



The Grace-Gospel Confirmed

Sermon - Steve Stanis

Galatians 1:10 - 2:10

Isaiah 52:7-10, Mark 7:24-30 (8am only)

8am/10am - May 15, 8:30/6pm - May 22

Introduction

I wonder how you came to know Christ? It is always an encouragement to hear someone's story of how the Holy Spirit worked in their life to turn them to God.

Paul's Testimony

Today we hear Paul's testimony. This is Paul's story. It is Paul speaking first hand. He is not speaking through Luke, as happens in the book of Acts, where Luke writes about Paul's experiences. This is Paul, telling his story, in a particular way.

It does not have all the details. It is intentional and specific. It is written to direct his readers to *Christ and only Christ*.

Faith alone, Christ Alone

Paul is clearly saying to the Galatians that we are saved by faith alone, apart from anything we can offer. We are saved on the merit of Christ's righteousness. We can offer nothing to our salvation but thankful hearts and open arms.

Remember in Galatia, the church was being attacked from within... attacked by false teachers who sought to change

the focus from Jesus' finished work to add additional human requirements. Paul is writing to preserve the truth of Jesus as *the only way, the only truth, and the only life which he offers with God*. He is defending the believers against the false teachers, who attacked this teaching and the man Paul was.

In today's passage from Galatians, Paul defends his ministry and his message. The false teachers accused Paul that what he preached was not the whole Gospel. How could Jesus accept us just as we are? They also doubted Paul because of his Jewish background.

We are naturally suspicious of anything for free. Surely a little effort on our part is required! How easily we slip into faith plus works. This is what the false teachers were preaching. But Jesus says we must believe in his work, not trust our own.

Jesus' revelation directly to Paul

Paul makes it clear that what he preaches is what he heard from Jesus Christ himself. This God news was not revealed by a human. It was revealed by God the Father, in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What Paul preaches is not a fad or lifestyle picked up from people. He preaches faith alone, Christ alone. He would not diminish Christ, as the false teachers were doing.

The esteemed apostles in Jerusalem

Paul defends his conversion in this passage by explaining that he was responding to God's call to him. He was not trying to be seen with the right people or be seen to be saying the popular things. He emphasises this by saying he did not spend all his time in Jerusalem. He spent fifteen days there early in his conversion of *Galatians (1:18)* and then it wasn't until fourteen years later he returned, because of a revelation from God.

At this time Paul met privately with the apostles. He knew they were esteemed by all believers, but Paul was not looking for esteem. He was not looking for approval. He makes it clear that he quietly wanted to partner with the apostles for the sake of God's world-wide mission. The apostle's focus was on the Jews. Paul believed Christ had called him to bring the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles.

This meeting was clearly no teaching time from Peter to Paul. It was two sets of leaders meeting as equals to learn from one another and make sure they were all on track.

Paul took two men with him to the meeting. He took Barnabas, a Jew, whom they knew and Titus, a Gentile whom they didn't know. Titus had heard the good news of Jesus and believed in his saving grace. He was a believer, but he had never been a Jew. Titus is living proof that the power of Christ's salvation is at work in the whole world.

Did the apostles accept Titus? Yes, *Galatians chapter 2 verse 3* says that Titus didn't need to be circumcised to be

part of the believers. He was accepted as a brother in Christ. These esteemed Jewish leaders accepted a non-Jewish believer. This growing community was unified. Paul wasn't running the race in vain.

This is a major moment in Church history. If the Jerusalem apostles forced circumcision on Titus, proclaiming it was necessary for salvation, the entire foundation of justification by faith alone would crumble. But Jesus' finished work prevailed. All the apostles agreed. Faith alone! Christ alone!

God's grace is sufficient

Sadly, not everyone was happy.

"...false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus." (v4)

What the false teachers wanted was to diminish Christ. They wanted to change the message of the Gospel. They wanted to undo what Jesus had done in his finished work. They wanted to put a comma, where God had put a full stop. That is always a danger, even for us.

Is God's grace sufficient for you? When you make a poor choice or continue a habit that turns your gaze from Jesus, do you feel too ashamed, too unworthy... like you must sort yourself out before you can come to him for forgiveness? Jesus calls us to run to God with conviction and cling to Christ's righteousness alone.

What about when others do wrong, to you or others? Do you hold them to an external standard of what they must

do to receive forgiveness, or is God's grace sufficient for them too?

These false teachers were holding others to a different standard. It was a standard they set themselves. It was a standard that was achievable. They could do it. They held the pen in their hands, marking out the boundaries, waiting for others to see the error of their ways and beliefs.

They drew a line which would keep some in and others out.

But that is not the grace of God. God erases those lines and through the blood of Jesus, draws a wider circle around the whole world, encompassing all people groups of all backgrounds, whoever will believe in him. God's absolute grace offers the freedom of life forever with him for all who call on the name of Jesus.

Let me make four brief observations from this passage:

- 1. When we believe the good news of Jesus, the Son is revealed to us.**

Firstly, Galatians 1:16 says God "called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles."

Paul is referring to his conversion. That's what happens when we believe the good news of Jesus: The Son is revealed to us. We see him in his glory, as he really is, for all that we really are.

God's message of salvation is not just for us; it is to be shared to advance his Kingdom. This is not a job to be done. That would be salvation plus... Rather, Paul sees this

as stewardship of ministry. The All-Holy God entrusts his world-wide salvation plan to a fallen, sinful man with limitations, weaknesses and inadequacies. The Church grows despite Paul, not because of Paul. God takes people in their weakness, saves them through the finished work of Christ, and sends them out for his glory. We share the good news of Jesus because the Son is revealed to us.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news. (Isaiah 52:7)

2. Gospel ministry is God's work done through us, not our work done for God.

Secondly, Galatians 2:8 says,

For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles.

God's plan was always to save Jews and Gentiles by his grace. When Jesus rose from the grave, this work was made clear - to tell all people, make disciples of all nations. Paul was God's appointed evangelist to begin this work with the Gentiles. Peter was God's appointed evangelist to continue that work with the Jews.

Paul is making it clear in this passage that both he and Peter are vessels used by God. It was not Paul's Gospel any more than it was Peter's Gospel. It is God's Gospel.

God will use us too. We are called to be vessels used by God. Our ministry is not our work done for God. It's God's work done through us. It is a proper response to his saving

grace. It is not salvation plus... it is God who deserves all the glory.

3. The Gospel of grace is a gift from God.

Paul now knows who he is as Galatians 1:22-24 records...

I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.

He's a man saved by God and called to a gospel ministry to the Gentiles. Paul explains his conversion because of the extreme turn around in his life. Paul had been a Jew. He had spent his life in obedience to the Law. He had risen in the ranks of Judaism but then Jesus appeared to him and gave him his Gospel. Paul received it as a gift. Jesus transformed him from a persecutor to a preacher.

The gift of the Gospel is why Paul does not boast of his achievements among the Galatians. His only ambition is for God.

It is a challenge, isn't it, to humbly do ministry for the glory of God.

4. The Gospel for the people and the purpose.

Peter and Paul have agreed that Peter will go to the Jews, Paul to the Gentiles. The ONLY thing Peter asked of Paul was that he "*remember the poor*". (v10)

In other words, as we all set off to our mission fields, be like Jesus. Don't just meet with the expected, meet with

the unexpected. The action of remembering is to do something. It must mean active inclusion, welcoming and hospitality. It means taking those who are outside of the membership group and bringing them in. It means knitting together our lives, giving and receiving from one another, becoming friends.

The Grace-Gospel Mission and Vision.

In everything, we must, as our KAC Mission says...

"...glorify God, making Jesus known as we love and serve together".

In doing this we recognise our shared poverty and the shared promise of the richness of God's grace.

Whilst things around us have changed, our mission has not changed. As we wait for the day when, as Isaiah 52:10 says....

*"The LORD will lay bare his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth will see
the salvation of our God."*

Until that day, our five year KAC Vision focusses us...

*"To be prayerful, intergenerational and connected,
being transformed by Jesus."*

Praise him always for his Gospel of grace!