

A Gospel Changed Life

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[0:00] Have you ever been accused of something? Maybe you've been accused of being a coward before.

And if you've been accused of being a coward before, it doesn't take much, something like that, to get on the defensive pretty quick. Well, this morning we're going to look at a passage in which the Apostle Paul is defending himself against a charge of cowardice.

It comes in the phrase of a man-pleaser. There were a certain group of people in the southern region of Galatia at this time when this letter was written that were seeking to distort the gospel that Paul preached.

And they were troubling these recent converts to Christ, these recent Gentile converts to Christ. And one of the things that they were saying was this. Hey, it's okay to believe in Jesus, but in order to be right with God, not only do you have to believe in Jesus, but you need to be circumcised if you're a guy, and you need to observe all the Jewish dietary restrictions, plus you need to get time off for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah and Hanukkah just to make sure you're observing all of the Jewish holy days, and then you'll be right with God.

And out of that, they were saying of the Apostle Paul, Paul is preaching a watered-down gospel to you. He's not telling the whole truth of the gospel because he's not preaching circumcision.

[1:39] And the charge was he's doing that because he's trying to curry favor with you Gentiles. And so Paul responds to this charge in 110.

He says, Am I now seeking the approval of man or of God, or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. Essentially, this passage is the Apostle Paul defending his ministry from an accusation that he's watering down the gospel out of the fear of man.

And so the way that he lays this out is, in verse 10, he makes a claim. If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

That's the claim. And then in 11-12, he offers his first line of evidence, the gospel itself. And then in verses 13-24, he offers a second line of evidence.

He's no man-pleaser because of the gospel and what the gospel has done in his life. And so the point of this passage is this. The gospel of Jesus Christ, the one true gospel, sets us free from the snare of the fear of man so that we can live as servants of Christ among men.

[3:12] The gospel sets us free from the fear of man so that we can live as Christ's servants among men. So let's look at this claim. Let's look at the two different lines of evidence that support this claim.

And the claim, again, is found in 110 where he says, if I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. Now, if you weren't here last week, the apostle Paul lays out the one true gospel in verses 1-5 of chapter 1.

And then 6-9 is this apostolic rumble strip in which he's saying to these Galatians, why are you departing the gospel? And then he goes on as far as to say, hey, if there's someone preaching the gospel to you that is contrary to the gospel I preach, that's adding to faith in Christ alone, let that person be damned.

And then he turns to verse 10 and says, hey, do you think that me, speaking God's damnation on people, do you think that I'm now in doing that seeking the approval of man or of God?

Or am I trying to please man with what I'm saying? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. Three times in verse 10, he raises this issue of the fear of man.

[4:38] He says, the approval of man, am I seeking that? Am I trying to please man? If I'm still trying to please man? The fear of man is when

you're more concerned what people think about you than what God thinks about you.

You're ruled by people's opinions of who you are, how you're living, instead of God. And so what we see going on in verse 10 is the apostle Paul responding to this accusation.

Man pleaser? Seriously? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. Do you see what he's doing there? He's saying, it's one or the other, baby. You're either going to live for what people think about you, or you're going to live as a servant of Christ.

You can only have one master. Let me try to illustrate this. Let's pretend you have a friend who claims to be a Packers fan. He invites you over, you go down into his man cave, and when you go down into his man cave, you can't help but notice all the bears paraphernalia on the wall.

In fact, he has a giant big screen TV, and there is this perpetual loop of the 1985 Bears Super Bowl shuffle being played.

[6:02] Now, according to the rules of fandom, you can't have it both ways. You're either a fan of the Bears, or you're a fan of the Packers.

All in, baby. One or the other. Jesus says something very similar in the Sermon on the Mount, where he says, you can't serve both God and mammon.

It's one or the other. You can only live for one God. And here, the Apostle Paul is saying, you can only live for either what people think about you, the approval of man, or Christ.

Christ. Being a servant of Christ. If you are in this room right now, and you find yourself regularly ruled or controlled by what people think about you, here's what you need to understand about that. That's just not a psychological issue. That's just not a result of the way you were raised with an overbearing mother or an absentee father.

[7:15] At the core of the fear of man is a worship issue. It's idolatry. It's living for a false god.

And when you're ruled by the fear of man, you live a miserable life. I know. I've been there often. In this book by Ed Welch, he is a member of the CCEF staff, the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation out of Philadelphia.

Excellent group of people. He penned this book in 1997, When People Are Big and God Is Small. It's a book about the fear of man and overcoming the fear of man. And at the beginning of the book, he says this, however you put it, the fear of man can be summarized this way.

We replace God with people. Instead of biblically guided fear of the Lord, we fear others. Of course, the fear of man goes by other names. When we are in our teens, it's called peer pressure. When we are older, it's called people pleasing.

Recently, it's been called codependency. With these labels in mind, we can spot the fear of man everywhere. And he then lists a bunch of descriptions of the fear of man. Let me share with you a few. Have you ever struggled with peer pressure?

[8:32] Peer pressure is just a euphemism for the fear of man. Being more concerned with what people think about you than what God thinks about you. It's idolatry. Are you overcommitted? Did you find, do you find it hard to say no when wisdom indicates that you should?

You are a people pleaser. Another euphemism for the fear of man. Being more concerned with what people think about you than what God thinks about you. Do you need something from somebody to fill your love tank?

Is self-esteem a critical concern for you? Do you ever feel as if you might be exposed as an imposter? Are you always second-guessing decisions because of what other people think about you?

Do you feel empty or meaningless? Do you get easily embarrassed? Do you ever lie, especially the little white lies? What about the cover-ups where you are not technically lying with your mouth, you're just trying to cover your shame before people?

Are you jealous of other people? Maybe it's because you're controlled by what they think, what they have. Do other people often make you angry or depressed? Do they make you crazy? If so, maybe they're the controlling center of your life.

[9:40] Do you avoid people? Isn't a hermit dominated by the fear of man? Aren't most diets, even when they are ostensibly under the heading of health, dedicated to impressing others?

And then he sums it up by saying, have all these descriptions missed the mark? When you compare yourself with other people, do you feel good about yourself? Perhaps the most dangerous form of the fear of man is the successful fear of man.

Such people think they've made it. They have more than other people. They feel good about themselves, but their lives are still defined by other people rather than God.

At its core, being a man pleaser, the fear of man is idolatry. And it's something that we don't just get therapy for, it's something we need to repent of.

What Paul is saying here is he's saying, I am no man pleaser. I can't be. Otherwise, I wouldn't be a servant of Christ, living all of who I am for Him.

[10:57] And so in one sense, Paul is saying here, hey, this charge doesn't stick. But maybe you're in the room and you're thinking that charge sticks. Because I'm ruled by what other people think about me.

I spend a lot of time replaying conversations I've had with others. Could it be that you are enslaved by the snare of the fear of man? Proverbs 29, 25.

This morning, what you need to know is that the gospel of Jesus Christ frees us from the snare of the fear of man in order for us to live as servants for Christ before man.

So Paul begins by making this claim, if I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. And then he moves on in verse 11 and 12 to support that claim.

And the first place he goes, his first line of defense is pointing to the gospel itself, the very nature of the gospel. What he doesn't do is this.

[12:12] He says, okay, I've been accused of being a man pleaser, so I wrote the apostles in Jerusalem and they wrote back and I've got this letter and this letter says it's signed by Paul or Peter and by James and John and they say, yeah, this guy's not a man pleaser.

See? See what they say? He doesn't do that. He points to the gospel. He says in verse 11, for I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. You see, he's not a man pleaser because of the gospel. What the gospel is. What does he mean by this?

This gospel preached by me is not man's gospel. It didn't start with man. The gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul proclaimed to these Galatians, the gospel of Jesus Christ that you yourself have heard, this gospel is not a result of human ingenuity.

Nobody thought this up on a whiteboard. The source of the gospel is not human. The source of this gospel that Christ delivered himself for our sins in order to deliver us from this present evil age, this gospel comes from God.

[13:49] What Paul is correcting here is this idea that somehow he thought up the gospel or that he somehow tweaked it or he was given a tweaked version of the gospel.

He's saying, no, no, no. This gospel is not human invention. I didn't get online and get licensed on this gospel by men. Remember in The Wizard of Oz, Dorothy and her gang shows up at the gold castle and they walk in and there's Oz and the big head and then something goes wrong on the sides and then they realize that Oz is actually this itty-bitty professor from Kansas with a big self-esteem problem.

Paul is saying, no, no, no. The gospel isn't that. I'm not behind the gospel. Someone else is.

In verse 12, he says, for I did not receive it from any man nor was I taught it but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ and here is the origin story of the gospel.

the gospel is not born of man. The gospel comes from God. I received it, the gospel, through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

[15:19] That word revelation is this sense of disclosure, God pulling back the curtain of being able to see something that God alone allows you to see. here's the gospel and what Paul is talking about in verse 12 but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ, he's talking about that moment in his life on the road to Damascus in Acts chapter 9 where the risen Christ intersects his life and dramatically reorients Paul from being a man pleaser to a servant of Christ.

Paul's saying this message that I preach to you I received it as a revelation from Jesus Christ from God.

This is God's message to you. I'm no man pleaser because the message I preach is God's message. God's message to save sinful humanity from the consequences of their sin.

Now here's the connection I want to help you see. Because the gospel is God's message to save it's a message about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That's the power of it. because this is God's message about what God had done on the cross it's God's power to change sinners.

[17:03] Because it's from God it's God's power to change. That's why in Romans 1.16 the apostle Paul says I am not ashamed of the gospel.

I fear no man. I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is God's power unto salvation for all who believe. Because this message that the risen Christ had entrusted to Paul himself is God's message it is able to do things that no human can do.

So here's the line of argument so far. Paul makes a claim hey I'm no man pleaser I'm a servant of Christ I live for him now. Because of the gospel what this gospel is it's it's God's message to sinful humanity it alone has the power to change people.

so let's apply it this way. Two things first is this what you need to understand is that this gospel is God's revelation.

[18:21] I don't know about you but sometimes you can hear the word gospel so much you can forget what it actually is. God's message to us God making his appeal to us to be reconciled to him God's power to us to change us from beginning to end to save from beginning to end so the first question I want to ask you this morning is this have you forgotten the nature of the gospel that it's God's message and his power the second way to apply it is to realize like Paul that the gospel is our first line of defense we go to the gospel daily to inform who we are in Christ the gospel frees us from slavery to sin and enslaves us to Christ you see the blood of Jesus not just set us free to do whatever we wanted to do the blood of Jesus set us free from sin so that now we can live for Christ and his will the gospel is God's ongoing provision of power for us to rescue us from the fear of man it reminds us again and again we are not our own in just a few verses

Paul is going to say this I have been crucified with Christ and I've been crucified Christ how does it go I've been crucified with Christ I hear all that I'm not hearing it though I've been crucified it's no longer I who live but Christ lives in me in the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me that's how Paul is saying I'm a servant of Christ now maybe you remember Philippians 1 21 for me to live is Christ and to die is gain maybe you remember 1 Corinthians 5 15 and he died for all that those who live may no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised the gospel doesn't free us to do anything we want to do the gospel frees us from slavery to sin from the fear of man so that we would serve Christ this gospel is

God's message and God's power that's the first line of Paul's argument of his support the second line of Paul's support is found in 13 verses 13 through 24 again Paul is saying hey I'm not a man pleaser I am a servant of Christ because of what this gospel is and 13 through 24 what this gospel has done in my life see in verses 13 through 24 Paul begins to lay out his life for us he shares his testimony with us he says look in verses 13 through 14 he shows us what he was like before his conversion and then in verses 15 through 17 he shows us what happened at his conversion and then in verses 18 through 24 he shows us what happened three years after his conversion and it's all there to help us see about what the gospel is and the effect on this man he's no man pleaser he's

Christ's servant so in verses 13 and 14 he tells us what he was like before his before his conversion he says for you have heard of my former life in Judaism and two things come out I was a persecutor of the church you see that in verse 13 violently tried to destroy it in verse 14 he says I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my father so much so I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people he was a persecutor of the church if you look at the book of Acts when Paul comes on the scene he comes on the scene as one who is causing great harm to

the people Jesus has bought with his own blood he throws in his lot to put someone to death he's saying oh yeah you deserve to die Christian he was breathing out lies and violence he was having people rounded up and bound in

Acts 9 he is given official authorization by the Jewish high priest to go to Damascus and bring back any Christian bound he was a persecutor of the church he was not loving his neighbor and what seems to have been fueling that we see in verse 14 he was a zealot extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers notice he wasn't extremely jealous for God's name for the traditions of men he was moving up in the pharisaical ladder advancing more than other people his age if he would have been in the Jerusalem the Shalom magazines top 40 at 40 he's been very impressive what seems to have been controlling the apostle

[24:21] Paul before he was converted by Christ is a fear of man he was a man pleaser he was so zealous for the traditions of his fathers and he was seeking to impress a small group of people he was so driven by this he was willing to do violence to other people cast his vote to see them killed we got to ask a question here what drives a person to such extreme measures to do things like this in 110 for

I am now seeking the approval of man or God or am I trying to please man if I were still trying to please man I would not be a servant of Christ ironically Paul's saying hey I'm no man pleaser now but 15 20 years ago before I was converted oh yeah I was a man pleaser the successful fear of man guy I was moving up in the world isn't it scary how our fear of a small group of people can result in our hurting other people maybe you're here this morning and you're just being honest with yourself and you're thinking you know what this sounds a lot like me I am willing to hurt others for the sake of my reputation in the eyes of a few if that's you you have a lot in common with

Paul before he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and it begs the question what do you think it takes to change a person who's driven by man pleasing to become something other what do you think it takes it takes an act of God an act of God's grace so we move from what Paul was like before his conversion to 15 16 and 17 Paul at his conversion in verse 15 we read but when he who had set me apart before I was born that but is God's grace God interrupting God's sovereign grace interrupting the plans of this man pleaser it's

God's grace butting in so to speak the apostle Paul says but he who set me apart before I was born that's prophet talk it's like Jeremiah 1 5 it reveals that God had a plan for Paul even before he was born that God's plan for Paul in his big scheme of salvation included having to rescue Paul from being a persecutor and a zealot it was all part of God's plan he called me by his grace who called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me do you see that in verse verse 15 excuse me 16 was pleased to reveal his son to me literally the original language says pleased to reveal his son in me here's what here's what

I think Paul's getting at when he was on the road to Damascus he was moving to Damascus driven by this persecution of this zeal to please win the approval of man and then he meets the risen Christ says Saul Saul why are you persecuting me and Jesus reveals to Paul his plan what he has done for Paul and at that moment on the road to Damascus God's gracious calling in the form of this revelation of Jesus it had this immediate and internal impact on the apostle Paul it's called conversion he was immediately and internally changed by the grace of God in the appearing of Jesus God's grace flipped

[29:47] Paul flipped him from being a persecutor of Christ to a proclaimer of Christ and it happened in moments at this moment I I have a sneaky suspicion that that for the first time in Paul's life he realized this he realized the scope and scale of God's love for him he realized that there is nothing that he could do to make God love him more nor was there anything that he had done that would make God love him less this was God's grace on Paul on the road to Damascus it's his conversion and his calling for many of us in this room it is hard for us to believe how deep and wide and ongoing is the grace of God for us to fathom that there's nothing that we can do to make

God love us more nor is there anything that we've done to make him love us less seems crazy to us but that's the crazy love of God that's his grace that's gospel that's what Jesus purchased for us and so what we see here in these few verses is Paul referring to that moment in time where Christ the

risen Christ flipped him by his grace he freed him from his man pleasing and bound him to himself the grace that freed Paul bound Paul the grace that freed Paul from sin and man pleasing bound him to Christ and here's what this means for us the risen Christ in his glory revealed in the gospel is the cure for our people pleasing our fear of man in all of its forms the gospel frees us from the fear from the snare of the fear of man and it sets us free to serve

Christ among men he flips us he flips us from wanting to advance our own reputations among men and he flips us by his grace to advance Christ's reputation before men that's the power of the gospel the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ radically reorients an idolatrous heart off oneself and onto a glorious risen Christ and in verses 16 and 17 what you see is the immediate results of his conversion look what he says he says in verse 16 I did not immediately consult with anyone verse 17 nor did

I go up to Jerusalem to those who are apostles before me you know what he is saying I wasn't seeking anybody's approval I was converted by the risen Christ who revealed the gospel to me and I didn't check with anybody because it was God's message and I was converted and called in a moment what this is getting at is the apostle Paul making a defense I'm nobody's puppet the apostles in Jerusalem I'm not in their back pocket I was independently converted and called by the risen Christ to be his apostle to proclaim the one true gospel to the Gentiles he doesn't go to Jerusalem he goes to Arabia goes out into the sticks in isolation it's at least two or three years and you know what he's doing there he's in the

Jesus finishing school for apostles that's what he's doing Paul having now encountered the risen Christ goes out on his own to make sense of everything for Jesus to help him understand how he Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament he went to Arabia for a two three year apostolic finishing school and it was from there that now the apostle Paul is ready to make a case and seek to persuade people that Jesus is the Christ that was at his conversion or closely there too and then in verses 18 through 24 we have his post conversion three years after being converted by [35:18] Christ and called to be an apostle three years of personal reflection and this Christological rewiring of his thinking you know how you buy an old house and it's got a fuse box and it's got cloth covered wires you come in in order to get it to code you need to put a new circuit breaker in and then you need to rewire the whole thing those two to three years in with Jesus at the center he's a servant of Christ now it's all about him following that three years verse 18 he goes up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas aka Peter and he remained with him 15 days now it's important to understand what he's saying he is saying that he went up to Jerusalem not for a theological conference with Peter but to visit Peter you see those two words to visit that just simply means to get to know him he's not going to visit

Peter Cephas for Cephas to tell him what to do Christ has already done that and he was there just for just over two weeks and while he was there verse 19 he happens to bump into James the Lord's brother just two of these apostles just kind of informal run ins with them just getting to know one another he he's not there to win their approval is his point verse 20 what I'm writing to you before God I do not lie he's like before God whom I fear and of his Christ whom I'm a servant of I'm telling you the truth I'm no man pleaser I'm a servant of Christ 21 that I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia Damascus is in Syria Tarsus is in Cilicia go back to business and in verse 22 he says and I was still unknown in person to the churches of

Judea that are in Christ the churches the region around Jerusalem those Jews who had become Christians upon hearing the gospel what Paul is saying is hey they didn't know me by person I didn't go there in order to prop myself up to win followers they didn't know me they just knew of my reputation 23 he who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried his reputation he's got flipped by the grace of the risen Christ and then verse 24 and they've glorified God because of me do you know what that says who he's in it for he's not a man pleaser he's a servant of Christ working living out his life for the glory of God so here we have in this second line of reasoning before his conversion at his conversion and after his conversion

Paul's life bears testimony to the unique power of the gospel that has dramatically changed his life and those Galatians who are reading this would be thinking it's the real gospel he's preaching the real thing it truly is God's message and I'm hoping this morning that when you're hearing this Paul's

testimony is putting hope in your heart that the gospel what the risen Christ did for Paul he can do for you deliver you from your man fearing he can deliver you from addictions to porn and alcohol and gambling he can deliver you from greed and lust and he can deliver you from anger and anxiety because these things are nowhere close to the power of God that's displayed in the gospel of Jesus Christ this gospel saves us from beginning to end next week

Paul's going to continue with more lines of evidence that demonstrate the true nature of the gospel and the transformation it brings about he's going to fast forward from 14 years from his conversion to a theological powwow with apostles in Jerusalem and then he's going to show us this confrontation in which he rebukes another apostle he is nobody's pocket he's not a man pleaser he's a servant of Christ the gospel sets us free from the fear of man in order to live as servants of Christ before men I want to apply this in a particular way this last line of reasoning if you are a follower of Jesus in the room you are a living billboard for his grace and power your conversion and your ongoing transformation it is a powerful tool for advancing

[40:50] God's purposes it's called a testimony what God has done in your life what he's doing in your life so let me ask you this morning do you have a testimony of what God has done in your life spelled out in your mind can you speak it relatively quickly to someone else for God's glory if you can't let's take our cues from Paul it is a tremendous tool not only does it share his testimony here we get a bit of his testimony in Philippians 3 we see his testimony being used in Acts 22 and 26 he's always using his testimony to speak of the glory of God because he's a servant of Christ so to that end I have with me a number of these sheets it's from a book called evangelism in a skeptical world by Sam Chan and there's a strategy I've told you about this in the spring it's about how to tell our story as story and what

Sam Chan helps you with is to write out and get into your mind the unique way that God in his grace intersected your life and has changed you reorient you from living for sin to living for Christ I've got a number of copies up here I'd be glad to give you one of them if you're a life group leader in the room get your life group leader through this stuff equip your people in order to speak of what God has done for them so that they can share it in their witnessing with others it's a tremendous tool this morning we've looked at Paul's response to an accusation that he's a man pleaser no I'm a servant of Christ and then he supports that by saying because of what the gospel is this is God's message God's power and then he points us to how the gospel has transformed his life before at and after his conversion and the effect is this gospel is

God's gospel it frees us from the snare of the fear of man in order to live as servants of Christ before man so let me just ask of you a couple more things how do you respond I believe that in this room right now many of us need to confess our fear of man we need to repent of it you need to go before God and say God forgive me for being more concerned of what people think about me than what you do that's idolatry that's wrong please forgive me and then you remind yourself of the gospel of what God and Christ has done for you he gave himself up for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age from our fearing of man and then would you get the story the unique story of God's grace changing your life would you get working on that so that you can share it with others if you're in the room and you have not been flipped by the grace of Jesus yet that you're still living in fear of what people think about you it rules your life you know it does I want to encourage you to do this one thing Jesus is alive would you call out to him something like this Jesus set me free set me free from what people think about me because whom the son sets free he is free indeed so if you've yet to become a Christian let me invite you this morning turn from your man pleasing and join us as we become faithful followers servants of

Christ for his glory amen let's pray God in heaven thank you so much for Galatians chapter 1 10 through 24 Lord God I pray for those in the room who are feeling the sweetness the goodness of the spirit's conviction exposing an area of idolatry God thank you for that and we pray that you would have them turn from that and trust you and that you would bring freedom freedom to them as a slave of Christ it's in his name we pray amen hit and verse two you you after mover it ahead time on ta