



Galatians 1 - Part 3 - CHANGED LIVES

¹¹ But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

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. 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.

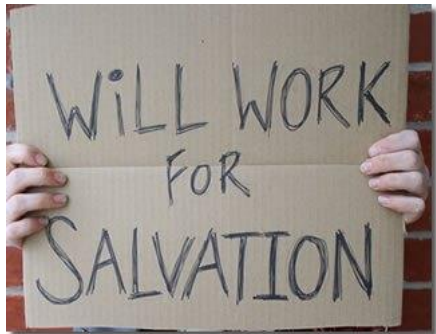
¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Contacts at Jerusalem

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

²¹ Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. ²³ But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God in me.

I want to wrap up Chapter one today and talk about some of the details that are in this passage. If you'll remember, last Sunday I taught on "JESUS ALONE". During the podcast on Wednesday, Sandy and I talked about how insidious and how horrible the legalism trap is. We fleshed out how when you add anything to Jesus for salvation there is no assurance of salvation. When we are able to accept God's grace and we truly understand Jesus' statement from the cross "It is finished" we can have the full assurance of our salvation and not wonder whether or not we are truly saved. As Paul left Galatia, detractors had come along to the churches in Galatia, and tried to convince people that Jesus was not enough and that a person had to keep the Mosaic law and had to be circumcised to be saved. Sometimes we call these legalists, these law-keepers, Judaizers. They felt that a person could only be a good Christian by in essence becoming a Jew first. This defeated the message of the gospel which was "Jesus Alone".



Humans are funny. We often feel a little weird about getting something for nothing. We are more comfortable with the idea of earning something. I think it's because usually when someone gives us something for free there is an angle or an agenda attached to the gift. Humans seldom give something without wanting something in return. Understanding the gospel is difficult because we're being given something that we have not earned or deserved. Probably the most difficult thing about coming to Christ and receiving the gospel is that our pride gets in the way. We want to be able to say "I did this on my own".

It is really hard to come to Christ while you have a pride problem. A person must come to the end of himself or herself to recognize the need for God and the need for His mercy. This is offensive to a self-made self-assured person. It doesn't mean you have to be a failure, rather that you have to understand that you are missing something really important that you can go get yourself. I have heard it said that to receive the good news you have to understand the bad news. The bad news is that you cannot do it without Jesus. The Prophet Isaiah said it this way, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way." (Isaiah 53:6) Paul repeated it saying, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) So when we realize that we've fallen short, we try to figure out how to make up the difference ourselves. That can't be done. You and I CAN'T "make up the difference". Biblical Christianity says that only through Jesus can you measure up to God's ideal.

The Bible says that we've all fallen short of the glory of God. None of us likes to fall short in anything. We as humans (especially men) want to do something to make up the difference. But Biblical Christianity says that you're NEVER going to be GOOD ENOUGH. You can't put points on the "score board" when it comes to God. We love to contribute because it makes us feel better about ourselves. But what is Paul saying?



"What do you mean 'How do you plan on paying for your sins?'"

He's saying that no man came up with this gospel. One good clue to that is that there is nothing that a human can do to measure up. If man had made this up, there would be a list of things that needed to be checked off to be acceptable, forgiven, and saved. All other religions have a laundry list of things you've got to do to "measure up" and to be on the "list". Only Biblical Christianity offers salvation, forgiveness, and love unconditionally. All sorts of different religions and spiritual paradigms have added more and more things that supposedly make us acceptable to God. The truth is that NONE OF THE ADD-ONS MAKE US MORE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD.

This last part of chapter one of Galatians one mention three people who were changed radically by their encounter with Jesus: Paul, James, and Peter. The passage only tells us about how Paul's life changed, but he mentioned James, the brother of Jesus, and Peter so I will say something briefly about them as well.

PAUL – THE APOSTLE

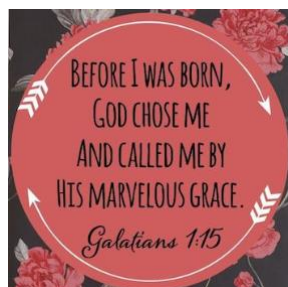


Verses 13 & 14 really tell us about Paul's past. This man who was a Jew of all Jews had NOTHING to gain from following this "mad rabbi" from Nazareth. He had EVERYTHING to lose. The fact that Paul had everything to lose by following Jesus is one of the most compelling reasons that exists to demonstrate that Paul's conversion was supernatural. Paul was not a crazy person, and yet he threw it all away to follow this Jesus. Paul was educated. He was articulate. He was schooled in Judaism under the instruction of a man named Gamaliel who is revered even to this day. Paul was a Pharisee. They were SERIOUS about obedience to God. They were the most religious of all of the sects of Judaism. Paul says he was ZEALOUS about following the law and the traditions of his fathers. Paul mentioned this to point out that he knew more about following the law than any of these people now trying to interject the law into the simple gospel. He understood the self-defeatism and person knows when they try to find righteousness in

following the law.

I had intended to present a timetable of Paul's life after his conversion (36AD) on the road to Damascus, but scholars differ somewhat on the dates, so I think in general terms we can understand that: 1) Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, 2) he was baptized three days later in Damascus by a believing Jew named Ananias, 3) He received his call to preach to the gentiles while he was in Damascus, 4) He later went to Jerusalem to present what had happened to him to the original church fathers, 5) He began missionary journeys, 6) He returned to Jerusalem to the Council of Jerusalem in around 50 AD. The issue to be discussed at the council was whether converted gentiles also needed to follow Jewish law and traditions.

In that synopsis, what I really think we need to focus on is the absolutely totally changed life of Paul. He had an encounter with Jesus and he was never the same. I think that is what Paul is trying to bring attention to in verses 15 and following.



¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Paul says that God separated him out from birth, and in God's marvelous timing, He called Paul through "His grace". It causes me to wonder why in the world God called someone like Paul who had been so hostile to the gospel. **I think it may have to do with the fact that Paul was absolutely passionate about following the will of God.** Even as a Jew, there were none more dedicated than Paul. And you know what? God still does this. Are you absolutely passionate about following the will of God? Are you absolutely passionate about desiring Him above all else?

**You will seek me
and find me
when you
seek me with all your heart.**
Jeremiah 29:13

We hear God's heart as He speaks to us in scripture. The Holy Spirit spoke through Jeremiah when he said, "*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*" (Jeremiah 29:13)

You see, that is a promise. If we seek after Him WITH ALL OF OUR HEART, we WILL find Him. So, if you haven't been seeking, start doing so. Seek passionately, and when you feel like giving up, He'll reveal Himself to you. At least that is what has happened to me in my life. I remember one time when I was around 15 years old, I spent a lot of time in prayer for about 6 months, and then one day, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit about my profound need for Him. I surrendered to Him that day, I was changed, and I have NEVER BEEN THE SAME. I went from being a very selfish person to being a person that lived and breathed the love of Christ. This is the kind of changed life that Paul is talking about. God is still in the business of changing lives. And, I'm not talking about just being saved. Even after we're saved it's easy to drift back into self-centeredness. How much time, energy, and money do you spend on yourself and your own projects and interests? That can be an indicator of whether you're really seeking after the Lord. Scripture says, "SEEK THE LORD AND YOU WILL FIND HIM." Are YOU the main focus of your daily agenda?

We can also hear David as he speaks to us in the Psalms, "*The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.*" (Psalm 14:2)

God is looking for "those who understand" for those who "seek after God". I think "those that understand" are those that understand that there has got to be something bigger to this thing called life. When life is only about getting up and doing another day's work it loses its purpose. In Sunday School we talked about going out and looking at the night sky and being struck by the magnificence and the mystery of it all. When you begin to "understand", you look up and say to yourself, "Wow, God, what does this all mean? How do I fit into what I am seeing?" Seek the Lord, and you will find Him. After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, Peter was a changed man. Before all of that, he had been all about Peter. In knowing Jesus, Peter truly understood that the Lord is not far from us even when we feel like he is. In Acts chapter 17 Peter was preaching a sermon, and he says,

²⁶ *From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.* ²⁷ God did this so

that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. (NIV; Acts 17:26-27)

God pursued Paul and Paul passionately pursued God. When we get beyond the here and now and when we get beyond our mere senses, we "understand" that there is something more to all of this. It is sometimes a slow process, and sometimes it is a quiet process. Sometimes it is spectacular and loud. I do not know why God doesn't come to all of us like He did to Paul. I had a friend who was dying of alcoholism and I begged the Lord to come to my friend like He had come to Paul. I knew that if Jesus would just appear to him as He had to Paul the Apostle, my friend would trust in Jesus. God did not appear to my friend. I think it was because my friend never truly pursued God. God looks for seeking hearts. God is a rewarder of "those that diligently seek Him." Scripture tells us, *"⁶ But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6 NKJV)*

So what does all of this mean to you today? What happened to Paul and my alcoholic friend really isn't the issue. The issue is you. If you do not have faith that this whole Jesus thing can be real, then just tell God in your mind, "God if you're real just help me have the faith to have faith that you are real. God reveal yourself to me." My suspicion is that Paul had prayed such prayers often, and God was a "rewarder of Paul because Paul was a person that diligently sought Him." So, what does it look like when we diligently seek Him? I know in my own case, I had to really listen to realize I was too busy with the things of the world to be interrupted by God. Being "interrupted by God" in my own case meant reducing my own interests to become passionately interested in others and in their needs. It seems that the more I've become involved in ministering to others, the more I feel God's closeness and direction.

Start this very day by being willing to put self aside and laying yourself before the God of the Universe who loves you and cares for you. Have you gotten too busy to be interrupted by God? He's a gentleman and He won't interrupt you. *"The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God."* (Psalm 14:2). He is waiting to change you into all you were meant to be.

Let us pray.