

When It Pleased God

Epistle to the Galatians

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Open your Bibles and look in Galatians 1. This has always been a precious passage, portion of scripture right here to me. It's a precious testimony and I truly believe that all that are the Lord's can identify with what Paul gives here as his testimony of grace. In fact, the title is simply "When It Pleased God." When it pleased God. When will a man be saved? When it pleases God. Let's read it here in Galatians 1 beginning with verse 10.

He said, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men?" He was taking a lot of flack over the message of grace and the gospel that he was proclaiming. In fact, there were different preachers coming through behind him in this region of Galatia that were denouncing him as even being an apostle of Christ and dissuading many of those to whom Paul had preached. But he said now, "do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Dear friends, the message of the gospel is not pleasing to men. In fact, it drives a deep wedge between what men think and what God reveals. There's a clear distinction and where the gospel is faithfully, faithfully set forth you're going to find that wedge being driven.

Like old Rolfe Barnard said one time, "Whenever you preach the gospel, preach for a verdict." When people go out, they out to know on what side they stand, and I believe that that's what we see here. Paul takes his stand. He said, "if yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." You can't take this gospel and try to water it down or make it palatable to men, or try to come in the back door with it. You've just got to declare it. You've got to set Christ forth, Christ and him crucified.

Then he says, "But I certify you," verse 11, "brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man." Well, if it's not after man, then why even try to change it or make it palatable to man? This is his point here.

"For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." And here it is, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I

might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed." What a testimony and, what? "They glorified God in me."

It's notable here that I've just read a whole portion from verse 10 all the way to verse 24, Paul describing a conversion experience and never used once the term "I got saved." In fact, you can read throughout all of scripture and never find that term used. That's popular in religion, you'll have people ask you how many got saved during the service, or when did you get saved, the problem with that terminology is that it implies something you procure to get it. When did you get saved? But that's not the salvation of scripture.

If you look over in 1 Corinthians 1:18, here's language that the scripture uses with regard to salvation. It's not a getting of salvation, there's no such thing as getting saved, salvation is a gift. It's a gift. Here in 1 Corinthians 1:18 Paul said, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." It doesn't say "but unto us which got saved, which are saved." There's a sense here in salvation it's not just something that's happened but continues. We are saved. There's a continuing, the keeping of that salvation, but it's the power of God, isn't it? It's through the power of God.

Over here in Ephesians 2 look how it's used. Ephesians 2. This is our state. It says in verse 1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." A dead person can't do anything. That's the state of a sinner outside of Christ. That's the state of a sinner up to the moment that the Spirit is pleased to reveal Christ in him. He's dead. He can hear with his ears, he can think with his mind, but spiritually he's dead.

What does it take? Verse 4, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye," what, "are saved)." It doesn't say "ye got saved, ye are." That's that salvation, the tense there is the perfect. It means that at some point in time the Lord did the saving and that saving continues on forever. It's the Lord's work. It's the Lord's doing.

And down in verse 8, it's attributed wholly to the grace of God. Not even to faith. A lot of people read this backward. They say, "Well, by faith you're saved through grace." That's not what it says, "by grace are ye saved through faith." Faith is the fruit of the grace of God being manifested in the heart of the sinner. That's why any sinner believes. Where the Lord has been pleased to give the life of Christ, that comes first, faith is the fruit, but it takes the very grace of God.

Then you look in 2 Timothy 1:9. If you're the Lord's and someone asks you that question, you know, "When were you saved?" Well, when it pleased God. That's a good answer, when it pleased God. Here in 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul says, "Who hath saved us." It's hard even to fit the phrase "got saved" into that, isn't it? "Who hath saved us." It's not something I do, it's something God does. "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works," it's not God looking and seeing that you'd believe and therefore favoring you with salvation. No, "not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace," and when was that purpose established, when was that grace purposed? "Which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." That eternal, electing grace of God in Christ Jesus, purposed from even before the world began. That means even before the first sinner ever fell. Was God surprised by Adam's fall? No. Christ was already there as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He'd already purposed to have a people out of a fallen race. Well, what a glorious truth it is.

Now coming back here to Galatians 1, the Apostle Paul gives us a clear distinction between any work of man and a true work of God. The answer to that question, "When will a sinner be converted?" When it pleases God. When it pleases God. The good pleasure of God in the salvation of sinners, dear friends, is fundamental to the gospel message. It's fundamental to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you look over in Isaiah 53 in verse 10, Isaiah 53:10, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him." We're talking about the Lord Jesus Christ here, pleased God the Father to bruise him. That word means to crush, just like taking a seed and running it through a millstone and making it just crushing making it flour. That's the term. "He hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and," what, "the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand." When Christ hung on that cross, it was the very pleasure of God himself, the purpose of God, that's what that word means. It pleased God to put his Son on the cross that he might be a just God and a Savior. If you ask anybody wants to know what's God pleased with? Well, he's pleased with his Son. He's pleased with what his Son accomplished.

It says he'll be satisfied. He'll see his seed and be satisfied and he'll be satisfied with the effect of that death too. You know, if it's like preachers are telling us today that, you know, Christ died for everybody but the majority end up in hell anyway, there's no satisfaction there. That's not a satisfied God and certainly not a satisfied Christ. But it says the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. That means every one that God purposed to save he's going to have. They'll prosper in his hand. It's not in man raising his hand and saying I believe, it's Christ taking sinners from the Father into his hand and saying, "I'll be their substitute. I'll be their satisfaction. I'll be their Redeemer. Not one shall perish." You see, that's salvation. That's salvation.

We see the pleasure of God not only in the death of Christ but in willing, in the willing of those that he's pleased to save. If you look over in Ephesians 1, what I want you to see here and ask you this question, as you read the scriptures, don't listen to what men say but read the scriptures, is there any part of this that is attributed to man? In Ephesians 1

beginning with verse 4 it says, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him," and then, "in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself," how? According to the good pleasure of our will? No, "according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Boy, I'll tell you, if the Lord has opened your eyes to Christ, that's a glorious truth right there, to realize that if I've come to him, it was all God's doing in the first place. Left to myself, I'd still be blind, I'd still be dead. I wouldn't even have a desire. I might have a desire to know a Christ of my imagination but I'd never have a desire to know the Christ revealed here in this word. But to love him, to follow him, to serve him, to will him, desire him, that's a work of God.

That's a work of God and it's through the work of the Spirit, coming back here to Galatians 1, it says here in verse 15, Paul said, "when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb," his hand was on him already from his mother's womb but, "called me by his grace." There's a time. All that God has chosen, all that Christ has redeemed, in time the Spirit is going to bring, going to call, going to cause to hear. "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me." What a work of grace it is.

Well, how is it accomplished? Let's look here at these verses for a few moments. In verses 11 and 12, here's the first point: it's entirely of God. It's entirely of God. Paul said, "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man." Paul is attesting to it, "If the gospel that gives all the glory to God in Christ, if I'm preaching it, I didn't get it from man. I didn't learn it in the school." He sat at the feet of Gamaliel, he didn't learn it there. He grew up, you talk about people who say, "Well, if you could just get back to the original language," he grew up with the original language. He knew the scriptures in the original language in Hebrew but it wasn't the knowledge of those languages that caused him to know Christ. It was God. He said the gospel is not after man, it's not after man's methods, it's not after man's devising, it's not after man's manner, man's promoting, and I'll tell you, that's the reason you can say that most of what people call the gospel today being preached in the world is not the gospel. Just listen to who gets the glory, listen to who's doing the promoting, listen to the methods that are being employed. It's all man-centered. That ought to tell you something right there.

Paul said, "the gospel which was preached of me is not after man." You know, people are surprised like Brother Mike was telling me, you know, someone asked him, "You don't give invitations at the end of your services? You're not asking people to walk an aisle, raise a hand, come forward, do something?" No, because the gospel is not after man. If God's going to do a work in a heart, he's doing to do it in that heart and people say, "Well, how are you going to know?" They'll tell you. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. They're going to desire to identify with him in the waters of baptism. They're going to desire to identify with his people. They're going to desire to sit there and hear this gospel.

Can't you tell when someone's been made alive? Sure, but it's not after man. It's not after man's wisdom. It's not after man's power. It's not after man's will. All this talk about, "Well, if you'd just be willing." Who will be willing? "Thy people shall be willing in the

day of thy power," is what the scriptures say. It's God making the sinner willing, not man. It's not after man's works. Don't you think by rolling up your sleeves and knocking on doors that percentage-wise if I just knock on enough doors, eventually somebody is going to get saved. That's the way I was taught when I was back in school. They said, you know, that the law of salesmanship, percentages, is, you know, sooner or later you're going to get somebody saved and, boy, you went out there thinking that. "Well, there's one more no that I've had to endure to get to the yes." That's terrible. That's blasphemy. It's not after man's works or wisdom or will or way but it's of God.

He said in verse 12, "I neither received it of man," and I believe the Lord does employ human means through his word, the preaching of the gospel. What we read right here is the word that the Spirit inspired through man, there's no question, but I'll tell you, no man's going to receive this word, no one is going to hear the gospel unless, first of all, the Spirit of God does a work in his heart, makes him alive.

Don't you ever forget that. That's why Ezekiel when the Lord took him out to that valley of dry bones said, "Can these dry bones live?" He said, "Lord, thou knowest." And the Lord said, "Prophecy to those dry bones." And he did, he preached, he prophesied, and there was a shaking and rattling of the bones it says in Ezekiel 37, but it says there was no life. We tend to get a little excited every time we see a little bit of movement, somebody having some understanding, they can repeat back to you maybe some of the things they've heard. That's not salvation. You can assess these things in your mind and still not know the Christ that they're about. It takes the work of the Spirit to reveal Christ in your heart.

That's what Paul's saying, "I received it not of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." There's a good definition right there of what the regenerating work of the Spirit is, it's the revelation of Christ, to have Christ revealed in the heart, not just to the mind but in the heart. I believe, dear friends, that this is the answer to when is a person converted. I ask you the question, "When was Christ made wisdom to you?" Because that's what conversion is, it's the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, to see him as he is in truth, to see yourself as you are before him, a wretched sinner, unworthy, and yet to see him as that Savior, that substitute, that Redeemer that God has established, and to be brought to seek your all in him, your righteousness, forgiveness, all glory is in him.

I believe that's what this is describing here. That's how the work of grace is accomplished, it's entirely of God and, secondly, it's by the revelation of Jesus Christ. If you look over in 1 Corinthians 1:30, and I know I quote this verse often but it's because it was one of the first verses that the Lord was pleased to teach my soul after he opened my heart and caused me to...I'd read this for years but I'd never seen what it said and I couldn't. I was reading it just with my mind but God being your teacher and opening the heart, listen to what it says here, verse 30, 1 Corinthians 1, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus," of God are ye in Christ Jesus. There it is, it's all of God, "who of God," speaking now of Christ, "is made unto us wisdom."

Do you see the wisdom of God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ? He is wisdom. Do you see the wisdom of God in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? The death of the Lord Jesus Christ answers the question how God can be just and justify a guilty sinner. I'll tell you, if the Spirit's done a work of grace in your heart, your eyes are open to see there in him the very wisdom of God. Darius the king labored all night without finding the solution of how he could be just to that law of the Medes and the Persians which cannot be changed and at the same time deliver Daniel. He couldn't find a solution. He had to end up throwing Daniel into the lions' den but God found the solution. God showed him where it was. He shut the lions' mouths. Why? There was another man in there, the substitute.

There's the wisdom of God. You'll labor all your lifetime trying to figure out how to satisfy a holy God, dear friends, the wisdom of God teaches you if I'm to find satisfaction with God, be accepted before a holy and just God, it's got to be through this one, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose life, perfect life worked out a perfect righteousness and his death satisfied all the just demands of God the Father that he might be just and justify one like me. I'll tell you, that's more than just knowledge, that's the wisdom of God revealed in Christ. "Wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." I believe that where God has been pleased to reveal Christ in a heart, that's what you find the lips doing, glorying in the Lord and that is through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

So it's entirely of God, secondly, it's by the revelation of Jesus Christ, thirdly, in verses 13 through 15 of Galatians 1, it's according to the outworking of God's eternal purpose. Paul speaks here of being separated from the mother's womb, verse 15. What's he talking about there? Well, I believe he's talking about what some of the old writers called prevenient grace, in other words, God saw him already even before he was born, saw him as one of those that he had chosen from before time, and even from his womb his hand was upon him in a special way. You say, "Well, didn't he for awhile persecute the church?" Yes, but all of that was according to God's purpose as well, to bring him to that point where his path would cross with the Lord Jesus Christ.

God never took his hand off him. I believe that's the sense here, and there's, you know, scriptures talk about God's general mercies toward the just and the unjust, that's true. The thieves out there are fed. They breathe this air. They drink water. They live their lives. They benefit from God's mercies even though they're reprobate, but in a special way those that God has chosen, his hand is upon them even in their rebellion, even in their false way his hand is upon them guiding, directing, keeping, moving until that time when he's pleased to reveal Christ in him. That's what Paul's describing here. Even in false religion, works religion as he describes in verses 13 and 14, he said, "You've heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." And there might be different ones here that could probably give the same testimony. I know I never went out and physically killed anybody with these hands but I'll tell you, in false religion I've slayed an awful lot of people. For years I preached a false gospel. I was

zealous in it and I was zealous just like Paul in the traditions of my fathers. When I went to school, I learned techniques, I learned methods and I was zealous, going to airports, going door-to-door, going out on these mission trips, all of these things. And I think about different ones that I stood before and in the name of God pointed them to a way that is not Christ. It was nothing but works religion. I think about that but I have to say that even in that, the Lord's hand was upon me just like Paul, separated from my mother's womb. I didn't know it at the time but I do now. Why? He called me by his grace. There it is, the very purpose of God, the outworking of God's eternal purpose is going to, in time, bring that sinner that he's purposed to save to Christ. I do not believe that there's one sinner that God elected and that Christ redeemed that's ever going to die in ignorance. It might come right down to the wire like the thief on the cross but God's going to open that sinner's eyes and cause him to see that he is indeed a sinner and see that Christ alone is his hope for salvation. I believe that. That's why I preach the gospel. I'm just nothing but an under-shepherd on the trail of God's sheep and you run into an awful lot of goats along the way but you just keep going. Why? Because God has that people that he's purposed to save.

That's what Paul's talking about here "called by his grace." This calling always follows separation. If there's a calling of grace, it's because God has already set that sinner aside in his purpose and will to save him. If you look over in Romans 8, and if the Lord has brought you to Christ, dear friend, you can look back on your life, every bit of wandering, every turn of the road, every step that you took, you might have been lost at that point in doing it but God was directing it. God was directing it.

It says here in Romans 8:30, "Moreover whom he did predestinate," what, "them he also called." He's not going to leave you in ignorance. "And whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" Oh, that effectual grace of God, calling sinners from darkness because that's what we're born in, darkness, calling them from darkness to light, calling them from condemnation. If we were to stay in that state in which we were born, we would most certainly be condemned but God be praised he's not going to condemn one for whom Christ has died. He's going to bring them to himself.

All right, well, fourthly here, this work of grace, it's entirely of God, it's by the revelation of Christ, it's the outworking of God's eternal purpose, but simply put here, friends, verse 16, it's Christ in you. Christ in you. Do you see that, how Paul puts it? Christ in you. You know, I can affect people's minds logically just with doctrine. I could stand up here, I could week by week, I could take the doctrine of election and show you how it's logical. I could take the doctrine of depravity and show you how it's true. I could take and preach to you a series on the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and show you how it's reasonable that Christ should have everyone for whom he died. But dear friends, that's not salvation. To know these things in your mind and to be able to repeat them, to state them, even state them as true, that's not salvation.

Here's salvation, verse 16, Paul said, "He called me by his grace." And what is the evidence of being called by his grace? "To reveal his Son in me." Christ in truth, no

question, but I'm still learning of him. I'm still learning of him but revealed in me. Christ in you, that's the fruit of God's will and pleasure. Christ in you, the glory of his person, the fullness of his grace, the necessity and completeness of his salvation. Not just seeing it in the gospel. You know, I get just real uneasy because I was there for seven years and someone says, "Well, I could see that in scripture." Well, you can see it in scripture and still not have Christ in your heart. It's Christ in you the hope of glory. It's not just objectively seeing it in the gospel but experientially knowing it in the heart.

Let me show you that in just a second here. Romans 10, look at verse 9. It says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus," now there's no question that where God has done a work of grace there's a confessing of the Lord Jesus with the mouth. That confession, that word "confess" means to say the same thing about the Lord Jesus Christ as God says. It's to receive the record that God has given of his Son.

But notice that confession with the mouth is joined, it says "and shalt believe in thine heart." There's where a true work of grace is, what the mouth declares is what's already been revealed in the heart otherwise it's just honoring the Lord with the lips.

It says, "and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." That doesn't just mean believe in the fact that God raised him from the dead but it's God showing you why he raised his Son from the dead. Why did he raise him? Well, full satisfaction was made and if God's satisfied with his Son, the death of his Son, I'm satisfied as a sinner.

There's my satisfaction in him because it says, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." It's not with the doing that you come to righteousness. It's with the heart, God revealing in the heart Christ, God's wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. But the work's already been done in the heart. Do you see that? Christ in you, that's the evidence of a work of grace.

Then fifthly here coming back in Galatians 1, I want to say this, this is clear here to me too: it requires no consultation with man. If you've got to come and ask somebody, you know, to make something plain or try to work this thing out and try to reason in your mind, that's just not it. Do you see what it says here in verse 16, "To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." He wasn't looking for somebody to come along and approve this confession or profession. I fear when people come and they run to the pastor and they want the pastor to give them assurance, they want the pastor to reassure them. That won't do it. It's like a man that came to Henry Mahan one time and said, "You know, I just, I feel I'm lost. What can you do to help me?" And he said, "Well, who told you you were lost?" And he said, "Well, I believe God's told me I'm lost." And he said, "Well, then God's the one that's got to save you. Go deal with God." Now modern-day man, man-centered thing would say, "Well, let's get down on our knees right here," and the preacher would be putting his arm around him and, you know, trying to give him some assurance. "Now when you get up, don't doubt."

Paul said, "I conferred not with flesh and blood." He didn't have to stand there reasoning or debating the matter within himself. He knew that God had done a work. In fact, years went by. A lot of times you think, well, this was immediately evident. Didn't he say here after three years, verse 22, "And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ"? What would most modern-day so-called evangelists do if someone like the Apostle Paul were converted? They'd be tramping him all over the countryside testifying, getting him on tv, promoting him. He said, "They'd heard heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed." They learned it as God was pleased to cause his path to cross with different ones. That's a glorious thing. That's a glorious thing.

Well, the final thing that I want to bring out here, there's a lot here but here it is in verse 24, a true work of God's grace when the Lord's people hear of it, it causes them to glorify God for the evident transformation. It'll be evident. It'll be evident to you. It'll be evident to those that are the Lord's. It says, "they glorified God in me," hearing that testimony. I'll tell you, a spirit bears witness with spirit, and when a person the Lord has truly brought that one to Christ, that testimony of that one is going, you're going to listen to it and you're going to say, "That's how the Lord was pleased to do a work in my heart, caused me to see Christ, caused me to glorify him." But that's who gets the glory, it's God.

They glorified God, and I believe in any true work of grace, the bottom line is, I know the Lord uses me and I know he uses this word, I know he uses preachers but you're not going to hear one glorifying the preacher, you're not going to hear one glorifying a method, they'll be glorifying God. Glorifying God.

Ah, those are truly blessed who have this knowledge of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you? Do you? John said whom to know is life eternal. Whom to know is life eternal. I'll tell you, any that do know him, they're loved of God, they are beloved, they're God's favorites and he gives them an interest in his Son and he gives them all the blessings of his grace in him. They're justified how? By his righteousness. They're pardoned how? By his blood. They're accepted how? In him. They have that communion with the Father how? Through the Son. And they live eternally how? In him. It's all to the praise of the glory of his name.

Well, I pray that this has been of help. I know if you're the Lord's you can identify with what I've preached here tonight. And if you're not, I pray the Lord will be pleased to reveal Christ in you. I know that's what it's going to take.