



Grace Snap Shot

“Viewing life through the lens of God’s grace!”



An Interview with Saint Paul

Written by Art Henkel (Paul’s answers are straight from Galatians ‘The Message’)

Q. Paul thanks for being willing to answer a few questions. It is obvious God has given you a great love for His church so I’m sure your comments will prove to be very insightful. Why don’t we get started? What is your honest response to the message that is commonly proclaimed through today’s church?

A. I can’t believe your fickleness – how easily you have turned traitor to Him who called you by the grace of Christ by embracing a variant message! It is not a minor variation, you know; it is completely other, an alien message, a no-message, a lie about God. (Gal. 1:6,7)

Q. Wow, that’s a pretty strong statement Paul. Way to start off with a bang. You know, there are many good people in today’s church who believe that having a right relationship with God is dependent on them trying to serve Him faithfully. Is that correct? Was that the understanding during the early days of the church?

A. We know very well that we are not set right with God by rule keeping but only through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Convinced that no human being can please God by self-improvement, we believed in Jesus as the Messiah so that we might be set right before God by trusting in the Messiah, not by trying to be good. (Gal. 2:15,16)

Q. I’m told you were once a very religious man. What changed when you experienced Christ?

A. I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn’t work. So I quit being a “law man” so that I could be God’s man. Christ’s life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with Him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. (Gal. 2:18-20)

Q. I’ve heard you speak against living under the law while being a Christian. Is it that big of a deal?

A. Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God’s grace. (Gal. 2:21)

Q. Many people in the church today understand that salvation is only experienced through Christ Jesus, by God’s grace. But once they come to faith they start thinking that they must add something to the process by doing things for God. What would you say to them?

A. How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God’s message to you? Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren’t smart enough and strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it?

Does the God who lavishly provides you with his own presence, His Holy Spirit, working things in your lives you could never do for yourselves, does He do these things because of your strenuous moral striving or because you trust Him to do them in you? The person who lives in right relationship with God does it by embracing what God arranges for him. Doing things for God is the opposite of entering into what God does for you. (Gal. 3:2-3, 5,9)

Q. But there are many Christians today who follow the example of those in the Old Testament that faithfully obeyed the law. They believe that by doing this, they will experience God's blessings. What do you think?

A. But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent His Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that He might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as His own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, "Papa! Father!" Doesn't that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you're also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance. (Gal. 4:4-7)

Q. If what you say is true, why do we seem to hear so much law teaching from our church leaders?

A. They want to shut you out of the free world of God's grace so that you will always depend on them for approval and direction, making them feel important. Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you. I am emphatic about this. The moment any one of you submits to circumcision or any other rule-keeping system, at that same moment Christ's hard-won gift of freedom is squandered. The person who accepts the ways of circumcision trades all the advantages of the free life in Christ for the obligations of the slave life of the law. I suspect you would never intend this, but this is what happens. When you attempt to live by your own religious plans and projects, you are cut off from Christ, you fall out of grace. (Gal. 4:17; 5:1-4)

Q. Okay, I get it. As Christians we are no longer to live under the law but under a new covenant of grace. But how do you go about doing that?

A. Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness. Why don't you choose to be led by the Spirit and so escape the erratic compulsions of a law-dominated existence? Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. (Gal. 5:16,18,25)

Q. This sounds so different from the message that many of us have been hearing. Are you saying that what many of our church leaders have been teaching doesn't carry any substance?

A. People who are attempting to force the ways of circumcision on you have only one motive. All their talk about the law is gas. They themselves don't keep the law! (Gal. 6:12-13)

Q. If we start living out what you have been saying, there could be a lot of church people that don't agree. Shouldn't we be concerned about that?

A. For my part, I am going to boast about nothing but the cross of our Master, Jesus Christ. I have been crucified, set free from the stifling atmosphere of pleasing others and fitting into the little patterns that they dictate. Can't you see the central issue in all this? It is not what you and I do – submit to circumcision, reject circumcision. It is what God is doing, and He is creating something totally new, a free life! (Gal. 6:14-15)

Q. There could be a lot of people who will strongly disagree with what we've discussed. How do you plan on dealing with the possible fallout?

A. Quite frankly, I don't want to be bothered anymore by these disputes. I have far more important things to do – the serious living of this faith. (Gal. 6:17)

Paul, I'd like to thank you for sharing with us today. In talking with you it has become very clear that the gospel message that many of us have been hearing and proclaiming is very different from what you've been teaching. It certainly gives us something to think about.