

Galatians– Embracing Grace and Truth

Facilitated by Sister Patricia Weaver

 **828 7580 6094** ▶ **Thursday April 2, 2026**

Women of Excellence

Bible Study 7pm

Memory Verse

Galatians 2:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 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.

PAUL'S LIFE HISTORY CONTINUED

POINT 2 - CONVERSION PROOF

But when He 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 I might preach Him among the Gentiles, (1:15–16a)

Not until Christ sovereignly in resurrection glory confronted him on the road to Damascus did Paul respond to the great reality of the gospel: that Jesus, though put to death and buried, was now alive. He immediately realized that only a resurrected Jesus could proclaim from heaven, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (**Acts 9:5**).

No human explanation or influence could account for the 180-degree turnaround in Saul's life. He had lost control of his life and was without restraint. His legalistic zeal had put him on a headlong course of destruction from which no natural force short of death could have deterred him. His apostolic calling could only have been supernatural and sovereign, completely apart from human testimony or

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persuasion (though he may have heard much truth from the Christians he captured).

Paul did not initiate the choice to be saved, much less the choice to be an apostle. He was “called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (**1 Cor. 1:1**). The phrase **when He who had set me apart** refers to the elective purpose of God before Paul was even able to consider a choice. No person is saved or called to leadership in the church except by such sovereign and predetermined divine will. “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (**Eph. 1:5–6; cf. v. 9**).

The Lord **set apart** Paul to salvation and apostleship not because Paul developed great leadership ability and writing skill or was a determined and hard worker. He had been **set apart** and consecrated by God **even from his mother’s womb**, long before he could have demonstrated the least potential for anything. Paul was chosen to be an apostle before he was born, just as Jacob was chosen over his twin brother Esau before their births (Rom. 9:11–13), as Isaiah and Jeremiah were called and consecrated to their prophetic work while still in their mothers’ wombs (Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5), and as John the Baptist was called even before his conception to be the forerunner of the Messiah (Luke 1:13–17). Paul’s Jewish readers knew immediately that he was comparing his call to apostleship to the calls of those great men of God. He was not trying to rank himself with them but to establish unequivocally that, like theirs, his call was entirely God’s doing.

This purpose became historical fact on the Damascus Road and in the subsequent days, when, Paul says, God **called me through His grace**. By

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means of unmerited love and kindness God actually brought the already elect Saul to Himself in salvation.

God **was pleased to reveal His Son to** Saul in a direct and absolutely unique way. As “he was approaching Damascus, ... suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who art Thou, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do’ ” (**Acts 9:3–6**). In his testimony before King Agrippa, Paul gives further details of his first encounter with the risen Lord. After identifying Himself as “Jesus whom you are persecuting,” the Lord said, “Arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose, I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you” (**26:15–17**). God’s direct revelations of Christ and Scripture to Paul began that day and continued during the short time in Damascus and the years in Arabia, and then as God desired throughout the apostle’s life.

The call to be saved was accompanied by the call to serve, to **preach Him among the Gentiles**. Although the experience of Paul was utterly unique, God does not call any person to salvation whom He does not also call to service. Every believer is “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (**Eph. 2:10**). Speaking to believers, Peter wrote, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (**1 Pet. 2:9**). We are saved to be witnesses and servants of the Savior.

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And the subject of his preaching was **Him**, Jesus Christ. To the Corinthians Paul wrote concerning “the testimony of God,” that it called for him “to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (**1 Cor. 2:1–2**). The Judaizers needed to see that **the Gentiles** did not need to hear the law of Moses or the traditions of the Jewish elders-only the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, the choice of Paul, his transformation, the revelation and call to preach to the nations were all done by God, not men. Even after that, men played no part in his preparation to fulfill his calling.

Discussion Questions

- 1. What shaped Paul’s belief that God appointed him before his birth?
And what means was Paul’s call made known to him?**

- 2. Did Paul understand his experience on the Damascus Road as a conversion or as a call to a particular role within God’s plan?**

POINT 3 - POST CONVERSION PROOF

- 16 I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,**
- 17 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.**
- 18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted
with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.**

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- 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.
- 20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)
- 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.
- 22 I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ;
- 23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."
- 24 And they were glorifying God because of me. (1:16b–24)

After spending several days "with the disciples who were at Damascus" and preaching briefly in the synagogues there (Acts 9:19–20), Paul **did not consult with flesh and blood**. He sought from Ananias or other Christians at Damascus no advice or understanding, no clarification of the revelation he had received. It is not that he would not have been helped by going to learn from other believers, but his being given the unique place of reaching Gentiles seemed to demand that he not be seen as being merely convinced by some Jewish converts to this doctrine. Gentiles might have been more reluctant to accept his message if they perceived of it as of Jewish origination. And the Judaizers needed to understand that the gospel was not at all a heresy advocated by a few Jews.

Paul **went away to Nabatean Arabia**, a region that stretched east from Damascus down to the Sinai Peninsula. Although he does not identify the exact location, it seems likely that he stayed near Damascus. The place and purpose of his sojourn in Arabia are unknown, but that was surely the place of his preparation for ministry.

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After his stay in Arabia, the apostle **returned once more to Damascus** and continued preaching there for a period of time. He almost immediately encountered persecution from the Jewish leaders, a group that doubtlessly included some of the men with whom he himself had once planned to conspire against the Christians (see Acts 9:2).

The two periods of preaching in Damascus and the in-between sojourn in Arabia alone with Lord Jesus—learning, meditating, and studying the Old Testament—totaled **three years**. After that, Paul **went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas**, that is, the apostle Peter. Paul makes a point of noting that he went solely for the purpose of becoming **acquainted with Cephas**, who was the personal companion of the Lord Jesus and the most powerful spokesman in the early years of the Jerusalem church, from Pentecost on (Acts 2:14–40; 3:11–26; 4:8–20; 5:3–32; 8:20–25).

He only **stayed with him fifteen days**, obviously far too short a time to have been fully transformed from all his Jewish theology and tradition and fully instructed in the gospel. Nor did he **see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother**. Paul’s visit to Jerusalem was not to learn more about the gospel message but to meet and get **acquainted with** these two men who had been so close to Jesus and perhaps to learn from them some of their intimate experiences with the incarnate Lord, whom he had come to love and serve, and with whom he had spent those three years getting acquainted.

It should note that Acts 9:23–25 indicates that Paul’s leaving Damascus was the result of a dramatic set of events. The Jews strongly resisted his preaching and had developed a plan to kill him when the opportunity arose. They patrolled the

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city gates 24 hours a day waiting to capture Paul, but when his disciples heard of the plot, they helped him escape by lowering him over the city wall in a basket.

Apart from such a predicament that threatened his life, Paul may have stayed longer in Damascus. No time frame is given for his going to Jerusalem, but when he arrived there and tried to see the apostles, he was rebuffed because of fear that he was not a true believer (Acts 9:26). Without the help of Barnabas, Paul would not have been able visit even Peter and James. He met none of the other apostles at all, who may have been too afraid or may have been away from Jerusalem at the time. It could be surmised that, though the apostles did not scatter under Paul's persecution (Acts 8:1), they may have done so by now. When Herod moved against them (12:1), it seems that only Peter and James the brother of John were still in the city, and Peter soon fled to avoid the fate of James (12:17). The mention of Paul's being "brought to the apostles" (9:27) must refer only to Peter and James the Lord's brother, who was certainly attached to the apostles at that time. Because of his having seen the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:7) and his having been intimately associated with the other apostles (much like Barnabas; see Acts 14:14), this James would easily have been considered by Paul to be an apostle in the wider sense.

To give his readers the greatest possible confidence in what he was **writing**, Paul made a common Jewish vow: **I assure you before God that I am not lying**. That statement, along with many others, contradicts the claims of liberal interpreters that Paul was a sincere and highly capable leader but that many of his teachings reflect only his personal ideas and preferences. If that were so, he would either have been terribly self-deluded or else a shameless liar. He was either an authoritative and completely reliable spokesman for God or he was a sham.

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Paul's point in this part of the letter was to affirm that he had received his gospel directly from the Lord, not from the other apostles. He only visited two of them for two weeks, and only after three years had elapsed since his conversion. Any accusation that he was a second-hand apostle, receiving his message from the Jerusalem apostles, was false.

After Paul left Jerusalem, he **went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia**, the latter of which included his home town of Tarsus (see Acts 9:11, 30). This move was precipitated by another group of hostile Jews who were “attempting to put him to death” (Acts 9:29). He was escorted out of Jerusalem to the port city of Caesarea, where he likely took a ship to his home town of Tarsus. He preached there until Barnabas called for him to come to Antioch in Syria.

During a stay of several years in those **regions**, Paul preached (v. 23). The other apostles were still in Judea and Samaria and had no contact with or influence on him. When word of revival in Syrian Antioch “reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, ... they sent Barnabas off to Antioch,” who ministered there for a while by himself and then “left for Tarsus to look for Saul,” with whom he then “taught considerable numbers” in Antioch. It was here that “the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:20–26). Paul stayed on as a teacher in the church at Antioch until the Holy Spirit sent him and Barnabas off on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–3), and after that they returned to Antioch, from where they were sent to the council in Jerusalem (14:26–15:4).

At this time Paul **was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. Churches** is a plural designation indicating local assemblies that are part of the one church. Paul's two visits to Jerusalem did not include visiting

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the churches of Judea, which region was usually thought of separately from its major city, Jerusalem (see Acts 1:8). All that those **churches** knew about this independent apostle was what **they kept hearing**, “**He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.**” For obvious reasons, it had been extremely difficult for believers to accept the genuineness of Paul’s conversion (see Acts 9:13–14, 21, 26). But when the Lord gave such great blessing to Paul’s ministry, resulting in his own persecution (vv. 23–24, 29), his fellow Christians could no longer doubt he was a specially chosen and gifted man of God, and **they were glorifying God because of him**.

To reject Paul’s teaching is to reject God’s Word. Neither the testimony of Paul himself nor of the other apostles allows another conclusion.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Why do you think Paul gave these life history details? Was it merely to inform the Galatians about his early life or to make the crucial point that God called him rather than the apostles in Jerusalem?**

- 2. How can you discern God’s calling in your life?**

Closing Prayer