

Galatians Chapter 1 – John Karmelich

1. We are beginning a study of Paul's letter to the Galatians. Of the 13 letters in the New Testament that are written by Paul, this one primarily focuses on how we as Christians are to live by faith in God's existence. A big misconception about Christianity is that one must work hard to earn God's love and His respect. Paul wrote Galatians to teach us exactly how Christians are to live by faith that Jesus is God, Jesus is also the Son of God, He wants to guide our lives as opposed to us just trusting in our own ability to earn our way to heaven.
 - a) If that statement is too long to remember, then I would encourage you to learn this short, half of a verse from the Old Testament that is quoted three times in the New Testament:
 - i) "The Just shall live by faith". (Habakkuk 2:4b, King James Version).
 - ii) It is quoted in the book of Romans. That book focuses upon who are the just.
 - iii) It is quoted in the book of Hebrews. That is about how do have faith in Jesus.
 - iv) It is also quoted here in Galatians. This letter focuses on how we shall live just by trusting in Jesus. If one wonders how Christians shall live and what that means, the best place to learn that concept is here in Galatians. That idea of how we live by faith is the main focus of this book.
 - b) I can hear some of you asking what if I am already living by faith that Jesus is God? Then Galatians will help us to understand why that is necessarily and help us explain that faith in Him better to others. With that said, I encourage you to read further as we all spend a little time thinking about why we to live by faith in Jesus and what that really means.
2. Before I go any further, let give the "who, what, when, how and why" of this letter so that we can understand why it was written before we take on the letter itself.
 - a) Let's start with the "who" question. Of all of Paul's letters, there is in effect no significant doubt that he wrote it. While the original letter is long gone, the events described here fit well with historical events. It corresponds well with what was written about Paul's life in the book of Acts written by Luke. A key point in Acts as it relates to Galatians is that there are churches started by Paul in the region of Galatia in Chapters 13-14 of the book of Acts.
 - b) This brings up the question of course of who are the Galatians? If you have ever heard of the word "Gaul", that is an ancient name for France. The Gaul's were a group that lived in an area spread from Scotland down to Northern Spain and included most or all of France. They also migrated eastward into what is today the country of Turkey. This all happened prior to the Roman Empire. Eventually that area called Galatia became part of the Roman Empire. There are a lot more details I can discuss about that area, but for the purposes of keeping it simple, that is the group of churches that this letter was addressed to.
 - i) In case you care, this is the only one of Paul's letters addressed to more than one church. The letter was meant to be circulated among those churches in that area.
 - c) Next is the question of "when". In Galatians Chapter 2, Paul refers to a meeting with the leaders of the Christian church. Most likely this refers to something in Acts Chapter 11. A big issue of that time in the church was about whether or not a non-Jewish person could be a Christian without becoming a Jewish believer first. That issue was probably the main reason why this letter was written. With that said, most scholars do estimate that the year of that church meeting in 49AD. Most bible scholars date Galatians to be right after that meeting which would be 49 or 50AD. This was probably Paul's first letter written. I doubt the Gospels were in circulation yet. Everything spread by word of mouth as of that time.
 - d) That lead me to why this was written: As I said, the big issue of that day was the question of whether one should become a Jewish convert before becoming a Christian. There were people who taught that in order to trust in Jesus as one who is both God and the one who is in charge of one's life, one has to obey all the Old Testament laws in order to be saved.

- e) Let me put all of this debate in modern terms: There are some who want to argue that, if you really want to be a devout Christian, one has to do "this or that" to believe in Jesus. The "this or that" is what Paul argues against in this letter.
 - i) This leads me back to the idea of "The just shall live by faith". The point is Romans focuses on who are the "Justified". That is who are the ones who believe in Jesus in the first place. Hebrews focuses on how we have faith in the first place and who it is that we have faith in. Then we have Galatians. It focuses on how we shall live.
 - ii) To me, the main issue of this letter is whether we are trusting God to guide every area of our life. When I am worried about something in my life, I then like to ask the question, "Am I trusting God or not?" Galatians gives us the proper (God's) perspective to deal with problems and issues in our lives.
3. Now that I've explained what the book of Galatians is all about: living by faith, it is time for me to focus on Chapter 1 of this book. My one word title for this chapter is "background". Paul spends a lot of time here explaining in effect why He is a disciple, why we should listen to him and more importantly why we should live by faith in Jesus. In other words, why should we trust Paul?
- a) Suppose you are thinking, I already believe Paul is an apostle of Jesus, why should I read any further about his background? For starters, one reason we should study this book is to be able to explain to others why we should trust Jesus to guide our lives.
 - b) Think of it this way: People can always question issues like is God real or is the bible true. However, one cannot argue with giving one's testimony. If one lived "this way" before we trusted Jesus to guide our lives and are now living "that way", no one can argue with that.
 - c) I'm not saying one has to be perfect all the time. I'm explaining why we should trust Jesus to guide our lives. The short version is the best way to live out our lives. When one gives one's testimony about our changed lives to others, nobody can argue with that story.
 - d) In this chapter, Paul explains how he became a Christian based on his own encounter that he had with the resurrected Jesus. He explains how he changed his life based on that first meeting. Finally he explains how he got to meet some of the "big shots" in Christianity at to show that he changed from someone who used to persecute Christians to someone who became a Christian himself. Once one understands Paul's background, it shows us why he went to so much trouble to live differently based on that trust that Jesus is God.
 - i) Note that Galatians is not Paul bragging about his new lifestyle. It is Paul telling us how an encounter with the living God got him to change his life for the better. He learned to trust in Jesus to live the life the type of life God wants us to live.
 - ii) The more one understands how Paul changed, the more one also understands that what happened to him (his conversion story) can and does happen to anyone alive today who learns to trust Jesus to guide his or her life.
 - e) This leads to you and me. I've met many Christians who have had dramatic changes of lifestyles based on becoming Christians. It is not that all of a sudden one day they lived like "this" and dramatically, the next day they lived like "that". In most cases, it is usually an issue of that one learned to trust God with this area of my life and before one knew it, one has changed only because God changed us and not that we changed ourselves.
 - i) I also know many people who had boring conversions. They believed since they were children that Jesus is God and lived accordingly. It is important to state that others need to hear boring conversions as well as dramatic ones. There are many people who lead regular lives who don't understand what the big fuss is all about when it comes to trusting God to guide their lives. Such people need to hear about Jesus before it is too late to change. Therefore no conversion stories can be thought of as boring in that God uses our lives for His glory no matter how we started our journey to trust Him with our lives.
 - ii) With all that said, let us now study the background of Paul's life not to memorize his story, but to learn how to apply our background to our lives as believers.

4. Verse 1: Paul, an apostle--sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead--² and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia:
- a) To begin, think about the formal process of writing a letter. The paper we write upon or we print that letter upon may have our name or our company letterhead on top in order for the reader to know whom the letter is from. In other words, we usually don't start a letter by explaining whom "we are", but start by explaining whom we are writing to.
 - i) In Paul's time, a letter started by explaining who was the letter author. Instead of just saying "Dear whoever", Paul's letter starts by explaining who it is the person who is writing the letter in the first place.
 - ii) To state it another way, let me tell you why you (us) should read this letter based on who wrote it and why he wrote it. In other words, if we are to believe Paul had an encounter with God Himself, how do we know this letter is in effect the word of God? That is the issue Paul is going to focus upon as he starts this letter.
 - b) Now that I've gotten my point about letter style stated, it is time to discuss the verse itself.
 - i) The first thing we read is the word "apostle". This word is transliterated from the Greek language and means "sent one". If I send you out to go on a journey for me, then at that moment, you are an apostle for me. When we think of apostles in the bible, we tend to think of the original twelve that Jesus picked and that is it.
 - ii) There is a classical debate within Christianity whether or not Jesus picked Paul to be the 12th apostle when Judas betrayed Jesus. I'm not here to solve that debate. One simply has to remember that Paul was not one of Jesus 12 apostles during the time frame when Jesus walked the earth. In effect Paul came later. In the book of Acts one discovers Paul spent a lot of his time persecuting Christians until the time he became a Christian himself.
 - iii) Think of Paul's background this way: He changed from literally being an enemy of any person that called themselves a Christian to becoming the single greatest influence for Christianity in the two thousand year history of Christianity itself.
 - a) One may think, "I can't top Paul's conversion story". No one said that you or I have to top that story. Remember that boring conversions are just as important for others to know about than dramatic ones like Paul's story. My goal before this lesson is over is to explain why Paul is an apostle. He is either as one of the "12" or just as someone sent by Jesus and why it is we should listen to what Paul says based on his story of his conversion.
 - c) So are you saying we should believe Paul because he says so? Should we believe he is an apostle because the bible has been published for two thousand years this way? No. I am saying that the evidence and background as presented in this chapter does show us that He is sent directly from God and we should believe him because God sent him.
 - i) It is one thing for me to make the statement, "God sent me, here I am, now believe what it is I have to say because I say I am an apostle." It is another to understand the background of one who is making that claim and that is what Paul is going to do in this first chapter of this letter.
 - ii) Before I move on, I am always aware that with every new study I take on there are people with no background in the bible. Therefore, let me quickly remind all of us that when this letter was written, there were no chapter and verse numbers. Paul didn't write "Chapter 1 Verse 1". Those were added many centuries later in order for us to find verses easier. Therefore when I say "Chapter 1", I am referring to the verses that we think of as Chapter 1 and not as it was originally written.
 - iii) With that said, Paul is making the claim that he had some sort of direct encounter with the living God. However that happened, it was so dramatic that it got him to change everything he believed about God up to that point in his life. He is saying his encounter with changed him dramatically and it can change us that way too.

- d) I have learned that experience tops theology every time they encounter each other. For example, someone may be telling us why Jesus is not God. However, they can't argue with what experiences we have had with Jesus. When I was a newer believer, someone tried to convince me for about an hour why Jesus was not God. The whole time we talked all I could see was Jesus as I pictured him standing behind my friend in effect mocking his facial expressions. I am not sharing that story to brag about it, but just to remind us that, experience tops theology whenever they encounter each other. My own experience with my relationship with Jesus tops any arguments to the contrary.
- i) So are you saying we should believe Paul "just because he says so"? No, however I am saying that the evidence is out there that Paul's encounter with Jesus is real.
 - ii) The evidence of that encounter should get us to trust that what he says is the truth. What that evidence is, is the main topic of this letter and we'll get to that later.
 - iii) Let me take a moment to discuss the book of Acts. Paul did not write the book of Acts. The author was Luke. That is the same Luke who wrote the gospel of Luke. We know that Luke wrote Acts because if one compares the start of each book, one can see the similarities of whom each book was addressed to. Over half of that book focuses on the life of Paul and his accomplishments. Luke was a traveling companion of Paul later in his life and Luke knew Paul's life story fairly well.
 - a) The book of Acts is a necessary part of the bible because if Acts were never written, we would never know who Paul was. That book gives us the story of Paul's conversion told in third person. The short version of Paul's story in Acts is that Paul was raised as a very devout Jew. He spent a lot of time persecuting believers before he was converted to a Christian himself.
 - b) The story and event of Paul's change and conversion changed the course of human history and has influenced billions of people to date. No one has had a bigger influence on history in the last two thousand years than Paul other than Jesus himself. That in itself is support for the accuracy of Paul's background and support that he was a true apostle of Jesus.
- e) What as some critics say, is that Paul made up the story of his conversion out of guilt over how we persecuted Christians. That change in his lifestyle was Paul's way of repenting for how he acted. My answer to that argument comes back to the issue of experience tops theology every time. We can argue theology endlessly. On the other hand, we can't argue at all with what someone says happens to their life. We can't interview Paul and question his experience. All we can do is study the facts about his conversion as told through out the New Testament and come to our own conclusion about those facts.
- i) The reason I'm telling you all of this is not to make us all walking experts on Paul's background. It is so that if we share our own background with others, they too can believe the Gospel message not because we say so, but because the evidence of our changed lifestyle is a greater witness than any and all theological arguments.
- f) With all of that background out of my system, Paul's point in Verse 1 is that he is a "sent one" (apostle) by Jesus and God the Father in order to pass on a message to those who live in the churches in the area known then as Galatia. To remind us quickly again, this is an area that is part of the modern day country of Turkey. The reason this letter is part of the bible is because this letter written to those Galatians is not that we can be an expert on the Galatian people or even Paul's background. It is so that we too can live by faith based on the idea that Jesus is God, God the Father did raise Him from the dead and we too can have a life changing experience just as Paul did by his own experience of this set of facts.
- g) The final part of Verse 1 mentions that Paul was not alone when he wrote this letter. Paul mentions the "brothers" that are with him. That word brothers refers to fellow believers. Paul's point is that he has witnesses to testify that what he is about to say in this letter is true and we should accept it as true as we study this letter. Meanwhile, Verse 2.

5. Verse 2: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
- a) For those of you not familiar with Paul's writing, he loves long run on sentences. I am at times guilty of this myself, but I have a computer to help me edit my too long sentences. I state this because Verses 2 through 4 is all one long run-on sentence. My point is get used to the idea of long sentences as one studies any of Paul's letters.
 - b) With that said, the first thing that Paul says to the Christians in Galatia is the term "grace and peace". This is Paul's standard greeting and is used in most of his letters. Let me talk for a moment what those words mean and why we should care. First know that the word grace always comes before the word peace in all of Paul's letters. It is his way of telling us that we need to have God's grace in our lives in order to have His peace upon us. Let me explain that a little better:
 - i) The concept of grace is about receiving something for free we don't deserve. It is like getting some sort of wonderful gift for no particular reason, nor for anything that we have asked for. It is the giver of the gift saying I want to give a gift to you not because you deserve it, but just because I love and care about you.
 - ii) The word "grace" is even more significant in this letter. The focus of much of the book of Galatians is on the issue or rebuking the idea that we have to work hard in order to please God with our lives. In effect God's grace is the ultimate rebuke to the idea of working hard to earning our way into heaven. Grace is God saying to us, the work of our salvation is already done. We get to spend eternity with God in heaven, not because we have earned it, but only due to His grace. Jesus dying for our sins demonstrated that grace for us.
 - iii) That leads to the word "peace". It is because of that grace and that grace alone that we as Christians can have peace with God. When I speak of God's peace, the point is that God wants us to turn from sin as that is the best way for us to live our lives. At the same time, our salvation is a separate issue. Our salvation is strictly based on whether or not we are trusting in Jesus payment for our sins. Even the concept of our belief in that fact is part of His grace, but I'll get to that later in the letter.
 - iv) In summary, because God has given us His grace and us accepting that fact, then and only then can we have peace with God. Know that in the Hebrew language, the concept of God's peace encompasses every aspect of our lives. It is far more than just not arguing with someone. It is that we are at peace not only with God and not only with those around us, but have peace in our lives knowing that we have received God's grace in full when we trust Him to guide our lives.
 - c) Meanwhile, it is time to get back to that long sentence of Verses 2 through 4.
6. Verse 4: who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
- a) I think most of us get the idea by now that Jesus died for our sins, so I want to move on the next point about this sentence. It says Jesus did this to "rescue us from the present evil age." So does that refer to the time when Paul wrote this, or now or both? Why does Paul call life on earth "present evil age" anyway? Let me use an illustration: If I told you that I want to sell you, say a large office building, in order to take me seriously, you would need proof that I own that building in the first place. In three of the gospels is the story of Jesus being tempted by Satan (Matthew 4, Mark 1 and Luke 4). My point is when Satan offered Jesus this world in those Gospel accounts it would not have been a real temptation in the first place unless one gets the idea that Satan controls this world to begin with.
 - i) I am not saying Satan is personally lurking right outside our door. I am saying in effect what Paul is saying, that this world in effect belongs to Satan. Think about it this way, when we are not focusing on God, is it usually our natural desire to then do good things or do sinful things? That concept alone is pretty good proof that the world we live is an evil age. What we do about it is my next point.

- b) The idea comes back to the concept that without God's power, on our own we do not have the willpower to overcome sin. The mistake Christians and other religious people make is we think that by trying hard enough we can overcome sin. What Paul is teaching us here is that living the type of life that God wants us to live is not based on trying hard in order to please Him. It is based on relying upon His power in order for us to live the type of life that He desires us to live in the first place. That is what His grace and peace are all about.
 - i) OK John, I'll bite. How do I do that practically? Is there a magic prayer that one states and then God works through us? Hardly. It is about reminding ourselves that God desires to be in charge of our lives. For example, when I read my bible, I have made a habit of asking the Holy Spirit to guide me as I study it. Asking God to be there reminds me that I desire Him to guide my life and be in charge of it.
 - ii) Again remember what prayer is, desiring His will to be aligned with our will. His will for our lives is for Him to be in charge of every aspect of our lives. This leads me back to the text itself. God allows this world to be under Satan's rule because it reminds us that we need His power in order to overcome that fact. The basic idea is that we are to rely upon Him and not ourselves in order to make a difference for Him. That is why it is necessary for God to "rescue us from this evil age". Since I have beaten that point to death, it is time to move on.
 - c) The rest of the verse gives praise to God. The last phrase says in effect, we Christians will give thanks to God for all of eternity because by His grace not only has He saved us for all of eternity, but we can live our lives here and in the world to come to glorify Him.
 - i) I have always found it fascinating that the bible says very little about heaven. It is almost as if the bible is saying to us, "Here is how I (God) want you to live. Now you (that's us) let Me (God) tell you when you get in heaven when you get there. I doubt that we just sit around in heaven all day. I'm sure there are lots of things for us to do in heaven. A purpose of this life is to prepare us for that eternal existence. What we do there is God's business. Our job is just to live to make a difference for Him now by relying upon His power to do. That is what this book teaches us.
7. Verse 6: I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--
- a) To explain this verse, I need to start with the word "different". In the Greek language of which this letter was written, there are two words that can both be translated "different".
 - i) As an example, if I say to you, "bring me a different pencil", one kind of different would be another pencil exactly like the one I have in my hand. A second kind of different is an entirely different kind of pencil, like a mechanical pencil.
 - ii) That leads back to Paul's point here about a "different gospel". Paul is not talking about things Christians disagree upon, such as the age of the earth, or whether or not Jesus was dead three full days before He rose again. When Paul says different, he is referring to a message that is truly different than the one he is preaching.
 - b) To explain this further, it is best to define the Gospel message as Paul himself defines it. One can find it in 1st Corinthians: "That he (Jesus) was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures". (That is 1st Corinthians 15:4, NIV). The different gospel (that word gospel means "good news") that others were preaching at that time, was in effect that one had to become Jewish first in order to become a Christian.
 - i) That "alternate" Gospel is in effect, that we can't be saved unless we obey the laws as written in the Old Testament. While the intent of these people were honorable, this alternate Gospel is not "good news". Christians are called to do good works not to prove to God we are worthy to be saved. We are called to do good works because we believe Jesus died for our sins. We should do works out of gratitude, not out of necessity. The question is about our motivation to live a life to make a difference for God? That is what Paul is teaching here.

8. Verse 7 (Part 1): which is really no gospel at all.
- a) If you think about it, being told one has to earn their way into heaven is not good news. That is what Paul meant by this last part of the same sentence of the previous verse.
 - b) Think of it this way: when people coming knocking on our door telling us that we have to work hard in order to be pleasing to God, that is not good news. The good news that Paul taught in effect is that we don't have to do anything to earn His love. That is what His grace is all about. We don't have to go door to door preaching Jesus in order to get a greater reward in heaven, to continue that same example.
 - c) Again, the issue is our motivation. If we make the effort to do things for God, we should do them not to earn His love or "get points" with Him, but only because we love Him for loving us and want to express that love through our efforts.
 - d) That is why Paul is saying this "alternative gospel" is not good news at all, because when we are told we have to make an effort to please God, then it is no longer God's grace that saves us but our efforts. That is why this "different" gospel is not really good news at all.
9. Verse 7 (Part 2): Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!
- a) Paul's main concern here is that some people were telling the Galatian Christians that they had to work hard to prove that they were worthy enough to be considered Christians in the first place. I like to emphasize the fact that the people who do this, have good intent as they just want others to be better people. There is nothing wrong with that in theory. The question again is our motivation. Are we trying to please God so that He can look at us and think, "Look at what he or she is doing right now. I am so proud of them for how they are acting at this moment". That thought is a false gospel concept.
 - b) God can't love us any more than He does already. A God that is perfect cannot learn and He cannot love us more than He does already. The point that I'm beating over all of our heads is that we should do good works, but not to earn His love, but simply because we are grateful for the salvation He has already given us. That is the message of this book.
 - c) Meanwhile, I still have Verse 8 to discuss here. Paul states that it does not matter who is the one who preaches that alternative message. If an angel tells us that we have to work hard to be saved or a person says it to us, it does not matter. It is only the message itself that counts. That is another reason why I chose the title "background" for this message.
 - i) Paul is saying that God Himself revealed the true Gospel message to him as God also gave it to the other apostles and gives it to each of us who trusts in that fact.
 - ii) Let me use the Mormon theology as an example here. They believe that there was an angel named Moroni that gave Joseph Smith the message that they preach. Do I believe that Joseph Smith really saw that angel? Yes I do. The issue is what was that message that he received? Without getting into a long discussion about their theology, the point here is that they believe one must work hard in order to prove their devotion to God and prove they are worthy to enter heaven. Again, the issue is motivation. It is an alternative "gospel" because they don't accept the idea that Jesus is God, and that God Himself paid for our sins, but an angel sent by God.
 - iii) Remember what the "good news" is: That God Himself paid the price for our sins so that we can be free to live our life as we please. How we should live our lives is to give it back to God by saying in effect, "My time is now your time, guide me as You want me to live out my life." Therefore if an angel or a person tells us how we are to be pleasing to God other than as Paul preaches it, then Paul says that such a person or even an angel should be condemned for that view.
 - d) Speaking of being condemned, that is Paul's next point that he is going to bring up. Does that mean Paul doesn't want people to be saved if they preach another message? No. Let me at this point add Verse 9 and I'll explain what Paul meant by condemnation.

10. Verse 9: As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!
- a) If one studies Paul's letters and the book of Acts which teaches us about Paul's life from the perspective of an outsider, one learns that he was a devout Jewish believer who spent a good amount of time before his conversion to get people to deny that Jesus was God. In Acts 9:1 we even learn that Paul had people put to death who believed Jesus was God.
 - i) Paul himself once preached an "alternative gospel" before he became a Christian himself. He argued in effect that one had to prove their worthiness to God to be saved. Given that background, Paul would have looked back at his old life and condemned himself. My point is Paul's condemnation in this verse means that he really wants all people to be saved. Remember that those who were trying to kill Paul as he preached the gospel were in effect those preaching a different message.
 - ii) Consider that one of the 10 Commandments is in effect to not use God's name in vain. (See Exodus 20:7). The key point behind that commandment is to not preach evil and say that evil is "God's will". For Paul, to preach an alternative gospel is the ultimate form of that type of evil of speaking what is false in God's name.
 - iii) Remember that we are not talking about debatable issues as Christians. We are talking about denying the basic fundamentals of Christianity: That Jesus is God, that He did die for our sins and that God the Father resurrected Him. Finally it is the key belief that we can trust Jesus to guide every aspect as believers. That is the Gospel that Paul preached. To deny those facts is what Paul is condemning here.
 - b) Let me explain this another way: Did Paul want all people to be saved? Of course. Does God Himself want all people to turn to Him and trust Him with their lives? Of course.
 - i) Still God does not violate our free will. If God made us robots to trust in Him, we would not be choosing Him over this world. As I have been taught, here are three things God cannot do: 1) He cannot learn as He knows all things. 2) He cannot lie, as then we can't trust Him. Finally 3) He cannot violate our free will. If He did, we would be coming to Him "as robots" and not based on the concept we have chosen to be with Him forever.
 - ii) How does "free will" mix in with God's grace? The way I explain it is that if God knows all things, He knows who will choose Him. Since we don't know all things, from our perspective, it is a free will choice. That is how I reconcile that issue.
11. Verse 10: Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.
- a) One of the keys to living the type of life that Paul and Jesus for that matter desire of us is to think in terms of pleasing God and not pleasing people. One learns early in life that no matter how hard one tries, one can never please all people all the time. That doesn't mean we should try to say, insult people in order to please God. In another letter Paul wrote, he made the point that he tries to be all things to all people in order to win some to Jesus. (See 1st Corinthians 9:22).
 - i) So if Paul said in 1st Corinthians that he tries to be all things to all people, and in Paul's letter to the Galatians here he is saying we should try to please God and not people, which is it? You can't have it both ways.
 - ii) The interesting thing is that this is not a contradiction. Paul's goal was to use his life to make a difference for Jesus in all that he did. He saw Jesus like a boss at a job in terms of how Paul should live his life. What Paul was in effect "paid to do" is win souls for Jesus and help believers draw closer to Him with their lives.
 - iii) That in effect is what God calls you and me to do. That doesn't necessarily mean we have to quit our present jobs or go on the full time mission trail. The point is that if we have committed our lives to serving Jesus, then we too have been called to live our lives accordingly. How we do that is different for each of us.

- b) That lecture on using our lives to make a difference for Jesus leads me perfectly back to this verse. Paul's point here is in effect, "Judge me, am I using my life to make a difference for people or for God? Given Paul's letters and the book of Acts, one can see that Paul trusted God to guide his life and use his life to make a difference for God in all that he does.
 - i) I can just hear people saying, "but I'm not Paul". My answer is neither am I. God does not expect each of us to have the impact on the same number of people as say Paul or even a Billy Graham. We are not rewarded in heaven based on the exact number of people we lead to God. We will be rewarded in heaven based on how loyal we were to what God has called us to do with our lives since we were saved.
 - ii) One of my favorite daily prayers is simply, "Father, I don't know what you have planned for me today. However, You know all things and You know what will happen. Therefore, prepare my heart for today and help me to use my life to make a difference for You in whatever it is You want me to do today." Then I would go do whatever it is I desire to do (assuming it is not sinful) and trust God is going to guide my life to make that difference for Him. Again, I am convinced our rewards in heaven are based on our loyalty to do what it is God has called us to do and not to live exactly like any other Christian we admire in our lives.
 - c) This verse is interesting from another perspective too. Paul is asking the reader to judge his life and see how he lives. People often wonder if judging is wrong. Here Paul tells others to judge his life. When Jesus condemned the idea of judging, His point was that we should not have a judgmental attitude about judgment. (See Matthew 7:1). My point is that it is acceptable to judge how people act as Paul asks us to do here, but at the same time we should be encouraging each other and not discouraging each other. That is Jesus' point in Matthew Chapter 7.
12. Verse 11: I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.
- a) Remember how I titled this lesson "background". Paul's point in these verses is the idea that he got the gospel message directly from God and not from other people. To put it another way, someone could ask Paul, "How do we know the Gospel that you preach is the true gospel?" Paul's response in effect is that it came from God Himself.
 - b) So Paul believes he saw a vision from God Himself. The question for us of course, is why should we believe it? What is the evidence that Paul's background is the Gospel truth?
 - i) For starters, it is consistent with the other books of the bible. It is amazing to think about the fact that the bible as we know it was written over 1,600 years (or longer if one considers the book of Job) with a consistent message. It was written in three languages and on three continents and is consistent in that message.
 - ii) For example, the historical facts stated in the bible and in Paul's letters is consistent with what evidence we have of history. The book of Acts (again written by Luke) stands up well with the facts as stated in Paul's letters.
 - iii) So should we not accept Paul's letters on faith but just on his evidence? My point is the evidence supports our faith that all of this is real. We as Christians do not just blindly trust in a made up story. There exists lots of internal and external biblical evidence to support our belief and our faith in Him.
 - c) Let me try it one more way: Why doesn't God dramatically show Himself in some way so people would believe in Him? Then we would not be coming to Him by faith. By coming in human form, God is showing all of us how we can have eternal life by trusting in Him for His complete payment for our sins and our faults. Also we can trust Him to guide our lives. That is in effect the Gospel message in one quick thought.
 - d) For what it is worth, Paul is going to spend the rest of the chapter giving evidence of his background to explain why what He is preaching is the Gospel truth. So let's move on.

13. Verse 13: For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.
- a) One way that Paul tries to prove that his background of receiving a direct revelation from God is to compare his way of life prior to becoming a Christian with how he acted once he became one. Think of it this way: If someone was a very devout Jewish believer and was doing his best to destroy Christianity, what would it take to make such a lifestyle change?
 - i) Paul's point that he really did speak to God is the only way one could explain why a person changed as much as he did as quickly as he did.
 - ii) Imagine going from someone persecuting Christians to becoming one overnight. That alone suggests that Paul must have had some sort of encounter with God.
 - iii) What, as some have suggested is that Paul made all of this up, out of guilt because he was putting people to death over Christianity? If that were true, why wouldn't he then just stop persecuting Christians and still be a devout Jew? The fact that he used his life to preach Christianity is the support of a true conversion.
 - b) OK, good for Paul. I get that. What does it have to do with you and me? There are many Christians today with dramatic stories of conversions as well. There are also many other believers with what we would call boring conversion stories. I believe that people need to hear about both types of conversions. What may be boring to us is necessary for someone else to trust in Jesus. Someone could say, "My life is not that bad, but if I now know that the most valuable use of my life is to make a difference for Jesus" that could change them.
 - i) Let me put it this way: I am convinced God loves us too much to leave us alone. He puts the right type of witness in each of our lives at the right moment. This is not just a witness to lead us to Jesus, but witnesses to help us draw closer to Him with our lives. That comes back to my prayer I stated earlier in this lesson about having God use my life to make a difference for Him today. We never know how and when God can use our lives to make a difference for others. That is why we should be willing to pray that our lives for His glory as that is the greatest purpose we can use our lives for.
 - c) Meanwhile, I left Paul discussing his background about how he became a Christian.
14. Verse 15: But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.
- a) One has to remember that Paul never met Jesus during the time before He was crucified. The story of Paul's conversion shows us that we can have encounters with Jesus after His resurrection. That doesn't mean we all need dramatic stories like Paul. It just means that anytime anyone realizes that Jesus is God and changes their lives based on that belief is when we too have had our own encounter with Jesus as Paul is describing here.
 - b) Speaking of time frame, notice that Paul said he was not saved when he first saw Jesus appear to him, but that he was saved from birth. I've had many people tell me that they can look back at their lives even before they were saved and see how God had His hands on them the whole time. I can see that in my own life as well. The point is Paul realizes that God was guiding his entire life even when he was condemning other Christians.
 - c) The interesting thing is that Paul, trained as a religious Jew then focused on teaching Jesus to any and all non-Jewish people (called Gentiles). One can see God's sense of humor in that statement. Here is Paul, trained to be a strict Jew, now preaching Jesus to non-Jews.
 - d) Paul's related point is that when he was converted, he didn't go immediately to see other Christians in Jerusalem, but first left for Arabia and later returned to Damascus. The next verse will tell us that there was a three year time frame between the time Paul was first converted and when he first meet Peter and James, the author of the book of James.

- e) Before I get into Paul's meeting with Peter and James, let me discuss why Paul mentioned the fact that he went to Arabia (think Saudi Arabia or outlying areas) after he was saved.
 - i) I have found that when people go through a dramatic change, they need time to think about that change. I've heard about people who have converted from being a Jehovah's Witness to "regular" Christianity and how they need time to digest the fact that they were wrong about their beliefs in Jesus and accept the fact that Jesus is God as well as the one who guides our lives. My point is just as Paul needed to go spend time digesting these facts so others need to when they first got saved.
 - ii) The mistake too many Christians make is when someone famous first gets saved they try to lecture them how you need to do this or that. If we believe God is now in control of their lives, He, not us will guide them His way and on His timing. If their conversion is not genuine, that will become obvious over time and we can't fix them no matter how hard we try. The point is we need to let God work on His timing not only on our own lives but on the lives as others as well.
- f) The "bottom line" of these verses is that Paul said he first had an encounter with Jesus, then he spent some time by himself to digest it and then he went home to Damascus. He didn't go to search out other disciples until three years later as we'll read about in the next verse. Speaking of the next verse:
 - 15. Verse 18: Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles--only James, the Lord's brother.
 - a) If I first got saved and there were not many Christians around, personally I would want to seek out other believers as soon as possible. Paul waited three years before he made a trip to Jerusalem to go visit the apostles. I suppose there were other Christians in Damascus where Paul lived, so he had others he could talk to about his early experience.
 - b) You may find it interesting that the Roman Empire was at its power peak when Paul was on his missionary journeys. That fact about the Empire and the fact that he was a citizen allowed him to travel freely to be the missionary that God called him to be.
 - c) I'm sure it was a shock to Peter that Paul even visited him. I suspect Peter was nervous when he first meet Paul and wondered if his conversion was legitimate.
 - d) Why James? This was the half brother of Jesus, and the leader of the church of Jerusalem at that time. I'm guessing Paul wanted to describe his conversion to those with detailed knowledge about Jesus. That is why he sought out both Peter and James to compare the story of Paul's conversion with what these other two men knew Jesus well earlier.
 - e) The application of is that when we do get saved, we should seek out other believers to see whether or not we are on the right path towards our salvation.
 - 16. Verse 20: I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. ²¹ Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they praised God because of me.
 - a) Remember why Paul is giving his background: He is trying to convince believers who live in Galatia that what he is saying about Jesus is the truth. Paul is saying that even if one doesn't believe his story from his own letter, those Galatian Christians could travel to Jerusalem and verify Paul's story with Peter and James. Paul is not discussing his meeting with Peter and James to brag, but just to show what he preaches about Jesus is the same as what the church leaders are preaching about Him.
 - b) After that visit was over, Paul then states that he went to Syria and Cilicia. Why does Paul want us to know he went there next? The answer is that Paul knew God has called him to preach to the Gentiles, and the nearest location of lots of Gentiles away from where Peter and James lived in Jerusalem, was north of Israel in Syria. To put it simply, Paul set out to do what God called him to do after that meeting. There alone is a good lesson for us, to do what we believe God called us to do and go find a place to fulfill that mission.

- c) The final thing that Paul says about his visit to Jerusalem is from Verse 24: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."
 - i) In other words, Paul's reputation was growing in Jerusalem that he used to be the type of person who vigorously worked to destroy the Christian church. Now he has dedicated his life to helping the church grow as much as possible.
 - ii) One has to ask, what would it take to change a person that dramatically? Let's say he changed out of guilt. If that were true, wouldn't he still believe what he used to believe about God and just stop hurting people? For someone to change one's life that dramatically, it would truly take an encounter with God if one was to change his or her life that much. That is the point here.
 - iii) For those of us who have changed our lives to following Jesus as an adult, think about how much our lives has changed since we made that commitment. If you have made that commitment as a child, be grateful that God has used your life at an early age to make a difference for Him. If you are a fairly new Christian, my advice is to regularly read the bible, daily spend time in prayer, find a good bible teaching church and let God guide your life as He sees best.
 - iv) The point is that it does not matter when we started. The point is we started. The idea is to use the most valuable thing God gives us, our time, to make a difference for Him. Paul had some sort of significant encounter with God directly. If we are using our lives to make a difference for Him, whether we realize it or not, we too have had a significant encounter with God.
- d) That is why I called this lesson "background". It is not to brag about say, how horrible our background was before we got saved or to brag about a dramatic way that our lives have changed since we became Christians. It is to realize that God has had His hand upon our lives from the beginning whether we realized it or not. It is to realize that He wants to use you and me to make a difference for Him in this world.
 - i) So how do we know if God has picked us or not? That's easy. Start living to make a difference for Him. Then you will know for sure that He has chosen you just as He has chosen Paul or any other example one can think of.
 - ii) What if my life is really messed up? Welcome to the club. What if I'm not that bad of a person? Then remember that God's standard is perfection. The only way one can spend eternity with Him to be perfectly forgiven. That is why God Himself as opposed to another person or an angel had to pay the price for all of our sins.
 - iii) The question of course is what are we doing with our salvation? Paul believed that God called him to preach primarily to non-Jewish people so that is how he focused his life after his salvation. Remember that it is not the size of whatever it is that He calls us to do that counts, but the question of our loyalty to what He has called us to do in the first place.
 - iv) That is why our background is important. Not to brag about it, but just to realize that God has called you and me to live a life to make a difference for Him. How we respond to that calling is different for each person. With that said, I'll explain in my closing prayer how our background can make a difference for Him.

17. Father, Help us to remember that even though You created all things, You care about our lives and want us to use them to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to use the most valuable thing You give us, our time and our resources to make a difference in this world. We may not be able to fix the entire world, but You do call on us to do something, and that starts right where we are. Make it obvious to us that since our lives belong to You, how it is You want us to use our lives to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen