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Galatians 1:11-24

God's Gospel, God's Grace, God's Glory

“That’s your truth, but that’s not my truth.” Have you ever heard that phrase before, or something like it? THE idea that truth is subjective - that truth lies in the eyes of the beholder, as if truth is a subjective reality that can change from person to person. This kind of way of thinking has become fairly common in our day and age. It has become out of vogue to make a claim that something is objectively true - especially when it comes to matters of morality or religion. So when you share the truth of God, the truth of the Bible, the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone, we very well might get a response along the lines of: “Well, I respect your beliefs, and I’m glad those beliefs work for you; but that’s your truth - it’s not my truth.” In other words, they're saying, “Who do you think you are to tell me my beliefs are wrong? Who do you think you are to impose your beliefs, your truth claims, onto other people?”

After all, that's what we're doing when we share the gospel, isn't it? We're proclaiming that there's only one God, that we've all sinned against Him, and that everyone deserves His eternal wrath and judgment in Hell. That's an offense message - telling someone that they aren't good enough, but are actually considered evil and stand condemned before the Holy God. Furthermore, we proclaim that there's only *one* way to be saved: by trusting in the free grace of God in Christ Jesus, who lived, died, and was raised to save guilty sinners from our sins. But that means that *only* those who repent and believe in Christ will be saved. That's an *exclusive* gospel message. We are proclaiming that unless they agree with us and believe the same thing we do, then they are going to Hell and there's nothing they can do about it.

That's an offensive message, isn't it? That doesn't appeal to people naturally. That doesn't make us feel good. And so, who are we to proclaim such an offensive, audacious, exclusive message? Doesn't this make us arrogant?

Well, if this were a man-made message, that human beings came up with, then yes, it would be very arrogant, and we would have no right to impose it on others. But the gospel isn't a man-made message. The gospel comes from God - not man. Like it not, the Bible tells us the truest of realities, and it also proclaims the only hope anyone has to be saved: The good news of salvation by grace through faith in the gospel of Christ Jesus!

That's exactly what we see in our text this morning: *Galatians 1:11-24*. Paul claims boldly that this gospel is not man-made - not by Paul or anyone else. He tells us that he received his gospel and his apostleship directly from Christ! Then he backs up this claim through the testimony of his conversion and early ministry. And along the way, we not only see the divine authority of this gospel message, but we also see the incredible, glorious power of God's grace at work in this gospel. And those two points are exactly what I want us to see from this text this morning: 1. First, that the gospel is not man-made, but comes directly from GOD himself, meaning that it isn't up for negotiation, but is universally true and authoritative; and 2. Secondly, this is *incredibly good news*, because this gospel displays the glorious power of God's grace for sinners like you and me! That's what we see here, in this passage.

So let's begin with the first point:

I. The Gospel Message Comes from God, Not Human Beings (1:11-12, 16b-22)

In verses 11-12, Paul begins the main body of the letter by giving us a *thesis statement*; in these two verses, he makes a claim, and then, in verses 13 through chapter 2, verse 14, he shares biographical accounts from his own life to back up that claim. And the the thesis statement he makes it this: *the gospel that Paul proclaims is not man-made, but it comes directly from God Himself, and therefore must be accepted by all*. We see this in verses 11-12: "For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

Here's what Paul is saying here: first off, he's telling us that the gospel he preaches - the good news of salvation by GOD's grace alone for anyone who repents and believes in the perfect life, substitutionary death, and miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ - Paul tells us that *this gospel* is "not man's gospel" or "not according to man." What he means is, it's not man-made. It's not made up, not a clever scheme or teaching or philosophy made by human beings. It's not a man-made religion. Now, this has a couple of implications. For starters, it means it's objectively *true*. Paul assures us here that the gospel he preaches is true: it's not made up by him or any other man or human beings, but instead comes directly from God. And this has another implication: it means that it is *authoritative*. It is true and unchanging. It's not up for negotiation. Since human beings didn't create the gospel, that means we don't get to change it, or tweak it, or decide we like a different version of it better.

But that's exactly what the Galatian churches were being tempted to do. As I've mentioned over the last couple of weeks, Paul wrote this letter to the churches in Galatia because false teachers had come down from Jerusalem and were preaching *Jesus plus works of the Law* equals salvation; that these non-Jewish believers couldn't just trust in Christ - they needed to become good Jews to be saved as well. They told these Galatian Christians that it wasn't enough to be saved simply by grace through faith in the work of Jesus Christ - they need to obey the Law of Moses, be circumcised, and live under the Old Covenant Law in order to truly be God's people and in order to truly be saved.

But here's the problem: that is *exactly the opposite message* of what Paul had proclaimed to these people when they first heard of Jesus Christ and became believers! So in order to convince the Galatians Christians to listen to them instead of Paul, these false teachers had to undermine Paul's authority. They probably began to say that Paul couldn't be trusted because he wasn't a real apostle. They probably said something like, "Paul isn't a real apostle! He isn't part of the church leadership in Jerusalem! He's not one of the Twelve Disciples who became the Apostles, like Peter, James, and John! He didn't even know or follow Jesus before Jesus ascended into heaven! So why are you listening to him? He doesn't have any real authority!" Therefore, they would say, Paul's gospel message couldn't be the right one, since he was changing the gospel that he had heard. They probably argued that Paul didn't correctly hear or understand the gospel of Christ as he was taught it, and therefore, could not be trusted as he was teaching it to the Galatians. They would then point to themselves and say, "We're the more trustworthy guides! We come from Jerusalem, after all, where the Apostles are!" These false teachers would have asserted their own authority and their own false gospel by undermining Paul's apostolic authority and Paul's true gospel.

But here in this passage, Paul counters those arguments and says: *not so fast!* In verse 11, Paul tells us that this gospel isn't man-made, but comes from God. And then, in verse 12, Paul tells us that he himself did not receive the gospel message from any man - he was not taught it the Apostles in Jerusalem, or by any other human being. Now, you and I have all been taught the gospel by human beings, by other flesh-and-blood people. We believe that the gospel is God's message - but we also *received this good news* from other people - maybe your parents, like I did, or from your friend, classmate, or co-worker, or maybe from a gospel tract or Bible or other book someone gave you, or you hear the gospel preached and proclaimed at church. I

would suspect that many of these are true for all of us - that we have received the gospel and been taught it from many different people in our lives! And there's nothing at all wrong with this; this is a good thing, it's how GOD has chosen for his gospel to go forth, through the mission of the church, through the evangelism of His people! THis is the normal way that we receive the gospel - through other people sharing it with us and teaching it to us!

But, this is *not how Paul received the good news of Christ!* He tells us, in verse 12, that he "received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." THat is, God the Father revealed Jesus Christ directly to Paul while he was traveling on a road. Paul then recounts the story of how God did this, and how it changed his life, through the testimony of his conversion, in verses 13-16. Now, we're going to come back to this testimony and look at it further in point 2. But for now, I simply want us to know why he's sharing his testimony here and how it plays into the larger argument that Paul is making. He's telling us here that he didn't receive the gospel from one of the Apostles, or from a missionary like Barnabas, or from a pastor in a local church, or Christians he knew - no, *Jesus Christ Himself told him the gospel and He was explicitly, personally revealed to Him by God!* He had a direct encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ - God revealed Himself to Him and changed His heart, giving him faith in the good news of Jesus Christ! THis means, *Paul knows that his gospel is universally true and authoritative because he got it directly from the source: the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!*

And not only this, but when CHrist was revealed to Paul, he wasn't just converted - he was also *called to be an Apostle, to proclaim this gospel message he received to the Gentiles - to non-Jewish people!* Paul didn't receive this authority to proclaim an authoritatively true gospel from the other apostles - he received it from God directly. We see this in verses 16-22, where Paul tells us that when GOD "was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus." What Paul tells us here lines up with what Luke tells us in Acts chapter 9. After Paul was converted, he was also *uniquely called by God to be an apostle, to carry the good news of salvation in Christ by grace to faith to all peoples in all the world!* And so, Paul didn't wait around, or go ask for permission from the other Apostles in Jerusalem - he started proclaiming the gospel where he was, in Damascus! As Acts 9:20 tells us: "And *immediately* he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'" Now, this passage, in Galatians, tells us

another bit of information that Acts 9 leaves out; here Paul tells us that he didn't just stay in Damascus that whole time during his first three years of ministry, but also "went to Arabia." He most likely went to keep preaching the gospel there. NOW, in those days, the word "Arabia" could refer to a very large area, including lands both to the north of Israel, where Damascus was, and to the east, or southeast, of it. But regardless of where exactly he went, he came back to Damascus, and as Acts 9 tells us, he eventually had to flee the city, due to persecution. And then he traveled to Jerusalem, as we see in Acts 9:26-31.

And so, at this point, the false teachers could say, "Ok, see, Paul, we got you! YOU did indeed go up to Jerusalem and meet with the apostles! You learned the gospel from them after all, like we said, meaning you don't have any more authority than we do!" But again, Paul says, "Not so fast!" This is why he continues giving us an account of his life in *verses 18-22*: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas" that is, Peter, "and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ."

He tells us that he didn't go up to Jerusalem for *three years* after his conversion, long after he had already begun his public gospel ministry, as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, he tells us, that when he *did* go to Jerusalem, he didn't meet with all of the apostles, just two of them: Peter and James. And when he did meet with Peter, it was only for 15 days. Two weeks hardly enough time to receive instruction about the gospel! To be sure, they talked about Christ and spiritual matters together. I mean, this is Paul and Peter we're talking about - they didn't just sit around talking about food, sports, and the weather for 15 days! But this is was much more of a meeting between two peers, getting better acquainted with each other, rather than Paul coming to be trained by the apostles and receive gospel instruction from them. No, Paul assures us - he received the gospel and his apostolic calling *directly from God through a revelation of Christ*. He is on the same, authoritative level as the other apostles Therefore, the Galatians - and that means us, today, too - can trust that Paul's gospel is the only gospel: because it came not from Paul, but from Christ Jesus Himself.

Now, this has several applications for us today. *First off*, this should give us greater confidence in the truth of the Scriptures. The Bible is God's WORD; He wrote it by inspiring men such as Paul, and the other Apostles, who saw the risen Christ firsthand and received the true, pure

gospel directly from Him. Therefore, their teachings are trustworthy and true, even authoritative, because they come not ultimately from themselves but God. Therefore, let us have confidence in the truth of our Bible and devote ourselves to reading, studying, and understanding them.

Secondly, this means we can have greater confidence in the truth of the gospel that the Bible teaches us. This gospel isn't a hoax. It's not made up charlatans trying to get a cult following. The gospel really is a *sure hope of salvation to all who believe!* And it is our *only hope*.

Therefore, thirdly, we should not be ashamed of the gospel, but must preach it boldly. We can't change the gospel message to make it more modern, more relevant, more attractive, more inclusive, or less offensive. As you go and share the gospel with your friends and family members, there are going to be moments where you're afraid to share the full truth. YOU might shy away from proclaiming it boldly. YOU might be tempted to soften the blow, and tell them they're ok, as long as they mean well. Or you might be tempted to just not say anything at all, even though you know that person isn't a believer, simply because you don't want to hurt or offend them, you don't want to make them mad and angry, you don't want to risk your relationship with them. But that's not loving them, is it?. There's only one gospel that saves - the good news of salvation for all who repent and believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins! We should not feel any shame or embarrassment when we proclaim the gospel to unbelievers and call them to repent and believe in our message as the only true way to know GOD and be saved from Hell - because it isn't ultimately our message, but *GOD's message*. YOU're not arrogant when you tell people that they have to believe in Christ, like you do, as the only way for them to know God and be saved. That's not arrogant, because you and I didn't come up with that message - God did. It's God's message. And that makes it objectively true and universally authoritative. Therefore, let's go forth and proclaim the gospel to anyone and everyone we know, in our homes, our neighborhoods, our work places - with all our friends and family members!

And we can do so with confidence because not only is this message true and authoritative, but it is also *gloriously good news!* And this is because *the gospel proclaims the good news of GOD's powerful grace*.

II. The Gospel Proclaims the Power of God's Glorious Grace (1:13-16a, 23-24)

We see this in the story of Paul's conversion - of his testimony, the story of how God powerfully worked out his grace in Paul's life through the gospel of Christ. And this is the same gospel, and the same glorious grace of God, at work in our lives today.

Paul begins his testimony in verses 13-14, telling us *what his life looked like before God's grace broke into his life*. We read: "For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it." We are all sinners. We all have personal histories filled with sins and deep, dark regrets. And Paul is no different. He actually *persecuted the church!* He imprisoned Christians for believing in Christ, participated in executions, and even made it his aim to *destroy* the entire church of Christ! No matter how much you and I have sinned in our lives, it's hard to compete with the grievous record of Paul. But even though his life was marred by grievous, terrible sins, he didn't see it that way at the time - he justified them all, as part of his legalistic, Pharisaical self-righteousness! He continues: "And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers." Paul zealously kept the traditions of the elders and Pharisees - legalistic measures that claimed to keep the Law of Moses in the Old Testament, but actually changed it, and went beyond it, teachings instead the traditions and laws of men. But Paul genuinely believed, before his conversion, that this was the good and godly thing to do! He believed he was obeying God. He was so zealous to glorify God, that he began persecuting the Christian church. He probably thought of himself as a contemporary Phineas - the Levite from **Numbers 25:1-11**, who killed an Israelite for breaking the Law of Moses, and was commended by God for his zeal. Paul was convinced that he was keeping the Law and glorifying God by opposing Christ and his church.

The point is striking. On the one hand, Paul is saying, if anyone could boast of keeping the Law and being righteous by it, it was Paul! As he says in *Phil. 3:4-6*: "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the Law blameless." He was a legalist of legalist. On the other hand, he was a hardened sinner opposing God, rejecting Christ in unbelief, and persecuting Christ's people. What could possibly change such a man? Such a legalistic, self-righteous Pharisee? Such a hardened, unbelieving sinner? Nothing - save divine intervention!

And thankfully, that's exactly what happened! GOd stepped in to Paul's life - and he *wrecked it, turning it completely upside-down by his overwhelmingly powerful grace!* We see this in verses 15-16a: "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me..." Paul is referring to the story of his conversion on the Damascus road - which we see in Acts 9:1-19. God stepped in and miraculously revealed Jesus Christ to Paul; in that moment, the futility of Paul's legalistic self-righteousness and misguided religious zeal was exposed to him. He was confronted directly by Christ, being forced to acknowledge that Jesus truly is Lord - the risen Messiah and savior! Christ appeared and made it clear, beyond all doubt, that the gospel is true. And Paul tells us here that this was *all of grace*. Paul says that this was the work of "he who had set me apart before I was born." That is, he's recognizing that God Himself revealed Christ to him *purely because He chose to have mercy on Paul!* He chose to do so *before Paul was born* - just like all of us who are Christians, GOd chose to save you *before the foundations of the earth* (Eph. 1:4)! God didn't choose to save Paul because of his legalistic self-righteousness, or anything He did. No, it was all of grace; as he says, God "called me by His grace." Nor could Paul's misguided zeal and stubborn unbelief stop God from overwhelming and converting Paul, changing his heart and giving him faith! No - it's all of grace! *Conversion is the work of God. Salvation is the work of God - from beginning to end!* It's not about us at all. IT's about God's grace. And we see that here even in God's pursuit of Paul. And as the grace of CHrist's gospel broke into Paul's life, it radically changed it. We see this clearly in verses 22-23: "And I was still unknown in person to the church of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." Paul went from persecutor to preacher! Sinner to saved! What could produce such a radical change in someone's life! ONLY the powerful work of God's grace! And since GOd's grace was so evident, it lead to God's glory: "And the glorified God because of me."

THis reminds us of the power of testimony. In particular, of the importance of sharing our testimonies in a way in which we recognize God's grace at work, not our own moral effort. All of us who are believers in Christ this morning have a testimony: a personal story of how God revealed Christ to our hearts through faith, and how we experienced the powerful work of His grace in us! For some of us, our testimonies highlight God's grace by showing how He placed us in Christian homes, and allowed us to grow up in churches where we heard the gospel preached so that we believed early on, by God's grace. For others of us, we can identify with Paul: perhaps

before you were a believer, you lived a life of explicit sin and unbelief. Perhaps you were a self-righteous legalist, who justified what you did. Perhaps you knew what you were doing was wrong but dove-in head first anyways. Some of our stories start in very broken places: abuse, addiction, hatred, faithlessness, lies, scandal, regret.

No matter how broken your past is, no matter how much regret, guilt, and shame lies in your past, here's the beautiful thing about the gospel: *it turns our broken stories into beautiful stories that display the powerful grace of God!* So no matter what your testimony is, remember that it tells the story of God's love for you, and of the power of God's grace in your life! Therefore, it is so good and important for us to tell our testimonies of the Lord's work in our life stories! As we do so, it encourages fellow believers! And it also can be a powerful evangelistic witness to non-believers. In fact, if you're not a believer this morning, please hear this: every single one of us in here has a past history full of sin, regret, guilt, and shame. Every one of us comes from broken places. And none of us became a Christian by getting our act together, cleaning ourselves up to be good enough, or doing the right things. No - *God simply had mercy on us and showed us the good news of His Son, Jesus Christ, who came and lived the perfect life you and I couldn't, died on the cross in the place of our sins, and rose again, so that if you turn to Him and trust in Him alone, He will save you! He will forgive you, declare you righteous, and raise you up to eternal life! Simply because of His grace, no matter how messed up your past life has been!*

In a few moments, we're going to come to the Lord's Table. If you're not a Christian this morning, then this meal isn't for you. And that's not because we want to be mean and exclusive - it's because the gospel is a dividing line, and we love you so much that we want you to know where you stand, and we plead with you to turn and trust in Christ alone for your salvation! And then, be baptized to make your faith public.

If you are a baptized believer and a member of a gospel preaching church in good standing, then I invite you to come to the table, as we proclaim our faith publicly in the Lord's Supper and remind one another that we are forgiven by the one true gospel of Jesus Christ, simply by grace through faith!

We'll have a moment of silence, and then you can come up, row by row, to receive a stack of cups - one with bread, the other with juice. And then you can bring them back to your seat, and we will all partake of the Lord's Supper together before we close in song. Let us pray.