

Explosive Grace

Study in Paul's Letter to the Galatians

Session 3: Church Requirements in the Age of Grace

I. Introductions and Prayer

- a. Teaser: Which is more like you? "Go along to get along" or "I march to my own drum"? Why do you think that is?
- b. Prayer

II. Recap: Knowing the Galatians & Greeting

- a. Galatians — Galatia is a mountainous region in Turkey. The Galatians are mostly Gentiles, wanting to be hard-core for God. Paul was the founder of some churches in Galatia. This letter would have been read aloud in worship at one house-church, then passed to another. Probably written in 50–56 AD.
- b. Themes to watch for — Some Jewish-Christian missionaries are telling the Christians in Galatia that they have to keep all the Jewish Law to be saved. Paul wants to be clear that grace is what matters. Watch how Paul defines grace and how it affects/changes Jesus' followers and their futures.
- c. Context — Paul spends Galatians 1:11–24 looking at his eyes through the lens of Christ's grace. Now he uses that lens to look at the Church and its people.

III. Words to watch for

- a. Barnabbas. Joined Paul in a missionary trip out of Antioch.
- b. Titus. Pure Gentile. Where Timothy was the son of a Jew (and therefore Jewish), Titus and his gifts show the Spirit comes to Gentiles too.
- c. revelation (*apocalupsis*) — literally, *unveiling*. The Book of Revelation is the *unveiling* of God's final resolution for God's people and the world.
- d. Gospel/Good News (*euangelia*) — note angel is part of it
- e. false siblings (*pseudoadelphos*) — not gender exclusive; has an openly hostile feel
- f.

IV. Reading Galatians 2:1–10

V. Questions for Reflection

- a. In v. 2, Paul wants to make sure he's not running his race in vain. Is Paul worried that he got the message wrong? Why or why not?
- b. Circumcision was an ongoing way the Jews remembered God's promise to Abraham (see Genesis 15 and 17). Does "covenant" figure into the conversation about circumcision or not for Gentiles? If so, how?

VI. Why does this matter?

- a. What requirements do some churches put on becoming a member? Why do they put those on?
- b. What "age" are we in? Is it still the same age as the Jews, or are we in a new age?
- c. When is Jesus coming again? For Paul, Jesus second coming was just around the bend. If Jesus came back while we were arguing about "Who's a Christian?" what do you think he would say?

Galatians 2:1–10

Gal. 2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. **2** I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the Good News that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain. **3** But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. **4** But because of false brothers [and sisters] secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us— **5** we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the Good News might always remain with you. **6** And from those who seemed to be leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those leaders contributed nothing to me. **7** On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the Good News for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the Good News for the circumcised **8** (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), **9** and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. **10** They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

Translation by Rev. Doug Gray

What Do We Know about the Life of Paul?

- Birthname was Saul. After becoming Christian, changed his name to Paul.
- Born in Tarsus, a city on the southern coast of what is now Turkey, near northern Syria. Tarsus was a Roman colony, which meant Paul was a Roman citizen. Being a Roman citizen was a privileged status, and brought certain benefits and protections that saved Paul's life.
- Studied under Gamaliel, one of the greatest Jewish Rabbis of the first century, really ever.
- Paul was a Pharisee, the hardest core, most passionate, elite, keepers of the Law. Paul was considered to be the "elite of the elite."
- Virulently, violently opposed the early Christians, those of "The Way."
- Held people's cloaks so they could more easily throw rocks at Stephen, the first Christian killed for his faith. (See Acts 7. Paul's cameo is in 8:1.)
- Got warrants from Jewish authorities to persecute the church: "But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, Saul dragged off men and women and put them in prison." (Acts 8:3)
- When the early Christians scattered ahead of these persecutions, Paul got warrants to follow the Christians to Damascus, capture them and return to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1–2)
- Jesus appears to Paul on the road to Damascus, blinds Paul and sends him on to Damascus. Paul is healed by a brave Christian, named Ananias, and begins life as a Christian.
- Paul spends some time with Christians in Damascus, then (as we learn in this passage in Galatians) he heads into the deserts of Arabia to learn from Jesus.
- On his return, Paul is part of one of the first, inclusive churches—Jews and Gentiles.
- He has four missionary journeys up into Syria, Turkey, Greece, and last of all, Rome.
- Paul writes letters of thanks, encouragement and admonition to many churches.
- Paul participates in the Council of Jerusalem in 45 AD, where the church leaders believe God is leading them to include Gentiles as well as Jews, and without having to keep the Law.
- Paul is eventually martyred (impaled) in Rome in AD 67 by Emperor Nero, in the persecution following the burning of Rome in AD 64.