

# Galatians– Embracing Grace and Truth

Facilitated by Sister Patricia Weaver

 **828 7580 6094** ▶ **Thursday March 26, 2026**

**Women of Excellence**

**Bible Study 7pm**

## Memory Verse

**Galatians 1:10 (ESV)** For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

## Paul Defends His Ministry

### Galatians 1:10–12 (NLT)

<sup>10</sup> Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant. <sup>11</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. <sup>12</sup> I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ.

### Galatians 1:10–12 (NASB95)

- 10** For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.
- 11** For I would have you know, 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 I *received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

## POINT 1 - PAUL WAS NOT A PEOPLE PLEASER

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**For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. (1:10)**

The accusations against him involved the lie that he was purposely watering down the divine standard to make it easy, so that he would be popular and win the support of people weary of the hard, demanding way of legalistic Judaism. They claimed that he was simply saying what men wanted to hear.

**For** has numerous meanings, which are largely determined by context. It can also be translated “because,” “yes, indeed,” “certainly,” “what,” and “why.” It can also sometimes mean “there,” which is a helpful rendering in this verse. “There,” he is saying, referring back to the strong previous two verses, “does that sound like I am a people pleaser? **Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men?**” Obviously, (v. 9) does not fit with the accusations of the Judaizers against him. Rather, it unquestionably seeks to honor God, whose truth was being perverted.

**If I were still trying to please men** refers to the days when he did seek to please his fellow Jews by zealously persecuting Christians, assuming he was being faithful to God while concentrating his effort on favoring traditional Judaism. But in light of what he taught and the way he had lived since his conversion, the idea that he was **still trying to please men** was preposterous. If that were true, he **would not be a bond-servant of Christ**. He had surrendered his life entirely to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and that surrender had cost him dearly in human terms. At the end of this epistle Paul reminds his readers, “For I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus” **(6:17)**. Some of those marks he had received in Galatia, where, in the city of Lystra, he was once left for dead after being stoned (Acts 14:19). Suffering at the hands of people who were not pleased with him was a common occurrence for him and was the price of honoring God. By nature, people pleasers are not martyrs. The desire to escape ridicule and trouble is one of their hallmarks. Pleasing men does not bring the severe persecution Paul endured and is totally incompatible with being **a bond-servant of Christ**.

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It was rather Paul's Jewish accusers who were men pleasers. It was "to make a good showing in the flesh" that they tried "to compel [Gentile believers] to be circumcised," for the very purpose of *not* being "persecuted for the cross of Christ" (**Gal. 6:12**). Paul's first purpose was "to be pleasing to Him" (**2 Cor. 5:9**). And pleasing the Lord Jesus Christ meant that he had every right to pronounce a curse on anyone who tried by a doctrine of works righteousness to detract from the gracious finished work of the Savior (cf. Gal. 2:21). His second purpose was to see men saved and that required strong denunciation of any false gospel that would damn them by its deceit.

### **POINT 2 - PAUL'S MESSAGE WAS NOT DEvised BY MAN**

**For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. (1:11)**

**I would have you know** means to make known with certainty, to certify. It was often used, as here, to introduce an important statement that immediately followed. In the phrase could be rendered, "Let me make it perfectly clear." "The gospel I preach," he said, "is not human either in nature or in authority. I did not invent it or alter it, nor did any other **man**. Its message is completely divine in origin, without any mixture of human wisdom whatever." That is why Paul's gospel is the standard by which all false human theories of salvation are measured and condemned.

Had Paul proclaimed a **gospel** that was **according to man**, it would have been permeated by works righteousness, as is every humanly devised system of religion. Man's sinful pride is offended by the idea that only God's mercy and grace can save him from sin, and he therefore insists on having a part in his own salvation. The very fact that Paul **preached** a message of salvation in which works play *absolutely* no part was itself evidence that his message was from God and **not ... man**.

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### Discussion Questions

1. How can Christians avoid people-pleasing?
2. How can we discern true gospel teaching?

### POINT 3 - PAUL'S MESSAGE WAS NOT RECEIVED FROM MAN

#### **For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, (1:12a)**

That statement was particularly directed against the Judaizers, who received their religious instruction primarily from rabbinic tradition by means of rote memorization. Rather than studying the Scriptures directly, most Jews—religious leaders and laymen alike—looked to human interpretations of Scripture as their religious authority and guide. Their theology, moral standards, and ceremonies had roots in God's revealed Word of the Old Testament, but the biblical truths and standards had been so diluted and distorted by human interpretations that the Judaism of New Testament times was largely **received ... from man** and **taught** according to man's interpretation. Although the Scriptures, especially the Torah, or law, were ritually given the highest honor, they were not honored by the people through direct study and sincere obedience.

In the eyes of many Jews of that day—just as in the eyes of many professing Christians today—Scripture was a religious relic that deserved superficial reverence but not *serious* study or obedience. The religious ideas they took seriously and attempted to live by were the man-made traditions related to their unique community culture that had accumulated over the previous several hundred years. Many of the traditions not only

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were not taught in Scripture but contradicted Scripture. With few exceptions, Jews “invalidated the word of God for the sake of [their] tradition” (**Matt. 15:6**).

But Paul’s teaching and preaching had no such human basis. **Neither** means “not even.” The idea is, “Not even I who might so readily have been taught by men was so taught.” Although he had been highly trained in rabbinic schools and was “a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of [Jewish] religion” (**Acts 26:5; cf. 23:6**), he had discarded every unscriptural notion he had learned in that man-made religious system. No Jew had more reason than Paul to boast in his accomplishments in Judaism; but everything he had accomplished in the flesh before receiving Christ he counted “as rubbish” (**Phil. 3:4–8**), and even the elements of the story of Christ that he knew prior to his conversion were shallow and empty because of his unbelief. What he now believed and preached he **neither received ... from man, nor was ... taught** by man. There was no human source for Paul’s message. The gospel was not invented by men nor transmitted to him by any human being. This response no doubt reflects another of the Judaizers’ accusations against Paul, namely, that he had been taught his doctrine by the apostles in Jerusalem, who had also abandoned Judaism.

### **POINT 4 - PAUL’S MESSAGE WAS DIRECTLY FROM CHRIST**

**but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (1:12b)**

The gospel Paul preached and taught was neither a human invention nor a human tradition, but was given to him directly by God **through a revelation of Jesus Christ**. **Revelation** means an unveiling of something previously secret. **Jesus Christ** is best understood as the object of that very **revelation**. It was not that he had no previous knowledge of Jesus. It was for the very reason that he *did* know something of Him and His work that he had fiercely persecuted those who believed in Him. He obviously had known that Christians believed Jesus was the Son of God and the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, because it was for those claims that Jesus was most criticized and eventually crucified (Luke 23:2, 35; John 5:18; 10:30). Paul had known that Christians believed Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. He also knew that Jesus

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not only dispensed with the rabbinic traditions but even with the ceremonial laws of Moses. Before his conversion Paul could have accurately stated many of the central teachings of the gospel. But he did not believe those teachings were true and thus had no grasp of their spiritual meaning and significance.

It was only after he himself at Damascus (Acts 9:1–16) came personally to encounter and to know **Jesus Christ** as Lord and Savior that he received the supernatural truth of the gospel **through** divine **revelation**. As he explained to the Corinthian church, it is only when a person turns to the Lord that the veil of spiritual ignorance and separation from God is removed (2 Cor. 3:14–16), so that the truth received can be understood. And for Paul the details and distinctions of that gospel truth came by special revelation directly from God (cf. v. 16).

### **Discussion Questions**

- 1. How did Paul receive the gospel in Galatians?**
- 2. What does Paul mean by revelation of Jesus Christ?**
- 3. What is the significance of Paul's Damascus road Experience?**
- 4. How I can I discern God's voice in my life?**

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## **PAUL’S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CREDENTIALS**

It is one thing to claim direct revelation from God but another to prove it. Throughout the history of the church many people have falsely claimed such revelation, as many do today. But Paul was not content merely to make the claim. Nor did he expect his readers to believe him simply on the basis of personal assertions. In the next 12 verses, therefore, the apostle proceeds to substantiate his claim by presenting irrefutable evidence of that divine revelation and of his apostolic credentials.

From the three periods of his spiritual life—preconversion, conversion, and postconversion—Paul shows how certain events before he was saved, when he was saved, and after he was saved all prove his message was received from God. **(1:13-24)**

### **POINT 1 – PRE-CONVERSION PROOF**

**For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried 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.**  
**(1:13–14)**

Here Paul describes his **former** standing and activities while he was **in Judaism**, offering them as a kind of negative proof that his message of grace had no foundation in the beliefs, circumstances, or events of his former life. It becomes clear that nothing in his unconverted life provided the source of the truth he was now proclaiming. In fact, both his conversion and his message were built on divine intervention.

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Paul had been a Jew of the first order, “circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (**Phil. 3:5–6**). His pre-conversion life was centered totally in law and tradition. Grace was a foreign concept to the religion of Saul the Pharisee, despite the fact that grace was as much the basis of the Old Covenant as the New. God’s redemptive work originated from His grace and has never had any other basis. But most Jews, brainwashed by the religiously dominant scribes and Pharisees, had long since lost sight of God’s grace and had instead come to trust in their own works and goodness to please God. Accordingly, everything in the apostle’s **former manner of life in Judaism** had been opposed to the message of sovereign and saving grace of Jesus Christ he now proclaimed and defended.

The first aspect of Paul’s **former ... life** that proved he had no previous grounding for the gospel was that he **used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it.**

Saul the Pharisee had had such passion for traditional Judaism that he could tolerate no contradiction or compromise of it by fellow Jews. Immediately after the martyrdom of Stephen, “Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison” (**Acts 8:3**). Perhaps a year later, “still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, [he] went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (**9:1–2; cf. 22:4–5; 26:10–11**). His single, overriding passion was **to destroy** the infant church. It was partly because of that activity that he always had a great sense of

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unworthiness when contemplating God’s saving grace in his behalf (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:12–14).

The second aspect of Paul’s former life that proved he had no previous grounding in the gospel was his unequalled zeal for traditional Judaism. **I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my countrymen**, he declared, **being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions**.

**Advancing** literally means to chop ahead, as in blazing a trail through a forest. Saul kept on blazing his trail **in Judaism**, which meant cutting down anything in his path such as Jewish Christians, who in his mind were arch traitors to their **ancestral traditions**. He was so **extremely zealous** that he continually punished Jewish believers “in all the synagogues, [and] tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, [he] kept pursuing them even to foreign cities” (**Acts 26:11**). In his extreme zeal, he exceeded **many** of his contemporaries. Few Jews matched his passion for his religion and his intolerance for the truth about Jesus Christ.

**Ancestral traditions** refer to the body of oral teachings about the Old Testament law that came to have equal authority with the law. Commonly known as the Halakah, this collection of Torah interpretations became a fence around God’s revealed law and all but hid it from view. Over a period of several hundred years, it had expanded into a huge accumulation of religious, moral, legal, practical, and ceremonial regulations that defied comprehension, much less total compliance. Even the learned rabbinical scholars could not master it by interpretation or in behavior. Yet the more complex and burdensome it became, the more zealously Jewish legalists declared it.

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Paul's point in reciting these two general features from his past life was that, prior to his encounter with Christ, there was not the slightest human preparation or source for his understanding, much less accepting and proclaiming, the gospel of salvation by God's grace working through faith completely apart from works. It was foreign to all his previous thinking.

### **Discussion Questions**

- 1. What was Paul's life like before he met Jesus?**
- 2. How does Paul's past highlight God's grace?**
- 3. Can someone with a zealous past become a Christian Leader?**
- 4. How can you highlight God's grace in your life?**

### **CLOSING PRAYER**