

## Galatians 1-2 – Justification by Faith

For those of you who are returning for another year of POW and for those who are joining this Bible study for the first time, I want to welcome you. We are in for a real treat as I have no doubt God is going to bless each and every one of you for your desire to come to know Him more through the studying of His Word. That is the purpose of God's Word - the Bible – for the Creator of the heavens and earth; for the Creator of humanity; for your personal Creator to reveal Himself to each of you. He wants to tell you how much He loves you, that He sees the effects sin has had and still has in your life, and He wants to show you He has the willingness, the ability, and the power to heal you and restore you from these terrible effects of sin. Sounds pretty amazing, doesn't it? But do you believe it? Do you really believe it?

Today's opening lesson is a great place to do an inspection of what you believe because that's exactly the purpose of the Apostle Paul writing this epistle. By most accounts, his letter to the Galatians is one of his first, which by itself is interesting given the topic is a lesson on grace. As opposed to most of his letters, which were written for a specific church, this letter is written for several churches in an area that is now present day Turkey. Supposedly, Julius Caesar said about the Galatians, "They are fickle, fond of change, and not to be trusted." Sounds like our modern day politicians. Paul experienced the fickleness of these people – when he healed a lame man they tried to worship him as Jupiter. In the evening of the same day, they threw rocks at him and left him for dead. Now that sounds like the media. I guess some things never change.

He had started these churches in his first missionary journey, but he has learned that not only his teaching is being challenged but also his position as an apostle is being questioned. The religionists were attempting to infect their form of the "Three Rs" – Rules, Regulations, and Rituals – into Paul's Gospel of Grace. That's why we see something a little different as he opens up this letter as opposed

to his more typical greetings in his other letters. He begins by making it clear whom this letter is from and where his authority comes from. “Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.” (Galatians 1:1).

We all know Paul was not one of the original 12 disciples. Jesus specifically chose them. When Judas did his dastardly deed and then hung himself, the remaining 11 disciples elected a 12<sup>th</sup> – Matthias. Among the qualifications of being an apostle was someone who had been with Jesus, so no doubt the people challenging Paul’s authority as an apostle were pointing out to the churches in Galatia that not only did Paul not know Jesus like the other apostles, but also he persecuted the church.

So Paul makes it clear from the very beginning of this letter that he is indeed an apostle, and like the disciples, he received his appointment and training directly from the Lord Jesus. He then immediately introduces the central theme of this epistle – grace. “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:3). The importance of the order of this statement cannot be overstated for every believer. God’s grace **MUST** occur **BEFORE** God’s peace is available. Verses 6-9 speaks to one of the chief issues Paul is addressing in this letter – the people are turning to a different gospel – and as Paul rightly says in verse 7, unless the gospel is that of Jesus Christ, then it really isn’t a gospel at all.

For most of us - we’re pretty familiar with the gospel, but I’m going to spend a few minutes on reminding us of what the gospel is that is in Bible. Please forgive me if this seems too elementary or rudimentary, but I don’t know about you, but I need to be reminded of even the most basic truths of Scripture regularly because I’m so easily distracted. Therefore, please bear with me.

We were created to have a close and intimate relationship with God and be in constant fellowship with Him. That was His original design for each of us. When sin entered the world with Adam and Eve’s fateful nosh, it created a barrier

in that relationship. Because God is perfect and holy, He cannot participate in a relationship where sin is not dealt with. Imagine a clean room environment for medical testing – absolutely nothing foreign – like an illness or virus - can enter the room, or it violates the purity of the environment. Because sin is a spiritual sickness, it demands a spiritual remedy – a spiritual cure. The Bible tells us the wages of sin is death, so as a result of this sinful nature we all inherited from our original parents – Adam and Eve, we are born spiritually dead. Therefore, as long as we are spiritually dead, we are *totally* and *completely* unable to do anything about our spiritual sickness. We need a spiritual physician – we need the Great Physician.

Sin is an offense to God, so God is the only One who can forgive the offense. Yes, sin has emotional, mental, and physical offenses, and these are offenses to our fellow human beings. But the spiritual sickness of sin is the source of the consequential emotional, mental, and physical offenses. The human offenses will continue until you deal with the spiritual offense. Leviticus 17:11 provides the remedy for the spiritual sickness, “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”

My sin sickness and your sin sickness can only be cleansed and forgiven through the shedding of blood. The blood is, in effect, the only acceptable “cleaning agent” for God. Here’s an important point to think about – God did not have to provide a method to forgive us for our sins. He could have just picked each one of us off upon our first sin. But - He didn’t, did He? God is a God of mercy, and a God of grace – there’s that word we’re going to hear a lot of over these next 30 lessons. Not only does He choose to forgive sin, but also He made it possible to have sin permanently forgiven.

It's not just any blood that is shed to forgive sin, it is the blood of the Only Begotten – Yeshua – Meshiach – the Holy One – Jesus Christ – the Lamb of God. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, the blood He was shedding was paying the price for every sin I have committed, am committing today, and will commit until my very last breath. And He was doing the same for each and every one of you. He would die, but three days later He would be raised in glory giving proof that His sacrifice was acceptable to God the Father. Our confession of this amazing act of forgiveness and grace is what applies the cleaning agent to our sin sickness. 1 John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Upon that confession, we are born again with a new spirit, and we are a new creation.

So what is *our* role in the works of salvation? We don't have one. Sin is a spiritual sickness, so it must be cured spiritually. God must do all of the work, and because of His love for you and for me; He did do all of the work. This is a huge point everyone, so please don't miss it. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, the last words He said before giving up His Spirit was what? “It is finished.” What was finished? The totality of God's plan to provide a mechanism to save His creation from its spiritual sickness – the eternal consequences of sin.

What does “finished” mean? It means finished! Done! Complete! Nothing more! When a horse runs its race and crosses the finish line, does it need to keep running? – No, because what was required of him was finished. If there is anyone who comes to you professing a faith that says believe in Jesus plus something – like being baptized for salvation, doing good works, etc. it is a false gospel, and it is coming from Satan. No other faith, no other belief system offers this message that is purely out of the grace of God – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter said it perfectly in his response to the religious leaders in Acts 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to

mankind by which we must be saved.” God gives this Gospel of Jesus Christ to us out of His grace – He didn’t have to, but He wanted to. Gospel means what? - Good news. That good news is God, out of his love for you and desire to restore you to your original design of having a relationship with Him and fellowshiping with Him, demonstrated amazing grace to send His only begotten Son to die on a cross as a sacrifice for my sin and your sin and raised Him from the dead. For us to be saved from the consequences of our sin, we can do *nothing* but receive this gift of grace by doing one thing and one thing only BELIEVE.

Delivering a false gospel is dangerous business. In verses 8 and 9, Paul pronounces the judgment on those who preach a false gospel – they’re to be accursed. The Greek word for accursed is anathema, which means a religious ban – or excommunicated. Sadly, there are many cults today deceiving people with false gospels – the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses – to name just a couple. My heart goes out to these people because they’ve bought the lie. The hope they think they have is really no hope at all. Carol talked about righteous anger in her opening lecture last week, and when it comes to my opinion of the leaders of these cults who are preying on these people, I understand righteous anger. Vickie and I were in a small group not long ago, and included in the group was this one guy who was from a different church. He immediately became a divisive force attempting to instill blasphemous interpretations into the discussion. I found myself getting more and more enraged over his clear motivation to push his hell-found agenda on the group. Whatever sympathy I felt towards his obvious deception was overwhelmed by my desire to accurse him – to excommunicate him from the group. We must be on guard to the gospel messages we receive from sources we don’t know and trust.

So getting back to verse 3, we cannot have the peace of God until we have peace with God. We cannot obtain the peace of God in any way other than by our confession of faith in the finished work of His Son. One final thought about this

statement of Paul's – He mentions God the Father and Jesus Christ, but where is the Holy Spirit? Isn't He an equal part of the Holy Trinity? Absolutely, but He has a specific role. Jesus defined the Spirit's role in John 16:13-14, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you."

The Holy Spirit's role is to glorify the Son. He's not looking for the attention – He's perfectly comfortable stepping back and glorifying Jesus. This is something we should be remembering – upon our confession of faith in Jesus, we are given the Holy Spirit as a down payment for our redemption, and we are baptized in obedience to Jesus' command for His disciples. If we have the Holy Spirit living in us, what should we be doing? Glorifying ourselves? No, we must be glorifying Jesus in all that we do that is good. John the Baptist understood this and said what we should all be saying when serving the Lord, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

Verse 4 is worth spending a few moments on as well "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." We see in this verse Paul is spelling out the real Gospel – the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins. That was the act of grace and mercy, but then Paul speaks to the *purpose* of this act of grace and mercy "that He might deliver us from this present evil age." Is there any one in this room that doesn't view the age we're living in as evil? It seems as if the pace of evil is picking up, doesn't it? Frankly, I don't know how people who don't have the hope of Christ even function these days. These are terrifying times, and the devil has done a masterful job of blinding us and deafening us with distractions to prevent us

from seeing and hearing things as they really are. “Yes we can” only works if you add to it, “if God is there and allows”.

The word “deliver” in Greek is “exaireo”, and it means to tear out, pluck out, and rescue. As humans, we are in the hands of one of two spiritual entities – God’s or the Devil’s. When you confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior, He plucks you out of Satan’s hands, and He will never let you go. For those of you who are suffering or in pain, the lack of deliverance from that suffering and pain makes it hard to see the blessing of being in God’s hands. In fact, it’s almost worse, because you know He has the power to deliver you from your suffering and pain, but has chosen not to – at least at this point. I completely understand that feeling. During this time in my life, I clung onto Romans 8:28 with everything I had “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.”

The stark truth of the Christian life is God’s deliverance doesn’t necessarily mean you will be completely delivered from the hassles of this evil age – that might happen, but for purposes that only God knows – the hassles may continue. That’s why the key word in Romans 8:28 is “All”. All means everything – the good *and* the bad. God has an amazing way of taking the most painful and horrible circumstances of our lives and using them to reveal His goodness and love for us. Believe me, it’s not easy, but I can speak from experience it is true. This revelation doesn’t typically happen overnight – we have to press in and ask God what is He trying to show to us about Him in our painful circumstances. In time, your circumstances may not change, but what changes is your newfound security in Who’s hands you are safe. God may or may not deliver you out of all your troubles during your lives, but your ultimate deliverance is when you breathe your last breath and enter into the eternal Kingdom of God to live with Jesus forever.

That brings us to the final and most important segment of verse 4 “according to the will of our God and Father.” It was God’s will to instruct His Son to give Himself for our sins, and it is God’s will to deliver us from this evil age. God’s will is to save you and deliver you. If you ever start listening to those voices that tell you you’ve sinned too much, you’re a failure, you’re not worthy of being delivered or saved, you are not listening to God – you are listening to his enemy and your enemy – he’s feeding you lies. God says He wants to save you and deliver you. That’s what God says. Are you going to believe the One that cannot lie or the one that is the father of lies? It’s your choice.

In verse 10, Paul brings up an important point that not only applies to his argument but also should apply to our walks with Jesus. “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10). The homework brings up a good point regarding a potential contradiction from Paul himself in light of his words in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, which speak to him becoming all things to all people. Do verse 10 and his comments in 1 Corinthians contradict themselves? No – the key word here in verse 10 is “approval”.

This may seem like a weird question, but when you are serving the Lord, whom are you really serving? Are you giving everything you have in terms of your commitment to that work to glorify God? Or is some of that commitment to that work motivated by self-glorification? I will confess to you this is an issue I am deeply concerned about when I stand up here and teach God’s Word. I love to do this, and I love to see people respond positively to the words God gives me. I also appreciate the kind words you have said to me over the years, but I know myself well enough to see the potential to get a fat head over the compliments. When God chooses to bless our efforts in our works for Him, we must regularly remind

ourselves that the gifts we're using to do the work are given to us by Him - out of His grace. Without His gifts and His blessing, our efforts for the Kingdom will produce no fruit. The work of the Lord is to glorify *only* the Lord. Chuck Smith said it well when recounting something he learned early in his ministry, "There are three things you never touch - the money, the women, and the glory."

The reason there is no conflict between these two statements is Paul was willing to do whatever it takes and be whatever he needed to be - to be a vessel that people would hear the message of the Gospel. The "approval" he sought was not from man - it was from God, and the people coming to faith in Christ validated God's approval. We need to check the true motivation of our hearts when we're serving the Lord.

I've come to develop a great appreciation for the Bible's accounting of the relationships between the apostles. We read throughout the New Testament about the importance of unity in the Body of Christ, and this is indeed a very important issue. Church splits, arguments within the leadership, and negative talk/gossiping do terrible damage to the Body of Christ. These give footholds for the devil to come in and prey on the weaknesses that get created when there is disunity.

The reality is, we are human, and we are not always walking in the Spirit, which is a prerequisite to being in unity. My comments are not meant to be condemning but merely stating a fact that as new creations in Christ, there is an enemy who is doing everything he can to remind us of the failings of our past and present. A good response for us to exercise when the devil makes these attempts for us to remember our past is to remind him of his future. Even the apostles wrestled with their flesh. Why do we know that John was known as the disciple that Jesus loved? -Because he told us. Why do we know that after Mary Magdalene informed Peter and John that the tomb was empty, John beat Peter in the race to the tomb? - Because he told us. Do you remember when the risen Jesus was telling

Peter of his future martyrdom, he looked at John and asked the Lord, “What about him?” These guys were no doubt incredible men of God, and rightfully deserve our respect and regard. However, they were just men – flawed like you and me. As they matured, you can see their acts of humility – people would bow down to them upon witnessing a miracle, but, with no exceptions, they would stop the people from giving them the glory and divert the glory to where it belongs – to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In today’s reading we get a glimpse into the relationship between Peter and Paul. Paul no doubt had respect for Peter as he did for the other apostles. He also no doubt knew what he was up against in getting the apostles to accept his conversion given his well-known and well-documented history of persecuting the church. It does appear Barnabas laid some groundwork with the apostles regarding the legitimacy of Paul’s conversion. Ultimately, though, Peter would come to receive Paul. Paul mentions in verse 18 that three years after his conversion, he went to Jerusalem for the sole purpose to get acquainted with Peter – interesting that he calls him by his Greek name – Cephas. It does appear that other than James, Jesus’ half-brother, none of the other apostles wanted anything to do with Paul. Peter would later call Paul a “beloved brother” in his second epistle and affirmed Paul’s authority and God-given wisdom in all of his epistles. Notably, though, even Peter acknowledged some of Paul’s letters were hard to understand.

Even though these two great men would become friends, we read of a confrontation during Peter’s visit to Antioch. The scene is Peter is eating with the Gentiles – a big deal to a formerly strong Jew such as Peter. Some of the leaders from the church in Jerusalem – this is what is meant by “certain men came from James” – arrive in Antioch. These leaders are likely all Jews by nature. Peter, knowing this, withdrew and separated himself from the Gentiles in fear of these leaders’ opinion of him.

Proverbs 9:25 tells us, “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.” This is an important point for all of us. Here’s Peter – this is the new Peter empowered with the Holy Spirit – not the old Peter who wilted under the accusation of a young child that he was one of Jesus’ followers. Yet, he falls back into his old ways. Yes, we are new creations in Christ, but we still have our flesh warring against us. The reality is the flesh breaks through from time to time, and our obedience to the flesh yields failures. Even a great man such as Peter obviously still struggled with his flesh.

Paul, never the shy type, calls out Peter. It wasn’t just Peter that did this - Barnabas and the rest of the Jews did the same thing. However, no doubt knowing Peter’s standing as a leader in the church, Paul calls him out in front of everyone for not being straight-forward about the truth of the gospel. He says, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles (Galatians 2:14b-15a)

What is Paul saying here? The Jews lived by the Law – the commandments given to them by God through Moses. Since God gave the Law and God is good, how can Paul be calling into question those who are trying live by the Law? Paul himself professed how closely he kept the Law. Until Jesus arrived on the scene, the Law had a singular purpose – to be used as a measuring stick of holy living. With Jesus’ arrival, He became the only example in human history to live by the Law perfectly. He never sinned. This is what is meant when we hear Jesus fulfilled the Law. In witnessing Jesus’ example, it became clear it was impossible to live a life in perfect accordance with the Law. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, would draw on the words in Psalm 14, “we’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

With Jesus, the Law now served two purposes – again, it would establish the measuring stick of holy living. The second purpose was to get people to realize they couldn't do it. Because we can't do it, we become aware of our sin, so the Law condemns us. If we're condemned, then we need to be saved. If everyone is condemned, then man cannot save himself. Since Jesus lived that perfect life to fulfill the Law, and He gave Himself on the Cross for our sins to be forgiven – God the Father established God the Son to be our Savior. This is why Peter said what he said in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

The title to this lesson is "Justification by Faith", and we find this line in verse 16 "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." The Greek word for justified is "dikaioo", which means to be rendered just, innocent, free, and righteous. The "works of the Law" means our efforts to live perfectly according to the Law. We've now proven we can't do this, so we are condemned by the Law – we are declared guilty by the Law. Before we come to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the eternal verdict on our lives is guilty. God is the judge and the jury, but it is each person's choice – their free will - as to whether or not he or she wants God to be their Executioner or Savior.

I mentioned earlier verse 4 tells us what God's will was for us. Ezekiel 33:11 says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!" Peter says in verse 9 of chapter 3 in his second epistle, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) Make no mistake about this, my friends, God's desire is for everyone to be saved. However, he's left that

decision up to each one of us. That's why the saying goes, "God doesn't send people to hell, they send themselves."

The idea that salvation comes through faith is nothing new. This core truth in Scripture was first revealed way back in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis. Abram – soon to be called Abraham – is wondering how God can make from him a great nation if he hasn't yet had a son to start the process. Abram and his wife, Sara, are way past their reproductive years, and he's understandably asking God, "What gives?" The Lord takes him outside and tells him to look toward heaven and count the number of stars if he's able to number them. He then tells Abram "so shall your descendants be." The next line is where this faith thing kicks in "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6)

It is only by believing in the finished work of Jesus Christ – by having faith in what He accomplished at the Cross that we are justified – declared not guilty once and for all. Think about it this way – the Bible tells us the wages of sin are death, and we're all born with a sin nature. As I said earlier, we're born dead spiritually. How much can you do when you're dead? - Nothing, right? All of our efforts, all of our striving, all of our attempts to do good and raise our standing before God are utterly worthless. Scripture equates these efforts to filthy rags. God has to do the saving work. Our sole responsibility is whether or not we choose to believe that what He did was enough.

Paul then poses an interesting question in verse 17, "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* Christ therefore a minister of sin?" Paul answers his own question with a "Certainly not!" What the question is challenging us is once we are justified by the finished work of Christ, but we still sin (and we do), does that mean Jesus stands as an approving minister over our sin? This is a terrible and deceitful teaching in the church – it basically

pushes the idea “If I’m permanently forgiven, then I can go ahead and sin all I want.”

I go back to my statement as to our original design – to have a close, intimate, and loving relationship with God. The attitude this teaching advocates is void of this central truth of each person’s existence. There are consequences to sinful behaviors that hurt those we love – especially God. Sin hurts us, but it also hurts God. One long and close look at the Cross and what Jesus went through to make salvation available should cause a person’s heart to change and desire to stop doing things that hurt the One who suffered greater hurt than we’ll ever know on our behalf.

Verse 20, our memory verse, says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” When we come to faith in Jesus Christ, our sin and sinful nature is crucified on the Cross of Christ. When He died on the Cross, so did all of our sin as well as our sinful nature. What died was replaced by a new life – given to us by Christ, and it is Christ Himself that lives in us. From that point on, we will continue to live in this world in our flesh, but we will be a separate and new creation – we are born again. If this is all true, then why do we struggle with a sinful nature that was supposedly crucified?

The answer is Satan. He had you in his grip. He lost you to Christ. You are now his enemy, and he is yours. He is going to try to resurrect that crucified sinful nature and use it against you and more importantly against your relationship with God. The success he has in doing this is, once again, our choice. If we truly believe our sin is forgiven, then Satan will fail in his attempts to make you miserable by heaping shame, guilt, and condemnation on you. However, if you’re not rooted in the truth of God’s Word, you’re vulnerable to his attacks. That is why Bible studies

such as these are so very important – they remind you what is true and help you recognize the lies.

As Carol said last week, and I have said today, you're going to hear a lot about grace in these lessons. We love singing the great hymn Amazing Grace, and we hear acronyms like Grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. But do we really understand grace? I will make a statement you may not like, but it is very true in my life, "The level of understanding and appreciation of God's grace towards you is directly proportional to the level of grace you give to others." What does that mean? Jon Courson has a great saying "Because love sees more, love sees less." I've been married for almost 26 years, and my wife, Vickie, knows me better than anyone on the planet. She knows the good, the bad, and the very ugly. She's seen it all, yet she still loves me. I'm not saying this to make her out to be some saint – it goes both ways. The point I'm making is when you love someone, the good you see in him/her far outweighs the bad.

Take a look at this picture. Pretty gross, huh? This is a picture of something under a microscope. A microscope bores in and magnifies all the flaws and all the junk of what it's looking at. That, my friends, is what judgment is. If we look closely enough at people, we'll find plenty of things wrong with them. It's what we choose to do with that information of flaws and defects that will determine whether or not we are living lives of giving grace and forgiveness or living lives of judgment and condemnation. We don't judge and condemn people to Christ - we love people to Christ. You want to know what this is under the microscope? A beautiful rose – you don't see the flaws and defects when you step back and see something in its original design, do you?

This is how God sees you, my friends. This is His grace. He sees you as a finished work – as His beautiful creation. Yes, He sees every sin – there's no secret sin with God – but He sees your sin with a desire to forgive you and heal you from

it – not to condemn you. Jesus said in John 3:17, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world.” That’s the good news, my friends. That’s the gospel. Do you believe it? I hope you do. Let’s pray.