

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

This morning we are going to continue our study through the book of Galatians, we will finish the remaining portion of chapter one.

I have always enjoyed reading a good biography.

It didn't matter if the biography was of an athlete, a past president, a successful business leader or one of a missionary – I was always interested to find out the inner working of that person.

And every time I would read a biography, I would always focus on two things.

1. What kind of obstacles did they have to overcome?

Maybe they grew up in poverty

Maybe they had a physical or mental handicap or impediment that they had to overcome

Maybe they grew up in an abusive home

2. What was that their driving force?

Was it money, was it fame, was it because someone challenged them when they were younger or was it something else.

In our study this morning, Apostle Paul is going to give a biographical defense of not only his message but also his ministry.

You might remember from our study last week that these Judaizers had infiltrated these churches in the Galatia region and had started preaching a perverse gospel.

They started to teach that grace was not enough.

And the dangers of preaching that grace is not enough is that you undermine the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

A work based gospel is turning your back on grace and turning your back on Jesus.

Remember, before He breathed His last, Jesus said – it is finished.

He didn't say – it is almost finished, He didn't say – all you have to do is keep this list of sacraments and then it will be

finished, He didn't say – all you have to do now is be good and it is finished.

He said – it is finished.

So Paul – after challenging the churches of Galatia at the opening of the letter, he is now going to give a defense of his message and ministry –

And the first thing that we are going to see this morning is that Paul is going to point out that the basis of his message is grace.

And then he is going to point out that the basis of his ministry is also one of grace.

Let's pray...

[Gal 1:11-17 NKJV] 11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.

As I mentioned last week, one of the accusations against Paul by these Judaizers was that the message, this gospel of grace that Paul was preaching – it was all made up by him.

It was all a sham by Paul.

The Judaizers were saying-

“You guys have been deceived by Paul – he calls himself one of the apostle yet, he didn’t even walk with Jesus Christ – that message that Paul is preaching is just cheap grace, he made it all up”

But church, Paul says that his message – the gospel of grace- was not according to man – because there is no way that man would come up with a message that salvation is by grace alone.

You see, every other religion is based upon works.

And the foundation of manmade religion is always - What can I do to please God.

You see manmade religion is man's attempt to reach up to God.

However - Grace, is God's attempt to reach down to us.

Available to anyone – all they have to do is accept it.

Church, God has already done the work and provided the opportunity for us to be right with Him.

12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught [it], but [it came] through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As we look back at our own conversions, the majority of us responded to the gospel being shared by someone else.

This is as a result of the great commission – which Jesus calls all of us to do.

To go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We saw the impact upon that person's life as they shared their testimony and God used that testimony to lead us to make the decision to accept Him as our Lord and Savior.

This is by far the most common way of communicating the gospel –

However, Paul's conversion was different – it is unique - he received the gospel in a dramatic, direct revelation when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Turn with me to the book of Acts 26,

Here we see Paul providing his testimony before King Agrippa.

[Act 26:12-18 NKJV] 12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission

from the chief priests, 13 "at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 "And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? [It is] hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 "So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 16 'But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 'I will deliver you from the [Jewish] people, as well as [from] the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18

'to open their eyes, [in order] to turn [them] from darkness to light, and [from] the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

So Paul begins his journey to Damascus under the authority and commission of man – as the chief priests send him to go get the Christians that were hiding out in Damascus.

But on the road to Damascus, Jesus gives Paul a new purpose. And this is where Paul must choose to serve man's purpose or God's purpose.

So, starting here in verse 13, Paul is going to remind the churches in Galatia about his life before he came to believe in Jesus.

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.

The early church faced its share of persecution.

They faced persecution from both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Before his conversion, Paul was one of the people instrumental in persecuting the early church.

[Act 8:1-3 NKJV] 1 Now Saul was consenting to his death.

Whose death? Stephen's death in chapter seven – the Jews are so convicted as Stephen reminds them of their history of rebellion against God that Saul orders the stoning of Stephen.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen [to his burial], and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing [them] to prison.

That is why Saul was on his way to Damascus, to bring back more of these traitors to Judaism.

I asked you to make note where Paul says that he tried to destroy it.

In Acts 22:4 – Paul admits to having been involved in putting some of the early Christians to death.

Paul was not a nice guy –

Make a note of 1 Timothy 1:13

Because Paul tells Timothy that he was a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent man.

But the reason that he is giving these details to the churches in Galatia is because he wants to demonstrate the transformation power of God's amazing grace.

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.

Paul was at the top of his class at Jewishness school.

He had the pedigree.

He was born a Jew and educated by the great Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3)

He was in fact a Pharisee – the strict legalistic sect of Judaism. (Acts 26:5)

Paul had plenty of reasons to boast as a Jew.

Turn to Philippians 3,

Here he is warning the church in Philippi over these same Judaisers that were telling the men that they had to be circumcised.

[Phi 3:2-6 NKJV] 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4

though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Paul was a good Jew

It's important for Paul to be telling these deceived Galatian churches just what kind of background he himself had in Judaism.

You see, the Judaizers are trying to make a big stink about people needing to become Jews in order to be saved.

Paul is going to make it clear that he's pretty much of an expert when it comes to Judaism. He knows what he's talking about.

15 But when it pleased God,

The word "but" marks the contrast between the course Paul had chosen in the previous verse and the one God had chosen for him beginning at his salvation.

I like how Paul describes his salvation.

But when it pleased God,

Paul realizes what a wretched sinner he was.

And yet God's whole attitude toward it was that it "pleased" God.

You see church, God is not "reluctantly" saving people.

He's gladly, happily, doing it.

In fact, all of heaven rejoices - in the gospel of Luke (15:7) "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

We continue in verse 15,

who separated me from my mother's womb and called [me] through His grace,

Paul here, recognizes God's sovereign plan on his life. He knew that God had picked him out before he was even born – while he was still in his mother's womb.

Just like Moses, Jeremiah, Samuel and John the Baptist to name a few in scripture.

These men had an understanding that from birth – they were called to do the things that they did.

You see, God being Eternal can see our birth, life, death and glorification all at one time!

And here Paul attributes this calling to grace.

Paul wasn't called to follow Jesus because he had somehow earned the right to be saved.

Paul was called to follow Jesus only because of God's grace,

only because God chose to show His love to Paul.

This is what the whole letter is about - GRACE!

Our salvation, and our continuing relationship with God is not based on our works, but upon what God has done, is doing and will do for us.

16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

Here was the purpose for God saving Paul.

He was saved to serve.

The phrase to reveal His son in me – this is what happens to each and every one of us upon our salvation.

We are also saved in order to serve Christ.

We are to obey His word and obey His will.

If we are saved and not walking in the will of God, we are missing out on the reason that God saved us and why God has called us and why God has made us.

You see, God has a purpose for us in this world, God has a purpose for us in the church, God has a purpose for us in His kingdom and if we are not fulfilling that purpose, we are missing out on His will.

Yes, we are fallen sinners and yes, we mess up but God by His grace transforms us and will continue to use us to fulfill His will.

Paul was saved in order to bring the gospel to the gentiles – the same group of people that he had been brought up to hate.

At the end of verse 16, upon his conversion it states that Paul didn't immediately confer with flesh and blood – he didn't have to because the gospel was revealed to him directly through Jesus Christ.

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 after his conversion didn't go to the apostles in Jerusalem to learn or "be ordained" by them.

Paul was an apostle because Jesus Christ had chosen him, not because he had some magical ceremony done by the apostles that somehow transferred his apostolic authority.

The lesson that we must learn from this is the following -

Authority comes from God, and not man.

This is one of the fallacies of the Catholic Church, and even the Mormon churches.

They both feel that they have some kind of “authority” that was passed down from one apostle to the next.

The Catholic church claims to be the only church that traces it's authority back to Peter, the first pope.

The Mormon church, falling into the same assumption that authority is passed on from man, claims that there was a break in the line of authority, which was restored by Joseph Smith, after God gave him back this authority. And then the Mormon church has continued on with this line.

But both err.

Authority is given by God.

[Gal 1:18-24 NKJV] 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.

What Paul is doing here is – he is making it clear that he was a Christian for 3 years before he came to visit any of the apostles in Jerusalem.

So he is proving to the churches in Galatia that he did not receive his commission or gospel from the other apostles.

And we have an account of his meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem in Acts 9,

[Act 9:26-30 NKJV] 26 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

The disciples were afraid of Paul because they probably thought that he was there to capture them and imprison them for being Christians.

27 But Barnabas took him and brought [him] to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. 29 And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but

they attempted to kill him. 30 When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

So Paul meets with some of the disciples for 15 days – he didn't meet with them to receive the gospel or discuss it.

He wasn't there to authenticate his apostleship.

All that was taken care of by God.

19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

This James is younger half brother of Jesus. Mary and Joseph did have relationships after the birth of Jesus and they did have other children. (Matt 4:21)

This is also the James that wrote the epistle of James.

He was not a follower of Jesus while Jesus was alive, his conversion did not take place until after the death and resurrection.

However, this James does become one of the early church leaders in Jerusalem.

20 (Now [concerning] the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

Paul is adamant that he is telling the truth.

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.

Paul says this to further the idea that he did not get his gospel from man, but from the Lord.

He's already made it clear that he didn't immediately go to the apostles and ask them to teach him.

And now he says that he not only didn't go to the apostles, or the church in Jerusalem (except after 3 years), but that the churches in the whole southern part of Israel didn't even know Paul by sight.

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.

Church, this is the most powerful testimony that any one of us can give, the churches only heard of Paul amazing transformation. They heard how he had dedicated his life in serving the Lord.

And the result... that God was glorified because of it.

The only reason this happened was because of God's amazing grace.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians.

[1Co 15:10 NKJV] 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God [which was] with me.

Paul gave the grace of God all the credit for the transformation that occurred in his life.

He was a changed man, forgiven, cleansed, and full of love when he used to be full of hate.

He knew this was not his own accomplishment, but it was the work of the grace of God in him.

Always remember that the grace that saves us also changes us. Grace changed Paul. You can't receive the grace of God without being changed by it.

The changes don't come all at once, and the changes are not complete until we pass to the next life, but we are indeed changed by His grace.

Amen.

Let's pray...



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