

Knowing Him

Lessons from Paul's Life and Ministry

Lesson 1

Galatians 1

First impressions often make lasting impressions, and such is the case in Paul's letter to the Galatians. He is about to write what has come to be widely acknowledged as the *Magna Carta* of the Christian church—the epistle of freedom! To do so, he must put his pen to paper in the context of a great deal of conflict and controversy. But his convictions are clear and his inner voice is strong: the words are flowing from Paul's head, but the passion is evident from his heart.

Read Galatians 1:1–24.

After you've completed reading chapter 1, note your first impressions below. (As you have time and are able, you may want to read through all six chapters of the letter to help you understand the purpose of the letter from the big picture.)

At a glance

What is the overall tone in the first chapter of the letter—what is Paul's "voice"?

What is the basis of Paul's right to state his case to the people?

From your initial observations, what problem does Paul intend to address?

We will see that one-third of the letter reveals Paul's own personal story; the other two-thirds are the testimony that Paul has learned from his own pilgrimage: that true *faith* and *freedom* come only from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Fast facts

- Paul's conversion occurred on the Damascus Road around A.D. 35.
- He subsequently spent three years in Damascus where his ministry began.
- He returned to Jerusalem but, after an attempt on his life, the apostles sent him to Tarsus and then on to Antioch where he taught.
- His first missionary journey took place between A.D. 46–48, when he founded the church in southern Galatia, a region of modern Turkey.
- Other churches he planted in the region were in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.
- Letter to the churches in Galatia was written from Antioch in A.D. 49, to refute the influence of false teachers—*legalists*—who taught that good works must be added to faith in Christ in order to be saved.
- Paul's argument is based on the truth that Christians are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ—the free gift of God.

Galatians 1:1–5 Paul's Salutation

Letters written in Paul's day often began with a salutation that introduced the writer. Paul dictated most of his letters to a scribe (secretary), often signing the last few lines in his own hand to prove authenticity.

1. Paul reveals several things about his calling in verse 1. By what specific title does Paul introduce himself? v. 1
 - a. On whose authority does Paul stand, and what comment does he make about the power behind this authority?
 - b. Where did Paul's call as an apostle *not* originate?
2. Who adds their greetings along with Paul's? v. 2

Paul makes the point that he was not sent *from men nor by men* (as if to need their approval), but by Jesus Christ and God the Father. He also adds that *all the brethren* who are with him are in agreement with what he is about to say.

3. What does Paul wish for believers? vv. 3–5
 - a. Who provides these blessings; what is His plan for us?

Memory Verse: “*And they glorified God because of me.*” Galatians 1:24 NRSV

Galatians 1:6–10

Paul’s Disappointment

The believers in Galatia originally knew where to find the truth about salvation; they had heard the Apostle Paul preach the message of the Good News and had placed their faith in Christ to save them. But over time some had begun listening to false teachers—*legalists*—who were teaching that they had to add *works* to their faith in order to be saved. Becoming confused, they were turning away from God and to the world for answers. They were deceived into believing that it had to be Jesus *plus something* else; but Paul defends the Gospel, angrily and aggressively addressing his readers.

1. What is Paul’s response to the changing views of the these believers? v. 6
 - a. Why do you think Paul would be so astonished personally? Please comment.
 - b. To what (whom) were the people turning away from and turning toward?
 - c. Is there “another gospel”? What does Paul say about it? v. 7

2. If anyone—Paul the apostle or even an angel from heaven—preaches another gospel, what does that person deserve? v. 8

The strong meaning intended here is that such a person should be eternally condemned; *anathema* in the Greek.

Viewpoint Learn to view your circumstances through the lens of God’s truth rather than looking at God’s truth through the eyes of your circumstances. Practice this with the *In focus* word search below and then with the *Up close & personal* look to follow.

In focus: Write a definition for the following words, using the resources you have on hand (i.e., additional Bible translations, dictionary, Bible dictionary, concordance, etc.).

grace (Galatians 1:3) _____

peace (1:3) _____

Up close & personal: Have you listened to someone attempting to share a false gospel? If you were to embrace a “gospel” other than the one you received by faith in Christ Jesus, how would it affect the genuine *grace* and *peace* you now freely enjoy?

Galatians 1:11–24 The Call to Apostleship

Paul realized what all of God’s children must—that God had a plan for him. He recognized his encounter with Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road as part of that plan. In the remainder of chapter 1, Paul emphasizes that the initiative is always with God; and that we, His creation, respond to His grace.

1. In verses 11–12, how does Paul restate God’s plan?

The revelation that came to Paul on the Damascus Road was not only God’s plan for *him*, it was also God’s plan for the Gentiles.

2. In your own words, reiterate Paul’s previous way of life in Judaism.
 - v. 13

 - v. 14

The turning point for Paul came at his conversion, which resulted in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.



We read about Paul’s conversion three different times in the Book of Acts: 9:1–19; 22:3–21; and 26:1–23. What strikes you most significantly about his transformation?

3. According to vv. 15–17, what was the first thing Paul did as a new believer that would prepare him for his call as an *apostle*?

Paul would spend three years in the desert of Arabia before returning to Damascus to begin preaching the gospel. Put yourself in Paul’s shoes and try to imagine the communion Paul had with God during that extended time away.

4. What were some of the benefits and blessings that come to mind as you contemplate how Paul spent this time alone with God?

5. Who did Paul see first upon his return to Jerusalem? vv. 18–21 Why would this visit have been important to Paul?

- a. During the fifteen days he was there, who was the only other apostle that he saw?

Although the message Paul would take forth and his personal experience did not require the “endorsement” of the other twelve, Paul no doubt wanted their sanction for the unity he needed in presenting the gospel to the unbelieving Gentiles. It was the beginning of the strong emphasis Paul consistently placed on the church as one body in Christ.

6. Where did Paul go from there? How did the people know about Paul? vv. 21–24

Be transparent “And they glorified God in me” (v. 24). Perhaps the most important comment the world can make about us is to say that others glorify God because of what He has done in us. What is there about you that give others cause to glorify Him? Please explain.

Remember: Before others can glorify God in you, you must glorify God in yourself. The way to do that is to live as Jesus lived—moment by moment for God!

A Clear Perspective

“ . . . It pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me . . . ” Galatians 1:15-16a

As God writes your story, use this page to let Him highlight and clarify what He revealed to *you* this week. Revisit the points that stood out to you and note your findings below.

1. How has *His* perspective become *your* perspective?

2. What word of truth came into sharper focus for you?

3. In what way have you grown closer to the Lord?

4. What relevance is there between this week’s memory verse and your daily life?

Memory Verse: Write out this week’s verse from memory.
