

Explosive Grace

Study in Paul's Letter to the Galatians Session 4: Sitting at the Table with Jesus

I. Introductions and Prayer

- a. Teaser: When you were a kid, did you ever go somewhere where you sat at the "kids' table"? What did you think of that? When did you start eating with the "adults"?
- 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 — Starting in Gal. 1:11–24 Paul looks at his life through the lens of Christ's grace, including a "game-changing" meeting in Jerusalem that recognized that people could become Christians without becoming Jewish first. So now what?

III. Words to watch for

- a. James. The half-brother of Jesus, James didn't become a Christ-follower until after Jesus' rose from the dead. He is regarded as one of the holiest, kindest men of his time, and "all in" for God. He is usually credited with the book of James in the NT.
- b. Gentiles (*ethnos*). Also translated as *nations* or *peoples*. For Jews, there were two kinds of people: Jews (insiders, people of the promise) and Gentiles (everybody else, outsiders, no promise for you).
- c. circumcision. Sign of God's covenant with Abraham. (See Genesis 15 & 17, esp. 15:6). "Circumcision/Uncircumcision" were the names of the factions in the early church, like "Pro-Life/Pro-Choice" today.
- d. Gospel/Good News (*euangelia*). Note *angel* (who brings Good News) is part of it
- e. justify/righteous/righteousness. See back page.

IV. Reading Galatians 2:11–21

V. Questions for Reflection

- a. When you think someone is doing something wrong, are you more likely to say something at once, or later, or just let it go? Paul acts publicly. Why do you think he does it that way? How do you think that was received by the hearers? By Peter?
- b. Look for the places where the NIV and NRSV translate the phrase "faith in Christ." In the original, these could also be translated "faith of Christ." Try these sections both ways. What changes in the meaning? Which one emphasizes God's grace?
- c. Read verse 20. How does this help you understand the rest of the passage, especially the most difficult parts?

VI. Why does this matter?

- a. Throughout church history, churches have struggled with balancing how to be a “called out people” (*ecclesia*), a community of believers, and show grace and welcome to those who are not believers. Some churches have answered that by establishing “tiers” of membership. Based on this passage, what would Paul think about that? What are some of the negative effects introduced into churches that do that?
- b. If Christ is living in us, then our lives are aimed at bringing all the pieces of our life “into alignment” with Jesus. Are there parts of your life you know are “not in alignment” with what Jesus would want? How could you give that part of you to Jesus too?

Justify/Right/Righteousness

Usual English	Better English	Part of Speech	Greek
justify	make right	verb	<i>dikaio</i>
righteousness, justice	right relationship with God	noun	<i>dikaiosune</i>
right, just	right (in God’s eyes)	adjective	<i>dikaios</i>

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.