



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 1:11-24

Galatians

The Origins of Paul's Gospel

Transcript

[Message] -- Galatians and, this morning, we're finishing the first chapter, going to look at versus 11 through 24 of Galatians 1. So, if you have your Bibles open and follow along with me as I read our text. "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel, which was preached by me, is not according to man. For I neither received it from man nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and try to destroy it, and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when God, who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace was pleased to reveal his son in me, so that I might preach him among the gentiles. I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away to Arabia and returned once more to Damascus. Then, three years later, I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him 15 days, but I did not see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

Now, in what I'm writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying. Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ but only the kept hearing. He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroyed, and they were glorifying God because of me." May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] It’s not unusual today to hear people dispute the historicity of the gospels and call into question the life of Christ as it’s presented in them, to say that Christianity is the invention of the early church, specifically the invention of the apostle Paul.

[Message] I say you hear that today, but it’s not new. It’s not a new idea. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the German liberal Ferdinand Christian Baur taught that it was under Paul’s influence that Christ was deified, and justification by faith became the gospel. Before that, closer to home, Thomas Jefferson, our third president who publically claimed to be a Christian, wrote in his private letters that the apostles had corrupted the teachings of Christ. He called them a band a dupes and imposters who transmitted superstitions, fanaticisms and fabrications, and he called the apostle Paul the first corruptor of the doctrines of Jesus.

Well, for many today, as I suggested, that is the explanation of Christianity. It is a religion of human origin and was an invention of Paul, but that charge didn’t originate during the Enlightenment or with German liberalism.

Paul, in fact, had to answer the charge very early in his ministry. Jewish teachers who were called the Judaizers came to Galatia, and they accused Paul of preaching a truncated gospel, a shortened gospel that he had invented the message of salvation through faith.

They said that Paul was a second-rate apostle who was under the authority of the apostles in Jerusalem, that he got his authority from them and he received the true gospel from them, but he claimed, when he went out preaching to the gentiles, he changed the message. He modified the message to suit the audience. He neglected the law to make the message more palatable to people.

Now, if that charge is true, then Paul’s preaching and his letters are all a great lie. We don’t have the gospel. We don’t know the gospel. So Paul now defends his gospel and his ministry. He begins in versus 11 and 12 by directly stating his case. He didn’t invent the gospel that he preached or received it from men. He received directly from Christ. Then, in versus 13-24, he proves that from his own experience. Christ is the author of the gospel that Paul preached. It’s not of men. It is of divine origin. That is Paul’s claim, and he adds to that. He underscores the importance of that claim in verse 20 by stating, “I lie not.”

So, in the rest of the chapter, Paul begins to build his case in defense of the gospel of grace, and he does it forcefully. Book of Galatians, as I have quoted in the past, has been called a fighting epistle, but it was not only a fight to defend the gospel. It was also a fight to

deliver the Galatians from error, even though these people, these Galatians had greatly disappointed the apostle Paul by following false teachers, by entertaining the charges that they made against him and the teaching that they gave that undermine the gospel.

Even though that greatly disappointed the apostle, still he considered them friends. He considered them real believers. So he begins in verse 11 by calling them brethren, showing that he had not given up on them and had a real concern for them and was writing this epistle in order to help them regain the truth.

Verse 11, “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel, which was preached by me, is not according to man.” That is the point that Paul seeks to prove, that is gospel is not of human origin. If it were, it’s no gospel at all. This is not an invention of man. It is not a human idea, this gospel of grace.

Men have many ideas about religion, but the gospel of grace is not one of them. It did not originate with me. That is completely contrary to the way that man thinks. Man naturally thinks of religion, thinks a lot about religion, but he thinks in the opposite way from grace. He thinks of works. He thinks of human merit. Man thinks of earning God’s acceptance. That is true universally except for Christianity.

What these Galatians heard from Paul was very different from that. He writes, “I neither received it from man nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Now there’s nothing wrong with receiving the gospel from men. That, in fact, is how most of us learned the gospel, the truth about Christ. In one way or another, we heard it from a friend or a family member. Some people have been on a business trip, and they have been in a hotel, and they have been worried about things or some issues have weighed heavily. And they happen upon a Bible that’s there in the room and open it up and begin to read, and you hear stories of men or women who have come to an understanding of Jesus Christ in that way, by simply reading the Bible. That’s not all that uncommon.

But, generally, what we have is people who hear the gospel from their parents or from an acquaintance or a friend or a Sunday school teacher or an evangelist. They hear it from men, and they believe. That is normally the case. In fact, that’s universally the case but not in the case of Paul.

He received the gospel directly from Christ just as the other apostles did, and that is significant for two reasons. First, it shows that he is an equal with the apostles in Jerusalem, contrary to what these Judaizers were insisting. He was not a secondary apostle. He was not

of secondary importance to the men in Jerusalem, and he can speak of the gospel with full apostolic authority as a representative of Jesus Christ.

And, secondly, the fact that he received the gospel directly from Christ shows that it is true. It must be. It came from Christ. Who can argue with that? That can’t be disputed. If it came from Christ then it’s true, but Paul doesn’t leave it at that. He goes on, in the rest of the chapter, to make his case for the divine origin of his gospel by giving a brief autobiography.

He begins with his former life in Judaism to show that his life, as a practicing Jew, provided no psychological background from which his gospel might have developed. There was nothing back there that might have influenced this gospel that he preached and that these other men were saying was a false gospel. Just the opposite.

Everything about Paul’s former life, his previous life was contrary to the gospel. In fact, everything about his former life in Judaism proves the truth of the gospel. Only grace and divine intervention could explain Paul’s conversion to Christ. Paul was completely devoted to the law that the Judaizers promoted, and he was an intense persecutor of the church.

That’s where he begins his life as a persecutor. He states in verse 13 that he persecuted the church beyond measure and tried to destroy it. He tried to lay it waste. That word destroy was used by Homer of sacking cities. So Paul described himself as a man of war, a man at war with the church and with the gospel.

Luke records the persecution that he began against the church in Acts 8 in verse 1, after he approved the stoning of Stephen. He began a great persecution, as Luke calls it, against the church there in the City of Jerusalem. The apostles stayed in the city. They didn’t flee. They were there to minister to those who were in distress, but many Christians fled in fear and with good reason because Paul or Saul, as he was known at that point, was entering houses. He was dragging men and women away. He was throwing them into prison and having them put to death.

The effort which with he did that was done out of the absolutely conviction that was Christ was a false messiah and that Christians were heretics, and, at this time, the church was expanding. It was growing rapidly, and he was very concerned about this because their heresy, as he saw it, was going to affect the true religion of Judaism and so he earnestly, diligently persecuted the church and tried to lay it waste and tried to destroy the gospel. So there was nothing in his life, at that time, to show that he was, in any way, open to

Christianity or the teaching of the apostles. He was trying to blot out the gospel and the name of Christ.

Grace had no appeal to him. He was devoted to the law of Moses and to the traditions of Judaism. He was a convinced legalist. It was that fervent zeal for his religion that aroused his hot opposition to the church. As he says in verse 14, he was extremely zealous for the ancestral traditions.

Luke fills in some of the blanks in his life for us in the book of Acts. In Acts 22, Paul speaks of his former life, and he states in Acts 22:3 that he studied under Gamaliel, one of the greatest rabbis of Jewish history, and so spent much of his early life in Jerusalem and studying there in the academy that Gamaliel had probably there in the temple, one of the great academies of its day. Certainly among the Jews, it would have been the chief school of rabbinics, comparable to Oxford in our day or maybe Princeton or probably TCU. Why are you laughing? It was a great academy in which he studied in and learned a great deal there.

His life was devoted to the law and the traditions, the ancestral traditions. He was a gifted younger scholar. He was Gamaliel’s prized student. Paul says, “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries,” and, whenever I read that, I think, well, maybe that’s just a bit of modesty on his part, that the reality was he was probably advancing beyond all of his contemporaries. He was the rising star in Judaism. He was going to make a name for himself. He told the Philippians, in Philippians 3:5-6 that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews as to the law of Pharisee. In fact, his father was a Pharisee. He came from a line of Pharisees. As to the righteousness, which is in the law, he said, “Found blameless.” Who can say that?

Paul is devoted to those traditions and to the law of Moses, and the point that is that he was not under any Christian influence at this time, not receptive to any of it. There was nothing in his life in Judaism to account for the gospel that he came to preach. No influence would explain his preaching. If the gospel was, as the Judaizers claimed it was, a mixture of faith in Christ plus law keeping, that the law was necessary, wasn’t the only thing but it was necessary for one to be just before God, to be saved.

If that were the case, if that were the true gospel then Paul’s past life suggest that he would have sided with the Judaizers. He didn’t. He preached the gospel of justification by faith alone. Faith apart from law keeping.

So how do we explain Paul’s embrace of grace? Something dramatic must have happened, and, of course, it did. Christ revealed himself to him. He writes in verses 15 and

16, “But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son in me. That’s when the change occurred.” It’s an obvious reference to his conversation on the Damascus road when he saw Jesus in a light that was brighter than the noonday sun, and the Lord spoke to him.

That is normally how Paul describes his conversion in terms of external revelation, objective revelation and those events where he saw things and he heard things, but, here, he describes it differently. He describes it as an internal revelation. God’s son was revealed in him. The two occurred at the same moment, of course. It’s not – one’s not exclusive of the other. When he saw Christ with his eyes and heard him with his ears and understood what he was saying with his mind, Christ was at that moment, revealed to him in his heart.

The external revaluation became an internal illumination all at the same moment, and Paul’s description of his conversion that took place at that moment makes it clear that this was God’s work completely. Paul didn’t reason his way to Christ. He wasn’t on his way to Damascus walking northward through Palestine and over the Golan Heights to the outskirts of Damascus, thinking all the way about Jesus and this movement that he was persecuting and thinking about the Old Testament scriptures and trying to figure out Christ and how he fit within their if he did and pondering. He wasn’t doing anything like that.

He was absolutely convinced that there was nothing to Jesus Christ. He was opposed to him. He was setting out to destroy the church. He didn’t seek Christ. He didn’t find Christ. Christ found him. You see that indicated in the way Paul writes what he’s writing here. In verses 13 and 14, it’s all Paul, “I used to persecute. I was advancing my ancestral traditions.” It’s all about him, but then, in verses 15 and 16, God alone is the subject because the work is God’s alone.

The whole emphasis here is on Grace. Paul writes that God did three things for him. First of all, he set him apart, he said, “From my mother’s womb.” And that’s an image that is original with Paul. It’s an old expression. It’s taken from the Old Testament. It’s used of Jeremiah whose calling, God says, was before his birth. Jeremiah describes his calling to be a prophet in Jeremiah 1:5 where God said to him, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you.” That’s a way of describing God’s unconditional election.

The word know refers to more than intellectual knowledge. It is personal knowledge here. It’s not knowing about Jeremiah. It’s knowing Jeremiah. Before I knew you, I – before I formed you, I knew you. He’s not saying, “Before I formed you, I saw that you

would do something in the future. I saw that you’d be a young man of faith.” Not saying something about him. It’s saying – it’s knowing him before he was born. That’s the idea here. It’s a knowledge that is personal. It’s not intellectual, though it certainly involves that, but it’s a personal knowledge. It refers to God’s love and choice of Jeremiah before time.

It’s used, for example, in Amos 3:2 where God said of Israel, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” Obviously, that means that God knew something special about Israel, knew them in a special way, I should say. He knew all about Israel intellectually, but he knew all about all of the nations intellectually. He didn’t know more about Israel than he knew about the Babylonians or the Romans or America.

He knew everything about all of these nations, every nation that’s ever been and everything about Israel. He knows everything about everything because he’s omniscient. This isn’t about intellectual knowledge. This is the knowledge of love, the knowledge of election. He knew Israel in a different way, a special way, a personal way and set them apart from all the nations. That’s what he’s saying. I knew you meaning I loved you as distinguished from all of the other nations, and because he loved those – that people, he elected that people to be his people. That’s the meaning in Amos.

And it was the same with Jeremiah. He knew him meaning he loved him before time meaning he elected him and consecrated him for his ministry meaning he appointed him to be a prophet. Now that’s what Paul discovered about himself, that God had chosen him before his birth. He had elected him from the foundation of the world, and he had appointed him to be his apostle. He was another Jacob whom God chose over his twin brother Esau before they were born, before either had done either good or bad. “The older will serve the younger, God said, “Jacob, I have loved, but Esau, I have hated.”

God chose his people for himself as seen in his choice of Jacob, as seen in all of his choices of his people on the basis of his sovereign good pleasure. Before either had done or bad, he chose Jacob. In fact, if he had looked through time – if that’s how we’re to understand things – what would he have seen of Jacob but a deceiver, a heel grabber, a usurper, not one to be chosen, but because of God’s inscrutable love, his unconditional love, he chose that man over his twin brother before either had done good or evil. “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. It does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs but on God who has mercy.”

Now that is not Dan Duncan speaking. That’s the apostle Paul in Romans 9:15-16, and if Paul is a real apostle, as he claims to be, those are God’s words through the apostle.

But Paul discovered, there on the Damascus road, that those ideas, that truth about grace was true of him. God had chosen him, of all people, a man who was a zealot for the law and a persecutor of the church, in fact, when our Lord calls him, he says, “Why are you persecuting me?” So one who persecuted Jesus Christ is the one that God had set his love upon.

His salvation and his ministry, his apostleship were competed unmerited and undeserved. He was, by nature, an enemy of God, but, like Jacob, God had chosen him for himself from his mother’s womb, from the foundation of the earth, apart from any good works. That is the first thing that God did for Paul.

The second thing he did was he called him, and Paul uses the word call in his other writings. He means effectual call, his irresistible call to salvation. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit that draws people to an understanding and a belief in Christ, calls them out of darkness into light. That was God’s work not man’s. That is God’s work in each generation. It was God’s work in Paul’s life. He called him to salvation. He brought him to faith in Christ through, Paul says, his grace.

And, thirdly, God revealed his son in him. Paul realized immediately what God had done to him there on that road to Damascus. He had joined him to Christ, and Paul understood his union with Christ. You have that. Every believer has that. We are in Christ. That is our position. That is our standing before God, and Christ is in us. When God looks at us, he sees Christ. He sees us as just like Christ. He sees us as just and perfect and acceptable to him. He sees us in Christ, and Christ is in us. The one is our position. The other is our power, Christ within us, living within us, and Paul knew this, that God had joined him to Christ and put Christ’s life within him. He was a new creature with a completely new orientation toward life.

This was Paul’s testimony, and he tells it here as proof that he had received his gospel directly from Christ and received his apostleship directly from Christ. His gospel is not from men. It is from God, but he also tells this because his own experience is clear proof that the true gospel is a message of sovereign grace. Salvation is all of the Lord from beginning to end. It is based on divine election, unconditional election. That’s the basis of salvation. It is grounded on the unshakable mercy of God apart from the works of the law.

Now that teaching, these ideas that I’ve been setting before you upset many people. I know that, but the doctrine of election is of great comfort if rightly understood, and I don’t think it’s a difficult doctrine to understand. It’s stated rather plainly in the word of God.

It is a doctrine of great comfort as I say. In fact, without that doctrine, there really is no comfort at all in the Christian life. There is no assurance. If salvation is not sovereignly determined and accomplished and given then it ultimately depends upon us, upon our insight, upon our performance, and nothing can be more undependable than man, and if you doubt that, look at the garden. Go back to Genesis chapter 3 and consider Adam who was created perfect without flaw, put in a perfect environment, and in that situation, as a perfect man in a perfect environment with only one law to keep, with only one rule to stand by. Just don’t eat the fruit of one tree. He still failed, and you and I are not better than Adam. If he failed then, of course, we will fail.

Salvation is God’s work, and that understanding, this understanding of grace is of great comfort to us because it’s the only thing that offers us assurance. There can never be assurance apart from that, but it doesn’t depend upon us. It depends upon God. Our salvation from beginning to end depends upon him, and the great comfort is he’s always faithful to his word. So I say that’s reason for comfort. It’s reason for comfort. It’s also reason for humility if we truly understand it because what are we boasting about if we say we believe in the doctrine of unconditional election, we’re not boasting about anything. The only thing we can truthfully say about ourselves is we’re miserable failures. We couldn’t obtain it in and of ourselves. That’s a humbling thought, and the doctrine of election should instill that kind of humility but more importantly it leads to a praise of God.

If it’s not in us, it’s all of him, and he deserves all the glory and all the credit, and we direct our thoughts and our worship to him completely. It’s necessary to believe in the doctrine of election for each of those reasons, but in addition to that, more important than the comfort it gives, than the humility that it instills and the praise that it leads to, more important to that is that this is what the Bible teaches.

Read your Bibles and you will find that it teaches these great doctrines of divine, unconditional election. It preaches. It teaches predestination. These are the doctrines of the word of God and must be believed because of that.

Now what Paul was showing here, in addition to the fact that he got his gospel from God, is that his own experience prove that true gospel is a message of free grace. How else can you explain Paul’s conversion other than the sovereign free grace of God? This is the message that Christ sent him to preach to the gentiles. After his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, he was led blind into the city of Damascus and to a house there where he sat for three days without sight, sat in total darkness then got sent Ananias to him, a saint there in

the city, who was reluctant to go because he knew who this Saul of Tarsus was, a persecutor of the church, but he went, under the instruction of our Lord, to lay hands upon Saul, Paul, to give him sight and then to baptize him.

And the Lord told Ananias that, “Paul is a chosen instrument of mine to bear my name before the gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.” And that’s recorded in Act 9:15, so that’s the testimony of Luke which is the testimony of Ananias, the testimony that Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ sent to the gentiles.

Now you might think that the next thing Paul would do, having been converted and been called to be an apostle, is to then go up to Jerusalem and introduce himself to the apostles there and begin to mingle with them and associate with them and become a part of their company and their ministry, but he didn’t.

He states, in the rest of verse 16 and 17, “I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away to Arabia and returned, once more, to Damascus.” Paul doesn’t explain why he went to Arabia, and, as you can imagine, there’s been a lot of speculation amongst scholars as to why he went there. And some have thought, well, he went there to preach the gospel, and if you look at Paul’s ministry, the pattern of his missionary activity, he begins in Arabia and he works westward towards Spain, and that makes good sense but probably that is not the reason he went to Arabia. There are very few people there, and that’s not – doesn’t fit the pattern of Paul’s ministry which is mainly to go to the central cities of the Roman Empire to those major cities and major places of population centers, and Arabia doesn’t fit that.

So it’s more likely that he went to Arabia to be reeducated. No doubt he preached the gospel to people that he met, but the chief reason that he went there to a desolate, isolate place like that was to get alone with God and think and meditate on what he had learned and have quiet fellowship with God.

Paul had been trained in the doctrines of the rabbis. He knew the Old Testament, knew it quite well, but he understood it in that frame of mind according to Jewish tradition, and he had a lot of relearning to do and so he went out to Arabia to reorient his understanding of scripture and be retrained, and, in so doing, as he studied, discover Christ in the Old Testament.

There’s great wisdom in what Paul did, and there’s a good lesson in that for all of us, especially for people who are considering the ministry. Before taking a ministry, know what you believe. Before taking a Sunday school class, get training, be well grounded in the word

of God . A teacher in a church should, first of all, be a student. In fact, we never stop being students. We never stop learning. We never come to that point when we’ve got our degrees, and we can put them under our arms or hang them on our walls and say, “Well, I’ve done school, and I’ve learned everything, and now I can just teach.” We never stop learning, certain not this subject, and we must always be doing that and growing.

But that’s really true for every Christian not just for preachers or for Sunday school teachers. We should all, everyone one of us whether you're a Sunday school teacher or a minister or a lawyer or a doctor or an account or whatever your profession is, you need to be a student of God’s word, study the Bible, study Christian theology, know the word of God, know what you believe.

But, to do that, to have that understanding, you must spend time alone with God. We all need to routinely go off to Arabia so to speak, get alone for prayer and Bible study and meditation. That was what Paul needed, so he did that. He isolated himself for a time to learn the faith. After that, he says, he returned once more to Damascus. He still didn’t go up to Jerusalem. That’s the point Paul is making in all of this.

He didn’t get his gospel from men. He didn’t go up to Jerusalem and sit at the feet of the apostles and learn from them. He had no contact with Jerusalem. It wasn’t until three years later, he says in verse 18, that he went up to Jerusalem and then he went only to become acquainted with Cephas or with Peter, not to learn the gospel.

In the fact, the reason he left Damascus for Jerusalem was because he had been debating the Jews in the synagogues, and he had been preaching the gospel so effectively that a plot had been formed against his life, and he had to escape the city. So, from there, he went up to Jerusalem but didn’t go up there to learn what the gospel was or to learn what he should teach. He had been doing that for some three years.

He didn’t need the approval of the other apostles. He had that. He had received it all from Jesus Christ some three years earlier, but nevertheless, he went to Jerusalem to meet Peter. It was the proper thing to do to become acquainted with the, his fellow apostles. He adds in verse 19 that he also met with James, but he didn’t meet with any of the other apostles and he only stayed with Peter for two weeks, 15 days, he says, in verses 18 – in verse 18 which was very long.

It was long enough for Paul to get acquainted with Peter and to learn important facts about Jesus’ life, about his ministry firsthand from one who had walked with our Lord, and he was able to gain important information about the Lord’s teaching and miracles about his

death and resurrection which would be valuable for Paul’s personal knowledge of Christ and for his ministry, for his preaching and the letters that he would write. Two weeks was a sufficient amount of time for that, but it was certainly not enough time to become a disciple of Peter or to suggest that he had become Peter’s disciple.

Paul was an apostle in his own right based on God’s election and calling of him and his Gospel was revealed to him directly by Christ just as it had been revealed to the other apostles. That is the crux of Paul’s argument, and to reinforce it, he states in versus 20, “I assure you, before God, that I am not lying.” You can almost sense the emotions in Paul’s words.

These teachers of the law had come into Galatia and accused him of lying. They came to Galatia, and they called Paul a second rate apostle and accused him of teaching a false gospel, one that was different from the one that the apostles in Jerusalem had, and so Paul answers the charges brought against him with evidence from his life before his conversion, at his conversion and after his conversion, evidence that proves the gospel that he preached was divinely revealed to him. He did not receive it from men.

Having done that, he declares, “This is the truth. I lie not.” But he’s not finished. He gives further proof of that in the remaining versus of the chapter, versus 21 through 25. After his brief visit with Peter, he left Jerusalem and went far away into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Went to Cilicia first which is the reason – the region in Southeastern Asia Minor or Southeastern Turkey today and then, after that, he went to Syria.

But he went to Cilicia first and went to the city of Tarsus because that was his hometown, and there, after returning home, he’d minister there, probably had some ministry with his family and others. The scriptures are silent. We don’t know what he did there, but we know that he had activity there. It’s been suggested, by some, that the hardships that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 11, many of which are not found in the gospel of Acts, the shipwrecks that he describes, the imprisonments and beatings that he describes. They aren’t found in Luke’s record. Might have occurred during this silent period.

But he was involved in ministry. We know that because Luke records, in Acts 11, that the church in Antioch sent Barnabas to find him, and, obviously, they knew about him because they were well acquainted with his ministry, maybe he’d ministered to many of the people in Antioch, but they sent Barnabas to go out west to get Paul in Tarsus and bring him back to Antioch which he did.

And it was from there that Paul had a great ministry to the church and then, from there, he went out on his missionary journeys. All of those years of ministry and experience in Damascus and then in Tarsus and later in Antioch were years of preparation for his greater ministry to the gentile world. So there’s another side to what I said a moment ago. Ministry not only involves a lot of preparation. Fundamentally, it involves that, but we need to be well prepared. We need to be good students of God’s word and the subjects of it, but it’s more than that.

Preparation is also found in doing the ministry, putting into practice what we learn. That, too, is training. The more we do something, the greater facility we gain in doing it. It says we teach the things that we learn, that they are ingrained in our thinking, and we become more effective as teachers. So Paul was doing that. He was learning the ministry all during those years. He wasn’t idle. In those years leading up to his first missionary journey, he’d been very active.

He learned. He taught. He grew in his knowledge and experience. He was very active, and that is his point here. He was far removed from the apostles in Jerusalem during that period of his life which was a lengthy period of some 14 years in addition to the three years from his conversion to his time in Arabia and Damascus. So many years ministering without the aid of the apostles and, during that time, not under their authority or their supervision at all . He was ministering independently of them.

**Luther** wrote obviously he was – he is proving that he did not have the apostles as teachers anywhere but was himself a teacher everywhere. His life demonstrates that he was an apostle in his one right.

Well, in the final verses, he records the reaction of the churches of Judea to his ministry. They had not seen him. He was far away from them, but they kept hearing about him. The word of Paul’s ministry went out all over, and he writes that he – that what they heard was that he who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy, and he says, “They were glorifying God because of me.”

So, in contrast to the Judaizers, who came from Judea and Jerusalem, the churches of Judea, the churches of Jerusalem, the churches of that very region praise God for Paul and his ministry. They praised God for his transforming power. It wasn’t the law that changed Paul’s life. It wasn’t the law that made a persecutor into a preacher. It was God’s sovereign grace. It is sufficient to say the worst of sinners, without the help of circumcision or any ceremony whether it’s baptism or the Lord’s Supper or the mass or whatever you may

choose, God doesn’t need those things. He doesn’t use those things. Those aren’t necessary for salvation.

Salvation is apart from the law. It’s apart from works. It’s apart from ceremony. It is through faith alone in Christ alone, and Paul’s life is proof of that. So the praise that came out of the very region from which the Judaizers came was proof that Paul’s ministry was genuine and should be acknowledged as genuine and accepted as true by those Galatian Christians.

In all of this, Paul, in effect, puts the question to the Galatians, “Who will you believe? The Judaizers or me. They say my gospel is from me. I say it is from God.” And that’s the question that the passage puts to us. Who will be believe? President Jefferson who said that Paul corrupted the doctrines of Jesus or Professor Baur who said he invented justification by faith or the liberal preachers who deny the truth of all of this or will we believe Paul who said, of the gospel, “I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The Judaizers said Paul was lying. Paul said, “I lie not.” Who do you believe? I believe the apostle Paul. Is that who you believe? If not, I hope that God will open your mind to the truth. Paul’s gospel is the gospel, and the gospel is the good news that God saves sinners. He saves the undeserving. He saves the unable.

He doesn’t save them by their good works because they can produce no good works, and if it were the case that good works had saved us then man would be saving himself. We would not need a savior. We need a savior. We need Christ. We need the Cross of Christ because we cannot save ourselves. It’s God that saves us through the atonement of Christ, through the death of Christ, and he saves us freely on the basis of his grace, based on the work of Christ at the cross which we receive through faith and faith alone.

So, if you’re here without Christ, if you want salvation, if you see your need of salvation, then look to the savior. Look to Jesus Christ, believe in him as God’s son and man’s savior. And the moment you do, the moment you believe, you will receive the righteousness of Christ, acceptance of the Father forever and become a child of God. May God help you to do that and help all of us to appreciate the grace that Paul defended here, the grace of God. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for you that grace. We thank you for the apostle Paul who defended it so ably. We thank you that you saved a man like him who gives us something of the pattern of salvation. When he was not seeking you, you sought him.

Through your son, you stopped him. You saved him. You changed him, and you’ve done that with every one of us who are believers in Jesus Christ.

You call him from his mother’s womb, from before he was born, from all eternity, and that’s true for every one of us. Salvation is of the Lord. It’s all of grace. We praise you for it. Help us to understand it better and to live in light of it, to be greatly comforted by it and we pray these things in Christ name. Amen.