

Paul began his letter to the churches of Galatia unlike any of his other letters. He was shocked that they had so quickly been influenced to add the works of the laws of Moses as a necessity for their salvation. That nullified Paul's message of salvation by grace alone. Paul even pronounced a curse upon all who would teach that false doctrine. In doing so, he was comparing those who would distort the revelation grace to false prophets who came under a curse in the laws of Moses. (See Deuteronomy 13:1-5.)

¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. Galatians 1:11 Indeed! Egocentric mankind would *never* come up with a religion in which we had to humble ourselves and admit that we can do nothing but rely on the mercy and grace of God. Nor would we ever admit that we are such sinners that eternal damnation is the only appropriate justice for us; nor would we conclude that only the horrible, suffering death of the cross by One who would graciously take the punishment our sins deserve be the only way we could escape God's wrath; nor would we ever decide that the only way to expel our selfishness be to have the life of another fill us with divine love. We certainly wouldn't think that we could only come to understand the truth of these concepts by God's intervening grace in our hearts and minds. **This gospel is unique!** In spite of the claims of many who are uninformed, no other religion is *anything* like this gospel of grace (2 Corinthians 2:8,9ⁱ).

Paul is defending the gospel of grace by giving his testimony of how he received it. He did not think up something that would attract a lot of people. On the contrary, it is foolishness to the Greeks to whom he is called as an apostle (1 Corinthians 1:23ⁱⁱ). He is going to remind the Galatians of his about face and the forsaking of everything that was dear to him because of this revelation (Philippians 3:8ⁱⁱⁱ). Truly understanding this revelation of God's grace should have us putting Jesus first in our lives as well! And shouldn't our story of grace cause others to consider accepting Jesus as their Lord?

Our testimony is one of our greatest witnessing tools. People cannot deny our experience. Some of you have almost as dramatic turnarounds as did the Apostle Paul. We can say that line from The Chosen, "I was one way and now I am another and what happened in-between was Him!" It is hard to deny a person's personal experience of Christ. Even if your life was not so dramatically different, we can certainly speak of the love, joy, and peace we experience in a personal relationship with our Lord. That counters the world's propaganda that Christianity is a bunch of rules that make life boring. Our testimony breathes the truth of the blessing of knowing Jesus. People can sense our sincerity and earnest conviction. It is so different from those who share out of duty what they are taught to say.

¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:12 Paul's three years in Syrian Arabia must have been where he received much of his revelations (vs 17, Acts 22:14^{iv}; 1 Corinthians 2:10^v; 2 Corinthians 12:1^{vi}). I imagine him going over the scrolls in some synagogue and discovering the prophecies that matched with the details of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Throughout the book of Acts, we see Him declaring Christ in the synagogues from the Scriptures, which is to say from the Old Testament (Acts 17:2^{vii}).

After that time in the wilderness, Paul did meet with Peter and James for two weeks in Jerusalem (vs 18), and most likely he learned a lot from the disciples in

Damascus. But what he is saying here is that he first saw it himself in the Word of God as Jesus revealed the Scriptures to him. The types and shadows of Christ throughout the Old Testament must have been one revelation after another (Colossians 2:17^{viii}). We will see an example later in this letter (4:21f). The prophecies must have suddenly all made sense to Paul as he read them with the understanding that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. So, we too should read the Old Testament seeing Jesus throughout (Luke 24:44^{ix}). The fact that the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ does not only mean that we could see our inability to be righteous, but also that the Old Testament Scriptures declare in various ways predictions about the coming Messiah (Galatians 3:24^x).

¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. Galatians 1:13 The complete about face is what makes Paul's testimony so powerful. He was determined to stop this new movement of Jesus' followers and have them stoned or jailed (Acts 8:3^{xi}; 9:1^{xii}; 22:4^{xiii}). He oversaw the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58^{xiv}). He was certain that the followers of Jesus were distorting Judaism. He may have reasoned, "If Jesus was the Messiah, then where was the kingdom that Messiah was to usher in?" He felt that he had to stop this dangerous sect.

Nothing short of a divine revelation could so instantly change a man from being the church's greatest enemy to the greatest evangelist for Christ. No wonder he could write that if anyone was in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xv})! Paul would have loved Newton's line in the song Amazing Grace, "was blind but now I see!"

¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. Galatians 1:14 He was the up-and-coming rabbi of his day. He had so much to take pride in that you would have thought he could never be won over (Philippians 3:4-6^{xvi}). But then Jesus appeared to him when he was on his way to arrest and imprison the followers of Jesus in Damascus. That appearance turned his world upside-down. Jesus showed him that by persecuting the followers of Jesus, he was persecuting the very Messiah he longed for (Acts 9:5^{xvii}).

After God's messenger Ananias laid hands on Paul and commissioned him, his life was totally transformed. He instantly gave up everything he had worked for his whole life. He suddenly discovered the real way to serve God was completely different from what he was taught and from all he thought he knew. He came to realize that the new kingdom was in the hearts of men and women (Luke 17:21^{xviii}).

I had a similar awakening. I realized that what I had completely dedicated my life to for seven years was a lie. I thought to myself, how could I ever know the truth? In striving to serve God with my whole being I was instead teaching a lie from hell. People had been hurt by my zeal for what the group taught. It was so sudden and dramatic that I decided to end my life. My Ananias did not show up for about a year, but God did send him, a humble missionary who lived by faith, Dennis Turner.

¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, Galatians 1:15 If you are in Christ the same is true of you. God set you apart before you were born and called you by his grace, just like He did with the Apostle Paul. Paul had done nothing to deserve being called. He did have a zeal for God, but it was totally misguided (1 Timothy 1:13^{xix}). God knows the course we will take and uses it to prepare us, humble us, and help us to be dependent on Him alone. Paul tells us how unworthy he saw himself (1 Corinthians 15:9^{xx}). That made him humbly dependent on God.

God has designs on our lives. The psalmist declared that every day of our lives was written in His book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16^{xxi}). The prophet Jeremiah declared God knew him even before He formed him in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5^{xxii}). Is it only a special few, or is it not true of each person who will choose Christ? And if so, how does free will and God's desire that none perish fit in with it all (2 Peter 3:9^{xxiii})? That is a mystery to me. I only know that God knows the end from the beginning, and He is entirely just in all He does (Isaiah 46:10^{xxiv}).

^{16a} was pleased to reveal his Son to me, Galatians 1:16a Or we can read, to reveal His Son *in* me... the highest calling a human can have and an incredible display of grace. This is the call of every born-again Christian. Paul taught that we are to be crucified with Christ and should let Him live in us (Galatians 2:20^{xxv}). Jesus said He would make His home in us (John 14:23^{xxvi}). The fruit of the Spirit in our lives is Christ likeness (Galatians 5:22,23^{xxvii}). Listen to how Paul expressed this thought in his letter to the Romans applying it to all believers. ²⁹ *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* Romans 8:29

I often hear a sense of hopelessness regarding becoming a witness of Jesus' life. But this is why we are given the Holy Spirit. God wants to reveal Jesus to others through our lives! Of course, our cooperation is required. Paul explains it in Romans 8:9-11 ⁹ *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* ¹⁰ *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.* ¹¹ *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.* If you are in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables your life to be a witness by the power that raised Christ from the dead. That is not saying you must be an evangelist or pastor, but that your life will testify to the power of God to transform us and make us more like Jesus.

ESV translated the Greek word *en* to our English word "to." I cannot see why the translators chose that. *En* is always translated as in or through. It is true that the Son was revealed to Paul but that takes away the power that is being declared here. The life of Christ is being manifested *through* Paul to preach Jesus among the Gentiles. We can have a revelation but without the life in us to convey it we are ineffective.

I noticed this as I watched people preach. I noticed it when I read great preachers' sermons. It was not so much what they said or even how they said it. Their messages always contained the simple gospel, but **the power and connection with the audience came because of the life of Christ in the speaker.** The words came with the power of the Holy Spirit. Two people can preach the same message and one can be filled with life and the other dead as can be. It is like reading the Bible. Sometimes we read it and find it dry as cracker dust ten miles from a glass of water, while other times we read it with a thirsty soul while depending on the Holy Spirit and find it to be a fountain of life (John 4:14^{xxviii}). The deciding factor in our witness is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in us or in the recipient.

^{16b} in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Galatians 1:16b-17

Paul took three years in Syrian Arabia to examine the Scriptures from the perspective that Jesus is the Messiah. He saw the man, Jesus, who was executed now appearing to him brighter than the sun. Jesus told him that He is that man who was crucified and that He had a mission for him. If that happened to any of us it would rock our world. Then Ananias came with that message from God, restored Paul's sight, and told him that Jesus ordered him to go and bring His name to Jews, Greeks, and kings (Acts 9:17,18^{xxix}). Could you say no? But the Lord also told Ananias that Paul would be shown how much he would suffer for Jesus' name (Acts 9:16^{xxx}). It almost seems that Paul has no choice in the matter. He could have run like Jonah tried to do, but God has the final say.

Paul had been living in the hope of the Messiah coming. Now he finds out that all he once thought was true about the Messiah needed to be re-examined. The followers of the man from Galilee were right and he, with all his elite education, was wrong.

Sometimes a very similar revelation hits modern man. Our goal isn't as lofty as Paul's was. We just want the American dream. We want comfort and gadgets and retirement that is well padded. So we work and work and neglect family and live selfishly and one day Jesus shows up. Suddenly we find we have wasted so much time living for things that are soon to pass away. We realize half the things we worked so hard for are already in a landfill. Eternity stretches out before us and the love of God beckons us to step into the arms of the One whom we've ignored all our lives. And then, little by little He starts to send us off with a new purpose, and fills our hearts with His love for others, and rids us of old habits and replaces them with new ones. I wonder if the change would not be more sudden and powerful if we took time like Paul did to sit down and be still and find out what we now believe. What does the Bible really teach us, and what are we to do about it? What is God directing us to do?

*¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Galatians 1:18-21 I like Archdeacon Evans description of Paul's return to Jerusalem. He writes, *What a wave of motion smote his heart when after a three-year absence Paul caught the first distant view of the Temple, that house of sacrifice, that edifice of prophecy. He now knew the picture presented by its sacrifices had been realized; its prophecies fulfilled. As he approached the gates, he might have walked past the very spot where he had assisted in the death of Stephen, and he entered them perfectly content, were it God's will, to be dragged to the same fate. When he entered the city, what deep thoughts were suggested by the haunts of his youth, and by the sight of those spots where he had so eagerly sought that knowledge which he had now so eagerly abandoned. What an intolerable burden he had cast off. He felt as a glorified spirit may be supposed to feel on revisiting the scenes of its fleshly sojourn.*^{xxxi}*

Paul only spoke with Peter and James for a couple of weeks. I imagine Paul's hunger to hear about every detail Peter could share of his three years with Jesus. There were most likely some very late nights as Paul barraged Peter with question after question. The accounts of Jesus' life seem to have only strengthened the conviction in what Paul had received by revelation and the conclusions he reached from the Word of God. We would have loved to have been there! How much of Paul's writings were affected by that two weeks of fellowship?

The Gospel of Mark was probably conveyed to Mark by Peter, and we can read that book easily in a half day. Two weeks with Peter and James must have brought out so much more that is not recorded. Paul even shares one quote from Jesus that is not in the Gospels, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* Acts 20:35

We know of Jesus' brother James only from being mentioned here and in Acts as the leader of the Jerusalem church. He was called James the Just. If we are to believe extra-biblical writings, he was an austere man with a long unshorn locks and beard. People vied to touch the hem of his garment hoping to be healed. He is said to have prayed for rain that ended Palestinian droughts. He was martyred after preaching in the Temple on the return of the Son of Man to judge the world. The religious leaders threw him from a precipice. For centuries, a pillar marked the place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat where he died.

After Paul met with Peter and James he went north through Syria and to his home region of Cilicia. He was no doubt proclaiming the truth that had been revealed to him. In the place where he grew up, he must have been preaching against what he had once proclaimed, setting the record straight about the Messiah, Jesus. We have seen former New Age leaders return to Sedona to tell their former disciples that Jesus is Lord!

²² *And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.*

²³ *They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."* Galatians 1:22,23 The churches of Judea in Christ did not meet him but had heard his testimony and glorified God for the miracle that had taken place. Paul's point is that it was Jesus who revealed the proclamation that he preaches, not his own idea. It was through revelation of the Word and Jesus personally teaching him by those revelations, with only minor input from the Apostles, that his doctrine developed.

²⁴ *And they glorified God because of me.* Galatians 1:24 We glorify God today when an Isis member has a revelation of Jesus and becomes a pastor, from persecutor to being persecuted for his faith in Jesus. The son of the founder of Hamas is a bold witness for Jesus today. He had to flee for his life from the West Bank and now lives in California. There are many testimonies of Jesus revealing himself to some of the most violent persecutors and turning them into a testimony of God's great grace. Voice of the Martyrs magazine has regular accounts of such testimonies which cause us to glorify God (Matthew 5:16^{xxxiii}). They are a powerful apologetic for the truth of the gospel.

Our lives should be as well! Every sinner saved by grace is a rebel transformed into a testimony, thereby showing that God prefers to save His enemies rather than destroy them. We have some incredible transformations like the testimony you heard in the call to worship. Many of us can relate to Paul's declaration, Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. Praise God for His merciful grace!

Questions: 1 Why is this gospel of grace so unique? 2 How did Paul receive his gospel of grace? 3 What was so radical about Paul's conversion? 4 When did God call you to Himself? 5 In 16a what is the difference from "to" me and "in" me? 6 What does the fruit of the Spirit look like in our lives? 7 What causes our words to connect with others? 8 How is our conversion like Paul's? 9 What must it have been like to return to Jerusalem? 10 How did Paul's conversion affect the churches of Judea? 11 Why is his conversion a powerful witness today?

i 2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

ii 1 Corinthians 1:23 (ESV)

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

iii Philippians 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

iv Acts 22:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And he said, "The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth;

v 1 Corinthians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

vi 2 Corinthians 12:1 (ESV)

¹ I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

vii Acts 17:2 (ESV)

² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

viii Colossians 2:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

ix Luke 24:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

x Galatians 3:24 (ESV)

²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

xi Acts 8:3 (ESV)

³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

xii Acts 9:1 (ESV)

¹ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

xiii Acts 22:4 (ESV)

⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,

xiv Acts 7:58 (ESV)

⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

xv 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

xvi Philippians 3:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

xvii Acts 9:5 (ESV)

⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

xviii Luke 17:21 (ESV)

²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

xix 1 Timothy 1:13 (ESV)

¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

xx 1 Corinthians 15:9 (ESV)

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

^{xxi} **Psalm 139:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

^{xxii} **Jeremiah 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

^{xxiii} **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

^{xxiv} **Isaiah 46:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’

^{xxv} **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

^{xxvi} **John 14:23 (ESV)**

²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

^{xxvii} **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

^{xxviii} **John 4:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

^{xxix} **Acts 9:17-18 (ESV)**

¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

^{xxx} **Acts 9:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

^{xxxi} (*Archdeacon Evans cited in Biblical Illustrator - slightly revised.*)

^{xxxii} **Matthew 5:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.