

## Lesson 5 – Galatians 1:18-24

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### Review/Introduction

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.

Paul is writing to the Galatians defending the doctrine of justification by faith alone. They are in danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He is starting his defense by showing that the gospel that he preached, the true gospel, was not learned from other people nor found in Scripture-invalidating tradition nor did he invent it. He received it directly from the Lord Jesus.

Paul's testimony shows that only God could change a persecutor into a preacher thus demonstrating that the gospel that Paul preached is the true gospel. Last week we looked at Paul's life from persecutor to initial preaching.

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 to Tarsus, ministering in 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



from The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands

Today, Paul continues his autobiographical sketch with how Christ continued to change him.

**Paul's defense of his slavery to Christ – Paul's connection to the other apostles (1:18-24)**

1. Visiting the apostles in Jerusalem (1:18-20)

<sup>18</sup>Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup>But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup>(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)

<sup>18</sup>Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup>But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup>(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) (ESV)

In Paul's autobiographical sketch, he had returned to Damascus from his time in Arabia.

<sup>22</sup>But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ. (Acts 9:22)

<sup>17</sup>nor 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. (Galatians 1:17)

<sup>23</sup>When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, <sup>24</sup>but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; <sup>25</sup>but 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)

“Then three years later” puts Paul at three years after his conversion on the road to Damascus. In that time, he had initially ministered in Damascus for “several days” (Acts 9:19). Then he was led out into Arabia where he, presumably, was personally disciplined by the Lord.

At the end of the three years he is back at Damascus, but we do not know exactly how long he had been at Damascus when the basket-down-the-wall event occurred. We do know that the two periods of preaching in Damascus and the time totaled three years. “When many days had elapsed” in Acts 9:23 is the three-year span in Galatians 1:18. Interestingly, the disciples were with Jesus for about three years during his earthly ministry.

When Paul returned to Damascus, the king of Arabia was not happy with him implying that his time/work in Arabia was met with persecution. Again, presumably, just like the 12 during Christ's earthly ministry, Paul was putting into practice what Jesus was teaching him which led to persecution upon returning to Damascus.

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

Paul, “went up to Jerusalem”. Jerusalem was the center of the early church.

<sup>1</sup>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.** (Act 8:1)

Even as late as the Jerusalem Council in AD 50, the apostles were centered in Jerusalem. We know they traveled (e.g., Peter to Caesarea in Acts 10). But it appears they (except for Paul) used Jerusalem as their home base.

<sup>2</sup>And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them **should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders** concerning this issue. ... <sup>6</sup>The **apostles and the elders came together** to look into this matter. <sup>7</sup>After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them ... <sup>13</sup>After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me. <sup>14</sup>Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. <sup>15</sup>With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, (Acts 15:2, 6-7, 13-15)

Paul's purpose in going up to Jerusalem was to "become acquainted with Cephas". "Acquainted with" means to find out, learn, by inquiry, to gain knowledge of by visiting something (worthy of being seen or some distinguished person), to become personally acquainted with, to know face to face.

Since Paul had not yet met the apostles, Barnabas took him to Jerusalem after the escape from Damascus to visit the other 12 apostles. This event is recounted in Acts 9:

<sup>26</sup>When he came to Jerusalem, **he was trying to associate with the disciples**; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup>But **Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles** and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup>And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. <sup>29</sup>And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic *Jews*; but they were attempting to put him to death. <sup>30</sup>But when the brethren learned *of it*, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. (Acts 9:26-30)

During his time in Jerusalem, he met Peter (Cephas) and James and preached the gospel. He was so effective at using the OT in arguing with the Hellenistic Jews that they were attempting to put Paul to death.

Paul has already made it clear that the gospel he preached, the true gospel, was not learned from other people nor found in Scripture-invalidating tradition nor did he invent it. But it WAS in-line with the teaching of the apostles and the elders at the church of Jerusalem.

Paul's point is that the true gospel does not change over time. The gospel that Paul preached was consistent with the teaching of Jesus, the preaching of Pentecost, and with the decision of the Jerusalem council. Paul's mention of both Peter and James would move the readers to the account of them speaking at the Jerusalem council.

### ❖ **Have you changed the gospel to make it palatable?**

#### 2. Ministry in and around Tarsus (1:21)

<sup>21</sup>Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

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<sup>21</sup>Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. (ESV)

Paul had to escape from Damascus and then had to escape the plot on his life by the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem.

<sup>29</sup>And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic *Jews*; but they were attempting to put him to death. <sup>30</sup>But when the brethren learned *of it*, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. (Acts 9:26-30)

The persecution is not a surprise.

<sup>12</sup>Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

### ❖ **Are you living obedient in light of pressure from the world?**

Interesting that in Acts 9 at the beginning of his 15 days in Jerusalem that the disciples refused to associate with Paul because "they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple". At the end of the 15 days, the "brethren" risked their own lives to keep him safe.

The account seems to make it clear that it was not Paul's self-identification with Christ, but that he "had spoken" and was now "speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord". There are many things that may change when you surrender your life to Christ – thoughts, motives, work, relationships, life direction, etc. Yet, it was not his testimony (before Christ, encounter, with Christ, and change by Christ) that convinced the disciples that Paul was authentic. It was his bold preaching of the gospel.

You can fake many things, but to put the spectrum from your worldly reputation to your very life on the line to boldly proclaim the gospel is the deciding evidence.

❖ **Do you proclaim the gospel? What are you known for?**

Paul proclaimed Christ because he was not seeking the favor and approval of people, but was instead a slave of Christ.

<sup>10</sup>For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)

❖ **Is your slavery to Christ witnessed?**

Paul went into the regions of "Syria and Cilicia". This is Paul's quick account of his approximately 10-year time at Tarsus and Antioch.

<sup>25</sup>And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; <sup>26</sup>and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26)

❖ **Are you committed to serving Christ regardless of where you live?**

3. Service that glorifies God (1:22-24)

<sup>22</sup>I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; <sup>23</sup>but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." <sup>24</sup>And they were glorifying God because of me.

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<sup>22</sup>And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup>They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." <sup>24</sup>And they glorified God because of me. (ESV)

"Churches of Judea which are in Christ" seems like a strange thing to say, redundant – "the body of Christ, in Christ." The Greek for "church" simply means assembly. "The churches of Judea which were in Christ" are the assemblies of believers in Judea in contrast to the assemblies of Jews in Judea. The believers were "glorifying God". The Jews tried to kill him.

Paul contrasts the churches of Judea with the church at Jerusalem who would have known him by sight since he "was with the disciples, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord" (Acts 9:28). If Paul had stayed with the apostles to learn the gospel from them, then the surrounding churches of Judea would have known him. Yet, they did not. Remember, the gospel that Paul preached, the true gospel, was not learned from other people nor found in Scripture-invalidating tradition nor did he invent it, but he received it directly from the Lord Jesus.

You cannot surrender your life to Christ, become His slave, and not have a changed life. The two are incompatible. Even the believers who had not met or seen Paul “kept hearing” how his encounter with the living Christ had changed him. Yet it was his “preaching the faith that he once tried to destroy” that was what he was known for.

If Paul was still trying to get to God by works (like the Judaizers) then he would be trying to destroy the church. Instead, God powerfully, supernaturally, unilaterally intervened in Paul’s hopeless and helpless situation with actions that only He can perform and with the results that only He can produce, all for His glory.

Paul was living his purpose of glorifying God. To glorify God is to display His character and goodness in your life and therefore bring Him honor. It is to show His character in your motives, thoughts, words, and deeds. You glorify God when you live in a way that those around you can look at you and see what God’s character is like (Exodus 33:17-23). You glorify God by placing His attributes on display in your life.

We saw previously several ways to glorify God.

1. By believing what God says, trusting Him to fulfill His promises. When we do not trust God, we make him out to be a liar (1 John 5:10)

Abraham’s example... <sup>19</sup>Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; <sup>20</sup>yet, **with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,** <sup>21</sup>and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. (Romans 4:19-21)

2. By confessing sin, agreeing with God that you have sinned.

<sup>19</sup>Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I implore you, **give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done.** Do not hide it from me." <sup>20</sup>So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, **I have sinned against the LORD,** the God of Israel, and this is what I did: (Joshua 7:19-20)

3. By bearing much fruit, doing good works. “Good works” are love (for Christ and people) motivated acts with accompanying words that fulfill the believer’s mission of disciple making (Matthew 28:18-20).

<sup>8</sup>"My **Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit,** and so prove to be My disciples. (John 15:8)

<sup>16</sup>"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may **see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.** (Matthew 5:16)

4. By serving Christ’s church. We each have special gifts that we should be using to serve.

<sup>10</sup>**As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.** <sup>11</sup>Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things **God may be glorified** through Jesus Christ, **to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.** Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11)

5. By humbly attributing success to God, by making sure He gets the credit for the good things that happen in your life.

King Herod did not do that... <sup>21</sup>On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. <sup>22</sup>The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" <sup>23</sup>And **immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory**, and he was eaten by worms and died. (Acts 12:21-23)

<sup>10</sup>But 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 15:10)

#### ❖ Do you strive to glorify God?

The other aspect here is that the believers noticed God's work in Paul's life and they were "glorifying God because of" Paul. The believers' thoughts and words regarding God were influenced by seeing God's work in Paul. God's reputation was enhanced as they heard of Paul's change from persecutor to preacher. The believers had the correct view of God by hearing of God's work in Paul.

<sup>16</sup>Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

#### ❖ Do you glorify God for His work in the brethren?

### Conclusion

Paul is writing to the Galatians who are in danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. God changed Paul from persecutor to preacher, from slave to sin to slave of Christ. 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. The result of God's work in Paul's life was that God is glorified.

### Additional Study

1. Read Galatians once this week a chapter at a time (one chapter a day for six days).
2. Today's Questions
  - What is your professed and actual authority in your life?
  - How are you known? What distinguishing characteristic are you known by?
  - When is the last time you shared the gospel; were used by God to bring the gospel to a person God saved?
  - Are you committed to serving Christ wherever you are?
  - Is your highest purpose to glorify God in your own life and think properly about God due to His work in the brethren?