

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

December 16, 2020

Series – The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Paul's Experience of Grace

Text – Galatians 1:11 - 24

Introduction

I. Paul's Certification Of His Experience of God's Grace (vs. 11 – 12)

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11-12)

The word, "certify" (γνωρίζω – *gnōrizō* – Verb – Pres.; Act.; Ind.; 1st Per. Sing.), means "to make known," or "declare." This is a "strong Greek verb ... [which] often introduced an important and emphatic statement."¹ It is translated elsewhere as "give you to understand" (1 Corinthians 12:3), and "do you to wit" (2 Corinthians 8:1). Paul was declaring to these Galatian churches that his experience of grace was not man-made. If the gospel was "of men" it would teach a works salvation as all other man-made religions do.

Though Paul had seen the testimony of Steven, and may have even understood the doctrinal position of Christianity, at least on an intellectual level, it was not through the testimony of any man that Paul was saved. Paul received the gospel directly from the Lord (Acts 9:1 – 19). Any person who is saved today is saved by a direct interaction with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We cannot save anybody – we can only bring them to the One Person who can. Salvation is an act of God. God draws people to Christ (John 6:44). Jesus said:

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:44)

In a general way, the crucifixion was the means by which God draws people to Christ:

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32)

God also uses the Word of God to bring people to faith:

¹ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1789.

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

The Holy Spirit reproves the world and convinces them of their need for a Saviour:

"7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. 8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 Of sin, because they believe not on me; 10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." (John 16:7-11)

Though God uses men to communicate the gospel, salvation is clearly an act of God. Both Paul's Conversion and His Calling were experiences of God's grace.

II. Paul's Contemplation of His Experience of God's Grace (vs. 13 – 22)

This is where we will compare what is written in Galatians with the historical record given in the Book of Acts. By comparing the two together, we get a more complete picture of what happened. In this passage we will once again get a glimpse of Paul's testimony. Paul was forever telling people what happened to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1 – 19).

All good testimonies contain three ingredients:

1. A brief description of who we were.
2. A broad description of what God did.
3. A brief description of where we are going now.

The emphasis is on what God did and what He is doing.

Illustrate – Give my testimony.

A. Paul's Past Persecution of Christians (vs. 13 – 14; Acts 9:1 - 2)

"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." (Galatians 1:13-14)

The word, "conversation" (ἀναστροφήν from ἀναστροφή - *anastrophe* – Noun – Acc.; Sing.; Fem.), means manner of life, conduct, or behavior.

Notice the word, “persecuted” (ἐδίωκον from διώκω – *diōkō* – Verb – Imp.; Act.; Ind.; 1st Per. Sing.) All of these verbs are in the imperfect tense, which indicates continuous action. Paul was relentless in his persecution of the churches:

"As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." (Acts 8:3)

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest," (Acts 9:1)

Notice the word, “wasted” (ἐπόρθουν from πορθέω – *portheō* – Verb – Imp.; Act.; Ind.; 1st Per. Sing.). It means to destroy (Acts 9:21). Paul could not destroy the church (Matthew 16:18), but he attempted to.

These verses tell us that Paul profited (προέκοπτον from προκόπτω – *prokoptō* – Verb – Imp.; Act.; Ind.; 1st Per. Sing.), or increased (progressed or gained) as a persecutor of Christians, meaning that his zeal for beating, imprisoning, and even slaughtering Christians advanced him in his own religion. He was a rising star in Judaism primarily because of his passion for persecuting Christians. Paul was “exceedingly zealous,” which means he was passionate about what he believed, though he was wrong.

Note - there are a lot of people out there are exceedingly zealous for something, but how many Christians are exceedingly zealous for the Lord.

It's good to be zealous, and it's good to be profitable; but, make sure that you are profiting in a good thing.

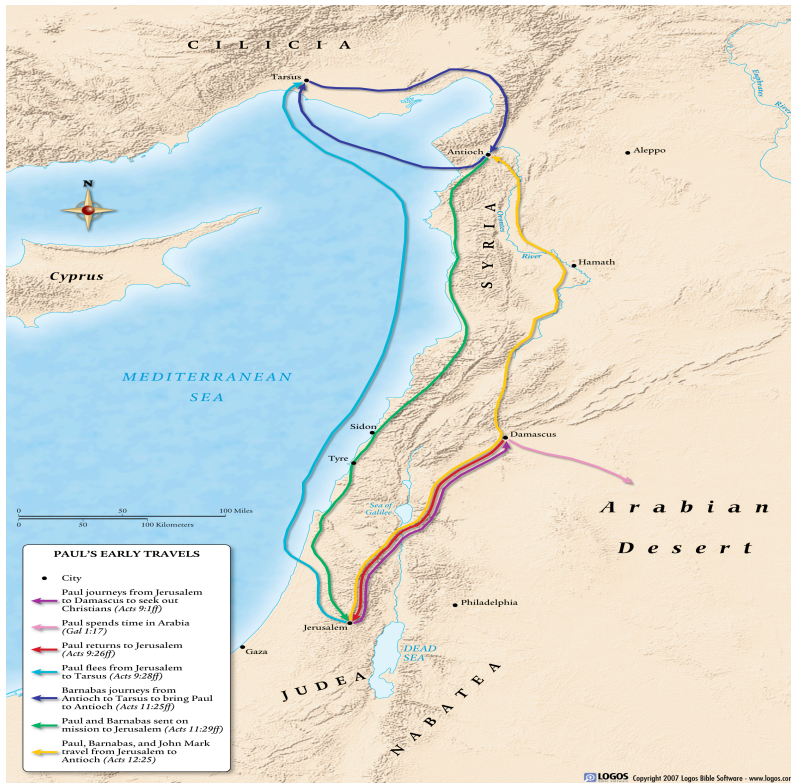
"There is something worse than failing in the eyes of men, and that is succeeding in something that does not matter to God."

B. Paul's Regeneration and Early Transformation (vs. 15 – 17; Acts 9:3 - 25)

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." (Galatians 1:15-17)

Notice that Paul was separated, or set apart, from his mother's womb. This does not mean that Paul was saved at birth, but it does indicate that God already had a plan in place for Paul from the womb. God said something similar regarding Jeremiah:

"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."
(Jeremiah 1:5)



Again we see that much of what was taking place in Paul's life was directly between himself and the Lord. People can help you – they are tools used by God to train you; but ultimately, it is the Lord who “worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). There has to be an inner desire, an inner drive because if there is only outward persuasion it will not last. I do what I do because there is something, rather Someone, on the inside of me that is pushing me, persuading me. Sometimes, there is another voice

inside of my head which resists what God is trying to do: that is my old man, my old sinful nature, which resists the will of God.

C. Paul's Presentation to Peter and James (vs. 18 – 19; Acts 9:26 - 29)

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother."
(Galatians 1:18-19)

Notice – he went to “see” (ἵστορησαι from ἵστορέω – *historeō* – Verb – Aor.; Act.; Inf.) Peter. This means he wanted to become personally acquainted with him or to know him face to face.

Here is where the exact order of events is a little confusing. We know that Paul went to Arabia for three years after his salvation and initial training in Damascus. It seems that he returned to Damascus, before presenting himself in Jerusalem. Here in *Galatians* it says that Paul met only with Peter and James; but in Acts it says that he went in and out with “the apostles,” which would seem to indicate all of them, but the text here in *Galatians* would limit it to just Peter and James..

D. Paul's Ministration in Syria and Cilicia (vs. 20 – 22; Acts 9:30)

"Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ:" (Galatians 1:20-22)

Notice here that Paul affirms the truth of what he was saying. Apparently, he had been accused of lying, or lied about, by either the Judaizers who claimed to be Christians, or perhaps by those in Judaism.

After Paul left Jerusalem, he went to Tarsus in Cilicia. According to Wiersbe: "Historians have concluded that he remained there perhaps seven years, until Barnabas recruited him for the work in Antioch (Acts 11:19–26).² Ultimately, Paul ended up in Antioch, in Syria, and he and Barnabas served in the church there.

Before the Jerusalem Council referred to in Galatians 2:1 (and in Acts 15), Paul had only been to Jerusalem as a believer on two brief occasions (Acts 9:26 – 30, shortly after Paul's conversion; and in Acts 11:30 when he and Barnabas were there to deliver an offering).

III. Paul's Conversation as a Result of His Experience of God's Grace (vs. 23 – 24)

"But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me." (Galatians 1:23-24)

Paul now had a reputation that brought glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. The people knew what he was, and they heard that he was saved, and they could now see that the life he was living demonstrated the grace of God working through him. God's grace not only saves us, it also changes us.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;" (Titus 2:11-12)

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 689.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1-2)

Conclusion

In this passage we have seen Paul's experience of God's grace. It is wonderful to see what God did in the life of the Apostle Paul; but even more wonderful than that is what God does in your life, and in mine. What is your testimony of your experience of God's grace? If God has truly saved you by his grace, then he is also transforming you by His grace as well. You too are a new creature in Christ. When others see the change that has taken place in your life, God gets the glory. You are adorning the doctrine of God (Titus 2:10); you are making God look good.

Don't resist the work of grace in your life. Yield to Holy Spirit of God as he guides you and corrects you. Let God have His way in your life, because when you are changed into His image, you cause other people to want what God has done in you.

Illustration - *We Can Safely Rest Everything on the Gospel*

If these things come to us from God, we can safely rest our all upon them. If they came to us from men, they would probably fail us at a crisis. Did you ever trust men and not regret it before the sun was down? Did you ever rely on an arm of flesh without discovering that the best of men are but men at the best? But if these things come from God, they are eternal and all-sufficient. We can both live and die upon the everlasting gospel. Let us deal more and more with God, and with Him only. If we have obtained light from Him, there is more of blessing to be had. Let us go to that same Teacher, that we may learn more of the deep things of God. Let us bravely believe in the success of the gospel that we have received. We believe *in* it; let us believe *for* it. We will not despair though the whole visible Church should apostatize.³

³ Charles Spurgeon, *Galatians*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).