

## Paul's Great Commission

### Introduction:

1. Many times you will hear preachers speak of "the great commission." Usually they are referring to Christ's commission of the eleven apostles in **Matthew 28:16-20**.
2. Unfortunately, when people use the term "the great commission" it can lead believers to some false notions.
  - It can lead them to believe that Christ only gave **one** great commission in the Bible.
    - Christ in fact gave the eleven apostles **five** commissions after His resurrection.
  - It can also lead people to believe that Christ only gave a "great commission" to the eleven apostles, and nobody else.
3. This of course is not true. There is another apostle who distinguished himself apart from the twelve apostles (**1 Corinthians 15:5-8**). He also saw the resurrected Christ, but he saw Him after His ascension into heaven. This of course was the apostle Paul.
4. Did Paul receive a great commission from Christ? Indeed he did.
  - Why do so many churches focus on Christ's commissions on earth to the twelve, and give little or no attention to Christ's commission from heaven to Paul?
  - Could there be something in Paul's commission that Satan does not want people to see? Could it be that the turning away from Paul in his own day (**2 Timothy 1:15**) has continued for centuries even until now?
5. In this lesson we will explore the commission of Christ to the apostle Paul and seek to understand how it applies to us today.

### First, Paul's commission involved an unlikely ambassador, Saul of Tarsus.

1. Any time a commission is given, it must have an ambassador to carry its message. There must be a spokesman to carry the message.
2. When the time came for Christ to give a special commission in Acts 9, He chose a most unlikely ambassador. A man known as Saul of Tarsus (Paul).
  - Saul was a devout religious Jew, a Pharisee. **Galatians 1:14**
  - Saul was zealous to keep the Old Testament Law. **Philippians 3:6**
  - Saul was the enemy of Christ. **Acts 26:9**
  - Saul was the enemy of believers in Christ. **Acts 9:1-2, 22:4, 26:10-11**
3. What an unlikely candidate to take the message of God's grace!
4. But, in another way, it makes perfect sense. Paul was the enemy of God who deserved God's wrath and judgment, but received the undeserved grace of God.
5. Who does this sound like? This sounds like all of us who have placed our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. All of us can relate to Paul. **Ephesians 2:11-13**
6. Who better to proclaim the message of grace than the person who has experienced grace?
  - Satan may convince you that you are unworthy to proclaim God's message of grace to others. He may use past sins and failures to persuade you that God could never use you.
  - Satan may even use others to cast doubt on your usefulness. **Acts 9:26**

- When this happens, remember Saul of Tarsus. He was an unlikely ambassador that God used mightily.

### **Second, Paul's commission involved a different focus, Gentiles.**

1. The kingdom program of Israel called for the conversion of Israel first. Israel would be converted, their earthly kingdom would be established by their Messiah in Jerusalem, and Israel would be a light and blessing to all nations. **Isaiah 60:1-3**
2. This is why Christ's commissions to the twelve required that they begin executing their commissions at Jerusalem. **Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8**
3. As soon as Paul was converted to Christ on the road to Damascus, Christ made it clear that His commission to Paul would be different. **Acts 26:14-18**
  - Paul's commission would be predominantly to the Gentiles.
  - In fact, when Paul attempted to go to Jerusalem to begin a ministry there, Christ commanded him to get out of Jerusalem quickly because Christ would send Paul far hence to the Gentiles. **Acts 22:17-21**
4. When Paul began his first missionary journey in Acts 13 (vs. 5, 14), Paul would always begin in the local Jewish synagogue. Paul did this for several reasons:
  - The local synagogue would have a copy of God's Word (the Old Testament).
  - Because Paul was in Gentile regions, there would be a combination of Jews and Gentile proselytes in the local synagogue.
  - Paul, being a Jew and Pharisee, would have opportunity to speak and show from the Scriptures that Jesus was the crucified and risen Son of God.
5. Invariably, whenever Paul would do this, the Gentiles eagerly received the message of Christ, but the Jews would bring persecution against Paul. **Acts 13:44-48**
6. Paul continued to try and reach his people, the Jews, throughout the book of Acts, but at the end of Acts, Paul makes a final declarative statement of judgment against Israel and announces that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles. **Acts 28:25-28**
7. Paul never addresses Israel again in any of the letters he wrote after the book of Acts (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon). Paul's focus was exclusively the Gentiles and called himself "*...the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.*" **Ephesians 3:1**

### **Third, Paul's commission involved a new message, the gospel of Christ.**

1. After Paul was converted to Christ, he immediately went into the synagogue of Damascus and preached to the Jews that Jesus was the risen Son of God and Christ, the Messiah. **Acts 9:20, 22**
2. This is what the twelve had been proclaiming to Israel in the book of Acts. Paul calls it the gospel of God. **Romans 1:1-4**
3. But in **1 Corinthians 9:17**, Paul stated that "*...a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.*"
4. Why would Paul say this if he had been proclaiming the gospel of God since Acts 9 that the twelve had been proclaiming since Acts 2? What was this dispensing and when did it take place?

5. Paul basically fades out of sight in Acts 9 after preaching the gospel of God, but in Acts 13 he begins his first missionary journey and dominates the scene for the rest of the book of Acts.
6. We know that during this time (between Acts 9 and 13) Paul spent three years in Arabia and Damascus. What was he doing? He was receiving the special gospel message that the Lord would have him preach to the Gentiles. **Galatians 1:11-12**
7. We see Paul preaching it for the first time in **Acts 13:38-39**. It was the message that sinners could be totally forgiven and justified before God apart from the Law of Moses.
  - This would mean that people could be saved without becoming a proselyte into the Jewish religion. They could be saved apart from the rite of circumcision. Paul never mentions water baptism as a requirement.
  - People could be saved by faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ.
8. This was a new message and Paul calls it "*the gospel of Christ.*" **Romans 1:16; Galatians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 9:17-18**
9. This is the gospel that Satan is desperately trying to blind people from seeing. **2 Corinthians 4:4**
10. This gospel of Christ message was not given to Peter or any of the twelve. Paul had to go to Jerusalem and explain it to them. Galatians 2
11. Can you see why Satan would want to shift people's focus away from the commission of Paul? Paul's commission is **our** commission today.
12. As the former enemies of Christ, we are to take the gospel of Christ to people everywhere, without discrimination.