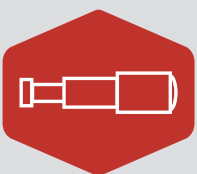




Lesson 3: A Clear Testimony

Main Idea: Paul believed the gospel legitimized who he was. He did not identify himself apart from his faith and calling. In this lesson, you will discover Paul's clear testimony and how much we need to allow God's presence to change, confront, and challenge us to answer the call to be His servants.

Scripture: Galatians 1:11-24



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

In this lesson, Paul uses his faith journey to give credence to his message. Paul went to the Roman province called Galatia and shared the good news that having a relationship with Jesus begins simply with believing in Him. Director of Education at First Fruits of Zion, D. Thomas Lancaster, says, "Paul wrote to the God-fearing Gentiles in Galatia, synagogue attendees who were not Jewish."¹ God-fearing Gentiles referred to non-Jews who were attracted to Judaism. They did not enjoy the rights and privileges of the Jewish people, nor did they have responsibilities within Judaism. The God-fearing Gentiles from the Galatian provinces came to Christ and churches were formed. At some point, Paul left the provinces and a group of religious leaders called Judaizers came to discredit Paul and his message.

The Judaizers told these new God-fearing Gentile converts that Paul was

¹ D. Thomas Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2011), 32.

preaching an incomplete gospel. Paul's message was Jesus plus nothing. However, the Judaizers came to Galatia to correct Paul and share what they said was the true message: Jesus plus becoming a Jew and following the rules and regulations of Judaism.

The Judaizers said Paul's message was different because he was a people pleaser. Paul was furious at this accusation because people-pleasing is a serious offense throughout Scripture. Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe." *Fear* in this verse carries a sense of terror at the unexpected, much like we understand fear today. Every time this Hebrew word is used in the Old Testament, it is used negatively—indicating what we should not fear. Proverbs 29:25 reminds us that it is a trap to fear people more than God.

Aaron, the older brother of Moses, is an example of what fear of people can do to a person. While Moses was away on Mount Sinai to receive the commandments from God, Aaron was in charge of God's people. When Moses did not return for a long while, the people grew restless. They came to Aaron and asked for a god to worship instead of the Lord. Aaron built the people a golden calf which was a violation of the very commandments that God was giving to Moses on Mount Sinai.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he found the people worshipping the calf and involved in all types of sin. Moses was furious with Aaron and asked him, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?" (Exodus 32:21). Moses meant Aaron was not an idolater—someone who worships anything other than God—so he must have done this to please people. He feared man more than God, violating his highest convictions. Moses saw this as a serious offense to God. Paul carries this same sense of seriousness when he refutes the Judaizers' claim.

Paul begins his defense by stating that the message of the good news he preached did not come from the apostles in Jerusalem, but directly from the revelation of Jesus Christ. This fact made Paul's message unique because gospel revelation typically comes indirectly—through other people representing God. This is often God's method.

However, Paul's case was unique because he received a direct gospel revelation from Jesus Christ himself. Paul had an incredible encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul proves that the message he is preaching came directly from Jesus by simply telling the Galatians his personal story. He divides his story into three sections: What his life was like before he came to Jesus Christ, how Jesus was revealed to him, and what his life was like after meeting Jesus.

Before his conversion, Paul persecuted the Church. He was born with the name Saul, and he lived in Tarsus (a city in present-day Turkey). He was steeped in Judaism, which was not just a religion, but a way of life to Paul. With a father who was a Pharisee (a conservative Jewish leader emphasizing the Law), he would have been given a scroll of the Law (the first five books of the Old Testament) as a child. At a young age, Paul would have had to memorize the first five Old Testament books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), and in so doing, he would have become *bar-mitzvah*—a son of the law.

Growing up, Paul had access to some of the finest schools in the world of his time. He had a thorough Greek education and understood Greek culture. Since Paul was also a Roman citizen, he had special opportunities as he traveled that other people did not have. He continued his religious training in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, the preeminent Jewish scholar of the day. Eventually Paul, too, became one of Judaism's very best.

Paul was a Jew of Jews. In fact, in Philippians, 3 Paul says that when it came to keeping the Law of God, he was blameless. Of course, this is hyperbole because Scripture says no one can fully keep the Law. But as good as anybody could keep it, Paul did. His desire to keep the Law was so strong that he gave all his energy to it. Once Paul encountered Christ, he became zealous for the right things.

Paul encountered Christ in a powerful way that is unparalleled for most of us. In Galatians 1:16, he uses the word “reveal” to describe how his experience came about. In time and space, Jesus revealed himself to Paul as he traveled on the road to Damascus, and the revelation transformed his life. Paul did not come to Christ because he heard many good testimonies or because he witnessed martyrs dying. What brought Paul to Christ was this encounter: God revealed life to Paul so He could reveal life *through* Paul.

When Paul came to Christ, everything in his life radically changed. He describes this change in Philippians 3:8: “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.” Virtually nothing is worth less than rubbish discarded in the street. Paul is saying that what brought meaning to his life before his revelation of Christ is now of no value to him: nothing compares to knowing Jesus.

In Galatians 1:17, Paul says he went to Arabia after his encounter with Jesus. Lancaster suggests Jewish communities were spread across the ancient world since the Roman government recognized Judaism as a legal religion, meaning

Jews had state protection to practice their religion.² According to Keener, too, it is likely Paul continued to share Christ among the Gentiles in Arabia.³ We see in Galatians 1:18–24 that Paul traveled extensively, not to simply disseminate information but to live life in community with other believers as they practiced walking by faith together. What Paul discovered was he and the original apostles were preaching the same gospel of grace. And in verse 24, Paul reminds the Galatians that people glorified God because of him. Professor of New Testament Robert Keith Rapa states, “If [Paul] can demonstrate his independence from the Jerusalem church and the original apostles, and if indeed he can show that they accepted the gospel he preached as legitimate, he has won the day for his beloved Galatians.”⁴ Paul indeed does this.

² Lancaster, 11.

³ Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 91.

⁴ Robert K. Rapa, “Galatians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians*, rev. ed., vol. 11, ed. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 572.



My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in the text and bullet points below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you today.

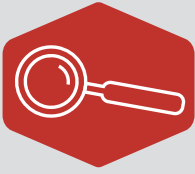
Read these statements and write below or in your journal what these truths say to you:

- The God who graces us with life also graces us with mission (Galatians 1:15).

- No one comes to faith and trust in Jesus apart from God revealing himself through the Holy Spirit working in their heart (vv. 15-16).

- The only source of truth is the Word of God (1:16-21).

- The greatest way to silence critics in your life is to live with consistency (1:22-24).



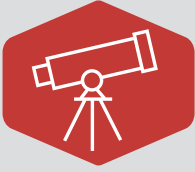
The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:

- Circle and write down any recurring words in this passage.
- Where is this passage taking place?
- When is this passage occurring?
- Why is this passage important?
- What is happening in this passage?
- How does this passage apply to my life?

- Write out your faith story in three sections: 1) What was your life like before Christ? 2) How was Christ revealed in your life? 3) What is your life like now after Christ? Then share your faith story with a friend in two minutes or less.
- Can you remember events where God was at work in your life *before* He was revealed to you?
- Explain how personal experience (subjectivity) and God's unchanging truth (objectivity) work together in our walk with God.
- How can you live your life in a way that will give God more praise, honor, and glory?



Upward and Outward Focus (Telescope)

How does the Scripture affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers in your journal.

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about the text you just studied. How did these verses help deepen your love for God?

- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate this love to others?



Using My *Fire Bible*®

Read the Fire Bible study notes for the following verse and article and then answer the accompanying questions.

- Read Galatians 1:15. Then describe what it means to you to be set apart.
- In your *Fire Bible* index, locate and read the article titled “Spiritual Separation for Believers.” Then answer the following in your own words:
 - » Why in the Old Testament did God want His people to live a separated life?
 - » What are the three types of separation found in the New Testament?
 - » What should the attitude of the believer be toward separation?
 - » What are some of the results in a believer’s life if they refuse to separate from sin and ungodliness?