

Lesson 4 – Galatians 1:13-17

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Review

Salvation from sin is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Christ plus anything is a different, distorted gospel.

One of the major issues of the early church was the integration of Jew and Gentile into one body. The Jews had been taught from childhood a salvation by works because they valued human tradition as equivalent to Scripture. They taught a lifestyle of obligatory works which they equated with being a follower of the one true God. This thinking moved into the church and some Jews who had believed were teaching a gospel of Christ plus Jewish legalism.

The threat of a different, distorted gospel is as real today as it was in Paul's day. All who come to Christ are tempted to bring a works-based mentality to their new relationship with Christ. Christ plus rules for salvation (in the fullest since which includes sanctification) is something that must be rejected. Paul is writing to present and defend the gospel of grace.

We have seen that the Galatians bear the responsibility for entertaining a different gospel. But the false teachers who distort the true gospel by adding works and turn grace into non-grace and the gospel into a non-gospel, Paul condemned to eternal destruction.

Paul is a slave of Christ. For Paul, everything was about his master, Christ Jesus. He was bought with a price; therefore, his desire was to glorify his Master. Because he is a slave of Christ, when the gospel is threatened, he must speak. We must speak too!

Introduction

A "testimony" is words delivered in a court of law, usually by a witness of an event. In the body of Christ, a "testimony" is the account of how someone personally encountered Christ. Examples are found in the Scriptures (John 4; Mark 5; Acts 22; Galatians 1-2).

The Samaritan women... ³⁹From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I *have* done." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹Many more believed because of His word; ⁴²and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:39-42)

The Gerasene demoniac... ¹⁹And He did not let him, but He said to him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and *how* He had mercy on you." ²⁰And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed. (Mark 5:19-20)

If you have encountered the living Christ, then you have a testimony. You have an account of the grace that has been given you; an account of how God through Christ supernaturally intervened in your hopeless and helpless situation to make you new; an account of what Christ has done to change you; an account that is all about Christ.

When saying your testimony, you do not have to understand everything in the Bible. But you know that your sins have been forgiven, you have been made new, and your life is different.

²⁴So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, “Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He then answered, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” (John 9:24-25)

Today Paul gives us his testimony – what he was like before Christ, how he encountered Christ, and how Christ changed him.

Paul’s defense of his slavery to Christ – Paul’s encounter with the living Christ (1:13-17)

1. Before Christ (1:13-14)

¹³For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. (ESV)

Paul now gives his testimony. “For” looks to Paul’s radical change as proof that the gospel is not a human invention or tradition, but a divine revelation. Human ideas have no power to bring about Paul’s radical change.

¹¹For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹²For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11-12)

❖ What changes do you see in your life that prove the divine origin of the gospel?

“Judaism” is the religious system of the Jews finding its basis in the OT and tradition. The OT taught grace through faith (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 4:3; Romans 4:6-8). The law was given to point to the need for a Messiah (Galatians 3:24). But the religious leaders made this a system of works. Verses 13 and 14 are the only places this word is used in the NT. Paul is making a contrasting point—grace vs. works (specifically law).

“You have heard” points to a past historical event when Paul told the Galatians his testimony. He had told them of his “former manner of life” – his before-Christ conduct or behavior. He is reiterating it for those who had heard and for those who had not met Paul. Two areas describe Paul’s “former manner of life”: “persecution of the church of God” and “advancement in Judaism”.

Jesus was crucified on Friday, 3 April 33, and rose that Sunday. To His disciples, “He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a *period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). After Jesus’ ascension from the Mount of Olives, the disciples “all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). Ten days later (50 days after the resurrection), on the feast of Pentecost, Sunday May 24th, the church was born (Acts 2), the gospel was preached, and 3000 souls surrendered their life to Christ (Acts 2:41).

The infant church grew quickly as “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47). Soon there was purification of sin from within as the Holy Spirit brings judgement on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 4:32-5:11). The jealousy by the religious elite of the explosive growth of the church led to persecution from without beginning with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60) by Saul of Tarsus.

⁵⁸When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, “**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!**” ⁶⁰Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “**Lord, do not hold this sin against them!**” Having said this, he fell asleep. ¹**Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.** And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²*Some* devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. ³But **Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.** (Acts 7:58-8:3)

Saul continued the persecution relentlessly.

¹Now **Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,** went to the high priest, ²and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2)

Acts 8 is the first time chronologically in Scripture that we are introduced to Saul (Paul). Yet, we know more from his own disclosures. And we also know the type from the gospels.

As we have seen before, Paul was born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28). He was extremely well educated under one of the leading rabbis, Gamaliel (Acts 5:33-40; 22:3). He spoke Greek and Hebrew (Acts 21:37, 40). He was the “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Philippians 3:4-6). He was “zealous for God” (Acts 22:3; Philippians 3:4-6). He found his purpose in being religious. That sounds like many people today – zealous for religiousness.

He was a Pharisee (separated one). Pharisees were the religious elite of Israel, but they were the blind leading the blind. They “trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt”.

⁹And He also told this parable to some people who **trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:** ¹⁰“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,** but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14)

❖ Are there areas in your life where you are a practicing Pharisee?

The Pharisees hated anything or anyone that threatened to take away their power so they deceptively “plotted” against Jesus.

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and **plotted together how they might trap Him** in what He said. (Matthew 22:15)

¹On one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders **confronted Him**, ²and they spoke, saying to Him, “Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?” (Luke 20:1-2)

¹⁹The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them. ²⁰So they **watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor.** (Luke 20:19-20)

Most likely in his mid-thirties at this time, Paul “was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions”. He had religious ambition. His “zeal” was seen in his persecution of the church.

“Persecute” means follow or press hard after or to pursue with the intent to do harm. The usage pictures Paul’s persecution as relentless.

“Beyond measure” means to exceed to an extraordinary degree.

“Destroy” means to attack and cause complete destruction, to annihilate. Again, the usage speaks of his relentless pursuit to annihilate the church.

In AD 55, Paul writes to the Corinthians:

⁹For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because **I persecuted the church of God.** ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1 Corinthians 15:9-10)

Paul’s gives a defense to the Jews and authorities later in Acts and describes his actions during his persecution time. This is in AD 57-60, nearly 30 years after the stoning of Stephen and the other murders occurred:

Paul’s defense before the Jews in Jerusalem ... ⁴I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, ⁵as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished. (Acts 22:4-5)

Paul’s defense before Agrippa ... ⁹“So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.

¹¹And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. (Acts 26:9-11)

In Philippians (written in AD 60), Paul writes:

⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. (Philippians 3:6)

To Timothy in AD 62, Paul writes:

¹²I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³even **though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy** because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. ¹⁶Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12-17)

Paul remembered the evil that he did (and that was done to him) throughout his life, but it did not define him. He focused instead on Christ's grace and mercy.

⁷But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, **so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;** ⁸*we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, **so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.** ¹¹For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Corinthians 4:7-11)

❖ Do your current or past sins/experiences define you or does Christ?

Paul's point – the gospel of grace had no foundation in the “ancestral traditions” of Judaism. Ancestral traditions have no power for regeneration.

2. Encounter with Christ (1:15-16a)

¹⁵But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased ^{16a}to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles,

¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ^{16a}was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, (ESV)

The second part of Paul's testimony is how he encountered Christ.

“But when God” contrasts Paul's pre-salvation life of hopelessness and helplessness seen by devotion to works including the eradication of the body of Christ with grace. Paul's only hope was God's unmerited, supernatural, sovereign, intervention.

God had “set Paul apart even from his mother's womb” (i.e., before he was born, ESV). In other places, the Spirit through Paul notes the timing of God's choosing.

¹³But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because **God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17)

³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love (Ephesians 1:3-4)

The point here is not the timing of the choosing, but the helpless state that Paul (and everyone) was in. The need for grace is clear.

Paul was chosen for salvation “before the foundation of the world”, called at the proper time through grace when Christ was revealed to/in him.

Paul (then Saul), wanting to persecute the followers of Jesus, encountered the King of Glory, Jesus the Christ, on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-21). Christ was “revealed” to Paul at a definite, completed, point in time. He was called for salvation for the purpose of service – to “preach”. “Preach” is the declaration of good news or the gospel. The usage means “that I might myself continuously declare the gospel”. Paul initiates the action and participates in the process. Paul was clear about his mission.

From that day on, Paul’s life would never be the same; everything changed.

⁷But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸**More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, (Philippians 3:7-9)

❖ **What happened when you encountered Jesus? How has your life changed?**

God had set Paul apart for salvation but also for service.

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰**For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.** (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Paul’s service happened to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

¹⁵And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But get up and stand on your feet; **for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;** ¹⁷rescuing you from the *Jewish* people and from **the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,** ¹⁸to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’ (Acts 26:15-18)

❖ **What is your service that you have been set apart for?**

3. Resulting change (1:16b-17)

^{16b}I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

^{16b}I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. (ESV)

The last part of Paul’s testimony is the radical change that grace wrought. To drive home the point that the gospel is not a human invention or tradition, but a divine revelation, Paul now starts the last part of his testimony and turns to what God did in and through him after salvation.

Jesus had appeared to Paul to save him from his sin, but also to appoint him an apostle to the Gentiles. After God supernaturally intervened in his life, Paul did not immediately “consult” with “flesh and blood” or people. “Consult” means to go to someone for advice, to present one’s cause to another as for approval or judgment or to obtain counsel or instruction.

❖ Do you rely on God’s revelation for truth or do you first “consult” people?

Paul did not immediately seek out a teacher nor present himself to the apostles in Jerusalem, but he “went away into Arabia and then returned again to Damascus”. This trip to Arabia is only mentioned here in Galatians. Paul’s autobiographical timeline must be pieced together by systematizing multiple Scriptures.

Date	Event
33/34	Saul encounters Jesus on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-21)
33/34	Spent “several days” in Damascus “confounding the Jews” (Acts 9:19-22)
33/34	Went away to Arabia to be with the Lord (Gal 1:17)
36/37	Back in Damascus preaching Jesus (Acts 9:23; Gal 1:17)
36/37	Escape from Damascus (Acts 9:23-25; 2 Cor 11:32-33)
36/37	To Jerusalem to become acquainted with the apostles (Acts 9:26-29; Gal 1:18)
37	To Caesarea, then Tarsus, then the “regions of Syria and Cilicia” (Acts 9:30; Gal 1:21)
~41-43	Barnabas and Saul minister in Antioch for one year (Acts 11:19-26)
47	Barnabas and Saul take the contribution for the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:30)
47	Barnabas and Saul return to Antioch with John Mark (Acts 12:24-25)
48-49	First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-14:28); Saul begins to go by “Paul” (13:9)
49	Paul returns to Antioch (Acts 14:21-28)
49/50	Paul confronts Peter in Antioch (Gal 2:11-20)
49/50	Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29)
49/50	Paul took Titus to Jerusalem (Gal 2:1)
49/50	Paul returns to Antioch (Acts 15:30-34)
49/50	Epistle to the Galatians written from Antioch

After Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he spent three days in Damascus either fasting or in too much shock to take sustenance (Acts 9:9). Jesus sent an initially-reluctant Ananias to heal Saul’s eyes and to visibly demonstrate the connection to the church by laying on of hands (Acts 9:10-17). Saul immediately obeyed Christ in baptism even before being strengthened with food (Acts 9:18-19).

We do not know if Paul was alone or not, but the big question is, “what was happening during his time in Arabia?” The kinds of things that could have happened are the things that happened with the disciples during Christ’s earthly ministry. Christ imparted to Paul divine revelation of the gospel of grace. He was being discipled directly by the Lord which would have included sharing the gospel in Arabia. Some view this “trip” as really his first missionary journey.

On the road to Emmaus... ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:27)

Gathered together in Jerusalem... ⁴⁴Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then **He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures**, ⁴⁶and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44-49)

²¹Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— ²²beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection. (Act 1:21-22)

We do know that when Saul returned to Damascus, the king of Arabia was not happy with him implying that his time/work in Arabia was met with persecution.

³²In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, ³³and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and *so* escaped his hands. (2 Corinthians 11:32-33)

²³When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; ²⁵but his disciples took him by night and let him down through *an opening in* the wall, lowering him in a large basket. (Acts 9:23-25)

❖ Are you bold with the gospel?

Paul’s biographical timeline is interesting, but the inspired text is making a point. The Jewish “ancestral traditions” (1:14) were not able to save because they invalidated the word of God (Matthew 15:6). The “gospel” of the Judaizers was based on that tradition, not on the gospel of grace. Only grace can intrude on death and make alive. The Judaizer’s “gospel” of Christ plus works cannot do that. Paul did not learn the gospel from other people or Scripture-invalidating tradition, nor did he invent it. He received it directly from the Lord Jesus.

❖ Do you view the gospel detailed in the Scriptures as divine revelation?

Nothing has changed in 2000 years. Human thought and wisdom believe that salvation (in whatever form it is called) is based on works. Some like the message of the gospel of the grace of Christ (or a misunderstood variant), but add works to Christ. Yet Scripture is clear. Salvation from sin is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Conclusion

Paul is writing to the Galatians who are at danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Paul did not learn the gospel from other people nor Scripture-invalidating tradition, nor did he invent it. He received it directly from the Lord Jesus. Paul presents his testimony to show that only God could change a persecutor into a preacher thus demonstrating that the gospel that Paul preached is the true gospel. Do you hold fast to the true gospel?

Additional Study

1. Read Galatians once this week a chapter at a time (one chapter a day for six days).
2. Today's Questions
 - Reflect on what you were like before Christ.
 - Reflect on the way God brought the gospel to you?
 - Reflect on how God has changed you since surrendering your life to Christ.
 - Do you have both the objective evidence (the truth of God's Word) and the subjective evidences that flow from salvation (a changed life)?
 - Spend some time thinking about your testimony. Are you prepared to share what Christ has and is doing in your life with others?