

The Book of Galatians

Lesson 2: Paul's Gospel Received from Christ -- Galatians 1:11-24

Everybody loves a good before-and-after story. We slow down to look at the photos, the wrecked car beside the rebuilt one, the overgrown yard beside the garden. There is something in us that leans toward redemption, that wants to believe a ruined thing can be remade. In this passage Paul tells his own before-and-after, and it is one of the most astonishing in all of Scripture.

Before, he was the church's fiercest enemy. He says it himself, without flinching: he persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. He was a rising star in his religion, zealous, gifted, advancing beyond his peers, utterly convinced he was serving God while he dragged believers from their homes. He was sincere. He was also catastrophically wrong.

After, he is the very man preaching the faith he once tried to wipe out. And he wants the Galatians to understand exactly how that happened, because it bears directly on their crisis. The other teachers were hinting that Paul's gospel was a watered-down, second-hand version, something he picked up from the apostles and then softened. Paul answers that his gospel did not come from any human being at all. It came by revelation, straight from the risen Christ who arrested him on the Damascus road.

There is good news for us tucked inside Paul's defense. The same grace that reached the church's worst enemy and made him its greatest missionary is the grace that reaches us, and reaches the people we have quietly given up on. No pedigree qualifies us for it. No past disqualifies us from it. As we read, watch how the whole story ends, not with people praising Paul, but with people glorifying God.

Group Discussion: The churches of Judea heard about Paul and "glorified God because of me" (1:24). When we hear a story of a changed life, why is it so important that the praise lands on God rather than on the person, and how can we tell the difference in the way we tell such stories?

Personal Reflection: Paul was sincerely zealous for God and yet was working against him. Where in your own life might you be pouring real energy into something that actually needs to be redirected by the truth of the gospel?

Read Galatians 1:11-24

Study Questions

1. 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?

2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 9:1–22, the account of Paul's conversion on the Damascus road; Acts 26:12–18, Christ's commission of Paul to the Gentiles; 1 Timothy 1:12–16, Paul as the foremost of sinners shown mercy as an example; Philippians 3:4–11, Paul counting his religious

pedigree as loss for the sake of Christ; Ephesians 2:8-10, salvation by grace through faith, created for good works.