

## Sermon

### Grace in Life and Ministry

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Happy Father's Day!

- We have a lot of great dads here
- I have a great dad
- Thank you for including the celebration of Our Heavenly Father in this annual celebration of fathers



We're continuing in our summer series, walking through the New Testament book of Galatians. I've put together the outline so that we would cover the entire book by the end of August.



Last week was 1:1-10, Gospel=Grace.

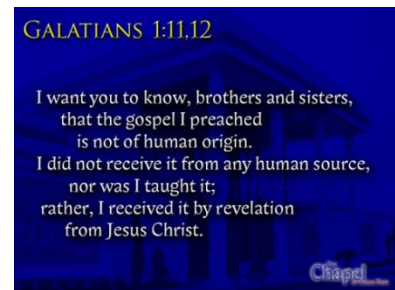
Today we're picking up at 1:11 and walking through 2:10. Next week we'll take a break, and then pick up again in the middle of chapter two. In addition the sermons I'll bring from Galatians, we're looking forward to contributions from Steve Sankey and John Vertefuille.

We also have opportunity to walk through Galatians together on a daily basis. We distributed a daily reading guide last week, and I've been updating our blog ([www.thechapelblog.com](http://www.thechapelblog.com)) each day. I hope that you are taking advantage of this opportunity.



Let's make it our goal to fill every day this summer with God's grace.

So the section we want to cover today starts at Galatians 1:11 and runs through the passage that Glenn read earlier, ending at Galatians 2:10.



<sup>11</sup>I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. <sup>12</sup>I did not receive it from any human source, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

If you listened to last Sunday's message, you'll remember that the **big problem** that Paul was addressing with this letter to the churches he started in Galatia was that the Gospel was being perverted... added to and changed so that it wasn't the Gospel of Grace that Paul brought to the Galatians. So, over and over again, throughout this

<sup>1</sup>The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Ga 1:11-12.

letter we will see the Apostle make claims about the pure, true Gospel... the Gospel of Grace.

We ought to remind ourselves, today and every day, just what that Gospel is... hear these words that Paul wrote to other churches, found in 1 Corinthians 15:

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup>By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup>For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup>and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

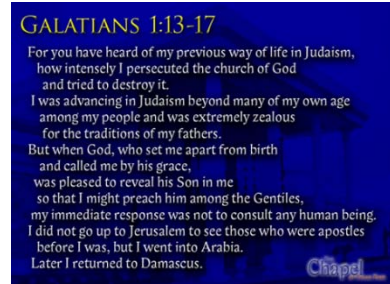
<sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. <sup>11</sup>Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.<sup>2</sup>

By this Gospel we are saved... this Gospel of Grace. It begins with God's Grace, it will end by God's Grace as we are presented before our Holy God for all eternity, and (in between the beginning and eternity) it is by God's grace that we live and worship and share this Gospel of Grace.

In our passage we see Paul clarifying that this Gospel came to him through divine means. He didn't make it up. He didn't get it from anyone else. He didn't read it or figure it out. Paul received the certainty of God's grace through revelation. What he preached was from Christ and any perversion of this Gospel is simply unacceptable.

Then Paul goes on to remind the readers of his story... since the dramatic and miraculous nature of Paul's story amplifies our understanding of the grace of God.

Can we agree that it is a miracle that any of us are saved? This is the Gospel of Grace; none of us deserves what Christ did on our behalf. Each and every changed life that comes to faith by the Grace of God is a miracle.



But there are some cases that, at least in our way of looking at things, seem more miraculous than others.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 1 Co 15:1-11.

I'm glad, for example (especially on this Father's Day), for the testimony of my sons who can't really remember anything other than believing this Gospel of Grace all their lives (and my prayer is that they will never have one of those dramatic testimonies of being saved from some treacherous circumstance or destructive lifestyle... this is the very best Father's Day gift that a dad like me could ever have). Someone on the outside might flippantly say "of course guys like Alex and Donny are believers. What is the big deal? Where is the dramatic miracle?" And that is understandable.

But there was no "of course" in the story of the Apostle Paul. Before he was the Apostle Paul, he was Saul of Tarsus, persecuting the church and trying to destroy it.

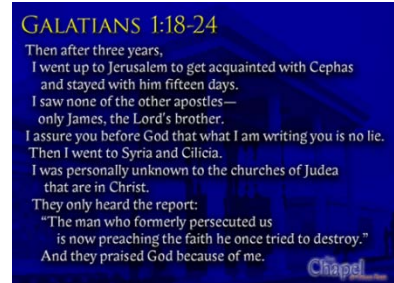
"But when God"... what a powerful turn! What a powerful statement!

The Sovereign God of the Universe, who stands outside of time knowing the end as well as the beginning of all things, called Saul to his knees... everything changed.

There are all sorts of ways to argue fine points of theology and such... but it is far more difficult to argue with a changed life, especially a life so radically changed. It is one thing to say something ought to work; it is a whole other (better) thing to point to our own lives and say "see! This works!" What Paul preached to others, he had experienced himself in a most dramatic way. Paul preached with **words**... and his **life** preached the Gospel of Grace.

These last verses of chapter 1 go on to underscore that Paul was cautious about seeking the approval of people, but rather focused on seeking the approval of God.

The other apostles had their three years with Jesus when he walked among them; Paul took his time with the Lord, too, in prayer and study and other spiritual disciplines.



And again, in this very last verse of chapter 1, Paul expresses again how his changed life was the most dramatic demonstration of the Gospel of Grace.

<sup>22</sup>I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup>They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."  
<sup>24</sup>And they praised God because of me.<sup>3</sup>

Moving on to Chapter 2, listen to what Wiersbe writes as an introduction to the chapter:

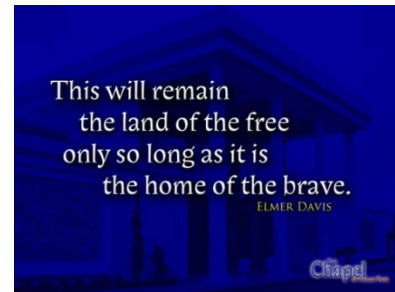
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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Ga 1:22-24.

“This will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave.”

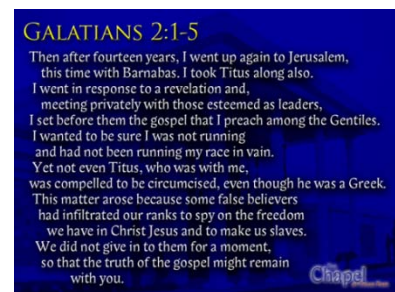
So wrote veteran news analyst Elmer Davis in his book *But We Were Born Free*, and his convictions would certainly be echoed by the Apostle Paul. To Paul, his spiritual liberty in Christ was worth far more than popularity or even security. He was willing to fight for that liberty.

Paul’s first fight for Christian liberty was at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–35; Gal. 2:1–10); his second was at a private meeting with Peter (Gal. 2:11–21). Had Paul been unwilling to wage this spiritual warfare, the church in the first century might have become only a Jewish sect, preaching a mixture of Law and grace. But because of Paul’s courage, the Gospel was kept free from legalism, and it was carried to the Gentiles with great blessing.<sup>4</sup>



What Paul describes here in the first verses of Galatians chapter 2 is detailed in Acts chapter 15.

This matter of the Gospel of Grace verse a *grace+* gospel wasn’t just a problem in the Galatian churches; it was a controversy that defined the early church. It “came to a head” at that first Council at Jerusalem.

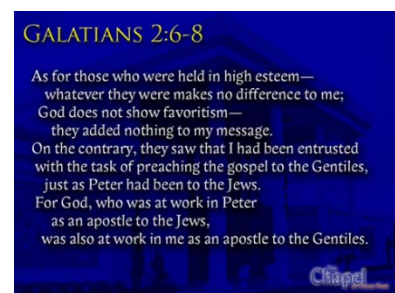


Before the apostolic leaders of the Church, Paul presented the Gospel of Grace that had been the message of his ministry, against the *grace+* gospel that was being popularized by the Judaizers. The calling and revelation that Paul received from Christ compelled him to contend for the Gospel of Grace.

The account in Acts 15 shows us that Paul’s contention for the Gospel of Grace was successful. Those who were intent on a *grace+* gospel that required new believers to take on the rules, rituals, and ceremonies of the Jews were now without credibility due to the deliberations of the apostles at Paul’s urging.

The church leaders in that Jerusalem Council examined Paul’s message of the Gospel of Grace and found it to be orthodox. It lacked nothing; “they added nothing to my message.”

Furthermore, they not only validated the Gospel of Grace, they authorized Paul to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, sending him as their missionary... sending him to take the Gospel of Grace to wherever God would lead, including to these new believers in Galatia.



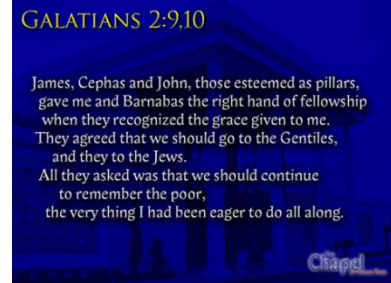
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<sup>4</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989). Ga 2:1.

These last two verses highlight a couple of practical steps to which the early church leaders agreed.

- Division of “territories”, and
- Unity in “priorities”

In recognizing that some would continue to preach the Gospel to the Jews, and Paul and his colleagues would continue to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, there was an acknowledgment that God gives distinct work to various people. The calling to the Gentiles wasn't better or worse than the calling to the Jews... just different. They agreed on different territories.



The agreement to remember the poor (agreement on priorities) was an important reminder that just because “works” do not earn God’s favor, the **Gospel of Grace** is not without work. Remembering, and more specifically *tending* to the needs of the poor, is not work in order to earn God’s favor, but rather work that demonstrates God’s love and favor. We don’t minister to the poor to earn anything; we worship God, expressing our love to our Savior, by loving the poor.

It is as if the parting words at the Jerusalem Council to Paul and his colleagues went something like “you are absolutely right, you are not obligated to work for God’s favor, but remember that the Gospel of Grace ought to result in work that demonstrates God’s favor... remember the poor.”

So what? As we come to the close of this section of Galatians on this Father’s Day, what should we take with us from this story?



This is one of the bigger chunks of Galatians we’ll handle through our series. It is dominated by Paul’s story... the story of Paul’s calling.

But what about our stories... your story? What about our calling?

I know that every one of us here has a story. I’m convinced that every one of us here has a calling from God, too. You may not think of your life’s work as a calling... why not?



I know that many of our stories are stories of the Gospel of Grace.

And if your story isn’t a story of the Gospel of Grace, you’ve come to the right place this morning.

Let's take a moment to reflect on the Apostle Paul's story and see what we might learn about **God's calling and preparation**.

I think we can look at Paul's story and learn something about our story and the story God has in mind for each of us.



I've been thinking about it in terms of three pairs of words. Each pair might seem like a bit of a paradox; it may seem that these words don't necessarily go together:

- Individual – Community
- Immediate Revelation – Passage of Time
- Grace – Duty

### ***Individual – Community***

We see **both** in Paul's story and calling. Paul places a great deal of importance on the individuality of his calling and revelation. We, too, need to learn to trust God's direct dealings with each of us. Through spiritual disciplines like prayer and study, we should seek to hear God's voice, and sense His leading and urging, as we go about our lives.

**And** we see Paul working in community.

- Paul was not a lone ranger... he seemed to always be with companions
- He submitted himself, his message, and his ministry to authorities... not insecure, but not so prideful and stubborn that he would not test his revelation

### ***Immediate Revelation – Passage of Time***

There was no doubt that Paul's life was radically changed at that moment Paul recounts in 1:15

<sup>15</sup>But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup>to reveal his Son<sup>5</sup>

Paul's conversion, like each of ours, is both a powerful moment **and** a process. There was that profound moment when Saul became Paul... but a lot happened before Paul would become the Apostle that we know from these pages. Years and years would pass before the author that we know would emerge from that conversion moment. Saul, the brilliant student and zealous religious leader required years of preparation and experience before he operated as an apostle.

We, too, can appreciate the long road. Wherever we are in the journey, whether it seems like we're only just beginning or we have been at this for many decades, God's plan that began at our salvation is revealed day by day, month by month, year

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<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Ga 1:15-16.

by year, and even decade by decade. Some of what God intends to do in our life is received instantaneously... other work in and through our lives requires the diligence of a lifetime.

### **Grace – Duty**

The message of Grace rings throughout Paul's story. The Gospel of Grace is not only his message; it is his personal story and experience.

And there also marks of duty in Paul's story. What is the point of a **calling** if there is no **doing**?

- Duty to the poor
- Duty to contend for the Gospel of Grace

Paul was compelled by God's calling just as Jeremiah:

The LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you."<sup>6</sup>

We read it together today:

God does not show favoritism

God's calling, and enabling, and leading, and empowering is not just reserved for the likes of the Apostle Paul. That same power is for us today:

- In life and ministry
- In our jobs and families
- As ministers and parents (and dads)



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<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Je 1:7.