

The Book of Galatians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Paul's Gospel Received from Christ

Galatians 1:11-24

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

In this passage Paul defends the divine origin of his gospel, and that defense is the doctrinal heart of the lesson. His opponents implied that his message was a human product, learned from the Jerusalem apostles and then watered down. Paul answers that he received the gospel directly by revelation from Jesus Christ, that his commission came from God rather than men, and that his independent message nonetheless agreed completely with the other apostles. The point is that the gospel is not human tradition open to revision but God's own revelation delivered through his apostles.

The lesson also carries a powerful word about grace and transformation. Paul's autobiography is the story of the church's chief enemy becoming its leading missionary, and he tells it to display the priority and the power of grace. Here the teacher must steer carefully. Paul affirms that God set him apart and called him by grace before he had done anything to deserve it, and we want students to feel the wonder of that initiating grace. At the same time, we do not teach an arbitrary, irresistible selection of some over others, for the gospel call is genuine and universal, and Paul himself describes responding in obedience to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19).

So aim at both the head and the heart. Help students stand confidently on a gospel that comes from God and not from men, and help them marvel that this same grace can reach the hardest case they know, including themselves. The lesson should end where Paul's story ends, with God receiving the glory for a life he alone could change.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul insists that "the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel," for he "received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:11-12). Why is the divine origin of the gospel so central to Paul's defense, and what does it mean that the gospel is revealed by Christ rather than invented or simply inherited as human tradition?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul lays down his thesis in verses 11 and 12, and everything in the chapter serves it. The gospel he preaches is not "according to man," not a human invention, and he did not receive it from any person or get taught it in a classroom. He received it "through a revelation of Jesus Christ." The risen Lord himself unveiled it to him. This is Paul's answer to anyone who treats the gospel as negotiable human opinion.

Help students feel the difference between something revealed and something invented or inherited. A human tradition can be improved, updated, or set aside, because it is only the accumulated wisdom of people. A revelation from God can only be received and obeyed. The Judaizers wanted to treat the gospel as the first kind of thing. Paul insists it is the second.

Notice how this connects to the authority of Scripture for us. We did not receive the gospel by a Damascus-road vision, but we have the same apostolic message preserved in the inspired writings of the New Testament (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21). What Christ revealed to the apostles, the apostles delivered to the church, and that completed revelation is now our authority. This is why we do not look for new gospels or new revelations to supplement it.

End with the reassurance this gives. Because the gospel is God's revelation, it does not rise or fall with the credibility of the preacher. Paul's message was true not because Paul was impressive but because Christ gave it. Our confidence rests on the same foundation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as divine revelation from Jesus Christ, not human invention or tradition
- The difference between revealed truth, which is received and obeyed, and tradition, which is merely human
- The apostolic gospel preserved for us in the inspired New Testament (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- The completeness of revelation, against the search for new gospels or new messages

Discussion Prompts

- What practical difference does it make that the gospel is revealed rather than invented?
- How does the divine origin of the gospel give us confidence even when teachers fail?
- Why does a revealed gospel rule out the search for new revelations today?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul describes his former life as zealous and sincere, yet deeply mistaken (1:13–14). Where in your life have you been sincerely zealous about something that actually needed to be corrected? How did you come to see it differently, or do you still need to?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the passage toward the student's own heart by way of Paul's sobering self-portrait. He was zealous, sincere, and busy for God, and he was fighting against God the whole time. Sincerity, it turns out, is not the same as being right. A person can be completely earnest and completely mistaken.

Invite honest reflection without harshness. Most of us can recall some cause, opinion, or crusade we threw ourselves into, certain we were in the right, only to learn later that we were

misguided. Sometimes the zeal was for a good thing pursued in a wrong way. Sometimes it was simply wrong. The goal is to cultivate a teachable humility that holds even our convictions open to correction by God's word.

Be careful here to honor truth as well as humility. The lesson is not that all zeal is suspect or that we can never be sure of anything. Paul became more certain, not less, after his conversion. The point is that our zeal must be governed by the revealed gospel, not by our own sincerity, traditions, or sense of certainty.

Move toward the hope in Paul's story. The same Lord who stopped Paul in his tracks is patient and able to redirect us when we are sincerely wrong. Misdirected zeal is not the end of the story when grace gets involved.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sincerity as no guarantee of being right
- The need for zeal to be governed by the revealed word, not personal certainty or tradition
- Teachable humility that holds convictions open to correction by Scripture
- God's patience in redirecting those who are sincerely mistaken

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you been sincerely zealous about something that needed correcting?
- How do we stay teachable without becoming unsure of everything?
- What helps you tell the difference between godly conviction and stubborn zeal?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says God "had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace" (1:15). What does this teach about God's gracious initiative in salvation, and how do we hold on to the priority of grace without concluding that God simply chooses some and refuses others apart from any real human response?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 15 is a window into the sovereign grace of God. Paul says God "set me apart before I was born" and "called me by his grace." Long before Paul had done anything good or bad, God had a gracious purpose for him. The initiative was entirely God's. Paul did not climb up to God; God reached down to Paul while Paul was still his enemy.

Let students savor the priority of grace. Salvation begins with God, not with us. Our faith, our repentance, our coming to Christ are all responses to a God who moved first, who sent his Son, who calls through the gospel. This guards us against any notion that we save ourselves or that we put God in our debt. Grace always goes first.

Now steer carefully past a false conclusion. Some read verses like this and decide that God unconditionally selects certain individuals for salvation and passes over the rest, so that human response plays no real part. That is not what Paul teaches. Paul's setting apart was a calling to a specific task, apostleship to the Gentiles, and Scripture everywhere presents the gospel call as genuine and universal, addressed to all and able to be resisted (Acts 7:51; 1 Timothy 2:3–4; Titus 2:11). Paul himself says he “was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19), which means he truly responded.

Hold the two truths together in the right order. Grace is first, and grace is the only reason anyone is saved, yet grace calls for a real answer of faith and obedience. God is not arbitrary, and people are not passive. The God who called Paul by grace also waited for Paul to rise, be baptized, and wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).

Bring it home as comfort. If your standing depended on your getting to God first, you could never be sure of it. Because grace moved first and still moves, you can come with confidence, knowing the whole rescue began in the heart of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The priority and initiative of God's grace in salvation
- Grace as the sole ground of salvation, against any form of self-salvation
- The gospel call as genuine and universal, against unconditional election and irresistible grace (1 Timothy 2:3–4; Titus 2:11)
- Grace that calls for a real human response of faith and obedience (Acts 22:16; 26:19)
- God's purposeful, gracious calling, distinct from arbitrary selection

Discussion Prompts

- How does the priority of grace humble us and comfort us at the same time?
- Why does affirming grace not require us to deny genuine human response?
- How did Paul both receive grace and respond in obedience?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul went from persecutor to preacher, proof that no one is beyond the reach of grace. Who in your life have you quietly written off as too hard, too far gone, or too hostile? How does Paul's story challenge the way you pray for and treat that person?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses Paul's transformation into our relationships. If grace could reach the man who was hauling Christians to prison and approving their deaths, then there is no

one whose name we are entitled to cross off. The chief persecutor became the chief missionary. That single fact should reorder the way we view the hard cases in our own lives.

Help students name the person, gently and privately if needed. Most of us carry a short list of people we have quietly decided are beyond hope: the hostile relative, the hardened skeptic, the friend who has wandered far. Paul's story does not promise that every person will respond, but it does dismantle our certainty that some people cannot.

Turn the conviction into action. If grace can reach anyone, then the right response is not resignation but renewed prayer, patient love, and a readiness to share the gospel. The way we treat people we have written off changes once we remember what we ourselves were when grace found us.

Close by pointing back to God's power, not our persuasiveness. Paul was not argued into the kingdom; the risen Christ confronted him. We are not responsible for changing hearts, only for praying faithfully and witnessing truthfully, and leaving the transforming work to the Lord who specializes in lost causes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reach of grace to even the hardest and most hostile sinner
- Our calling to pray for and witness to those we are tempted to abandon
- God, not our persuasion, as the one who changes hearts
- Hope and patience as the fruit of remembering our own rescue

Discussion Prompts

- Who have you quietly written off, and what would change if you stopped?
- How does remembering your own rescue reshape the way you treat hard cases?
- What is one concrete act of prayer or witness you can offer this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

God "was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (1:16). How does Paul connect being saved by grace with being sent on mission, and what does this tell us about the purpose for which God rescues people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 16 links salvation and mission in a single breath. God revealed his Son to Paul "in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles." The rescue was not an end in itself. Paul was saved to be sent. Grace laid hold of him and immediately pointed him outward, toward the nations who had never heard.

Help students see that this pattern is not unique to apostles. Throughout Scripture, God blesses people so that they become a blessing, saves them so that they carry the message further (Genesis 12:2-3; Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Peter 2:9). We are not saved merely to be safe. We are saved to declare the praises of the One who called us out of darkness.

Apply it concretely. Most students will not be missionaries to distant nations, but every Christian has a circle of relationships into which Christ has placed them, a mission field of neighbors, coworkers, family, and friends. The question is whether they see their ordinary life as a sending or only as a refuge.

Guard against two distortions. Mission is not earning our salvation by recruiting others, and it is not a burden laid on the reluctant. It is the natural overflow of grace received. People who have truly tasted the goodness of God find it hard to keep quiet about it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unity of salvation and mission: saved to be sent
- The biblical pattern of being blessed in order to be a blessing
- Every Christian's ordinary life as a mission field
- Witness as the overflow of grace, not a way to earn salvation

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing yourself as sent change your view of ordinary life?
- Who are the people in your circle that God may have placed you among?
- What keeps the overflow of grace from becoming witness in your life?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul's zeal did not disappear when he met Christ; it was redirected toward the gospel. Where is most of your energy, passion, and attention going right now, and what would it look like for that zeal to be aimed at the right thing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question gathers up the theme of redirected zeal. Conversion did not make Paul passive; it aimed his considerable energy at a new target. The same drive that once persecuted the church now planted churches across the empire. Grace does not extinguish our passions; it redeems and redirects them.

Invite students to take an honest inventory of where their energy actually goes. Our calendars and our worries reveal what we are zealous for. Some pour themselves into careers, hobbies, causes, or screens, while their zeal for Christ flickers. The question is not whether we have passion but where it is pointed.

Offer a hopeful reframing. The intensity that can be a problem when misdirected becomes a gift when surrendered to Christ. The competitive person can compete to serve, the anxious planner can plan for the kingdom, the talker can talk about Jesus. God rarely erases our temperament; he sanctifies it.

Press toward one concrete redirection. Ask each student to name a single area where their energy is currently overinvested in something small and could be turned, even a little, toward what is eternal. Small redirections, repeated, reshape a life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grace as the redirection, not the erasure, of our passions
- The heart's zeal revealed by where our time and energy go
- The sanctifying of temperament and gifting for kingdom purposes
- Transformation as a steady reaiming of the affections

Discussion Prompts

- Where is most of your energy and attention actually going?
- How might God redeem your particular temperament rather than erase it?
- What is one small redirection of zeal you could make this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul stresses that he did not first consult "flesh and blood," nor go up to the apostles in Jerusalem, before he began (1:16–19), yet his gospel fully matched theirs. What does this independence, combined with agreement, teach us about the unity and the divine source of the one apostolic gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul offers a careful timeline in verses 16 to 19 to prove a point: he did not get his gospel from the Jerusalem apostles. He did not rush to consult flesh and blood, did not go up to the leaders for instruction, but went to Arabia and back to Damascus, and only after three years met briefly with Cephas and James. His commission was independent and direct.

Yet, and this is crucial, his independent gospel matched theirs perfectly. There were not two gospels, a Pauline one and a Petrine one. There was one gospel, given by the one Lord, confirmed when these apostles later recognized Paul's message and ministry (Galatians 2:7–9). Independence of source plus unity of message points to a single divine origin.

Draw the doctrinal lesson about the unity of the apostolic witness. The New Testament is not a collection of competing opinions stitched together. It is the unified testimony of men

commissioned by the same risen Christ, and its harmony is one of the evidences of its divine source. When we read Paul and Peter and John, we are hearing one gospel in several voices.

Apply this to how we handle Scripture. Because the apostolic message is one, we do not pit one part of the New Testament against another or play Paul off against James. We let the whole counsel of God stand together, trusting that the same Spirit gave it all.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The independent yet harmonious source of the apostolic gospel
- One gospel confirmed by all the apostles, not competing versions
- The unity of the New Testament as evidence of its divine origin
- Letting the whole counsel of God stand together rather than pitting texts against each other

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul stress both his independence and his agreement with the apostles?
- What does the harmony of the New Testament suggest about its source?
- How should the unity of the apostolic message shape the way we read Scripture?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul never lets his impressive religious résumé define him; only grace does. What parts of your past, whether achievements you are proud of or failures you are ashamed of, are you tempted to let define your identity instead of God's grace?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question lets students examine where they anchor their identity. Paul had every credential his world prized, advancement in Judaism, zeal, pedigree, and elsewhere he lists them in detail. Here he mentions his past mainly as the dark backdrop against which grace shines. He refuses to be defined either by his achievements or by his sins. Grace defines him now.

Help students see both temptations. Some are tempted to build their identity on accomplishments, a quiet pride that says they have earned their place. Others are imprisoned by their failures, certain that their worst moments are the truest thing about them. The gospel speaks to both. In Christ, our standing rests not on our record but on his.

Make it personal and specific. Invite each student to name the achievement they are most tempted to boast in and the failure they are most tempted to hide in. Then set both beside the cross. Neither our trophies nor our scars get to have the final word over a person God has claimed by grace.

Close with the freedom this brings. When grace defines us, we can be honest about our past without being crushed by it and humble about our successes without being inflated by them. We become people who can say, with Paul, that what we are, we are by the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identity grounded in grace rather than achievement or failure
- The gospel's answer to both pride in our record and shame over our past
- Our standing in Christ resting on his record, not ours
- Freedom and humility as the fruit of a grace-defined identity

Discussion Prompts

- What achievement are you most tempted to let define you?
- What failure are you most tempted to hide in or be crushed by?
- How does a grace-defined identity free you from both pride and shame?

Question 9

Student Question:

The churches "glorified God because of me," hearing that "he who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (1:23-24). What does it mean that the proper response to a transformed life is glory to God rather than admiration of the person, and how does this protect us from a man-centered faith that prizes dramatic testimonies more than the God who saves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The passage ends on a note that carries real doctrinal weight, even though it sounds simple. The churches of Judea had never met Paul, but they heard that their old persecutor was now preaching the faith, and their response was to glorify God "because of me." The glory went up to God, not over to Paul. That direction is the whole point.

Help students see why this matters. A transformed life is meant to function like a window, letting people see through it to the God who did the transforming. When the praise stops at the person, the window has become a mirror, and the testimony has quietly turned into self-promotion. Paul will have none of that. The hero of his story is grace.

Apply this to our own culture of testimony. We rightly love stories of changed lives, but there is a subtle danger in prizing dramatic testimonies more than the God who saves, or in making the converted person a celebrity. The measure of a good testimony is not how impressive the person becomes but how clearly God is glorified. The quiet, ordinary Christian who has known the Lord since childhood is as much a trophy of grace as the rescued addict.

Tie it to worship. The proper end of every changed life, including ours, is the same as the end of Paul's: people looking at what God has done and worshiping him for it. Keep the camera pointed at God.

Guard one more time against a man-centered faith. Our confidence and our boasting are never in the strength of our experience or the drama of our story, but in Christ crucified and risen. The faith that saves is anchored in him, not in the vividness of our conversion.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Glory to God, not admiration of the person, as the right response to a changed life
- A transformed life as a window to God, not a mirror for self
- The danger of a testimony-centered or celebrity-driven faith
- The ordinary, lifelong believer as no less a trophy of grace than the dramatic convert
- Confidence anchored in Christ, not in the drama of our experience

Discussion Prompts

- How can we tell a story of a changed life so that God gets the glory?
- What is the danger of prizing dramatic testimonies above the God who saves?
- Why is the lifelong believer as much a trophy of grace as the dramatic convert?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Paul's ruined story became a trophy of grace that made people worship God. Name one specific way Jesus is rewriting your story by his grace right now, and how you might let that change point others to him this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole lesson and turns it toward formation. Paul's ruined story became, by grace, a reason for churches he had never met to worship God. The same God is at work writing something in each believer's life, and the question is whether we will see it and let it point others to him.

Help students move from Paul's dramatic story to their own, which may be quieter but is no less the work of grace. Ask them to name one specific way Jesus is currently changing them, a habit being broken, a fear being healed, a love being deepened, a sin being put to death. Naming it makes it visible and keeps us grateful.

Then turn the change outward. Paul's transformation preached to others without a sermon; people simply heard what God had done. Invite students to consider how the change in them might be allowed to point someone else to Christ this week, through a word, an act of love, or a story honestly told for God's glory.

Close in worship and hope. The God who turned a persecutor into a preacher is not finished with any of us. Send students home marveling that their story, surrendered to him, can become one more reason for someone to glorify God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The ongoing transforming work of grace in every believer's life
- Sanctification made visible and kept grateful by naming it
- A changed life as a witness that points others to Christ
- Worship and hope grounded in the God who finishes what he starts

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific way Jesus is changing you right now?
- How might that change point someone else to Christ this week?
- What helps you stay grateful for the quiet, ongoing work of grace?