

EXPERIENCING GOD'S GRACE

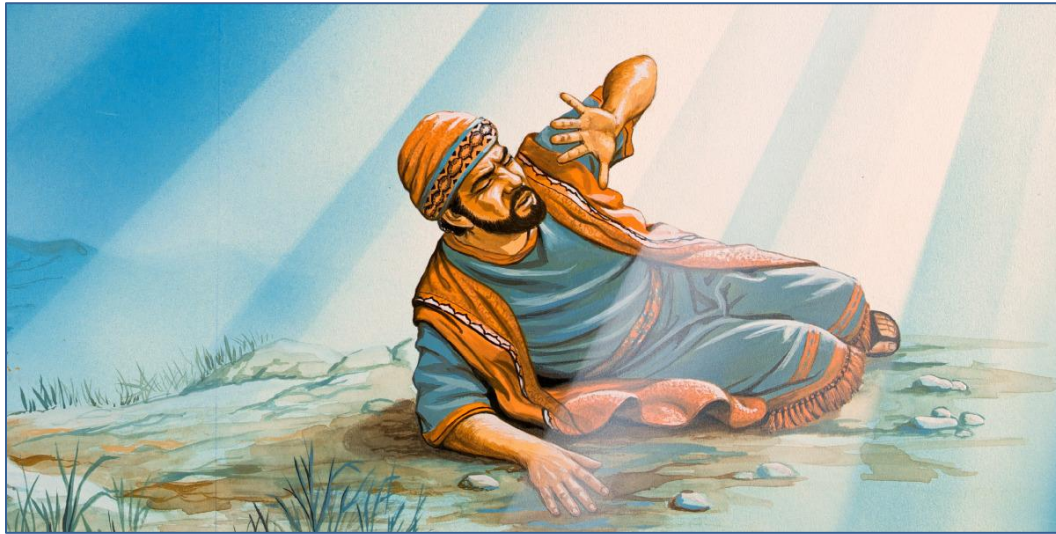
PART 3: THERE'S ONLY ONE GOSPEL

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In response to the Judaizers who claimed that Paul's gospel was not valid because he was not a true apostle, Paul defends both his apostleship and the gospel he was preaching by explaining how he received the gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19a; 22:3-21; 26:12-23).



I. GALATIANS 1:11-24 (NIV)

A. Paul's gospel was received directly from Jesus Christ (1:11-17)

"I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus."

B. God is praised because of Paul's change (1:18-24 NIV)

"¹⁸Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days.¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles-- only James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. ²¹Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²²I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they praised God because of me."

II. COMMENTS

A. Paul's five-point defense (1:11-16)

Point No. 1: The source of the gospel determines its authenticity! (1:11-12)

Paul emphatically tells these spiritually young Galatian Christian that his gospel was not of human origin, nor was it taught by a human. Instead, it was received directly from Jesus Christ. In contrast, the Judaizer's gospel (legalism) was from humans, not from God. They got their "gospel" from rabbinic tradition. If people were given the power to determine how a person earns God's favor and a place in heaven, they would probably make up a scoring system that emphasized human works... which is our natural default. That was exactly what the Judaizers taught...righteousness is gained by human works, by keeping the "laws" as taught by rabbinic traditions.¹ Their misconception is that If someone keeps the laws, they will become righteous.

Point No. 2: He was a better Jew than the Judaizers. (1:13-14)

Paul admits that he persecuted the church of God and that he actually tried to stamp it out. As a devout Jew he was advancing in Judaism, beyond others his own age, and was extremely zealous for the traditions (oral laws) of his fathers.

Point No. 3: He did not appoint himself to be an apostle; God called him to be an apostle. (1:15a)

Paul was actually called by God before he was born (1:15). He was set apart (Gk. ἀφορίζω; appointed) by God while he was still in his mother's womb. His calling was completely from God and by God.

Point No. 4: He did not earn God's favor; it was freely given to him (1:15b).

Paul did not earn God's grace it was given freely to him. (The gospel of grace is like water, people did not invent it, but we cannot live without it).

¹ Laws: especially the man-made oral laws ("traditions" Gal. 1:14).

Point No. 5: His calling by God authenticated his apostleship (1:16).

He was set apart for a purpose. He was called to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He was set apart to have Jesus revealed in him, just as Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20).

B. Paul's four responses to God's calling (1:17-24)

After being called by God, he deliberately chose not to consult with any human beings. If he did, his opponents would claim that they collectively made up his gospel. Instead, he responded to God's calling in four significant ways.



Figure 1: Paul's post-conversion travels

First, he went to Arabia to get alone with God (1:17a). It was there that he reflected on this tremendous thing that happened to him. He wanted to speak with God before he spoke with men (Barclay 14).

Second, he went to Damascus probably to correct the wrong he had done (1:17b). Where previously he was confronted by the risen Savior while pursuing Christians (Acts 9), and where Jews conspired to kill him (Acts 9:23). Paul most likely grew in his knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ during this time.

Third, after three years he went to Jerusalem to face his past (1:18-20). This took courage on Paul's part because it was in Jerusalem that he began persecuting the church. He met with Cephas (Peter), and James but no other apostles (1:18-19).

The churches in Judea did not personally know Paul (1:22-24) but heard about his conversion and praised God for what he did in Paul's life (1:22-24).

Fourth, he went to Syria and Cilicia to face his hometown (1:21). The friends he grew up with there no doubt thought he was mad and would probably meet him with anger and mockery. But Paul was fully prepared to be regarded as a fool for the sake of Christ.

III. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were the driving forces in Paul's life before his conversion?
2. What evidence is there that God was working in Paul's life even before his conversion to Christ?
3. Why does Paul take care to counter the accusations that he got his gospel from someone else?
4. In what ways did he give evidence that his gospel was authentic compared to the "Judaistic gospel"?

IV. APPLICATION: 8 BLESSINGS OF GOD'S GRACE

Grace does not stop once we are saved; God is gracious to us for the rest of our lives, working within and upon us. The Bible encourages us with many additional benefits that grace secures for every believer:

- Grace justifies us before a holy God (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 1:6; Titus 3:7).
- Grace provides us access to God so we can communicate and fellowship with Him (Ephesians 1:6; Hebrews 4:16).
- Grace wins for us a new relationship of intimacy with God (Exodus 33:17).
- Grace disciplines and trains us to live in a way that honors God (Titus 2:11–14; 2 Corinthians 8:7).
- Grace grants us immeasurable spiritual riches (Proverbs 10:22; Ephesians 2:7).
- Grace helps us in our every need (Hebrews 4:16).
- Grace is the reason behind our every deliverance (Psalm 44:3–8; Hebrews 4:16).
- Grace preserves us and comforts, encourages, and strengthens us (2 Corinthians 13:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17; 2 Timothy 2:1).²

Sources used in this study

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² (Houdmann, S. Michael)