

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **GALATIANS LESSON 1 (Chapters 1-2)**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Kevin Pendergrass.

Welcome to the Gospel of Christ. This is the first lesson in our study of the Book of Galatians. In this lesson, we will be talking about Paul, who was a true apostle. We will be doing a character study of the life of Paul to see who he truly was. Paul was his Gentile name. Some people have wondered, when reading the Book of Acts, why he was called Saul at first, but then has a name change. Saul was his Jewish name—a name he used until Acts 13:9. After that, he was called Paul. In the earlier part of his life he was “a Jew among Jews,” which is why he went by the name Saul. But on his first missionary journey Saul and Barnabas went to faraway lands where they worked not only with Jews, but also with Gentiles. Therefore his Jewish name was dropped, and he used his Gentile name—Paul. We will be reading some passages that talk about both Saul and Paul, but they will be talking about the same person. Do not let the two names confuse you. Saul was the Jewish name, and Paul was the Gentile name.

I first want to go back to the beginning—all the way back to Saul’s birth. When we read Acts 9:11, Acts 21:39, and Acts 22:3, we see that Paul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia. He also had Jewish parents of the tribe of Benjamin. In Philippians 3:5 Paul said that he was “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee.” He had Jewish parents of the tribe of Benjamin. His father was a Pharisee and a Roman citizen. Paul himself, therefore, also was a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 16:37; 22:28; 23:6). Because of this, Paul had dual citizenship, which plays a vital role later in Paul’s life, as he is both a Jewish citizen and a Roman citizen as well.

Paul was a worker. In Acts 18:3 we learn that he was a tentmaker. He was someone who knew that he could be paid for preaching, because he talked about that in 1 Corinthians 9. But Paul wanted to make sure, as he was establishing early congregations of the church, that he did not become a distraction. Paul knew how to make tents because it was something he had learned as a trade. He was not lazy; he knew how to perform secular, physical labor.

Now I want to talk about Paul’s training prior to his becoming a Christian. We know that Paul was trained by a great Jewish scholar by the name of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34). Paul also mentions this in Acts 22:3. He said, “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.” Paul was taught by the Jewish scholar, Gamaliel, yet he could speak both Greek and Hebrew (Acts 21:37; 22:2). We therefore see that Paul was educated in the Old Testament, and that he could speak both Greek and Hebrew. Paul was someone who had been taught from a very young age, and who had a good education as he grew up.

Now I want to look at something that Paul did before he became a Christian. If you were to look at some of Paul's writings after he became a Christian, you might think, "Paul must have had great Christian parents and a great raising, and always knew that Jesus was the Christ." But we see the exact opposite in the Scriptures. Paul was a great persecutor of Christianity. He persecuted the church of Christ. In Acts 8:1-3 we read,

"Saul was consenting to his [Stephen's] death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison."

Here we see that Paul did not take merely male Christians to prison, but also took females. He made no distinction between the two. He was a great persecutor of the Lord's church who took both males and females to prison. In Acts 22:4 he said, "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women." Was Paul one who was raised in the Lord's church? Did he have a good Christian home? Absolutely not! He persecuted the church and Christianity. When Paul was doing this, did he think that he was doing the right thing? The answer is that, yes, he absolutely did. Paul thought that he was doing the right thing. We need to understand that we may "think" we are doing the right thing, but just because we think we are, does not mean that we actually are. In fact, if we went solely on what we "thought" was right, then just about everyone would go to Heaven because most people do what they do because they think it is the right thing to do.

In Acts 23:1 Paul said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Did Paul have a bad conscience that told him he should not be persecuting Christians or putting Christians into prison? No. He had a clear conscience because he thought he was doing the right thing. When we look in the Scriptures, we see a lot of people who "thought" they were doing the right thing (or what they were supposed to be doing). Paul said that he was very zealous toward God (Acts 22:3). I do not want us to miss this point. Paul thought he was doing the will of God by persecuting Christians. He thought that Christianity was a sect that was going against God and that was a mockery of God. He thought that he was doing the right thing by persecuting Christians. He thought he was doing the will of God. In Romans 10:2 the Bible describes this as "zeal not according to knowledge." There are people who go to great lengths to do things for God. They think they are doing the right thing, but in reality they are not because they are not doing what the Bible says.

Have you ever studied for a test in high school, college, or for your work, and you spent a lot of time studying the book? But all the time you were studying the wrong book. When it came time for the test, you realized that you had studied the wrong material. Even though you "thought" you were doing the right thing, had great zeal, and put a lot of time into it, how good will you do on the test? You are going to fail—because you thought you were studying the right material, but you were not. Just because we "think" we are doing the right thing does not mean that we are. You may be one of those people who thought all your life that you were doing the right thing, and that you were doing things for God. But in reality, just because you "think" that does not mean that you are right. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." We have to go to the Bible to see what the Bible says. John 17:17 tells us that God's Word is truth. There is a way that seems right to a man, but it leads to death. Many people in the religious world today who think they are doing the right thing will end up in Hell because they are not doing the will of God. "Thinking" that you are doing God's will, and "doing" God's will (Mt. 7:21) are two different things. Let us not miss the point that even though Paul thought

he was right, even though he had the right intention, and even though he had great zeal, he was lost, and was on his way to Hell if he did not change. We know, of course, that he did change—which leads us to our next point: the conversion of Paul.

One of the great things about Christianity and God's grace is found in John 3:16, which tells us that God sent Jesus to die so that we could be saved from our sins. You may be lost right now, but the good thing is that, just like Paul, you can be converted. Let's talk about how Paul was converted. Did you know that Paul was converted in the same way that you and I are converted today? Paul became a Christian the same way that we today become Christians—by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). I want us to look at Paul's conversion. In Acts 9:1-6 we read,

“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’”

Notice that last part. Was Saul saved on the road to Damascus? No, he was not. I've heard people say that Paul was saved on the road to Damascus. He was not! The Lord told him to go into the city of Damascus, and there he would be told what he needed to do. I've heard a lot of preachers say that Saul was saved on the road to Damascus. Saul was still lost at that point. The Lord told him where to go so that he could be told what to do. But the Lord did not tell him at that point what to do to be saved. Let's go into Damascus and see what Saul was told to do to be saved. In Acts 22:16 we read, “Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” What was Saul told to do? Was he told to “say a sinner's prayer” or to “accept Christ as his personal Savior”? Do you ever find either one of those things in the Scriptures? Absolutely not! Such things are false doctrine, and will send many people to Hell because all they think they have to do is say some sort of “sinner's prayer.” Did you know that the sinner's prayer is never found in the Bible (speaking of an alien sinner)? There is no instance in which a sinner prays and becomes a Christian. That is a tradition of men. That is false doctrine. That is the “feel-good” teaching that so many people are willing to bring into religion today. But it is not found in the Bible. What was Saul told to do? Did Ananias say, “Give me a \$1,000 check, and then you will be saved”? No, that is not what happened. What was Saul told to do? He was told, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Saul had to be baptized in water for the forgiveness of his sins, just as you and I must do today. In 1 Peter 3:21 we are told that it is baptism that saves us because it is that point that we come in contact with the precious blood of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:5).

Once Saul was converted, we see that he was to preach not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. In fact, Acts 9:15 and Acts 22:21 explain that Saul (or Paul) was to preach especially to the Gentiles. Acts 22:21 records, “Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’” Paul was to preach not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. From Romans 1:16 we learn that the Gospel is for all.

After Paul became a Christian, he also became an apostle. He was chosen by God and Christ. In Galatians 1:1 we read, “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead).” It wasn't that God made Paul an apostle without him having any say-so in the matter. Paul could have rejected his apostleship and Christianity. But God, in His foreknowledge, knew Paul's heart.

He knew that Paul would be obedient to the Gospel and to the commands of God. Paul, therefore, was a true apostle—which brings us to Galatians 1 and 2. I want to offer a summary of the Book of Galatians, in which Paul defends his apostleship.

Why would Paul need to defend his apostleship? Didn't everyone know that he was a true apostle? Paul had been with the Christians in Galatia. In fact, he was the one who had established the congregations in Galatia. But when Paul left, false teachers came in (as false teachers do today in so many religious groups) and began to teach "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-10). They began discussing how people had to go back under the Old Law. They said, "Follow Christ, but be a **Jewish** Christian." They were even binding circumcision, and saying that people had to go back under the bondage of the Mosaic Law. Paul told them that such was not true. Of course, the false teachers then suggested that Paul was not a true apostle, and that people should not listen to him. That was false, of course. Paul opens the Book of Galatians by defending his apostleship. Let us now look at Paul, the true apostle.

How do we know that Paul was a true apostle? Paul lays out four arguments in the Book of Galatians in chapters 1 and 2. Paul first said that his message was not from man, but was from God. In Galatians 1:11-12 Paul wrote,

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Paul's first argument was: "How could you **not** believe that I am an apostle? What I am saying is not the traditions of men. It is not something I've invented on my own. Rather, it is indeed 'from God.'" All the writings we have in the New Testament from Paul are from God. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 we see that the Christians in Thessalonica had received from Paul what was, in truth, "the word of God." Paul wrote God's Word. In 1 Corinthians 14:37 Paul talked about the fact that the things he was writing were "the commandment of the Lord." In 2 Peter 1:20-21 we learn that Scriptures are not "of private interpretation." What Paul was saying was not from man, but was instead from God. How did Paul prove that? In Galatians 1 he showed that he preached for three years before meeting any of the other apostles—which meant that he could not have stolen anything from them because he had not come in contact with any apostles until three years after he had begun preaching. And when he did come in contact with them, he was with Peter and James for only fifteen days (and not to receive any kind of instruction). Thus, Paul's first bulletproof argument is that his teachings had come not from man, but from God. The principle we need to learn from this is that everything we do must come from the Bible, not from emotions or traditions of men. We must have book, chapter, and verse for the things we do. Paul's first argument was that his message had not come from men, but instead had come directly from God.

Paul's second argument was that the Christians in Galatia had seen him face to face. In Galatians 1:22-24 Paul wrote, "I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God in me." This is a very important point that I do not want us to miss. Paul was saying that he had written to certain other churches, yet they knew that he was a true apostle—even though they had not seen him face to face. But Paul was saying to the Christians in Galatia, "I am the one who taught you the truth. I am the one who showed you God's Word. Yet even though you saw me face to face, you have rejected me. You know I am sincere. You know that what I am doing is correct. These other congregations have not even met me. But you have. Yet you still reject me." Paul's second argument is that he had been there with them face to face, which meant that they should know his lifestyle, his sincerity, and the genuineness of his preaching of the truth.

As Paul's arguments go on, they get stronger and stronger. Paul's third argument is that he was accepted by the other apostles. In Galatians 2:7-10 Paul said,

"But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas [Peter], and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do."

Paul's argument is that Peter and the other apostles accepted him as a true apostle. They would not have accepted Paul if he had been a false apostle. Ephesians 5:11 teaches that we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but are instead to expose them. We know from 1 John 1:7-9 that we can have fellowship only with those who have fellowship with God. Paul's argument is that if anyone was going to reject him, it would have been the other apostles. But they knew that he was a true apostle. Peter understood—and gave Paul the right hand of fellowship. If the apostles accepted Paul as a true apostle, how much more the Christians in Galatia should have accepted Paul as a true apostle! Paul's third argument, then, was that he was accepted by the other apostles.

Paul's fourth argument is found in Galatians 2:11-15.

"Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, '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.'"

Peter did not have any problem eating with Gentiles when there were no other Jews around who believed that a person had to be circumcised. But when Jews arrived who believed that circumcision was required, and that people had to go back under the Old Law, Peter separated himself from the Gentiles. Paul saw that this was not right, and rebuked Peter publicly to his face as a result. Anyone could have rebuked Peter because anyone can rebuke another person if that person is in sin (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Tim. 5:20). But Paul's point is that if Paul had not been sincere as a true apostle, he would not have cared about Peter. Yet he saw that Peter's actions were wrong, and that his actions were affecting other Christians, including Barnabas. So what did Paul do? He rebuked Peter to his face. What Paul was saying was the truth. And Peter knew that it was the truth. Our culture today does not like the act of rebuking. But if we truly love people, we should want to rebuke them. Proverbs 27:5 says that "open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed." Because Paul loved Peter, he rebuked him to his face. If Paul had not been a true convert, much less a true apostle, this would have been the perfect time for Peter to expose Paul. But Peter knew that he was in error, which is why Paul rebuked him. Peter changed, and became a faithful elder in the Lord's church. Paul's argument was that he rebuked Peter because he loved him enough, and was sincere enough, to ensure that Peter did not continue in sin, and in so doing affect other Christians as well. Rebuking is something that is scriptural, regardless of what society might think.

Paul also was a great debater during his life as a Christian (Acts 9:29; 17:1-4). And, Paul was a great evangelist. Paul was faithful until the end of his life. This is the last point that I want to make in this lesson. Look at 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

“I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

Even though Paul started out persecuting Christianity and Christians, he ended up being very faithful. He was converted. He was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins, and he remained faithful until the end. You may be living a life of sin, but are ready to turn from that life. You must be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, and must remain faithful unto death, just as Paul did. If you have yet to obey the truth, we pray today that you will obey the Gospel of Christ.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR GALATIANS LESSON 1 (CHAPTERS 1-2)

1. In Acts 9 we read of a man by the name of Saul of Tarsus who, according to Acts 13:9, also was known by the name of Paul. What is the difference in those two names?
2. How does Philippians 3:5 describe Paul?
3. According to Acts 22:28, what special designation did Paul hold?
4. According to Acts 18:3, what was Paul's vocation?
5. According to Acts 22:3, under what learned scholar was Paul trained?
6. According to Acts 21:37 and Acts 22:2, what two languages could Paul speak?
7. According to Acts 8:3, what did Paul do to Christ's church before he became a Christian?
8. What does Acts 23:1 tell us about how Paul felt regarding the things he had previously done to Christ's church?
9. What description is found in Romans 10:2 that would describe Paul before he became a Christian?
10. What important event happened to Saul of Tarsus, as recorded in Acts 9:1-6?
11. In Acts 22:16, what did the prophet Ananias tell Saul he needed to do to get rid of his sins?
12. According to 1 Peter 3:21, what is one of the purposes of water baptism?
13. According to Galatians 1:11-12, what was the source of Paul's teaching as an apostle of Christ?
14. According to Galatians 1:22-24, there was one significant difference (relating to Paul) between the Christians in Galatia and the Christians in Judea. What was it?
15. In Galatians 2:7-10, what argument did Paul make that related to the genuine nature of his position as an apostle of Christ?
16. What argument is found in Galatians 2:11-15 that relates to the genuine nature of Paul's position as an apostle of Christ?
17. What instructions are found in 1 Timothy 5:20 regarding how one Christian should treat another Christian who is engaged in sin?
18. According to 2 Timothy 4:7, how had Paul lived his life as a Christian, and what message is found in that passage for Christians today?