament, this letter was copied and passed around a number of Christian churches. But originally, Paul wrote it to a specific group of people, who had specific beliefs and

specific needs. To best understand the message of this letter, therefore, we should study the context in which it was written.

We know that Paul wrote this letter because he signs it in the first verse (1:1). Here Paul calls himself an apostle—an important point that we'll discuss later, since it is crucial to Paul's message to the Galatians.

But who were the Galatians? Galatia was a region in what is today part of Turkey. It stretched along the south shore of the Black Sea and came down close to the Mediterranean. It included about the same land area as Texas in the United States, though its terrain was a little more like western Colorado—that is, rocky and mountainous. Travel there was difficult, so it would take years for a single person to visit all the villages and towns in the area.

Some Bible scholars believe that Galatia held a number of small churches, many of which began in Cappadocia and expanded into Galatia proper. Timothy, one of Paul's disciples, grew up in this area.

Points of Debate

Regarding the context of Galatians, scholars disagree over two big points.

Which Galatians Did Paul Write To?

This debate doesn't greatly impact the letter's message, but some scholars disagree over whether Paul wrote this book to believers in North Galatia or South Galatia. The south is perhaps more likely, as that region included churches visited by Paul during his first missionary journey. But some believe it makes more sense that Paul wrote this letter while in prison to the new believers in North Galatia, which Paul could not visit for obvious reasons.

When Did Paul Write the Letter?

This leads into a second point of debate—when was this letter written? Unlike other letters by Paul, Galatians does not include many historical references that let us pinpoint its date. The references that we do find in the letter come from early in Paul's ministry, before his first missionary journey.

Some scholars, including the author of this study, therefore conclude that Paul wrote Galatians around 49 AD, shortly after his first missionary journey. One big point of evidence appears when Paul marvels that the believers in Galatia are so quickly falling away from the gospel (1:6). Given that he visited the believers in South Galatia during his first journey, and that his last historical comment concerned his visit to Jerusalem in 46 AD, these verses seem to indicate that the letter was written shortly afterward.

But if you believe that Paul wrote this letter to the northern Galatians, it makes more sense to say that he wrote it toward the end of his life while in prison. Conservative scholars can therefore date this book anywhere between 49 and 65 AD.

Liberal scholars, however, erroneously date Galatians as late as the second century, mainly because the oldest copy of the letter available today was produced around that time. This Greek manuscript, called Papyrus 46, includes Galatians and a number of other Pauline epistles. These scholars assume therefore that this manuscript was one of the first copies of the epistle, simply because the idea fits within false theories that the majority of the New Testament was written long after the apostles were dead. But in the end, all credible evidence suggests that Paul wrote this epistle, just as his first readers believed.

What do these debates have to do with the message of the letter? Very little, except for some scholars' interpretation of chapter 2, which we'll discuss later. But it's helpful to note these disagreements, in case someone ever challenges what you believe about Scripture.

Outline of Galatians

The letter can be divided into three general sections:

The Defense

Chapters 1 and 2 contain Paul's defense of his message. In Galatians 1:6–9, Paul tells the believers that someone has taught them false doctrine concerning the gospel. He details the errors they've heard, and he denounces all perversions of Christ's teaching.

In chapter 2, Paul establishes his credibility as an apostle and explains the importance of God's ministry to the Gentiles—that is, non-Jews. He also mentions the time he rebuked the apostle Peter for hypocrisy. This hypocrisy, if left unchallenged, could have given believers a false impression of how the gospel works.

The Explanation

Chapters 3 and 4 contain Paul's explanation of his message. He presents this teaching as truth from God—revealed, clarified, and written down in this letter so that the Galatians could refer back to it when their faith was challenged.

The Application

Chapters 5 and 6 contain Paul's application of his message. He shows the Galatians how his teaching should affect their attitude and actions. Believers today are perhaps most familiar with this section of the epistle, since the passages here are taught frequently. But before we try to apply God's message, we must take time to appreciate the truth that makes our growth possible.

Context

This structure reflects Paul's usual approach to writing. First, he corrects error and establishes his credibility. Second, he explains a theology that gives us a glimpse of the character and work of God. Finally, he shows how this theology can impact our lives—how God lets us demonstrate our beliefs through action.

The Context of Galatians

God chooses the right people to be at the right place at the right time. In Luke 4:25–27, Jesus explains that while there were many widows in the land of Israel during Elijah’s day, God sent the prophet to just one of them—the right one for the right time. And while many people had leprosy during Elisha’s day, God had Elisha heal just Naaman, the Syrian captain.

And during the early years of the Christian church, there were many Pharisees, people of understanding and education, people who could teach and write and lead. But God chose one Pharisee, a man who hated Christ and His followers, to reflect truth and become a radical example of saving grace.

We’ve discussed the possible dates for Galatians’ writing, but this study will assume an early date—49 AD. With that in mind, let’s examine the context of this letter within Paul’s life and ministry.

The following dates are approximate.

31 AD

The Martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:54–59)

Stephen was the first martyr of the Christian church. He served as a deacon to the believers in Jerusalem before being stoned to death by local religious leaders. The prayer he made for his executioners in Acts 7 stands as one of the purest examples of grace in all church history. “Lord,” he said, “do not hold this sin against them” (v. 60).

God answered Stephen’s prayer in the form of Saul, a Pharisee that stood nearby that day, holding the coats of those who took up stones to kill an innocent man. Saul—ethnically Jewish but also a Roman citizen—was a scholar with great potential, a man that had studied under Gamaliel, who ranked as one of the greatest teachers in Jewish tradition. Saul excelled in academia, but he held political ambitions as well.

Knowing that his religious leaders sought the elimination of this new Christian sect, Saul made a name for himself by arresting followers of “the Way” and delivering them to Jerusalem for imprisonment or even execution. But his motives weren’t entirely political—he passionately believed that Christians represented a danger to the religious order and were therefore an offense to God.

32 AD

Paul’s Conversion on the Road to Damascus (Gal. 1:16–17)

When Saul finished tamping down open Christian activity in Jerusalem, he looked for new opportunities to persecute the sect. He knew Christian Jews probably wouldn’t flee to Samaria, and not many stayed in Phoenicia, but a great number of them went north to Antioch and elsewhere. One of the big stops along the road north was the city of Damascus. So before long, the Sanhedrin gave Saul permission to find and arrest Christians there.

Saul began his three-day trip from Jerusalem to Damascus with no clue of God's plan for him. But while on the road, he witnessed Christ appear in a literally blinding display of light. Jesus told Saul to go on to Damascus and wait for someone to tell him what he should do next.

So Saul, whose eyes were now blind, but who could finally see spiritually, waited in Damascus until God sent Ananias, a Christian, to heal his eyes and disciple him. Saul became a changed man, and his name likewise changed to Paul.

Paul includes his testimony of salvation in Galatians for an important reason. Until this point in time, only the original twelve apostles could claim direct authority to teach in Christ's name. That's not to say they were perfect or error-free, but God did use them to record and teach His Word. However, the apostles in Jerusalem largely ministered to the Jews. The church there included many Gentiles, but believers had not yet spread out and actively shared the gospel with many non-Jews. Peter's ministry to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was an exception (Acts 10).

God therefore separated Paul for a special mission, one with as much urgency and authority as the apostles' commission—to share the gospel of Christ with Gentiles and expand the church into the rest of the known world.

Paul therefore needed to establish his credibility and authority as an apostle—the primary qualification being that the person must have been taught and set apart by Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus made Paul an apostle by appearing directly to him, not in the flesh as He had to His other disciples, but in the spirit (Acts 26:13–20).

Many Christian Jews accepted Paul's apostleship with difficulty. Not only was this former persecutor now claiming to be a believer, but he also wanted them to worship with Gentiles—even Gentiles that didn't follow the traditions of the Old Testament.

Paul nevertheless argued that those traditions were part of the old covenant, that those signs and symbols were no longer necessary to the Christian life. This led many Jews—Christian and non-Christian—to get upset.

32–35 AD

Paul in Damascus and Arabia (Gal. 1:17)

After Paul's conversion, he spent some time in Damascus, worshipping with other believers and teaching in the local synagogue, explaining to Jews how Jesus fulfilled the old covenant as the Messiah, the Christ.

Eventually, the Jews in the city became angry enough to try to kill Paul, but his friends helped him escape by lowering him over the city wall in a basket during the night. Paul then traveled to what in that day was called Arabia, a land that stretched up beyond the eastern side of the Jordan River.

In Galatians 1:11–18, Paul claims that Christ taught him the gospel directly, not through the preaching or teaching of other people. This teaching likely occurred while Paul spent three years in Arabia,

meaning that during this time Jesus somehow met with Paul and prepared him for his future ministry. We might not understand exactly what happened while Paul was in Arabia, but we do know that the experience gave Paul the same authority as an apostle. God set him apart as a special channel of truth and grace.

35 AD

First Trip to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18–19)

After three years in Arabia, Paul traveled to Jerusalem, where he spent 15 days meeting with Peter and James, the brother of Jesus, who had become head of the church in Jerusalem. Barnabas, who knew Paul from back in Damascus, convinced the apostles that Paul was a genuine believer, and so they all met with their former persecutor—at least before he was forced to flee Jerusalem.

35–46 AD

Paul Travels Through Cilicia to Syria and Antioch (Gal. 1:21–22)

God used the first few years of Paul’s spiritual life to prepare him for ministry in Antioch, a city north of Israel, where he spent 14 years as a church elder alongside Barnabas and four other leaders. But one day, while the believers were praying together, God told them to set apart Paul and Barnabas for a special journey.

So the two men traveled to Cypress, Cilicia, Pamphylia, and southern Galatia, preaching and teaching Christ to whoever would listen. Paul and Barnabas were surprised to see many Gentiles accept Jesus as their Savior. Overjoyed, they returned to Antioch to report what happened, but there they encountered a problem.

The Christian church in Antioch included a healthy mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Some of them, however, were *Judaizers*—people who claimed to be followers of Christ, but taught that salvation was possible only if a person trusted in Jesus *and* continued to follow old covenant traditions. They believed that people earned their righteousness in part by doing good deeds, much like how modern Roman Catholics believe that Christ’s sacrifice merely gave us the chance to earn salvation for ourselves.

And the old covenant traditions weren’t even the commandments we find in the Old Testament Scriptures. They included extra, non-inspired rules designed to support a religious establishment and keep people from even the slightest appearance of sin.

Context

Jesus spoke out against one of these rules in Matthew 15:4–6. Here the religious leaders taught that if a person was obligated to take care of his parents financially, but instead gave the money to the Temple, he could tell his parents, “Sorry, tough luck. It was a gift.” Jesus berated the people for valuing human tradition above kindness, grace, and duty.

By adding requirements and qualifications to the gospel, people create something that is simply no longer the gospel. This gospel, plus works, is no gospel at all.

46 AD

Second Trip to Jerusalem with Famine Relief (Gal. 2:1–10)

Paul traveled back to Jerusalem in 46 AD, bearing a gift from the believers in Antioch. The church in Jerusalem was suffering from a severe famine, and Paul took up a collection to help.

46–49 AD

Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13–14)

Paul then began his first missionary journey, where he met the believers in South Galatia that were probably the original recipients of his epistle. Here Paul shares the gospel with unbelievers while establishing new churches.

49 AD

The Writing of Galatians

After returning from his first missionary journey, Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians, which spelled out the doctrine of grace he had received from God.

50 AD

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)

After some confusion and misunderstanding among believers, a council finally convened in Jerusalem to settle the doctrine of the gospel. With the help of the Holy Spirit, they confirmed that salvation is indeed by the grace of God alone, and that no good deeds are required. Anything good done by the believer after salvation is the fruit of the Spirit, not something that can earn grace, favor, or sanctification. The apostles officially denounced any additions to the gospel of Christ.

50–52 AD

Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)

Paul then set off on his second missionary journey, where in addition to preaching the gospel to unbelievers, he also spread the news of the council's decision. He traveled back into Asia Minor and even through part of Europe.

53–58 AD

Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23–21:15)

Paul's third missionary journey took him through the regions of Cilicia, Lycia, Thrace, Macedonia, Achaia, and eventually back to Jerusalem.

60 AD

Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21)

There at the Temple Paul was attacked by a mob. After he was arrested—and thereby rescued—by a Roman centurion, he appealed to Caesar for a trial. Since Paul was a Roman citizen, he could gain audience with Caesar and make his defense. He believed that God wanted him to share Christ in Rome, and by God's grace, he did so. By all accounts, many of Caesar's own household became Christians.

67 AD

The Traditional Date of Paul's Death

After a long period of house arrest, Paul was executed. Some scholars believe he was released and made another journey into Europe before his execution, while others believe he died at the end of his first imprisonment. The Bible doesn't include an account of Paul's death, but scholars believe that the emperor Nero or another Roman official ordered his execution in about 67 AD.

The Theme of Galatians

Galatians features one central message:

Only by God's grace do we enter and live the Christian life.

Paul knew that the believers understood salvation by grace—that God's grace alone provided us entry into His kingdom, that only by God's grace could we receive salvation. So Paul spent most of the epistle explaining how God's grace applies to our Christian life. If only God can give us salvation, then only God can help us live and grow as believers.

The Error

As we discussed before, some people in the early church wanted to add back into the gospel many of the old covenant traditions. Some were Judaizers, some were outright heretics, and many more were simply deceived believers who failed to understand how God worked in their lives.

The Truth

God used Paul and the Epistle to the Galatians to explain that no amount of human effort will ever earn favor from God. Nothing we do can make us more holy. We cannot be good on our own. Everything we have—salvation from hell, sanctification to a closer walk with God, and one day, glorification in heaven—comes to us through God's grace.

Read Galatians 2:20–21. As believers, we are crucified with Christ. We no longer live, but rather, Christ lives through us. And this life that we live here on Earth, we live it by faith in God's Son, Jesus,

who loved us and gave Himself for us. We don't frustrate, or set aside, the grace of God because if we could gain righteousness by obeying God's Law, then Christ died for nothing.

Christ did much more than offer us a way out of hell—He gave us the means to live in close fellowship with Him, to grow ever closer in the sure hope of seeing Him one day in heaven. That means, that *way*, is His grace, which is what we will study in these lessons.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Name one point of debate regarding the Epistle to the Galatians.

Answers will vary.

Audience: North or South Galatia

Date: Early vs. Late Ministry (49–65 AD)

2. Who were the Judaizers?

C. People who taught that Christians must follow Old Testament traditions to be saved

3. Why did Paul go to Jerusalem in 46 AD?

B. To bring a relief gift from the church in Antioch

4. Choose the one statement that best matches the theme of Galatians

C. We receive salvation only by the grace of God, and good works are the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

5. In Acts 9:1–25, Paul traveled to Damascus to arrest Christians. How did God alter this plan?

Answers will vary regarding God's work and Paul's conversion on the way to Damascus.

LESSON ONE

Introduction to the Epistle



Introduction to the Book of Galatians

- The Book Is Actually a Letter
- Points of Debate
 - Which Galatians Did Paul Write To? North Galatia or South Galatia
 - When Did Paul Write the Letter?
 - Early Date: 49 AD —Shortly after his first missionary journey
 - Late Date: 65 AD —In prison near the end of his life
- Outline of Galatians
 - The Defense – Chapters 1 & 2

Paul corrects an error while establishing the importance of his message and his credibility as an apostle of Christ.
 - The Explanation – Chapters 3 & 4

Paul outlines his message in greater detail.
 - The Application – Chapters 5 & 6

Paul demonstrates how his message should change his readers.

The Context of Galatians

- **31 AD** – The Martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:54–59)
- **32 AD** – Paul’s Conversion on the Road to Damascus (Gal. 1:16–17)
- **32–35 AD** – Paul in Damascus and Arabia (Gal. 1:17)
- **35 AD** – First Trip to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18–19)
- **35–46 AD** – Paul Travels Through Cilicia to Syria and Antioch (Gal. 1:21–22)

During the first century, Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire.

- **46 AD** – Second Trip to Jerusalem with Famine Relief (Gal. 2:1–10)
- **46–49 AD** – Paul’s First Missionary Journey (Acts 13–14)
- **49 AD** – The Writing of Galatians
- **50 AD** – The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)
- **50–52 AD** – Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)
- **53–58 AD** – Paul’s Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23–21:15)
- **60 AD** – Paul’s Arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21)
- **67 AD** – The Traditional Date of Paul’s Death

The Theme of Galatians

Only by God’s grace do we enter and live the Christian life.

Student Work

Reading 1: Acts 1:1–11; 2:36–47

- What responsibility did Christ give His followers before He ascended back into heaven (1:8)?

To be witnesses for Him.

- And how did God use Peter during the Feast of Pentecost (2:36–41)?

He testified of Christ before the crowd, and thousands joined the body of believers.

- How did the early church in Jerusalem reflect God's grace (2:42–47)?

They worshipped together, learned the doctrine of Christ, shared their property, and had favor with their community.

- Reflections

Reading 2: Acts 6:8–7:2; 7:51–8:4

- What did Stephen accuse the people of doing (7:52)?

Rejecting and killing the prophets and the Messiah.

- But how did he reflect God’s grace (7:59–60)?

At the moment of his death, he asked God not to hold his murder against those who murdered him.

- Read Acts 8:1–4 again. If you were a Christian in this time and place, what would you ask God to do?

Answers will vary.

- Reflections

Reading 3: Acts 9:1–25

- What was Saul’s plan for this trip (9:1–2)?

To imprison or even kill believers.

- But what was Christ’s plan (9:15–16)?

To redeem Saul and make him a messenger of the gospel.

- In the end, what do you think Ananias thought of all this?

Answers will vary.

- Reflections

One Gospel of Grace

Objectives

- Examine how Paul’s greeting reflects the theme of grace
- Introduce the false gospel that Galatians was written to dispel
- Recognize Christ’s grace as essential to the gospel

Text

Galatians 1:1–9

Teacher’s Lesson

Today we’ll look at the one gospel of grace. More than anything else, Paul wanted the readers of this epistle to understand the purity and simplicity of God’s grace—especially as it applies to the Christian life.

Grace is the goodness of God acting in a person’s life. It can take many forms and help us in many ways. Everything good we see, and even the good things we can’t imagine yet, come from the grace of God. He loves us, and His grace makes that love real to us.

Discussion

But some people might think, “Can’t I make my own good?” Don’t we make good things happen because we do good stuff? Can’t we be better when we do better? Of course we can’t do enough good to earn our way into heaven, but can’t we do enough good to make our lives on Earth easier? How does God’s grace fit in this picture?

It’s easy to spot the big errors. There are plenty of false religions and even supposedly Christian denominations that claim we can find salvation by doing good things. We’re quick to denounce those false teachers, but even though we understand that faith and salvation come by God’s grace alone, we can easily fall into the same, subtle mistakes made by the Galatians. Paul reminds them and us that grace plays an essential part in our life *after* salvation, as well as *for* salvation.

Because the fact is—we *can’t* make our own good. It’s all God’s grace.

Read Galatians 1:1–9. Given the seriousness of this topic, Paul hits the ground running. He’s written the epistle to address a specific threat, and that allows little time for pleasantries. People have

misrepresented grace, and they must be corrected. The gospel is under attack, and it must be defended.

Paul's Greeting Introduces Grace (1:1–5)

Beginning immediately in verses 1–5, Paul incorporates grace into his greeting. Everything written here reflects the grace of God, because no good thing would be possible without Him.

Grace in Paul's Calling (v. 1)

In the first verse, Paul identifies himself as an apostle, a claim which he defends in the second half of chapter one and all of chapter two.

A Call Not of Human Origin

Paul was an apostle on par with the original twelve who followed Christ, and only by God's grace could this be possible. No human gave Paul his apostleship. Note two Greek prepositions used in this verse:

- ◉ *apo*—(of, from)—People did not give or transfer apostleship to Paul. Some denominations hold to the teaching of *apostolic succession*, whereby Christ's original apostles taught others and passed on their title when they died. Paul states that he did not receive his calling through such a process, but that God Himself granted it—by grace.
- ◉ *dia*—(by, through)—The authority of Paul's teaching was not based on human power. The doctrine of Paul reflected God's power and authority, and when Paul acted, he did so to follow God's will. He was like an ambassador given a kind of representative authority by his government—but this government wasn't made of people. Paul had no power of his own, but he spoke with the power of his God.

A Call Through Jesus Christ and the Father

Paul's apostleship came from the same Person who gave apostleship to the original twelve. Jesus Christ and God the Father ordained Paul and instructed him directly.

Discussion

This calling could have come only by grace. How many people would have chosen Paul as an apostle?

We can imagine how difficult it would be for the original apostles to accept that God chose one of their worst persecutors to become a torchbearer for the gospel. Saul jailed and killed Christians, and now this Paul claimed to be one of them?

Only God's grace could have made this miracle happen. And only God's grace could have transformed a murderer into a reflection of divine love.

Grace in Paul's Greeting (vv. 2–3)

Paul reflects grace even as he greets the believers in Galatia.

The Galatians Are Brothers in Christ (v. 2)

First, he calls his fellow believers “brothers.” This may sound cliché from our perspective as modern Christians. We hear believers call each other *brother* and *sister* often. But when Paul, a devout Jew, asserted equal familial footing with a group of Gentiles, he made quite a statement.

In an age where tribal and ethnic ties bound people together more than anything else, brotherhood meant something important. Paul wanted the Galatians to understand that the gospel could break down any boundary, that it united God's children together in Christ. God views no believer as more or less precious than another.

The Galatians Are Blessed in Christ (v. 3)

In verse 3, Paul lists two blessings for the Galatian believers—grace and peace.

Context

Almost all of Paul's letters begin with a mention of these two blessings, though a few cases in the New Testament differ. Jude opens with mercy, peace, and love. All three of the pastoral epistles—1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus—start with grace, peace, and mercy. But each letter reminded believers of the common blessings given to them by Christ.

Paul's greeting varied on a common salutation made by people during this era. Some Gentile cultures included the greeting, “Grace to you,” which meant that the speaker hoped the other person would have a good day. Similarly, Jews spoke *Shalom* (peace) to each other. Today we might say, “Have a good day,” but that wish isn't backed up with any real effort or hope.

But grace and peace took on new meaning in Christ. As Christians, we already have access to grace and peace, and each day brings new opportunities to see God multiply His blessings to us. To see all this, we need only look up, and by His grace, focus on Him. He will show us His goodness.

Grace in Christ's Work (vv. 4–5)

Next, Paul reminds the Galatians of what Christ has done for them. It's His work that makes our brotherhood and community possible.

Christ, by Grace, Saves Us from Sin

Our salvation became possible only by the grace of God. No true believer would argue with this point. For if we discard God's grace, we say we have salvation by what—our own goodness? The goodness of someone else? By accident? To deny Christ's grace in salvation is to deny the central teaching of Christianity itself.

Christ gave Himself up for our sins and accomplished our salvation, once and forever. He suffered and died to pay the penalty we owed for our sins, and by rising again, He defeated death and sin forever. Now we need only come to Him, ask His forgiveness for our sin, and accept Him as our Savior and Lord.

Application

If we don't accept these basic truths, we reveal a lack of faith in Christ. In verse 9, Paul says that those who would distort the gospel are accursed. He calls them *anathema*—which in Greek means “judged and found guilty.” Paul uses this strong term to describe those who would teach any other gospel.

Christ, by Grace, Delivers Us from This Evil Age

In verse 4, Paul is also referring to sanctification—that is, the process by which we put off the old ways of sin and put on the new ways of Christ. Sanctification is God's way to grow us, spiritually. As we seek Him through His Word, He conforms us into the image of His Son, Jesus.

This deliverance does not mean that God prevents us from sinning after He redeems us. After all, Paul gave believers some of his strongest warnings against sin (Rom. 6:12–18). Rather, our deliverance means that God cares for us and allows us to grow in Christ.

Paul writes that this sanctification, this deliverance, is possible only by the grace of Christ, who gave Himself up for us. Paul had heard that the Galatians were falling back into bondage to their sin. He will address this problem in depth later, but here he states in no uncertain terms that sanctification is *not* a great human effort at self-correction.

Discussion

Many Christians struggle to accept this, and some even deny it. We know that we are saved only by God's grace, but can we admit that only God's grace allows us to grow? Do we believe that we need grace each and every day—as much as we did at the beginning of our relationship with Him?

When we truly believe that we need God's grace to do any good thing, that belief changes how we seek God. It drives us to our knees as we seek God's help for every part of our life.

But too often, we think, “Oh, I can handle this trial or this temptation. It's so small.” Our pride pulls us away from God's grace, and we begin to think we succeed on our own strength and merit.

If we misunderstand this idea of God's grace in our sanctification, we will seriously distort our faith. Throughout church history, many believers have swayed toward two possible extremes:

“I Don’t Need to Be Delivered from This Evil Age.”

If God gives us lots of grace to grow and be better, then we don’t need to worry about doing good, right? If He’s paid for our sins, and His grace works through our lives, then it doesn’t matter if we obey.

This is how the believers in Corinth once thought. They tolerated horrific immorality and abuse within their church—including abominations like incest (1 Cor. 5). From their perspective, Christ didn’t die *for* their sins, He died *so that they could sin more*. They had reduced their relationship with a holy God to a free ticket out of hell—and a free pass to do whatever they wanted while on Earth (1 Cor. 6:18–20).

This view of grace demeans God’s work—it is a mockery of Christ’s suffering, and it is a betrayal of His love. He took on our sin so that we by grace could take on His righteousness. That’s a trade no one in his right mind would reject.

Application

Christ told His disciples that if they loved Him, they should keep His commandments (John 14:12–17). Christians are identified by their love and obedience, which is possible through the Spirit of God. Those who demonstrate no love or obedience may never have accepted Christ in the first place.

“Christ Gave Me the Chance to Deliver Myself from This Evil Age.”

Another, much more subtle error is the belief that we can achieve our own sanctification. From this perspective, spiritual growth is simply a video game in which we grind our way to a higher level or a more impressive score. Christ gets us started at salvation, but we take it from there.

The Judaizers promoted this belief by telling Christians that in order to maintain their salvation and continue growing, they must keep all the laws of Moses, as well as Jewish traditions written after the canonical books of the Old Testament (Acts 15:1–2; 1 Tim. 4:1–5). They thought sanctification was only about hard work and perseverance.

Application

Refusing God’s grace is just as harmful as taking it for granted. If we view our spiritual growth only as the result of hard work, we will burn ourselves out trying to change who we are. We will create lists of good things to do, and we’ll feed our pride by checking off as many items as we can. And when we reach the end of our ability, we’ll collapse back into sin, because our strength isn’t enough to deliver us from evil (1 Cor. 10:12–13; John 15:1–11).

We cannot walk with God in our own strength any more than we could have found Him in the first place. We must acknowledge that only Christ’s grace can bring us closer to Him. Then we will seek to obey Him through His strength, resting in His peace and reflecting His love to others.

Both of these extremes—taking grace for granted and refusing grace—are harmful. You might begin to realize why Paul considered this topic so important.

Unfortunately, when believers see the bad results of one extreme, they often swing to the opposite. We can see strict, graceless, works-obsessed Christians, and then we immediately look for believers who will encourage sin. On the other hand, we can see the excesses of those who find no harm in the sins of our culture, and then we quickly try to distinguish ourselves in pride and self-righteousness. Neither response reflects the character of Christ.

Paul attacks both extremes in his epistles, but the epistle to the Galatians primarily addresses those who don't recognize God's grace in the Christian life. God wanted the believers in Galatia to know that He offered continual deliverance as well as salvation. His strength is sure, and as long as we rely on Him, we can never fall.

Christ, by Grace, Works God's Will for His Glory

God wills that every person who is redeemed will move forward in sanctification. He wants every believer to become closer to Him. And for Him to receive the glory for this relationship, *He* must enable it, not us.

Sanctification works the same way as salvation—His grace accomplishes His will for His glory (Phil. 2:12–13).

The person who can stop abusing drugs in his own strength will get the credit for it. Likewise, the person who can lose weight and get in better shape will get the glory. We encourage this kind of pride and achievement by giving awards and praise, hoping that others will follow the example of hardworking people.

And if we could promote sanctification by our own effort, we would get the glory, not God. But we can't.

Application

When we recognize our weakness, we may still sin again, but we can immediately turn to God and ask Him for His grace—the only grace strong enough to pull us back out of sin (1 John 1:9). When we struggle in our own power, we will fall, but every time we turn to God, He'll pull us out of that pit as a testimony for His glory—and as a reminder of our weakness and stubbornness.

God is the God of grace, and our life must be a life of grace.

An Attack on the Gospel of Grace (vv. 6–9)

Paul's letters often follow a certain pattern. He begins with an introduction, followed by whom he's writing to, a blessing with a brief description of Christ, and then thanks. Almost every epistle from Paul features this order.

So at this point in Galatians, the readers might expect Paul to give a word of thanksgiving, perhaps to appreciate how God has used the recipients of the epistle in some special way. But Paul skips the thanksgiving section and dives right into the topic at hand. It's that important.

Read Galatians 1:6. Note that Paul parallels the words *grace* and *gospel*. The gospel is “good news” because even though we're not able to live righteously, God's grace can enable us to do so. God has sent His Son to do what we cannot—that is, save us from death and help us live in new life.

Note also that Paul wrote this letter to Galatian believers, not the unsaved. These readers were called to the grace of Christ (v. 6) and received the gospel of Christ (v. 9). But Paul was concerned that their view of the gospel could become corrupted.

Paul wondered why the Galatian believers had so quickly turned from the message of grace to the error of human effort. But how serious was this false doctrine?

False Teachers Try to Turn Us from the Gospel's Power (v. 6)

In the first step of their attack, the Judaizers and false teachers tried to turn the Galatians away from the power of the gospel.

Context

We can imagine how difficult this situation must have been for Paul. To leave behind young converts was excruciating. He met and disciplined these believers during his first missionary journey, spending perhaps only a few weeks with them, teaching from the Old Testament Scriptures and the one or two Gospels that were written by that point. His teaching may have included only the basics of the gospel. And now, just a little while after he returned to Antioch, Paul heard that the Galatians have begun to turn from God's grace.

But we can see God's grace even in this situation. Paul needed to write letters to address doctrinal error, and through that need, God provided us with Galatians. In fact, God inspired much of the New Testament to address errors, crises, and misunderstandings.

But these false teachers needed correction. They believed that Christ's work had no relevance to a Christian after salvation. Once saved, they said, Christians should go back to trying to do good on their own. According to their teaching, we're still in bondage to our weakness and to the judgment of the Law. Nothing's changed, except now we're not going to hell.

This is not the gospel of Christ. It is a different gospel.

These Two Gospels Cannot Coexist

In verse 6, Paul said that people who accepted this false gospel were removed, or had deserted, from Christ. Paul uses the Greek word *metatithemi*, which means to transpose or put one thing

in place of another. This word was used when a soldier deserted his army and joined the enemy. Sides are switched, and the good has been replaced with the bad.

So Paul warned the Galatians that they could not accept this false doctrine and still trust the true gospel. The two could not coexist. People may attempt to believe contradictory doctrine, but this will always create confusion.

These Two Gospels Are Fundamentally Different

It's difficult to translate verses 6 and 7 from Greek into English. Paul uses two different Greek words that we could both translate to "another." In verse 6, he writes that the Galatians have turned to "another" or "different" gospel, and then in verse 7 he writes that there's no such thing as "another" gospel.

Discussion

What do you think he means?

Two Gospels

Verse 6	<u>heteros</u>	Another of a different type
Verse 7	<u>allos</u>	Another of the same type

In verse 6, Paul uses the Greek word *heteros*, which means "another of a different type." The Galatians had turned to a different doctrine that was *not* the gospel.

In verse 7, Paul uses the word *allos*, which means "another of the same type." He says that there is no second gospel, no option other than the gospel of grace through Christ.

He uses these two similar words—*heteros* and *allos*—to emphasize that we can try to substitute the true gospel with another, but that substitute will always be a false doctrine.

As an example of Paul's point, we can look to sandwiches. Imagine a turkey sandwich and a roast beef sandwich. These sandwiches are another of the same type—*allos*. The Galatians were turning to what they thought was an *allos* gospel—a gospel with just a few things changed, but still a gospel. But Paul warned them that a gospel changed is no gospel at all. They turned to a *heteros* doctrine. They didn't find another sandwich. They found poison.

Application

On an historical note: churches who change the gospel of grace for Christian life—for Christian sanctification—will eventually change the gospel of grace for salvation. As we allow ourselves to think that we can earn grace from God each day, we may come to think that we earned His grace when He saved us. It's a slippery slope.

False Teachers Try to Unsettle Us from the Gospel's Message (v. 7)

False teachers not only try to remove us from the gospel's power, but they also try to unsettle us from its message.

We see a similar strategy from sales people today. Car commercials don't just talk about what their cars *do*—they emphasize how their cars will make you *feel*. Their cars inspire confidence and happiness. They can even make you look more attractive, somehow.

The point of this kind of messaging is to make you feel discontent. My car doesn't make me feel confident, happy, or more attractive, but *that* one might.

Similarly, the false teachers in Galatia tried to make the believers feel dissatisfied with the gospel of grace. Shouldn't there be something more?

But when we accept this so-called "gospel" of works instead of the gospel of grace, we begin to struggle in our walk with God.

The Gospel of Works Troubles True Believers

Paul wrote in verse 7 that the false teachers tried to trouble, confuse, and disturb the believers in Galatia. The word Paul uses here is *tarassō*, which means to unsettle or cause discontent.

False teachers won't always say, "Hey, your gospel makes no sense. You're wrong." They'll often say, "Hey, that's interesting, but here's something else that will help you do that even better."

Context

It's a tactic similar to what Satan used on Eve. He never told her that she was wrong. He simply prodded her with questions and contradicted God. She didn't know how to answer him, and so he created doubt and discontent (Gen. 3:1–5).

So the false teachers in Galatia told the believers that sure, Paul's doctrine was great for getting a person saved, but what about after that? Grace can't help us grow in Christ, can it? We obviously need something more than the gospel.

Application

This false gospel removes grace and peace, the very things that Paul prayed for the Galatian church in verse 3. The false gospel of works requires us to work through life in our own strength, trying to do better and be better by our own power. But sooner or later, we'll collapse under our sin and weakness.

This is one reason many young people leave the church as soon as their parents allow them. Some believe—because many teachers teach—that their sanctification and growth is a measure of how strong and good and pure they can be. Many teachers, in an effort to encourage personal responsibility, drive away young people who realize that they can't be perfect on their own—so why bother trying?

Those people that do stay in the church may be stuck with a checklist—do these good things and don't do these bad things. But eventually, people tire of doing that in their own strength, as well.

Sure, the church might shorten the list—here's just three things on the list, instead of three hundred. Or even do just one thing—love people, and don't worry about the rest. Don't bother with holiness or justice.

But we can do no good—not even a simple thing like love—without God's grace.

So Paul warns us not to rely on our own strength to live the Christian life. We will have no peace and no grace.

The Gospel of Works Perverts the True Gospel

The word translated “distort” or “pervert” in verse 7 is the Greek *metastrepho*. It appears three times in the New Testament, with the other two occurrences often translated as “turn.”

The idea behind this word is to turn something around, to point something in a direction that wasn't originally intended. It's like if you were driving to a wedding in Kansas and someone gave you directions that landed you in Florida. You'd be “metastrephoed.”

Paul argues here that when we add works as a requirement for sanctification—when we think we can do good in our own power—we don't just skew the gospel, we turn it 180 degrees toward the wrong direction.

False Teachers Will Be Judged for Mistreating the Gospel (vv. 8–9)

Read verses 8–9. God will judge those who distort the gospel of Christ.

The Judgment Is Extreme

Paul uses one of the harshest condemnations possible in these verses. He writes that those who preach another gospel are *anathema*—that is, judged, and utterly condemned to punishment. Strong defines *anathema* as “accused, devoted to the direst of woes.”

The Judgment Is Indiscriminate

This judgment applies no matter who teaches false doctrine. Paul wrote that even if he or an angel from heaven taught a false gospel, it would still be wrong.

The Judgment Is Certain

Paul repeats the condemnation to emphasize its certainty. He wanted his readers to know how serious and how certain this judgment was.

In the next lesson, we'll compare the root of the false works-gospel with the origin of the true grace-gospel. God offers us the true gospel, while the false gospel grows from human pride.

Quiz Answer Key

1. What is grace?

Answers will vary. Grace is the goodness of God acting in a person's life.

2. How did Paul's greeting reflect God's grace?

D. All of the above

3. What did Paul mean when he wrote that Christ delivers us from this evil age?

C. God cares for us and improves us through the work of His Son, Christ.

4. Paul wrote that the Galatians had fallen for "another" gospel. What Greek word did he use?

A. *Heteros* – another of a different type

5. According to Christ's prayer the night before his arrest (John 17), what reason did He come to Earth?

Answers will vary. See John 17:1, 6. Christ came to glorify His Father by manifesting God's name to the world. Christ also came to offer light, life, and truth.

LESSON TWO

One Gospel of Grace



The Definition of Grace

- Grace is the goodness of God acting in a person's life.

Paul's Greeting Introduces Grace (1:1–5)

- Grace in Paul's Calling (v. 1)
 - A Call Not of Human Origin
 - A Call Through Jesus Christ and the Father

Paul was an apostle only by the grace of God.

- Grace in Paul's Greeting (vv. 2–3)
 - The Galatians Are Brothers in Christ (v. 2)
The gospel binds people together across ethnic boundaries.
 - The Galatians Are Blessed in Christ (v. 3)
As Christians, we have grace and peace in God.
- Grace in Christ's Work (vv. 4–5)
 - Christ, by Grace, Saves Us from Sin
 - Christ, by Grace, Delivers Us from This Evil Age
 - Two Extreme Responses:
 - "I Don't Need to Be Delivered from This Evil Age."
 - "Christ Gave Me the Chance to Deliver Myself from This Evil Age."

We know that we're saved only by God's grace—but can we admit that we can grow only by that same grace? Do we believe that we need His grace each and every day, as much as we did at the beginning of our relationship with Him?

- Christ, by Grace, Works God's Will for His Glory

An Attack on the Gospel of Grace (vv. 6–9)

- False Teachers Try to Turn Us from the Gospel's Power (v. 6)
 - These Two Gospels Cannot Coexist

To believe one, we must desert (*metatithemi*, v. 6) the other.
 - These Two Gospels Are Fundamentally Different
 - Verse 6: *heteros* – Another of a different type
 - Verse 7: *allos* – Another of the same type
- False Teachers Try to Unsettle Us from the Gospel's Method (v. 7)
 - The Gospel of Works Troubles True Believers
 - The Gospel of Works Perverts the True Gospel
- False Teachers Will Be Judged for Mistreating the Gospel (vv. 8–9)
 - The Judgment Is Extreme
 - The Judgment Is Indiscriminate
 - The Judgment Is Certain

Student Work

Reading 1: Acts 8:4–25

- How did God demonstrate His blessing over His church (8:5–8)?

Philip taught the doctrine of Christ to the entire city, and God healed many people.

- What did Simon want Peter and John to give him (8:19)?

The power to give others the Holy Spirit.

- But what was his mistake? Who was to distribute this gift?

God shares with His children the Holy Spirit as a gift of grace.

- Reflections

Reading 3: John 17

- What was Christ's primary purpose in coming to Earth (17:1, 6)?

To glorify God by connecting people to Him.

- Who was Christ praying for in this passage (17:20)?

Us—believers who have not yet seen Him face-to-face.

- What was His motivation for this mission? What blessing do we receive as a result (17:26)?

That God's love would live in us.

- Reflections

LESSON THREE

The Gospel from God

Objectives

- Understand Paul's argument for the divine origin of the gospel
- See the gospel as a self-revelation of God's character through Christ
- Recognize how Paul's ministry reflected the glory of God

Text

Galatians 1:11–24

Teacher's Lesson

For the past few lessons, we've read through Paul's introduction to Galatians, which among his letters in Scripture is probably his first, chronologically. The church in Galatia was dear to Paul, with many of the believers there having been saved under his ministry. But once he returned to Antioch, he heard that false teachers had crept into the church after he left, teaching that Gentile Christians must conform to Jewish tradition in order to continue growing in Christ.

These teachers also attacked Paul's authority as an apostle, falsely claiming he had neither the support of the church in Jerusalem nor the approval of Christ. They claimed that his ministry was inferior because he served Gentiles—thereby implying that Gentile believers were somehow inferior to Jewish believers.

Paul therefore defends his message first by establishing his authority as an apostle of Christ. He doesn't try to inflate his own importance, but instead connects his message and ministry to the authority of God Himself.

Having warned the Galatians of the dangers of false gospels, Paul continues to defend the true gospel—and his ministry of it. The remainder of chapter 1 and all of chapter 2 develop Paul's argument with three points:

The Gospel's Message Is Not of Human Invention (1:11–24)

If people had invented the gospel, then its creators would be more important than its message. The gospel would be in service to its preachers, not the other way around.

The Gospel's Message Is Confirmed Among Believers (2:1–10)

The gospel proves itself true no matter whom it touches. The gospel works the same way in New York as it does in the Congo. It affects a business executive the same way it does a dock worker. It is transnational, transchronal, transcultural—because Christ demonstrates His saving power everywhere, at all times, for anyone who comes to Him.

The Messengers of the Gospel Are Not Above the Message (2:11–21)

No matter how impressive the preachers or teachers might be, the gospel is always their master. When we believe that we are more important than the gospel, we will attempt to bend it to serve our own pride and weakness.

Today we'll discuss the first of these points.

The Gospel's Divine Origin (1:11–12)

The gospel can save us because it is not from us—it is from God. Only Christ's power could make us children of God, and only His grace will bring us closer to Him.

The Gospel Does Not Come from Mankind (vv. 11–12a)

Read verses 11–12. The gospel is not a product of human invention.

The Greek phrase used in verse 11 is *kata anthropos*, meaning “according to men.” The gospel does not follow human thought or logic. According to human thinking, if we wrong God, if we reject God and defy God with our sin, we have to make it right—right? Shouldn't the burden of restoration sit on our shoulders?

Context

Mankind's fundamental spiritual problem is our separation from God. Other religions might say this is a separation from some other supreme deity or being or collective, but these belief systems all offer the same solution—we must make it right. We, not God, must do enough good to balance the scales in our favor. We must work or fight or pray or meditate our way back to Him.

But the gospel of Christ offers a unique way back to God. We come to Him through the work of Christ on the cross, and we grow closer to Him by His grace.

Paul makes his point in two parts:

Paul Was Not Given the Gospel by People

Paul reasserts the parenthetical comment he made back in verse 1. His position as an apostle did not come from other people, and neither did his message. It did not originate in mankind's imagination.

Paul Was Not Taught the Gospel by People

There's a difference between education and revelation. Paul claims that he did not learn the gospel by studying under the teaching of another person. Rather, he learned through direct revelation from Christ. Paul knew that the gospel of grace came from Christ, because Christ taught it to him directly.

The Gospel Is a Revelation of Jesus Christ (v. 12b)

The gospel came from Christ, because He *is* the gospel's central truth. The good news tells us about His character, His love, His grace, and His work. It is a revelation from Him, so it contains none of the pride and error found in false, human-created doctrine.

Paul's Testimony Displays the Gospel's Divine Nature (vv. 13–17)

To demonstrate the power of God's grace, Paul gives his own testimony of salvation. Only God could have taken Saul and turned him into a vessel of grace and love.

Before His Salvation, Paul's Religion Was Led by Human Effort (vv. 13–14)

Read verses 13–14. Paul begins his testimony by claiming that he had excelled in religion without God's help. By his own strength, he climbed the ranks of the Pharisees and became one of the most driven persecutors of the Christian church.

His Religion Stood on Human Tradition

Paul had studied at the feet of Gamaliel, an important Jewish rabbi. That education left Paul zealous for the traditions of his fathers—the rules written by religious leaders to help protect Jewish culture.

Paul thought that he could work his way closer to God by following the do's and don'ts invented by mankind. He believed that his spirituality could be measured by his respect for his culture's norms.

His Zeal Grew from Human Labor

Paul did not find inspiration in the character and work of God, but rather in the great circus of human effort and achievement. He was excited about what he could accomplish, what his friends

and fellow Pharisees could do together. He learned and advanced beyond all his peers. He was disciplined and focused, but completely misguided.

Application

Paul included this testimony to showcase God’s grace, but he also had another point. If true religion consisted only of human effort, he could have mastered it. Education, opportunity, zeal—he had everything going for him. But it was all useless without God’s grace.

From Paul we learn that a person can appear zealous, focused, and religious without experiencing the grace of the gospel. Outward actions do not prove inward redemption.

Paul’s Salvation Came by Grace (vv. 15–16a)

Read verses 15–16. God gave Paul life through grace. Unlike in the previous verses, Paul is no longer the central actor. Instead, he writes of God’s work *through* him.

By Grace, God Watched Over Both of Paul’s Births

Paul sees God’s grace in both of his births—the physical and the spiritual. God had a plan for Paul before he was born, and after he was grown, God called him to the work of Christ.

Each birth—physical and spiritual—is a miracle, and we can see God’s grace in every new life.

By Grace, God Revealed the Son in Paul

The Revelation of Paul’s Changed Life

Some scholars debate how exactly to translate the beginning of verse 16. Here the Greek reads, literally, “to reveal His Son *in* me,” but some translations will change it to “reveal His Son *to* me” to help mirror this verse with the previous point on salvation.

This author believes that “*in* me” is more correct, but both translations carry the essential ideas. Not only did God reveal His Son, Jesus, *to* Paul, but God also made another revelation *through* Paul, visible to anyone that looked at the apostle’s life. God changed Paul drastically, thereby revealing Christ *in* Paul, like a painter painting a masterpiece on a canvas.

The Revelation of Paul’s Changed Message

According to verse 16, God changed Paul in order to change Paul’s message—so that he would preach Christ among the Gentiles. Before, Paul preached death to believers, and now he preaches life in Christ.

His life had to change before his message changed, and both needed to change before he could showcase Christ’s glory.

Application

Like Paul, every Christian serves as a canvas, and we shine only so much as we display God's glory. Only by His grace can we reflect Him in our life and in our ministry to others.

Paul's Message Came by Grace, Not Human Imagination (vv. 16b–17)

Read verses 16b–17. Paul's message was an expression of God's grace, not human imagination. To counter the arguments of Judaizers, Paul writes that he received this message straight from Christ.

Paul Didn't Learn a Human Version of the Gospel

When Paul received Christ, he didn't learn more about the gospel from a human teacher, but from the Author of the gospel Himself. So after Paul's salvation, he immediately began preaching Christ in Damascus—without first seeking approval from the apostles in Jerusalem.

Application

We do not find the gospel's authority in the person who teaches it. The gospel's power is inherent, derived from Christ alone.

We should therefore not accept a truth simply because it's taught by a teacher we like. Nor should we discard a truth because it's promoted by a teacher we don't like. We should be Berean (Acts 17:11), never holding to a truth unless the Word of God backs it up. Good teachers will expect you to compare their doctrine against Scripture.

Paul Made Time to Learn from Christ

As we discussed in a previous lesson, the reference to Arabia in verse 17 appears to be a time after Paul fled Damascus, when he lived alone in the desert and learned the gospel from Christ. Many scholars believe that this period lasted around three years, though it could have been as short as a few months.

Of course, Paul did not receive his education entirely from Christ. As a youth he must have studied the Old Testament Scriptures, even before he sat under Gamaliel's teaching. He also heard Stephen's sermon, as well as anything Ananias taught him in Damascus.

But Paul claims to be an apostle—a special title available only to those taught directly by Christ. When he taught, therefore, he merely passed on doctrine he received through direct revelation from God.

Paul's Ministry Displays the Gospel's Divine Nature (vv. 18–24)

As we discussed before, Paul defended his ministry so strongly because it reflected the gospel of Christ. God saved Paul and used him to show the change that Christ could make in anyone. Paul was by no means perfect, but God's ministry through him was important.

Context

Peter faced much of the same battle when he discipled Cornelius, the Roman centurion who accepted Christ after inviting the apostle to his house (Acts 10–11). Peter had to remind some believers that Christ offered salvation and grace not just to Jews, but to Gentiles, as well. If Cornelius had somehow been “disqualified” from Christianity, the cause of the gospel would have suffered. Peter needed to defend the conversion of Cornelius to establish clearly that all people could accept Christ, no matter their background.

Read Galatians 1:18–24. Here Paul describes those people with whom he has met since his conversion.

His Ministry Was Accepted by Other Believers (vv. 18–20)

Paul did not set out to change the faith he had accepted. He knew that while he had received teaching directly from Christ, he needed to establish unity with believers outside of Damascus and Antioch—particularly with the church leaders in Jerusalem.

So he visited the Holy City for fifteen days, talking to Peter and James. Christians there viewed him with skepticism—at least at first. After all, this was the man who had jailed believers, and then, after a supposed vision of Christ, he had vanished into the desert for three years. And now he said he was an apostle?

But Barnabas introduced Paul to Peter and James. And together they compared Paul's teachings with the teachings of Christ, confirming his role as a fellow minister of the gospel.

Discussion

So why did Paul visit these two specific apostles? Peter served as the de facto leader of the surviving apostles, reaching out primarily to the Jews in Israel. James, who was the brother of Jesus, not James the apostle, served as the leader of the church in Jerusalem, which included more than 3,000 people. Until the New Testament Scriptures were written, many Christians looked to these men as important authorities on the teachings of Christ. Paul could have met with more apostles, but they might have been away from Jerusalem at the time, or they might even have been afraid to see him.

Ultimately, Paul cites his relationship with Peter and James, not to establish his authority—Christ had done that—but to show the unity between his message and the message of the other apostles.

The gospel was universal, not regional, and it was far more important than any one teacher or group of people.

His Ministry Brought Glory to God (vv. 21–24)

Paul then speaks of his work in Cilicia and Syria. Paul preached in Cilicia first, and then settled in Antioch, a city in Syria, for a little more than a decade. There he ministered in a church comprised of both Jewish and Gentile believers.

Paul understood what he represented to other believers. In Paul was an amazing example of the divine power of the gospel. No one but God could have taken a powerful, influential religious leader and changed him into a humble servant of Christ. This gave hope to Christians in Antioch and Jerusalem—God could save anyone, even the people trying to stamp Christianity out.

Christians praised God for the work He had done in Paul, and for the work He was doing through Paul. Many were saved through this ministry, and many saw the majesty of God for the first time.

Paul therefore defended this ministry, not to make himself look important, but to show others what God could do for anyone who would trust Christ. The gospel of grace, no more and no less, was the only solution to mankind’s sinful state. God alone could redeem and sustain His children, changing them into the image of His Son.

In the next lesson we’ll discuss the importance of the gospel of grace in creating unity among believers.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Who is the gospel’s central truth?

Jesus Christ

2. According to Galatians 1:13–14, what defined Paul’s religion before his salvation?

E. B and C

3. How did Paul learn about the gospel?

A. He learned directly from Christ.

4. For what reason did Paul meet with Peter and James?

A. To show unity

5. In Colossians 2, Paul warned against vain lies, regulations, and traditions. According to this passage, what do some of these distractions look like?

Answers will vary. See Colossians 2:16–23. There Paul warned about needless rules over food, drink, festivals, holy days, asceticism, angels, visions, and more.

LESSON THREE

The Gospel from God



Overview of Galatians 1 & 2

- The Gospel's Message Is Not of Human
Invention (1:11–24)
- The Gospel's Message Is Confirmed Among Believers
(2:1–10)
- The Messengers of the Gospel Are Not Above the Message
(2:11–21)

The Gospel's Divine Origin (1:11–12)

- The Gospel Does Not Come from Mankind (vv. 11–12a)
 - Paul Was Not Given the Gospel by People
 - Paul Was Not Taught the Gospel by People
- The Gospel Is a Revelation of Jesus Christ
(v. 12b)

The gospel came from Christ, because He *is* the gospel's central truth. The good news tells us about His character, His love, His grace, and His work.

Paul's Testimony Displays the Gospel's Divine Nature (vv. 13–17)

- Before His Salvation, Paul's Religion Was Led by Human
Effort (vv. 13–14)
 - His Religion Stood on Human Tradition
 - His Zeal Grew from Human Labor

- Paul's Salvation Came by Grace (vv. 15–16a)
 - By Grace, God Watched Over Both of Paul's Births
 - By Grace, God Revealed the Son in Paul
 - The Revelation of Paul's Changed Life
 - The Revelation of Paul's Changed Message
- Paul's Message Came by Grace, Not Human Imagination (vv. 16b–17)
 - Paul Didn't Learn a Human Version of the Gospel

We do not find the gospel's authority in the person who teaches it. The gospel's power is inherent, derived from Christ alone.
 - Paul Made Time to Learn from Christ

Christ somehow taught Paul the gospel of grace during his time in Arabia.

Paul's Ministry Displays the Gospel's Divine Nature (vv. 18–24)

- His Ministry Was Accepted by Other Believers (vv. 18–20)

Paul met with church leaders in Jerusalem, establishing unity there with his brothers and sisters in Christ.
- His Ministry Brought Glory to God (vv. 21–24)

Student Work

Reading 1: Isaiah 53

- Contained in this psalm is a summary of the gospel to come. List the sufferings of Christ that are mentioned in the passage.
He was despised and rejected by others (v. 3). He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (v. 3). He carried our griefs and sorrows, but we treated Him like someone God would punish (v. 4). He was pierced to pay for our transgressions, and He was crushed for our sins. He took the punishment that gave us peace, and through His wounds we have healing (v. 5). God laid on Him the sins of an entire world of wayward sinners. (V. 6). He was oppressed and afflicted, but He did not protest (v. 7). He was taken away by oppression and judgment, but many did not care (v. 8). He was buried in dishonor, with no grave of His own (v. 9). It was God's will to crush Him (v. 10). His soul bore anguish for our sins (v. 11). He poured out His soul to death. He was associated with sinners (v. 12).
- Yet this was sung as a song of joy in the Old Testament. Why?
Answers will vary. God's justice, love, and power were all fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ.
- If mankind had invented the gospel, how might we have planned this differently?
Answers will vary.
- Reflections

Reading 2: 1 Corinthians 15:1 –28, 50–58

- How important is the gospel to our faith? What is the impact of our salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ?

Answers will vary. Our faith would be vain without the resurrection of Christ.

- How can we possibly live out that good news (15:10)?

Answers will vary. Not by our hard work, but by God's grace.

- Reflections

Reading 3: Colossians 2

- What should our Christian life be like (2:6–7)?
Abiding in Christ, completely dependent on Him, with gratitude.

- But how can we become distracted from this joyful life in Christ (2:8)?
By being led astray with false philosophies, empty lies, human traditions, or the values of this world.

- What do these distractions look like (2:16–23)?
Disputes over food and drink, or regarding holy days and ceremonies—things that are symbolic of higher principles and truths. Distractions also come in the form of asceticism, angel-worship, visions, or experiential things.

- Reflections

