

GALATIANS

1:1-24

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Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 22nd September 2024 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Romans 5:6-11

Introduction

This morning we are going to start a new verse by verse study of Galatians — the first time we've studied this book as a church family since 2008 — and I'm really looking forward to digging into this letter together on Sunday mornings, as well as talking back over it at our home group meetings.

As with every book of the Bible that we study, I encourage you to both read ahead each week in advance of our Sunday morning service, and to read the chapter again afterwards. Indeed, that's one of the advantages you and I can take hold of as a consequence of studying the Bible verse by verse, that we all know what we'll be studying the following week. It's oh so easy to not do it, but there's real value in doing so.

OLD TESTAMENT 39

5	LAW	5	POETRY	12	MINOR PROPHETS
	GENESIS		JOB		HOSEA
	EXODUS		PSALMS		JOEL
	LEVITICUS		PROVERBS		AMOS
	NUMBERS		ECCLESIASTES		OBADIAH
	DEUTERONOMY		SONG OF SOLOMON		JONAH
					MICAH
					NAHUM
					HABAKKUK
					ZEPHANIAH
					HAGGAI
					ZECHARIAH
					MALACHI
12	HISTORY	5	MAJOR PROPHETS		
	JOSHUA		ISAIAH		
	JUDGES		JEREMIAH		
	RUTH		LAMENTATIONS		
	1 SAMUEL		EZEKIEL		
	2 SAMUEL		DANIEL		
	1 KINGS				
	2 KINGS				
	1 CHRONICLES				
	2 CHRONICLES				
	EZRA				
	NEHEMIAH				
	ESTHER				

NEW TESTAMENT 27

4	THE GOSPELS	4	PASTORAL LETTERS
	MATTHEW		1 TIMOTHY
	MARK		2 TIMOTHY
	LUKE		TITUS
	JOHN		PHILEMON
1	CHURCH HISTORY	9	OTHER LETTERS
	ACTS		HEBREWS
			JAMES
9	CHURCH LETTERS		1 PETER
	ROMANS		2 PETER
	1 CORINTHIANS		1 JOHN
	2 CORINTHIANS		2 JOHN
	GALATIANS		3 JOHN
	EPHESIANS		JUDE
	PHILIPPIANS		REVELATION
	COLOSSIANS		
	1 THESSALONIANS		
	2 THESSALONIANS		

Now, getting going with our study (and starting zoomed out), we see the Bible is comprised of two parts — the Old and New Testaments. And together these consist of 66 books that were written down by around 40 different authors, each inspired by the Holy Spirit to write exactly what God would have them say — for our learning, for our obedience, for our comfort, and for our hope.

Each book is different. Some, such as Genesis that we've just studied, offer more of a narrative, following the lives and actions of both individuals, families, and nations. While others, are in the form of poetry, proverbs, or prophecy. Galatians is more personal, written in the form of a letter to a group of churches (to people that Paul knew firsthand), while other letters were written to a specific church or individual. And as you can see here, there are some logical ways we can group these books together.

In the Old Testament we find 3 groups of 5 books — first the Pentateuch, commonly known as the law, which Moses wrote down, and second, later on, there are 5 poetical books (3 of which were written by King Solomon), plus the 5 major prophets, most named after those who wrote them.

We also see 2 groups of 12 books — the first being the history books that focus on the history of the nation of Israel (including Ezra that we've just finished studying at our evening services), and the second are the minor prophets, so called because they are typically shorter in length — not lesser in importance.

In the New Testament, we find two groups of 4, and two groups of 9 books — plus one other. And it begins with the 4 gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — followed by Acts which records the history of the very early church. There are then 9 letters written by Paul to churches, 4 he writes to individuals, and then 9 more letters that are written by various men — each named after the author, with the exception of Hebrews (which I personally believe Paul also wrote) and Revelation, which the apostle John wrote (though in it we see Jesus write to 7 churches also).

And so then, it is here in the New Testament that we find the book of Galatians.

Overview of Galatians

Overview of Galatians

- **Author:** The Apostle Paul (formerly known as Saul)
- **Audience:** The churches in the Roman province of Galatia
- **Location:** Written from Ephesus (or Corinth, or Rome)
- **Length:** 6 chapters (149 verses, 3098 words)
- **Timing:** Likely 55AD (53-68AD)
- **Theme:** Grace and justification by faith alone

So what do we know about *this* book? Well, Galatians is one of nine letters in the Bible that the apostle Paul wrote to a total of seven individual churches, or, as is the case with Galatians, to a *group* of churches.

There's a few possible options for where he was when he wrote this letter, but the one that I believe best fits what we know is Ephesus, where he pastored a church for 2 years. And this book is relatively short, though not the shortest Paul would write, with its 6 chapters totalling just over 3000 words — making it easy enough to read in 20-30 minutes. Maybe even less!

While some believe it was written as late as 68AD, I'm confident enough that it was a jump earlier than that, being written in 55AD, only 20 years or so after the beginning of the church as recorded in the book of Acts.

But whichever of those dates, this was written very early on in the life of the church, and that is the first thing that should make us sit up and think, for we'll read that even *that* early on in the church, with so many of Jesus' disciples and the early church *still* around, there was false teaching creeping in, distorting, twisting, mangling the Word of God into something it was not. Trying to add to it, trying to change the gospel into something else. And if it can happen there, at a time where the Holy Spirit was so active in the church, then it can happen here if we are not careful. So we really need to pay attention to what this letter says.

As for its' theme, we could summarise it as a book that describes the wonder and effect of grace, the purpose of the law, and the horror of legalism. Such is it's articulate handling of the law and grace, that some have called it a mini Romans. But I don't think either statement quite captures all that this book is about.

J Vernon McGee commented, saying:

Galatians is the strongest declaration and defense of the doctrine of justification by faith in or out of Scripture.

J Vernon McGee

While Finnis Dake, in his Bible commentary, writes that the theme is:

To correct the fickle Galatians from further backsliding and following the legalizing, Judaizing teachers from Judea; and to set them straight regarding the relation of Christians of the new covenant with the Jews of the old covenant.

Finnis Dake

Chuck Smith's description of its' theme is the most succinct I've seen, saying this book is about grace and justification by faith. But to add one word for clarity, perhaps the best short description of its' theme would be *grace and justification by faith alone*.

Now, with that said, let's dig a level deeper, asking some questions:

Key questions

- Who was Paul?
- Who were the Galatians?
- Why did he write to them?
- What did he write to them?

First, who was Paul? Second, who were the Galatians that he wrote to? Next, why did he write to them? (What triggered this letter?) And fourth, what did he write to them? Of course, that last question is really where we're going to spend our time today and in the coming weeks, but it's helpful to answer these other questions to give us some context.

Who was Paul?

So, who was Paul? Well, he was a Jew and Roman citizen, originally called Saul, and born in Tarsus in what is now modern day Turkey, not long after Jesus had been born. He had studied under Gamaliel, a Pharisee and one of the most respected leaders in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish spiritual leadership of the day, who we also hear of in Acts chapter 5. And we first meet Paul in Acts chapter 7 at the stoning of Stephen, which he consented to, reading that the coats of those who stoned Stephen were laid at his feet.

As I've said before, consenting to an innocent man's death isn't probably the introduction any of us would want, but it actually gets worse — for we read in Acts 8 and 9 how Paul went on the rampage, throwing Christians into prison, and breathing threats and murder against the early disciples of the Jesus. That wouldn't put Paul in the category of *ideal Christian* in our eyes, right? But therein is an important lesson for us - that God's grace is not based on what *we've* done, but on what *He* has done. Paul will underline that point once again in this letter.

We read of his conversion in Acts chapter 9, which took place while he was travelling to Damascus in modern day Syria with the intent to take any Christians he found captive back to Jerusalem. While travelling, he was personally confronted by Jesus. And his conversion was nothing short of dramatic. He was blinded by the light from heaven on this road to Damascus, then after a visiting a man called Ananias in city of Damascus (as instructed), we read that he received his sight back. And having spent some days with the disciples in Damascus, he immediately preached that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, much to the shock and surprise of those who heard. We read in Acts...

Acts 9:21-22

Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

Saul, later to become known as Paul, had his life turned upside down. Even the meaning of his name went from "Requested one" to "little". He had been humbled by this experience. And He went from persecuting, to being persecuted. He went from being an opponent of the gospel, to preaching it everywhere he could, leading others to Christ, teaching God's Word thoroughly in many places, and writing to more, that those Christians — and us also — would grow in our walk with Jesus, that we would know all God has done for us. And that we would hold fast to God's Word, the Bible.

Who were the Galatians?

As for the folks that Paul wrote to in this letter, this was not an individual church, but all the churches within the Roman the Roman province of Galatia, which is in modern day Türkiye. The area was so named as those living in the area had descended from the Gaul's who had populated France. And they were known to be a fickle population. Julius Caesar went as far as to say "The infirmity of the Gauls is that they are fickle in their resolves, fond of change, and not to be trusted."

And that sounds a lot like our culture today, right?! We flip between opinions, always want the latest thing, seldom satisfied with what we have. And our culture struggles with faithfulness, honesty and integrity. I read one other comment on the Galatian people that described them as "frank, impetuous, impressible, eminently intelligent, fond of show, but extremely inconstant, the fruit of excessive vanity." Oh what a fitting description that also is of the world around us today!

Paul experienced this fickleness himself, for we read in Acts 14 how after Paul had — through God's power — healed a lame man, the people tried to worship both him and Barnabas as gods, saying "*The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*" And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Yet just a few verses later we read how quickly they turned, reading "*Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.*"

And that fickle nature gives some context for *why* Paul wrote to these people.

Why did he write to them?

For even in this first chapter Paul will say "*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,*". You see, these believers had heard the gospel taught to them, they had accepted it, and were living in response to it. But over time, those who sought to twist the gospel came in, and somehow convinced the people that more than grace was necessary to be saved. That more than good works *accompanying* salvation, there should be good works done to *earn* salvation. And Paul was evidently furious at this.

What did he write to them?

And so *what* Paul wrote was and is a staunch defence of the gospel; the good news that Jesus has paid for all our sin, and that all that is required to obtain salvation is faith, and not works. J Vernon McGee put it so well, saying:

Galatians is God's polemic against legalism of every and any description. The Mosaic Law is neither discredited, despised, nor disregarded. Its majesty, perfection, demands, fullness, and purpose are maintained. Yet these very qualities make it utterly impossible for man to come this route to God. Another way is opened for man to be justified before God, a way which entirely bypasses the Mosaic Law. The new route is by faith. Justification by faith is the theme, with the emphasis upon faith.

J Vernon McGee

So Paul makes crystal clear in this letter how salvation is by faith alone. And we find this is one of three books that quotes Habakkuk 2:4, saying "the just shall live by faith" — the other books that quote this being Romans and Hebrews.

Chapter overview

Chapter overview of Galatians

- **Chapters 1-2:** Personal
- **Chapters 3-4:** Doctrinal
- **Chapters 5-6:** Practical

As for how the 6 chapters of this letter are laid out, an easy way to memorise it is that the first two chapters largely detail Paul's personal experience with grace. Chapters 3 & 4 are Paul's doctrinal teaching on the law vs grace. And chapters 5 & 6 give us practical application, giving instruction on what our response to God's grace should look like.

Overview of chapter one

Now, for the remainder of our study this morning, we're going to look at what chapter 1 says to us:

Overview of chapter one

- **v1-5** — Paul's greeting, Jesus' accomplishment
- **v6-9** — Don't turn from the grace you received
- **v10-24** — Paul's personal experience of grace

In the opening 5 verses we will read Paul's greeting, but also a magnificent declaration of what Christ has done for us. In verses 6-9, Paul gives the strongest of warnings to not stray from the truth of the gospel, to not listen to those who distort it. And from verse 10 onwards Paul begins recording his personal experience of grace, which will continue into chapter 2 which we'll study next week.

Chapter one

And so, starting in verse 1 of chapter 1, we read:

Galatians 1:1

Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),

So Paul not only introduces himself, but underlines his calling. Why? Because those who had crept into the church to twist the scriptures had undoubtedly questioned his authority — a common tactic still used today, by those who will say “on whose authority are you teaching these things?” and “what qualifications do you have?”. Paul’s answer? *I’m called by God and I’m faithful to His Word*. And that’s infinitely better than someone who is merely commissioned by men. Indeed, the rubber stamp approval of men, women, or organisations is not qualification enough for ministry. Rather, the qualifications for ministry are set out in the Bible, such as we read of pastors, elders, and deacons, who are to be an example to all.

I’m not saying there isn’t a place for recognising God’s calling on an individual’s life — whether we call that ordination, commissioning, or sending. But such efforts are ultimately only recognising that God’s hand and calling are *already* on an individual, and that their lives *already* match up to the requirements of scripture.

Here, those who sought to keep the Galatians under the restraint of religion and legalism, were questioning Paul’s credentials, just as they do today. Indeed, not long after this church began, our founding pastor was meeting with a fellow minister in the town, who asked on whose authority he would be administering communion. And followed that up by saying “you do know I’m the official soul saver for the parish, right?”. That’s the type of audacity that Paul faced here, that those called and appointed by men, were questioning those who were called and appointed by God.

And Paul was having none of it, for he knew *Who* his calling had come from. Now, he continues this opening, writing:

Galatians 1:2

and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

While Paul was the one writing this letter, the welcome came from all those that are with him. Not only written to *one* church, but to *all* the church churches in the Roman province of Galatia. And given that Paul was addressing false teaching, this is important to note — for it’s clear that more than one church had been taken in by this dodgy theology, as so often happens (such as we’ve seen in our days with false teaching like the Toronto Blessing, or the Prosperity Gospel). A reminder that even wide acceptance among some churches is not a guarantee that what is being taught is sound.

But furthermore, a detail that we should notice here is that this is written to churches — that is, a distinct, local group of believers who gather together for fellowship for the study of God’s Word, for communion and for prayer. It’s not written to individual Christians who *instead* of committing to a local church, only listen to podcasts, or watch YouTube videos, or watch church meetings online when they are actually able to be there in person. Why do I stress this? Because it is becoming worryingly common for Christians to think that they don’t need to be part of a church, when in fact they do. For without that commitment, there is no accountability, no fellowship with other believers, no serving of the body of Christ.

Paul will go on in this letter to say how we should bear one another's burdens. How can we do that if we don't know what those burdens are? Or if we don't know who has those burdens? He'll go on to say "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness*". How can you do that if you are unaware of such difficulty in another believer's life? And Paul will also go on to write "*Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches*." and "*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith*." — instructions that make no sense for the isolated believer.

And so he writes, not to one person, not to one church, but to all these churches, declaring:

Galatians 1:3

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

This was his typical greeting, such as we read in 1 & 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Philemon. And he always put grace before peace. Why? Because it is impossible to have peace with God, without the grace of God. That is, without Jesus sacrifice in our place, we ourselves would have to bear the burden of our sin. For we would be guilty as charged when faced with the law of God. But praise God, that Jesus *did* pay for all our sin, that truly God's riches came at *Christ's* expense, as Paul continues:

Galatians 1:4

who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

So that is, Jesus died in our place to pay for our sin, not only that our sin would be forgiven, but that He might deliver us from this ungodly world, that He might sanctify us. That just as God wanted to deliver the Galatians from the evil world of their time, so He wants to deliver us from the evil that we are surrounded with today. That He might sanctify us, setting us apart as a holy people for His glory and our good. And indeed untold numbers of people *have* been delivered from addictions, vices, and habits of all kinds through coming to know Christ as their Saviour. Many a drunkard, murderer, thief, liar, adulterer — many a sinner — has had their life turned upside down.

And what a wonder this is, that he gave *Himself*. This wasn't merely a small matter, expense or inconvenience to Him. No, no. He gave *Himself*. There truly is nothing of value we can add to that! And for who? For *us*. For *our* sins. That He might deliver *us*. According to the will of *our* God and Father — may God be praised indeed, of whom Paul says:

Galatians 1:5

to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

May we praise and worship God with everything we have — not half-heartedly, but whole-heartedly. Not only with our lips, but with our lives. For He deserves all the praise and worship we can give. Not only on Sunday mornings, but on Monday mornings too — taking the time to thank the Lord for a new day, for His provision, for His goodness, for His love.

Now, with such a glorious, wonderful gospel in mind, we can see why Paul was so perplexed that anyone would turn from it, but also so angry that anyone would try and mutilate it, and twist it, as some were doing. It gives the context for what we read next as he writes:

Galatians 1:6

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

That is, he was astounded that anyone would turn away, not from *him*, but from *God* who had offered such unmerited favour, such grace that saves entirely at Christ's expense, and not our own. And indeed it is ludicrous if we or anyone turns away from that, proposing that we are saved by our good works, or by anything else! For any claim that says Christ's sacrifice for us was not sufficient to pay for our sin, isn't a gospel, isn't good news at all, as he continues, saying:

Galatians 1:7

which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

There are, then, people that would trouble you — leaving you worried about your faith, worried about your salvation, and worried about your works. And they don't mistakenly do this, but rather they knowingly, even intentionally do this, because they want to twist the Bible.

Why would anyone want to do that? Well some, motivated by Satan, simply don't want anyone to come to know the truth that they themselves want no part in, so they seek to corrupt it, to distort it. Others propagate such lies to suit their own ends, seeking money, power, control, or fame. And we should not be surprised to see such people standing in pulpits. That is, we should not be surprised to find that there are pastors, ministers, preachers and such that preach a false gospel. Paul warned the Corinthian church, writing:

2 Corinthians 11:12-15

But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

No doubt, here in the region of Galatia, a good number the believers in these churches were feeling rather queasy as some of these false teachers claimed circumcision was necessary for salvation! But know this, the gospel comes down to grace plus *nothing*. Everything rests on the *completed* work of Christ. The good news is good news because it does not depend upon us! And that is what Paul was desperate for the Galatians to hold onto. He wanted them to hold fast to the truth, not the lies.

And so makes one of his strongest statements in any of his letters, writing:

Galatians 1:8

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

That is, it doesn't matter someone's credentials — degrees, PhDs, diplomas, whatever — what matters is whether they are faithfully sharing the actual gospel of Christ. Woe to that man (or woman) who teaches anything they ought not. Woe to the parent that teaches their children falsehoods. Woe to the YouTuber, podcaster, author, pastor, or Bible teacher who says works are required for salvation. They are not.

So important is this point, that Paul repeats himself in the next verse:

Galatians 1:9

As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

That is the level of tolerance we should have to anyone who corrupts the gospel of Christ. Zero. We're not to say "oh, well, you know, they seem like a nice guy, they talk about giving to the poor, they tell us how we should love one another, they say how they love God and the Bible, we should really give them time". Paul says no, absolutely no. Anyone who preaches any other gospel to you than that which you have received, let him be *accursed*. In other words, let them be doomed to destruction, as Strong's Bible Dictionary puts it.

How do we know if they are preaching another gospel? Well, we must *know* what we received in the first place. How have we received it? Through God's *unchanging* Word — that is, through the Bible. That is our source of truth from which we must not turn. And if someone preaches anything contrary to the Bible, we are to steer well clear of them.

Now, you may ask, why is this so important? Surely works are a good thing?! Well, they are — and make no mistake, they should be present in the life of a believer — but as evidence of salvation, not a requirement for it. The great tragedy is that there are so many in this world who think that they are not good enough to be a Christian (and so turn away), when it is precisely because they are not good enough that they need a Saviour in the first place. When we place the emphasis on works, we remove it from Christ. And people look to themselves, rather than to Jesus for their salvation. And that is a damnable heresy of the highest order. It is straight from the pit of hell.

Now, having robustly warned to *not* turn to a gospel of works, over the gospel of **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**, Paul now starts to share his own experience of grace. We read in verse 10:

Galatians 1:10

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

So Paul starts by saying, "Look, I'm not trying to make anyone happy here. Rather, what's important to me is that I'm being faithful to God. And in fact, if I tried to please people first, I wouldn't be a very good servant of Christ." In other words, Paul isn't taking the easy route. For it's much easier to pander to people's wants. Much easier to compromise. Much easier to entertain, to scratch itches, to tickle people's ears. Indeed we could *fill* this church with people if we resorted to those things. But we must not. And we must not get sidetracked looking at a larger church thinking everything they are doing must be right. For just because a church is large, it doesn't mean it is healthy... it could also be swollen. We must compare what is said and done to the Word of God.

You see, the so called gospel of good works *appeals* to people — because it says they are basically good, and they just need to keep being good in order to have favour with man and God. All it asks for is commitment to a cause. For people to commit their lives to Christ. And as a result, we can all pat ourselves on the back for how good we are. And it's called self-righteousness.

But the real gospel exposes our sin, shows that we need a Saviour, and then presents Jesus to us as our Saviour. And we become entirely dependant on Him for our salvation. We must come to Him in repentance and faith. Not faith in ourselves, but faith in Him alone, for it is only by *His* grace that we can be saved. And that isn't good for the ego.

And so Paul next explains that gospel isn't a man made plan to get to heaven, but a God-given gift. He writes:

Galatians 1:11-12

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

That is, it wasn't something Paul looked up on Wikipedia. It wasn't something he overheard in passing, or cobbled together from stories his friends told him. It wasn't something that he studied to get a qualification in. It wasn't a rehash of mythology, as some have suggested. Rather, the gospel was directly revealed to him by none other than Jesus Himself.

When did this happen? Well, Paul now shares somewhat of his testimony — his personal account of God's saving grace. And he writes:

Galatians 1:13

For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.

Indeed, Paul didn't win the "Israel's next top apostle award" of AD34. No-one was saying, "you know what, I can see this man preaching the gospel!" Rather, he was trying to destroy it. He wanted no-one to hear it. And he continues...

Galatians 1:14

And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Taught at the feet of Gamaliel (who as I mentioned earlier was one of the most respected leaders in the Sanhedrin), Paul became (as he puts it) exceedingly zealous about Judaism. And that meant he was passionate about works, about tradition, about rule keeping. But God was about to show Him that he had misunderstood what the law was for. And he writes:

Galatians 1:15-17

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

So then, not of his own imagination or natural desire, but through God's calling, he came to understand God's grace, and came to know Jesus (whom He had persecuted) as His Saviour. Not as a concept, but as a person. Christ living in Him. And furthermore, He received God's calling to preach Christ among the Gentiles, the non-Jews.

But that was completely upside down to what he knew. For he had been zealous about rule keeping, holding God's law as the most precious thing. But now he realised that the law which he thought would help him, actually left him helpless, even writing in Romans 7 that "*...the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.*"

And so what did he do at this monumental news? Well, we know from Acts chapter 9 that he immediately preached that Jesus was the Messiah, to those around him, with the wonderful enthusiasm that it is so encouraging to see in the life of almost any new believer. But with Paul his preaching was to the extent that he had to escape from the city of Damascus in fear of his life.

His next move, though, he writes, wasn't to go up to Jerusalem, but to Arabia. Why? Did he fancy a sunny holiday? Was there a good package deal to go there? No, no — he went with a reason, and I believe that was to reconcile in his head and heart all he had know about the law, with all that he now knew about God's grace. And while there, perhaps for a matter of a few years, he waited on the Lord and received the glorious revelation he speaks of in verse 12.

What was the significance of Arabia? Well that was where on Mount Sinai, God had given the law to Moses. And my honest thought is that is right where Paul headed as he sought to reconcile all he knew about the law with the grace of God he had just received.

After Arabia, we read here that he returned to Damascus...

Galatians 1:18-19

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

And so, Paul now makes a beeline for Peter — in fact he says here that he specifically went to Jerusalem to see him. And while there he saw James also. Though we know from Acts 9 that the disciples were afraid of him, for they only knew him to be one who persecuted Christians. But why did he specifically go to visit Peter? Well, of all the disciples, Peter was a man acquainted with grace. Indeed, he had promised Jesus that he would never deny Him, yet that same night denied Him three times. So, Peter knew what it was to face Jesus when he had been disloyal to Him. But he also knew what it was to receive God's grace. And I believe that was the counsel Paul now needed to hear.

For while Paul had believed he was doing God a favour by persecuting Christians, he had come to realise that he was the one in error. And just as Peter had wept bitterly at *his* failure, so Paul had recognised his *own* failure — mentioning his uncomfortable past time and again in his letters. Sure, Paul could have visited Thomas instead, but Paul's problem was never in doubting God, but in understanding grace. The very same thing he was now desperate for the Galatians to understand.

We read next:

Galatians 1:20

(Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

In other words, Paul says he is being honest and truthful in all he says here, with God as his witness. And he then continues, noting what happened after he had been to Jerusalem. Verse 21 says:

Galatians 1:21-24

Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God in me.

So then, saved, called, and understanding the purpose of the law, and the wonder of God's grace, Paul began his ministry travelling to these places, preaching the faith. What a change this had been, what a testimony! And as a result of this wonderful response to grace, the Christians in Judea glorified God for all *He* had done. But God wasn't finished with Paul yet, and next week we'll see he picks up his testimony 14 years later, as he headed to Jerusalem again.

But before I close our study this morning, look at those final 6 words of this chapter, that say "And they glorified God in me". They didn't glorify Paul, but God. And that is the mark of a man who is faithful, first to point to God, but second not to draw people to himself. It's not that Paul tried to make himself repulsive, of course. But the gospel he preached wasn't about him, and how good *he* was, but about Christ, and how good *He* is. It wasn't about works, it was about grace. And that makes all the difference.

Application questions

As I bring our study to a close then, let me ask you two questions to think on, discuss, and use to apply what we have learned this morning.

- Have you turned away to another gospel?
- Do people glorify God because of you?

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