

**Galatians 1: 11-17**—“<sup>11</sup>I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. <sup>12</sup>I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. <sup>13</sup>For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup>I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. <sup>15</sup>But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup>to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, <sup>17</sup>nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.”

- But in order to change the gospel, they had to discredit Paul's gospel, who had founded these churches and taught them the gospel in the first place. It doesn't take too much reading between the lines to see that the people in verse 7 were calling into question Paul's apostleship. Since they basically were emphasizing circumcision (5:2) and the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament (4:10), they were probably Jewish Christians (in the loose sense) who had come from Jerusalem (like the men in 2:12) and who claimed to have James and Peter and John (the pillars of 2:9) as their authority. For them Paul was just a Johnny-come-lately to the apostolic band.
- So three attacks.
  1. They denied his authority.
  2. They denied his gospel.
  3. They denied his pattern for the Christian life.
    - And that was everything.

<sup>11</sup>**I want you to know,**

- The word literally means, “I reveal.” It's a very strong term. Greek: *gnoridzo*. In the vernacular, it would be, “Let me make this perfectly clear.”
- It is intended to remind the readers of something which they had forgotten.

**brothers,**

- Despite their culpable defection from the gospel, Paul still addresses his readers as “my friends.”

**that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up.**

- To the Judiazers Paul was not a theologian. He was a politician.
- But Paul argues that his gospel is not a human concoction. It is not his own private version of something he picked up secondhand from the other apostles.
- But when verse 11 says Paul's gospel is not ‘according to man,’ it also carries the idea that his gospel doesn't square with natural human desires.
  - The implication is that the Judiazers have adjusted the gospel to make it fit better with their own proud inclinations.
  - Their version of the gospel was very much ‘according to man.’ It catered to the self-assertive and independent yearnings of their sinful nature.

Truth Matters

- Now pause a moment and let what's happening here sink in. Authority and truth are the central issues here.
- Two messages are vying for our allegiance: Paul's and the Judaizer's. According to verses 8 and 9, heaven and hell is at stake. Only one of these gospels is true.

- Believing the true one is the most important thing in the world for every one of us. So there's a lesson for us already.
- We should be the kind of people for whom truth matters.
- I stress this because I think our culture communicates just the opposite.
  - *Piper*: “Everywhere you turn in the media or in your personal life people are expressing opinions. Almost everybody has some gospel to share. It may be "sex over sixty" or "the joy of jogging" or "the delight of organic dieting" or "the power of intimidation and self-assertion" or a hundred other things that people get interviewed about on the radio. The world is rife with opinions about the good life. But how often do you hear a solid statement about the *basis* of those opinions?”<sup>1</sup>
- **Assertion 1**: It must not sit well with us when people give their opinions with no concern to show that they are true because they conform to ultimate reality.
- I know that this sounds threatening, because it sounds intellectual. It sounds as if you are going to have to be able to answer every question someone asks you about your faith. But I want to encourage you that you are in a better position than you think. We have let the world intimidate us too long. You see, the world knows that Christians believe we are in touch with ultimate truth. That is very offensive. So as soon as we begin to make claims about truth (no matter how humbly), they start doing something that they almost never do with their own philosophy of life—they start asking us critical questions. Now that's okay. We ought to try to answer them. But here's a suggestion to keep you from feeling like they've got it all together intellectually while you are full of uncertainties. Make sure that if they probe your view of reality, you probe their view of reality. And if they ask you how you know your view is true, you ask *how* they know their view is true. What you will find, I think, is that as a Christian you have a grasp of reality that is more comprehensive and more coherent than theirs is. Most unbelievers (except in a tiny intellectual subculture) have never thought through the ultimate questions of life and formulated a comprehensive view of reality that governs their thought and action. All I'm saying is make sure that your non-Christian friend plays fair with you. It is not fair to take pot shots at life commitments from the grandstand of agnosticism and indifference. Let them come down onto the field and state their commitments (O, yes, they have commitments!) and state their underlying world view and then give the evidences.
- Will Paul give evidence and make his case? It's clear. Verses 13–24 are Paul's argument for the truth of his apostleship and his gospel.

<sup>12</sup>**I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.**

- The revelation spoken of here refers to Christ's appearing to Paul on the Damascus road.
- **Acts 9:1-20**—“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ <sup>5</sup>‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he replied. <sup>6</sup>Now get up and go into the city, and you will

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, “This is Not Man’s Gospel,” February 13, 1983, [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary-/Sermons/ByScripture/7/377\\_This\\_Is\\_Not\\_Mans\\_Gospel/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary-/Sermons/ByScripture/7/377_This_Is_Not_Mans_Gospel/).

be told what you must do.’<sup>7</sup> The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.<sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.<sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered.<sup>11</sup> The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.’<sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.’<sup>13</sup> ‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.’<sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.’<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.’<sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’<sup>17</sup> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’<sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,<sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.<sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.”

**<sup>13</sup>For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.**

- “Intensely;” the Greek phrase basically means “beyond measure,” “to an extraordinary degree.”
- *Stott*: “He went from house to house in Jerusalem, seized any Christians ... Not satisfied with persecuting the church, he was actually bent on destroying it. He was determined to stamp it out.”<sup>2</sup>
- He begins his argument in verses 13 and 14 by recounting how unremittingly anti-Christian he was before his conversion. "For you have heard of my former life in Judaism [NOTE: This was common ground; anyone could check out what he was about to say].
- Notice verse 13 begins with "for." This account in verses 13 and 14 is an argument that his gospel came from Christ, not man. How does the argument work?
- Paul points out how complete and astonishing his conversion was. From persecutor, to preacher. From one ready to kill Christians, to one ready to be killed as a Christian. From one who heard in the Christian message a threat to everything he stood for, to one who now had a vision of the gospel that blew his Pharisaism to smithereens. What happened? How do we account for such an astonishing reversal? Or to be more precise, as Paul put the question, was the grasp of the gospel that revolutionized Paul's life a work of man or a work of God?
- Did Paul somehow in those days of persecution get attracted to the apostles in Jerusalem and then go off on his own and botch their message? Or did Jesus Christ, alive from the dead, meet Paul on the Damascus road, manifest to him the truth of the gospel, and call him into service as an apostle?
- The reason Paul describes his pre-conversion life is to show how utterly improbable it is that he could ever have been allured into the ranks of the apostles by any human effort.

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<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 31.

- The apostles were his arch-enemies. Paul argues that there is only one adequate explanation of how he came to devote his life to the Christ he hated and how he came to preach a gospel that overturned his whole life of Pharisaic pride: verse 15, “When he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...”
- Every effect in the world must have an adequate cause.
- **Example: A blown up city and dynamite:** Imagine a major city in a foreign country is blown up. When an inquiry is made you are told that a stick of dynamite set off. You wouldn't believe such a story because one stick of dynamite simply isn't an adequate cause for such a powerful explosion. It would require a force vastly greater.
- In the same way, Paul argues that to try to explain the change from his pre-conversion persecution to his post-conversion passion for the gospel merely by the work of men is to grasp at a straw.
- But to tighten the case further, Paul sketches in verse 16ff. what he did *after* his encounter with Christ. No one should get the idea that the vision of Christ simply said: “Go study with the apostles.”

**<sup>14</sup>I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.**

- He was zealous. The word indicates a fanatical legalist. You want a pre-conversion characteristic of Paul? Here is it is: bigot, fanatic, legalist, ritualist, persecutor, hater of Jesus.
  - You say, ‘So, what's the point of all that, Jeff?’ The point is simple: You show me a man going that fast and hard in that direction, and then you tell me that same man is going in the opposite direction, and you're going to have to explain something to me.
- He was zealous not for the Mosaic law but what is called the *halaka*.
- The *halaka* is the body of Jewish oral law which grew up around the Torah. It contained all kinds of little practical (and many impractical) ethical and technical laws. And he was zealous for all of that minutia, all of that just sort of meaningless stuff in terms of Scripture that was added as an addendum to everything.
- Even before he turned to Christ Paul had realized distinctly the essential incompatibility between Christianity and Judaism. To Paul, a crucified Messiah was not only an insult to his national-political messianic hopes, it was also “incomprehensible absurdity,”<sup>3</sup> since the Messiah was by definition one uniquely favored by God, whereas a hanged man was, according to the law, cursed by God.
  - **Fung:** “Jesus had been condemned not only by the court of Judaism, but by the high court of heaven itself; hence, his disciples' claim that he was the Messiah could only be blasphemy worthy of death, and their further claim that he was risen could not be treated as anything but criminal deception.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Frederic Louis *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2 volumes (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889), 1: 105.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians in The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 59.

- **MacArthur:** “[Paul says] that there was absolutely no preparation in his former life for this message of grace.”<sup>5</sup>
- **MacArthur:** “Very often, you know, we say, ‘Well, you have to have understand old Charlie over there. He’s a product of his upbringing.’ You know, you can throw that out when you get into Christianity...”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>15</sup>**But when God, who set me apart from birth**

- Paul was chosen to be an apostle before he was born. That the basis of salvation is God’s will, God’s sovereignty.

**and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup>to reveal his Son in me**

- **1 Samuel 12:22:** “For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.”
  - You may say, that’s good. He won’t forsake them. Why? Because they’re good people. No. They weren’t too good. Then why? “Because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people.”
- **1 Corinthians 1:1**—“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God.”
  - Why was Paul an apostle? Because God wanted it.
- **Ephesians 1: 5**—“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ.”
  - You may ask: “Why did God predestine us to be saved?”
  - **Answer:** “According to the good pleasure of His will.”
  - **Verse 9**—“Having made known unto us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure.”
- **Stott:** “The initiative and the grace of God are emphasized. Like Jacob who was chosen before he was born, in preference to his twin brother Esau (cf. Rom. 9:10-13), and like Jeremiah who before he was born was appointed to be a prophet (Je. 1:5), so Paul, before he was born, was set apart to be an apostle.”<sup>7</sup>
- **MacArthur:** “Some might say, ‘Well, God was up there in heaven, and He saw his potential and said, ‘Boy, that old Paul. He’s really got a lot of fire. If I can just latch onto him, we’ll get something done.’ No, no. Listen to what Paul said, ‘When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb.’”<sup>8</sup>

**so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, <sup>17</sup>nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia**

- Lightfoot: ‘A veil of thick darkness hangs over St. Paul’s visit to Arabia’
- St. Chrysostom: ‘a barbarous and savage people’.

**and later returned to Damascus.”**

- Paul’s point is that *three years* of meditation and ministry on his own immediately after his revelation from Christ, followed by a mere fifteen-day visit to Peter cannot possibly support

<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur, “Apostolic Credentials, Part 1: Galatians 1:10-15,” <http://www.gty.org/resources.php?section=transcripts&aid=232064>.

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur, “Apostolic Credentials, Part 1: Galatians 1:10-15,” <http://www.gty.org/resources.php?section=transcripts&aid=232064>.

<sup>7</sup> Stott,

<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, “Apostolic Credentials, Part 1: Galatians 1:10-15,” <http://www.gty.org/resources.php?section=transcripts&aid=232064>.

the Judaizers' apparent contention that he was a secondhand disciple of the Jerusalem apostles. The point is that he was an independent witness.

### Application:

- I read a brief essay this week about whether or not a fish could know it was wet.
- “It is hard for a fish to know that it is wet. Wet is all there is for a fish. A fish doesn't even think of it. So it's hard for a modern person—a person living in the last two hundred years—to know that he is arrogant toward God. Arrogance toward God is all there is in the modern world. It's the ocean we swim in—the air we breathe. It's woven into the fabric of our minds. We don't even know it's there. We can't see it, because we look through it to see everything else.”
- **Lewis:** “The ancient man approached God...as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the Bench and God in the Dock.”<sup>9</sup>
- **Packer:** “There is no doubt that Evangelicalism today is in a state of perplexity and unsettlement. In such matters as the practice of evangelism, the teaching of holiness, the building up of local church life, the pastor's dealing with souls and the exercise of discipline, there is evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with things as they are and of equally widespread uncertainty as to the road ahead. This is a complex phenomenon, to which many factors have contributed; but, if we go to the root of the matter, we shall find that these perplexities are all ultimately due to our having lost our grip on the biblical gospel. Without realizing it, we have during the past century bartered that gospel for a substitute product which, though it looks similar enough in points of detail, is as a whole a decidedly different thing. Hence our troubles; for the substitute product does not answer the ends for which the authentic gospel has in past days proved itself so mighty. The new gospel conspicuously fails to produce deep reverence, deep repentance, deep humility, a spirit of worship, a concern for the church. Why? We would suggest that the reason lies in its own character and content. It fails to make men God-centred in their thoughts and God-fearing in their hearts because this is not primarily what it is trying to do. One way of stating the difference between it and the old gospel is to say that it is too exclusively concerned to be ‘helpful’ to man – to bring peace, comfort, happiness, satisfaction – and too little concerned to glorify God. The old gospel was ‘helpful,’ too – more so, indeed, than is the new – but (so to speak) incidentally, for its first concern was always to give glory to God. It was always and essentially a proclamation of Divine sovereignty in mercy and judgment, a summons to bow down and worship the mighty Lord on whom man depends for all good, both in nature and in grace. Its centre of reference was unambiguously God. But in the new gospel the centre of reference is man. This is just to say that the old gospel was *religious* in a way that the new gospel is not. Whereas the chief aim of the old was to teach men to worship God, the concern of the new seems limited to making them feel better. The subject of the old gospel was God and His

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<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 36.

ways with men; the subject of the new is man and the help God gives him. There is a world of difference.”<sup>10</sup>

- I close with *Matthew 21:23–27*: “<sup>23</sup>Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you this authority?’ <sup>24</sup>Jesus replied, ‘I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>25</sup>John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?’
  - his morning Jesus puts it like this: “The gospel Paul preaches—is it from heaven or is it from men?” Jesus is asking you that question as personally as though it were just him and you in this room.
- “They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' <sup>26</sup>But if we say, 'From men'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." <sup>27</sup>So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”
  - Some of you do not come to Christ because you have a question for God he must answer first. But God will not be badgered from the grandstand of agnosticism and indifference.
  - This morning he says, Come down on the field and get serious with me. I have a question for you. Tell me the answer to my question, and I will answer yours. The gospel which Paul preaches—salvation by grace through faith in Christ to the glory of God—is it from heaven or from men?
- **Stott**: “This, then is our dilemma. Are we to accept Paul’s account of the origin of his message, supported as it is by solid historical evidence? Or shall we prefer our own theory, although supported by no historical evidence? If Paul was right in asserting that his gospel was not man’s but God’s, then to reject Paul is to reject God.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990). It can also be found at “Introductory Essay to John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*,” <http://www.covenant-urc.org/literatr/jpiedddc-1.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Stott, 37.