

The Truth of the Gospel
Galatians 1:11-24
Tampa Covenant Church
30 August 2026

Proposition: Because the gospel comes from God through Jesus Christ and transforms us, we're called to receive it by faith and proclaim it to others to the glory of God.

FCF: Measuring the gospel by human authority and experience rather than submitting ourselves to its revealed truth.

RHF: Through his person and work, Jesus Christ is the revelation of God's saving power and the very substance of the gospel we receive and proclaim.

(#1) Introduction:

We're continuing our fall series entitled, *"The Gospel of Freedom."* As Lou shared last week; Paul began this letter with astonishment at how quickly these churches were departing from the grace of God in Christ and turning to a different/distorted gospel. And Paul emphatically asserted there is no other gospel. Thus, the consequence for laying aside the truth of the gospel for another was to be under a curse.

Paul's language in this letter is intense and direct and should give us pause in asking ourselves; do we understand the truth of the gospel we've received? I remember a few years ago, there was a family in our church and their daughter was completing a school project that concluded with an interview with the pastor. When we met for the interview, the father hit record on his cellphone and the daughter asked me two simple questions. 1) Do you believe the gospel is important; yes. 2) How would you define the gospel? When I looked down and saw the phone still recording, all of a sudden this sweet little interview felt more like an inquisition as I found myself reaching a little deeper for an answer that I should've already had in my back pocket.

As Christians, the gospel is something we all know but admittedly we can get a little tongue tied when put on the spot. And sometimes we can overlook the objective truth of the gospel and tend to speak more subjectively. What the gospel does for us; the peace it gives us; and how it benefits us. And as wonderful as those things are; they don't make the gospel true. We'll see today that the gospel is true because it originates from God and centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ, who secures our redemption from sin and death. It's a gospel we receive by faith alone; it transforms us we're called to proclaim it to others for God's glory. So let's look to the Lord in **prayer and (#2) then** we'll look to his word.

Gospel Revelation: *Revelation of Christ (vv.11-12)*

(#3) We look in v.10 and Paul is clear that in terms of his ministry, he's not seeking the approval of men. As we'll see later in the letter, it seems he was being accused of adjusting his message based on his audience. But Paul has just pronounced damnation on anyone preaching a different gospel and that doesn't sound like a people pleaser. And he asserts, *"If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."* We pull away **(#4 Blank) from this verse** and Paul sounds a bit defensive. But it's not the type of defensiveness we're used to. Someone lashing out to save face or because their pride has been wounded.

Paul isn't defending his ego; what's ultimately at stake is the truth of the gospel. See, Paul was also being accused of receiving his gospel from the apostles in Jerusalem and then he somehow modified it before

preaching it to the Galatian churches.¹ And so Paul's aim is to establish his authority as an apostle so that the Galatians might recognize the divine origin and authority of the gospel he preached to them. And with that, he tells them how he received this gospel and we'll see why it matters for (#5) us. He says in v.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."*

(#6) This is basically the same language Paul employed in his greeting, *"Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ..."* So Paul is clear his apostleship isn't manmade; he was commissioned by Christ and the same is true of his gospel; it didn't come to him through the agency of man (#7) but through a revelation of Christ.² John Calvin said in his institutes, that the gospel is the clear manifestation of the mystery of Christ. (#8) And continues that the *"gospel," taken in the broad sense, includes those testimonies of his mercy and fatherly favor which God gave to the patriarchs of old. In a higher sense, however, the word refers, I say, to the proclamation of the grace manifested in Christ.*³ The Confession amplifies Calvin's point. Under the law, God's covenant of grace was revealed through promises, prophecies, sacrifices and ordinances that pointed forward to Christ and built up God's people up in faith in the promised Messiah. But under the gospel, Christ himself; the substance has been revealed.⁴ Because all the promises of God find their fulfillment in Christ.

(#9 Blank) What does this mean for us? It means we can trust the gospel. Because we know its source (God himself) and we know its substance (Jesus Christ our Lord). The entire message we receive and proclaim centers on his person and work. He's the living reality in whom all of God's redemptive purposes find their fulfillment. And so, the next time someone asks us to define the gospel; our response has to be much more than how it makes us feel and the health, wealth and prosperity we enjoy now; because when those favorable circumstances turn southward in our lives; so does the sufficiency of the gospel. As recipients of God's free grace through the work of Christ, we do live in this world with all it has to offer. But the gospel also points us to that other world that offers infinitely more. To the place where true righteousness, perfect peace and everlasting joy is fully realized because the Lord is there.

And so we continue our sojourn through this world to that heavenly city with gratitude because through the blood of Christ, we're no longer estranged from God but have been brought near. And though our earthly circumstances often change; that fact will never change; the Lord is near. And this is what enables us to endure seasons of suffering, pain and hardship in this world; because no matter what comes our way; we're secured in Christ. And through worship our hearts are saturated in the truth that gospel hope doesn't rest on our circumstances; it rests on the finished work of Christ. Therefore, we look to Jesus and set our hope on him; the founder and perfecter of our faith. And so Paul assures these Galatians that the gospel wasn't something given to him through the agency of man but was received through a revelation of Christ. (#10) Now he continues his defense of the truth of his gospel and his apostleship by recounting his life before Christ and his transformation by the grace of God.

Gospel Transformation: *Through the sovereign grace of God (vv.13-14)*

(#11) He writes beginning in v.13, *"For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ 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 isn't exaggerating about his former life in Judaism. (#12 Blank) In Acts 8, he not only witnessed Stephen's execution but

also approved of it. And he ravaged the church, dragging Christians out of their homes and hauling them off to prison. And in all of that, his conscience was actually clean before God as he was advancing in the Jewish faith and zealous for the traditions passed down to him. In Philippians, he talks about the confidence he had in himself; circumcised on the 8th day, from the tribe of Benjamin, as to the law a Pharisee, as to his zeal, a persecutor of the church; and as to righteousness under the law; he considered himself blameless. Paul wasn't searching for Christ but that never negated God's sovereign plan for his life.

(#13) He says in v.15, *"But when he who had set me apart before I was born,"* Paul uses language reminiscent of the prophet Jeremiah's calling in Chap 1. Before Paul even took his first breath, God had already set him apart for a special purpose. And at God's appointed time, he called Paul by his grace and revealed Christ to him that he might preach him among the Gentiles. Paul understood his calling in continuity with the OT prophets; God's promised salvation was now going out to the nations through the proclamation of Christ and that included the Galatians.⁵ **(#14 Blank) And here's** what's amazing about this... while Paul was persecuting Christians, advancing in Judaism, and zealously guarding the traditions passed to him; God was providentially working through all of that in calling Paul to himself.

And this is why we continue to entreat God on behalf of friends, loved ones and co-workers who seem far away from him right now. Because it's not our job to try to figure out the mind of God. But we're called to strive in prayer on their behalf knowing that their resistance is no match for his sovereign grace. See, Paul didn't wake up one day and decide to become an apostle. He wants the Galatians and us to know that it was God's gracious initiative; God set him apart from birth, God called him by grace, and God was pleased to reveal the risen Christ to him. After falling to the ground on the road to Damascus; he looked up and what he heard was not the voice of final judgment but the voice of grace; "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you Lord?" "I am Jesus, who you are persecuting." And from that moment forward; his life would never be the same.

Church, what we see in Paul's life is that God's grace is powerful enough to overcome sinful resistance.⁶ But he doesn't drag those who are far from him, kicking and screaming into the kingdom. No, when his grace and mercy bid a person come, the heart is changed and they freely come and are lovingly received as a daughter and as a son; no matter their past. With their sin and rebellion forgiven and their guilt and shame covered by Christ; they freely confess; *"Not my will, Lord, but yours be done."* Church, that's gospel transformation. It's not something none of us readied ourselves for or accomplished on our own. It was a divine change wrought in us through the grace of God in Christ. In placing emphasis on God's gracious initiative in his life, Paul is leaving no doubt concerning the divine origin of the gospel and the fact that his apostolic is God's doing; not his own.⁷

And now Paul bolsters that claim by telling us what happened during those first few years after his conversion, which serves as further evidence that his gospel wasn't from the other apostles.⁸ **(#15)** Picking up in v.16b he writes, "I did not immediately consult with anyone;" literally, flesh and blood; meaning he didn't immediately consult with human beings about the gospel he received. Nor did he in v.17, go up to Jerusalem to those who those were apostles before him. But here's what he did; he went away to Arabia and then returned to Damascus.⁹ After three years, he finally went up to Jerusalem where he visited Cephas (Peter) and stayed for 15 days. They most likely discussed matters of faith. But after three years of preaching the gospel he received from God and meditating on the OT Scriptures; it's hard

to imagine Paul was being discipled by Peter. And he's emphatic that he saw none of the other apostles; with the exception of James, the Lord's brother.

(#16) And in v.20, Paul does something extraordinary; he basically places himself under oath before God, *"In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!"* Paul is invoking God himself as a witness that what he's saying is true. (#17 Blank) Think about everything Paul just said; after conversion he didn't consult with anyone, he didn't go up to Jerusalem, instead he went to Arabia and Damascus and when he did make it to Jerusalem; he was only with Peter for 15 days and only saw James. And he stands on all of it by calling on God as his witness. So there's no reason to believe he learned the gospel from any of the apostles then modified and preached his own version to the Galatians. Now, we don't know if this was convincing enough for his Galatian audience; nothing in Scripture details their response. But church, may it be convincing enough for us. And may we depart from here today knowing this same gospel which has now come to us is not a man-made gospel but a divine revelation from God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Conclusion:

And Paul has a final piece of evidence for us to consider; he writes in v.21 that he went north to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Although he was unknown personally to the churches of Judea; his story was getting around. (#18) We read in v.23, *"They only were hearing it said, 'He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.'"* How about that for a transformation; the man who tried to destroy the faith is now preaching the faith! (#19) And look what he says next, *"and they glorified God because of me."* None of that testifies to the greatness of Paul; rather it testifies to the greatness of God's grace in using Paul as his chosen instrument to proclaim the truth of the gospel. (#20) John Stott said, *"They did not glorify Paul, but God in Paul, recognizing that Paul was a signal trophy of God's grace."*¹⁰ As the trophy, Paul doesn't get the credit; God does! Because Paul's transformed life served as the evidence of what God's grace accomplished in and through him.

And the same is true of us church. (#21 Blank) In Christ, we're also signal trophies of God's grace. Our stories may not be as dramatic as Paul's but the grace that transformed him has transformed us. Through Christ, we've been adopted into the family of God and brought into this great redemption story that stretches from eternity past to eternity future. And just as that is true; it's also true that we'll encounter various setbacks, temptations, worries and disappointments this week (home, work, and other contexts) but none of those things can supplant the truth of the gospel because in all of it we still behold the grace manifested in Christ.

This is our story; we know where it comes from, who stands at the center. So, we're free to declare the beauty of this grace to those who are striving to justify themselves before God apart from the gospel. And we're free to demonstrate the sacrificial love and mercy of our Savior to those who are broken, discouraged and in desperate need of gospel hope in this life. And the goal is never our glory; but that others may see the wonder of God's grace at work in us and glorify him. And through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit; may we remain faithful toward that end. Amen.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 97.

² While a few scholars deny it, it seems relatively clear that the “revelation” Paul has in view is particularly the “revealing” (ἀποκαλύψαι [apokalypsai]) of Jesus Christ to Paul at the time of his conversion (see v. 16). This being the case, it would seem likely that we should construe the genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive: the truth of the gospel came to Paul when God revealed Jesus Christ to him. But the immediate context of the phrase, with its emphasis on the source of knowledge, could instead suggest a source or subjective genitive: the truth of the gospel came to Paul when Jesus Christ revealed it to him; hence the “from” in many English versions [NIV, HCSB, NLT]). The meaning we have given “revelation” certainly favors the objective genitive over the subjective; but this is one of those texts where it might be best to refrain from locking the meaning into either option: perhaps Paul simply means that the “revelation” he received is bound up with, and has to do with, Jesus Christ. Ibid, 95.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 & 2, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 425.

⁴ See Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap 7.6

⁵ Moisés Silva, “Galatians,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1210.

⁶ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 119.

⁷ Silva, 1210.

⁸ Ibid, 1210.

⁹ Many scholars, posit the three years were either spent between Arabia and Damascus or it could be the time period after his conversion.

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 36.