

Paul's Gospel And Apostolic Credentials

Galatians 1:11-24

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There were two things under attack as to why Paul wrote the book of Galatians, and I want to kind of warm up to my text and give a little bit of an introduction. First, Paul's authority and apostolic position was under attack. Second, Paul's gospel preaching, the content of his message, was under attack. The reason that Paul himself was under attack was because they were attacking the gospel by preaching a different gospel. When I say, "they," the churches of Galatia (which Paul started on his second missionary journey, visited on his third missionary journey, and was established when he was doing his missionary outreaches) had some false teachers come into these churches known as Judaizers.

Judaizers were actually professing Christians that were Jews, but they were telling the Gentile believers in Galatia, which were primary Gentile Christians, that they cannot be a Christian, you cannot be saved, until you first of all become Jewish; and you would do that by circumcision, submitting yourselves to the Mosaic law and all of the rites, rituals, worship and holy days, sabbath days, but had to basically, by rite of circumcision, become a Jew and follow Jewish laws and customs; thus, they are called Judaizers. They were Judaizing the Gentiles telling them that just faith in Jesus Christ is not enough, that you have to actually follow these rites, rituals, laws, and basically had to become Jewish in order to be saved.

The very gospel of God's grace was at stake. The very gospel that was deposited into Paul's ministry and life, that he preached so faithfully and the other apostles preached as well, but Paul was primarily given the task of going to Gentile believers and preaching the gospel and establishing churches that were started by Gentiles.

Paul is doing three things in Galatians. In Galatians 1 and 2, he defends his apostleship and gives us his personal arguments for his apostolic authority. In Galatians 3 and 4, he gives us the doctrine of the gospel of God's grace—that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The first two chapters are personal. The next two chapters, Galatians 3 and 4, are doctrinal. Galatians 5 and 6 are practical. He talks about the fruit of the Spirit, the Spirit-filled life, and that the Spirit of God has come to give us liberty in how we live the Christian life. These six chapters break down neatly. First of all we have personal, then doctrinal, and then practical Christian living.

A lot of people, if you've studied the book of Galatians, kind of say, "Well, the first two chapters are kind of boring, and you just kind of have to wait through them. They are real autobiographical, historical, and there's not a lot of exciting things for us," but I want to try to encourage you to really pay attention to these verses, learn them, and that the Spirit of God would teach us and we could glean some exciting truth even in these first two chapters that are autobiographical and very personal. Some see that there's not a lot of personal application there, but I believe quite the opposite.

In our text tonight, which runs from verses 11-24, we're going to back up to verse 10 and start our study, we see Paul's general defense of his apostolic gospel in verses 10-12. Secondly, we see Paul's autobiographical defense of his authority. Our text tonight is two sections. The first is verses 10-12, Paul's general defense of his gospel, and then verses 13-24, Paul's autobiographical defense of his apostolic authority. The first section tonight in our text is verses 10-12. I want to back up one verse. We see Paul's general defense of his gospel. Let's read them. Paul says, "For do I now persuade men, or God?" I want you to note the question mark there. Paul's asking two rhetorical questions as he opens up this section. "...or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. 11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. 12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

I want you to note what Paul says in verse 10. He says, "I want you to know that I do not seek to persuade men, but I seek to persuade God." The word "persuade" means to be approved by. He's saying, "What I'm seeking in my ministry is the approval of God, not the approval of men." Paul, verse 10, is saying, "I am a servant of God; I'm not a servant of men." He starts with "For" in verse 10 because it takes you back into the preceding verses, verses 6-9, where Paul says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be," in the King James translation, "accursed," which is the Greek word anathema, which means cursed to the lowest hell or destruction by God. Paul took this false doctrine, this false teaching, very, very seriously. Then, he repeated it. He said, "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed," anathema.

The Judaizers, in trying to undermine Paul's message, were trying to undermine Paul as a messenger. They did this no doubt in many ways, but one of them, and I think this is the background for verse 10, was that they accused Paul of trying to be a man pleaser. "Paul, you're just trying to placate to people trying to tell them that all you have to do is believe and God saves you by His grace, that Jesus' death on the cross was sufficient, and you don't have to do anything. You don't have to keep laws, rules, rites, rituals, or dietary laws. You're preaching an easy gospel," you're just preaching just what some say today is an easy believism, "and it's not enough. You have to work and be a participant in saving yourself." They were accusing Paul of actually being a man pleaser, so what Paul is saying in verse 10, in light of that, is, "I'm not doing what I do to please men." He uses the word "persuade" in the English Bible there, but it means, "I'm not preaching a message that's simply to tickle ears or gain men's approval." There's a whole lot we can learn from the verses we're going to cover tonight, but we can actually learn from Paul's example.

First of all, the pastor can learn from Paul's example that he is never ever to preach the Word or do ministry with the motive of trying to please or placate to people to try to gain their approval. He does what he does, and I'm speaking to my own heart and other pastors that might listen in, to be pleasing to God, to gain the approval of God. The Bible teaches that preachers are actually stewards. You and I, as Christians, are also stewards. God has entrusted His Word to us and wants us to faithfully share it with others, but especially from those who preach in the

church or teach the Word of God, God has deposited His Word with us and wants us simply to share, give, and pass it on to others by not adding to it, which is addition; by not taking from it, which is subtraction; or not substituting it for something else, or watering it down with other ingredients. It's the Word of God, nothing more, nothing less.

When Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, he said, "Preach the word," nothing more, nothing less, just preach the Word, which I happen to believe is what is called expositional preaching. What that means is that you read the Scripture, then explain the Scripture, which is expounding it, you exegete it, and then you apply it to believers' lives. It's always in that order: you read the text, explain the text, and apply the text, rather than reading the text and going off with a theme or thought and giving a homily or a teaching that has not any exposition. The text should be explained in its historical, grammatical, theological context. Paul was a faithful preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he makes it clear in verse 10 that, "I'm not seeking to win the approval of men, I'm seeking to win the approval of God. I do not seek to please men." When he said that, what he meant by that was, "My motive isn't that of gaining man's approval." What he wanted is what we should all want that when we get to heaven, we hear the Lord say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," not clever servant, not dynamic servant, but faithful servant.

What God is looking for is not great ability but availability and fidelity to His Word. Paul says, "Look, I'm preaching what I preach not to placate to men, not to tickle their ears or suit their fancy, but I'm doing it to please God." He closes verse 10 by saying, "...for if I pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Paul was a servant of God, not the servant of men.

Paul would change his methods, listen carefully, when he preached the gospel, but would never change the message. It's okay to change your methods, but never change the message. What happens in the church today is that people change the message to try to reach people with the gospel and end up diluting it, watering it down, and making it more palatable rather than preaching it faithfully as it is in the Word of God. Methods are many, methods can change, but principles never do. We can do it different ways, but it's the same gospel. When going to the Jews, Paul said, "I'm a Jew." When going to the Gentiles, he was a Gentile, but his message never changed. No matter where you go, no matter who you're preaching to, your method and approach can change—be led of the Holy Spirit—but the message never changes. The content of the gospel should never change or never be diluted and never be watered down.

Secondly, notice Paul's gospel in verse 11 was not devised or created or thought up by man. Verse 11, "But I certify," or confirm to "you, brethren," note that he calls these Galatians, that he wasn't very happy with and that were being influenced by these false teachers, as brethren, so they were true believers. He says, "...that the gospel," and we talked a lot about the content and the nature of the true gospel last week, "which was preached of me is not after man." What he means by that is that it's not of human creation. It's not of human invention. There's a lot that could be said about this, but the point is that of all the religions of the world, they all have something in common, except for Christianity. That common thread is, "You must do something to save yourself," that in some way, some shape or form, you do something to save yourself. By

that I mean, only in Christianity do we find a gospel that we are “saved ,” by grace, “through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

The Christian doctrine of God's grace and His saving grace is contrary to human wisdom, human understanding, and human creation. If man created his own gospel, it wouldn't be grace alone. Because of man's sinful, proud heart, he would have some part to play, something he had to do in order to save himself—climb the highest mountain, slay the dragon, steal the golden apple, you know, and free the princess or whatever it might be. You have to do something to save yourself or walk on your knees or go to confession or get baptized or get confirmed or wear certain clothes, worship on certain days, and eat or not eat certain foods because it would make their flesh feel good, “I'm participating. I'm doing something.” Don't misunderstand grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Faith is not a work, and faith is not something that merits your salvation. The Bible doesn't say, “You're saved by faith if it's strong enough,” or “You're saved by faith if it's intense enough.” You're saved by faith because you're trusting in Jesus to save you. Sometimes I think we get it wrong when we think in terms of faith and don't realize faith is trusting God to save us. It's not doing something, it's letting God save us. It's saying, “I trust in You. I put my faith in You.”

It's like getting on an airplane. I always use the airplane illustration. You can have faith in an airplane that can fly you to a certain location, but until you get on the plane, sit down, buckle your seatbelt, and take off on that plane, you haven't really put your faith in that plane. Jesus is Someone who died, buried, rose, did all the work for us, and what it means to be a Christian is, “I trust His finished work. I believe on Him.” To believe, to trust, to have faith is all synonymous of letting God save you by His grace, but there's nothing you do to work for it.

It's interesting that all the religions of the world basically say, “Do this and live. Work hard. Do,” but Christianity says, “Done.” Jesus cried, “It is finished,” and faith is simply resting in that finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The true gospel of God's grace is hated by the unsaved man and his sinful heart, so there has to be a work of the Holy Spirit in the unregenerated heart to bring them to the place of trusting Christ where they can be saved and have eternal life.

Paul was not in the ministry to please men. Paul was not in the ministry because he had a man-made preaching gospel. Thirdly, verse 12, Paul's gospel was not received from man. He says there, “I don't preach to please men. My gospel isn't invented, devised, or schemed up by men,” and in verse 12, he said, “For I neither received it of man,” and adds another point, “neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Paul says, “Look, I'm not living to serve men, I'm living and preaching to serve God.” He said, “The gospel is not devised or invented by men,” and thirdly, “I didn't receive it by men,” verse 12, “For I neither received it of men, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

It's interesting, and we're going to get it in the next few verses, that when Paul got saved on the Damascus road, he didn't leave there and go to Bible college and get taught the gospel. He didn't run right down to Jerusalem and talk to the apostles who were before him and say, “Hey,

can you explain this to me and give me the gospel so I know that I've got it right?" We're going to see that he was actually taught by Jesus directly. Ananias didn't teach or instruct him, and none of the believers in Damascus taught or instructed him. Barnabas, that partnered with him in ministry, didn't teach or instruct him. Paul was taught directly by the Lord. Paul says, "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it," by man, "but by," and this is so important, the end of verse 12, "the revelation of Jesus Christ." There's so much in that last statement there.

God cannot be known apart from revelation, so God has to reveal to us, if we're going to know anything about Him, because we are finite, God is infinite. God is transcendent, so there's no way that we can get a knowledge of God apart from God coming to us and revealing Himself to us. For us to be able to know God, God has to reveal Himself. There are a lot of different ways God has revealed Himself, but the primary way that God has chosen to reveal Himself is in Jesus Christ His Son, which is the logos, the Word of God. God speaks through His Son. God is revealed and seen in His Son. Then, the written Word, which is the Bible or Scriptures, where God reveals Himself in His Word. The Bible is a revelation from God; it's a revelation about God. I've always been fascinated by the doctrine of revelation in that idea that we cannot, by searching, find God. God must actually reveal Himself to us.

In this situation, it's a statement about God revealing to Paul, through Jesus, the gospel, "by the revelation of Jesus Christ." We're going to see in verse 17 that right after Paul was converted and went into the city of Damascus, he spent about three days blind until Ananias came and prayed for him and his eyes were opened. Then, he went for three years out into the Arabian desert, and God, by the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus, taught him directly the gospel, and all of his Judaism came into play, but it was the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in his life and then the revelation of Jesus teaching him as he was out there in the Arabian desert.

Paul is unique in that, unlike the other apostles, he didn't believe in Jesus, follow Jesus, or know Jesus during His earthly ministry. Peter, James, John, Matthew, Philip, Thomas, all those guys, got to hang out with Jesus. When Jesus was crucified and resurrected, they saw Jesus. Paul experienced seeing Jesus after Jesus had ascended back to heaven, and he was converted in Acts 9. It's interesting, we're going to see he went to Arabia for three years. The other apostles had three years with Jesus, now he gets his three years with Jesus as He directly teaches him and then Paul goes out and preaches.

What Paul is doing is building this autobiographical argument for defense on his authority and his accuracy in the gospel that he preaches—that he's truly an apostle, he's been given the gospel by Jesus, it didn't come to him by man.

Here's another point I want to make, that is, the revelation of Jesus Christ indicates that Paul got his message directly from the Lord. Years ago, I was in Corinthians preaching Paul's words and instructions on marriage. A woman came up to me and said, "Well, Pastor Miller, I just have to say I disagree with Paul the Apostle. I just don't agree with Paul." I said, "Well, then you can talk to him when you get to heaven." This Scripture is for a person that thinks that. Sometimes people like to pick the words of Jesus against the words of Paul, "Well, I'm not into

Paul. He's so harsh, he didn't like women, and was too radical. He said things I don't like. I like Jesus better, so I listen to the words of Jesus. I have a red letter Bible, and I only read the letters in red." Believe it or not, there are people who think like that, but this indicates that Paul got his message from Jesus.

Paul wrote 13 letters that are in the New Testament, 14 if you include Hebrews, which I think would be a good possibility. If you pulled out the Pauline epistles in the Bible, we would be of all men most miserable because most of the teachings of Jesus (and I'm not trying to put them down, obviously, we love what Jesus taught) are basically in a historical narrative, and He spoke in parables. He did preach the Sermon on the Mount and other sermons, but there's nothing that contradicts Jesus or Paul or James or Peter. We're not necessarily to put more weight in the words of Jesus than in the words of Paul. They are equally inspired and important. They're all given by inspiration of God. Everything Paul wrote is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and was revealed to him by Jesus directly, so he had apostolic authority to write.

I do think it's interesting that when you look at Jesus, Peter, Paul, James or John, or the other New Testament letters and epistles, they all basically teach the same thing—we're saved by grace through faith, it's not of ourselves, it's a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. When Jesus taught the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, He was teaching that we're saved by grace through faith by believing and trusting in Jesus Christ. That tax collector went home justified while the proud, self-righteous Pharisee went home from the synagogue that day unforgiven.

Paul's gospel came from heaven, and that's the first section of our text tonight. The second one runs from verses 13-24 (so we're going to have to move a little faster) where Paul gives his autobiographical defense of his apostolic authority. Verses 10-12 is more of a general defense that he got his gospel from heaven, directly from Jesus. In verses 13-24, he actually gives his autobiography. He does it in an interesting way, and I'll break it down for you. He first talks about before he was converted in verses 13-14. Secondly, he talks about his conversion in verses 15-16, and at the end of verse 16-24, he talks about what happened after his conversion. I do think that it gives to us kind of a pattern that when you share your testimony, that you share what you were before Christ, you share how you came to know Christ, and then share what your life is like now that you are a Christian in Christ. So, what you were before Christ, how you came to know Christ, and now what you are in your relationship to Christ—how your life has been changed.

Paul's pre-conversion experience, verses 13-14, follow with me. He says, "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past," which means the way that I lived. This is King James old English for my manner of living in times past. This is his pre-converted days. "in the Jews' religion," he uses that term twice, in verse 13 and then again in verse 14, "the Jews' religion," which actually the grammar there in the construction of the Greek actually is basically saying Judaism. "You know in my past life how I lived in my Judaistic religion." "...how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God," which is interesting he uses that term, "the church of God,"

which is Paul's pre-converted days. There are some what are called hyperdispensationalists that believe the church didn't start until Paul was converted. But here, obviously, the church was in existence before Paul's conversion, and he's talking about the body of Christ. He says, "and wasted it," that is, the church, "And profited in the Jews' religion," or Judaism, "above many my equals," those that were my own age, "in mine own nation," my own countrymen, "being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers," Paul's pre-converted zeal for Judaism and his hatred for Christianity and for believers and for the church.

When you look at Paul's conversion in light of his past, it is amazingly powerful. It's evidence that Jesus Christ is alive. Only the resurrected Christ can explain the change in Saul the proud Pharisee to Paul the faithful preacher. How you get this strict Jew, raised at the feet of Gamaliel, a Pharisee, and as we'll see in a moment in Philippians 3, he was circumcised, he was keeping the law, he was devoted to the law, how you get him instantly to change all his thinking, all of his thoughts about Christ, about the church, and all of the sudden go from a persecutor to a preacher.

The Bible says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old," things, "are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The conversion of Saul of Tarsus became Paul the Apostle is one of the great evidences for the proof of Christianity and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some have actually tried to explain Paul's conversion as some medical or mental problem and tried to explain it away. It's pretty hard to do that when you look at the life of Paul the Apostle.

Notice that Paul was excelling in his Jewish religion beyond measure and persecuted the church of God and wasted it. You can read about Paul's persecution in the book of Acts. When Stephen was stoned, the first Christian martyr, those who were throwing the stones killing Stephen laid their coats at the foot of a young man named Saul. He said, "Hey, I'll watch your things while you kill this crazy Christian," and was consenting unto his death. I believe that Saul, who before he was converted was known as Saul and then became Paul, was listening to Stephen's message and that the Spirit of God took that Word of God and was convicting Saul of his sin and his need for Jesus Christ and that Saul saw Stephen die, heard him pray, "Lord, Jesus, lay not this sin to their charge," and "receive my spirit," and died, that it impacted and convicted Paul, and that's why on the road to Damascus when he was struck down by the presence of the Lord, the Lord said audibly to Saul, "Isn't it hard for you to kick against the goads," which was a long pointed stick they used to drive the oxen in the fields when they plowed. It was a picture of the Holy Spirit convicting him, "Isn't it hard for you to kick against the conviction of the Holy Spirit?" He was coming under the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 26:9-11, let me give you just a reference, when Paul is before Herod Agrippa defending himself in the Roman court, he says, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. 11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme: and being exceedingly mad against them, I

persecuted them even unto strange cities.” Paul is a persecutor. He actually was one of the number one leaders of the Jews in hostile persecution vented out upon the church, so much so that when he finally got saved, even the Christians didn’t believe he was really saved. When he showed up for church, they freaked out because he had been throwing them in prison, persecuting them, killing them, and causing them to even blaspheme the name of Christ.

Paul tells his testimony by giving the truth about his past. When he talks about his sinful past, he doesn’t embellish, enlarge upon, or overemphasize it. It’s always wrong and very, very foolish for a Christian to embellish their sinful past in giving your testimony to try to have it more impactful on people’s lives. This has been something that has happened in churches. There have been people that have gotten limelight for their sinful testimony in their past, and then it has been discovered that it’s not even true—they weren’t even doing what they said they were doing. Even if it were true, don’t glorify your past. If you’re giving your testimony, don’t go on for an hour about all the wicked things you used to do and then spend two minutes saying, “...and then Jesus saved me. God bless you. Have a good day.” Focus on what Christ has done for you and how He has changed your life. Don’t focus on your sinful past, but Paul was truthful about it.

When Paul was a proud Pharisee, he wasn’t a hypocrite. He thought he was doing God a service. He was sincere, but he was deceived. He was religious, pious, devoted, and doing his best; but he was deceived. You can be sincere and be sincerely wrong. Sincerity isn’t the issue, truth is the issue.

Notice what Paul says in verse 14. He says, “And profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” Basically, Paul is saying, “Look, I was more Jewish than the Judaizers. I was more legalistic than the legalists. I was more devoted than the most devoted Judaizer that’s coming along.” Paul is saying, “Look, I know where they are coming from.” Now, put this along Philippians 3:4-7 where Paul says much the same thing. He says, “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh,” which is what the Judaizers had in their Judaism, “If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more,” in other words, if anyone can get to heaven by being Jewish or by being devoted to Judaism, I’m the man. He says, “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews,” meaning, I followed Hebrew culture. I wasn’t a Hellenistic Jew. “...as touching the law, a Pharisee,” you don’t get any more holy and devoted than the Pharisees. He said, “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me,” my spiritual pedigree, “those I counted loss for Christ.”

I’ve often used that Philippian passage, and it goes right with what Paul is saying here, to say, “If anyone can get to heaven by being religious, it would have been Saul of Tarsus.” If anyone could get to heaven by being a devout, sincere, devoted, religious person, it would have been Saul, but it wasn’t going to happen because we’re saved by grace. Saul had to be saved just like everyone else by the grace of God, and that’s why he said, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ...that I may be found in him,” that is, Christ, “not having mine

own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," Paul's pre-conversion.

Notice Paul's conversion in verses 15-16. "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, 16 To reveal his Son in me," or literally to me, "that I might preach him," that is, Christ, "among the heathen," or the Gentiles. Again, notice these things that Paul says took place in his salvation. First, it pleased God to save Paul. This is the initiative of God in salvation. I believe that you would never be saved if God didn't take the initiative. We're lost. We're sinners. We're in rebellion. We're running from God. God must pursue you. God must convict you. God must regenerate you. God must devise the plan of salvation. Salvation is of the Lord. I already said that faith isn't a work, and it's not meriting salvation, so salvation is all of God. There's so much that we could say about this, but I've got to move on.

Note these points. He says, "But when it pleased God," that means God took the initiative, God's initiative in salvation. Secondly, God "separated me from my mother's womb," that's predestinated him, so God purposed and then God planned, predestinated, him to be saved. In Jeremiah 1:5, God said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee," and called you. These verses just bless me so much. John the Baptist was converted in his mother's womb and filled with the Holy Spirit and called by God.

Thirdly, verse 15, notice God called him. God purposed, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace," thirdly. That's the effectual call of God in salvation. Fourthly, in verse 16, God "reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen." God initiated his salvation, separated him or predetermined he would be saved, called him from the time he was young, and then God called him in time. This is when he was saved on the Damascus road. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8, "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

Fourthly, God illuminated Paul by revealing "his Son in me." At the end of verse 12, the gospel was given to Paul by revelation, but he was also given a revelation or illumination of who Jesus was. He revealed, verse 16, "...his Son in me," and then called or commissioned him, "that I might preach him among the heathen," or the Gentiles. I like the fact that in verse 16, "preach him," he's preaching Christ, and so should we be preaching Jesus Christ.

Now we have after Paul's commission, verses 16-24. He says that not only did He reveal His son to me, "that I might preach him among the heathen," but at the end of verse 16, "immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." He's coming back to his opening statements about, "I didn't get taught the gospel by anyone. I didn't learn the gospel by anyone. Nobody thought of the gospel and communicated it to me. It was given to me directly by revelation from Jesus." He says, "Look, immediately when I got saved, I didn't confer with flesh and blood. I didn't get the gospel story or message from anyone," verse 17, "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto

Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.” Paul is being very, very specific about where he went, what he did, and how long he was there.

Verse 19, “But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother. 20 Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not,” to get a Jew to make a statement like that is pretty strong, “I lie not before God,” God is my witness. He said, “Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; 12 And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: 13 But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed,” and what did they do? “And they glorified God in me.” When they heard that God saved Saul the persecutor, and now he’s the preacher, they said, “Praise the Lord! That’s amazing that God would save that individual.” It is a miracle. It’s always a miracle when someone is saved, but when God saves a religious, self-righteous Pharisee, that’s a work of the Holy Spirit.

Seeing the miraculously divine intervention of God in Paul’s life blesses me because I see the same divine intervention and purpose and plan of God in my own life, not that I’m called to be an apostle, but I think, Why me? Why did God save me? Why did God reach down and reveal Himself to me? Why did God, when I was on my Damascus road, when I was running from God, when I was living in sin, when I was running from God in my self-righteousness, why would God in His grace, mercy, and love, reach down and save me, turn me around, call me to preach, and call me to be His child? Call you to be His child. It’s all the work of God’s marvelous grace.

I realize that we’ve run out of time. We have a lot to preach on from verses 16-24, so let me just make a few light comments and then we’ll wrap it up and touch base with it more next week. Paul basically says, “When I got converted, I didn’t confer with flesh and blood, and I finally went up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me,” and then notice verse 17, this is fascinating, “...I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.”

We all know the story of Saul’s conversion in Acts 9, right? He’s on his donkey or walking or whatever it was. He’s on the road to Damascus. At high noon the Lord came to Saul, and he was struck to the earth. He heard an audible voice, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me...it is hard for thee to kick against the goads,” and Saul, lying face down in the dirt said, “Who art thou, Lord?” and totally, totally blowing his mind, “I am Jesus,” and jokingly, I’ve often thought he said, “And I am dead because I’ve hated You and I’ve persecuted Your followers and now I’m in trouble.” “Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” Paul was persecuting who? The church. “...why persecutest thou me?” Is not the church the body of Christ? When people attack Christians, they’re really attacking Christ.

Paul is then taken, blind, into the city of Damascus, and the Lord told Ananias to go and to pray for him. Ananias said, “Lord, are You sure You know what You’re talking about here? I’ve heard this guy is really dangerous. He’s really scary. He came here to arrest Christians. You want me

to go put my hands on him and pray for him? Send someone else, please, Lord.” The Lord told Ananias, “He’s a chosen instrument. He’s a chosen vessel to take my name to the Gentiles.” Ananias obediently went and put his hands on Saul, “Brother, Saul, the Lord even that appeared to you, told me to come to you that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” He prayed for him, and Saul received the Holy Spirit. I believe just for a few days there he waited in Damascus, and I can’t be dogmatic about the order of events, but what it seems to be is that he went then, in the text, to Arabia, verse 17.

Arabia is not the Saudi Arabia of today. This is a different Arabia in Paul’s day. If you take the map and look at Damascus, which is way to the north of Israel and to the east, and then go a little further east of Damascus and south, you’re in the area today of Jordan. That’s the area there, that wilderness area, which was known as Arabia. Paul, or Saul at this time, went into Arabia and for three years he got schooled by, taught by, a revelation from Jesus Himself. That’s pretty cool. It’s pretty amazing how God calls, chooses, prepares His servants, teaches and takes them backside of the desert to prepare them. Moses had to go out into the desert to be prepared for his ministry. David had to be prepared in the wilderness before he did his ministry. Jesus had to go into the wilderness to be prepared before He did His ministry. You can get your education, but you’ve gotta be taken backside of the desert to be ready to do the ministry God has called you for.

After that time in the desert, Paul came back to Damascus (if you read Acts 9, you can get the story) and started preaching powerfully in the synagogue that Jesus is the Messiah. He stirred up such a frenzy there in Damascus with the Jews, and they got so angry with Saul, that at night they had to put him in a basket and lower him down under the guise at nighttime down the outside city wall. He got out of the basket and ran down to Jerusalem to the area of Tarshish. It’s mentioned here in the text in verse 21 where he says, “Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia,” which is the area from which Paul came from, the area of Tarshish, and there for about nine years he just disappears as far as the record goes until they went to find Paul and brought him down to Antioch to be one of the leaders and teachers in the church from which they launched their missionary journeys.

Paul was preaching in Damascus for some time with all boldness, but then says, verse 18, “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter,” not to be taught or instructed by him but just to meet with him. What a meeting that must have been. Saul, now saved, meeting with Peter the Apostle. I wish we could understand or hear the things that they must have talked about for those few days. Paul wasn’t being instructed in the teachings, he was just connecting with Peter and probably finding out about the earthly life of Jesus as well.

The other apostles that Paul saw was only James, the Lord’s brother. What he’s trying to point out here is that, “I didn’t go there to get apostolic authority. I didn’t go there to get confirmation that I’m called.” He didn’t go there to check his message or ministry. He just says, “I went there to touch base with them.” He says, “I’m not lying, after that I went home,” verse 21, “to the area of Syria and Cilicia, and I was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea,” which is Jerusalem, “which were in Christ,” before me, “But they had heard only, That he which

persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.” I love that.

Again, the overarching lesson is that if God can save Saul of Tarshish, God can save anybody. Amen? God can save your religious relative or friend or neighbor. Pray for them. God can convict and convert them. But salvation is of the Lord. God purposed, God planned, God called, God revealed, God commissioned, God gave Paul the gospel, and it’s all of God. The same thing is true of us. When you read Paul’s conversion, and it’s repeated three more times in the book of Acts as he told his testimony, stop for a moment tonight and think about your testimony. Stop for a moment and think about how you were living in darkness and sin. Do you ever have those moments as a Christian? I’ve been a Christian a long time now, and sometimes you’re so far removed from your sinful previous life that you sometimes forget, but then sometimes the Holy Spirit just brings that reminder of how empty you were, how dark it was, how lost you were. Remember how God came to you in His grace and His mercy and His love and convicted you and you trusted Him and He converted you and gave you His salvation and Holy Spirit? That’s awesome!

Your testimony is no less miraculous than Saul of Tarshish. God saved you by His grace. You’re saved by the grace of God, not by your righteousness, not by your goodness, not by your works; and your life has been transformed by the grace of God. You have a testimony. Your testimony is valid and powerful, so take the time to prepare your testimony in those three categories: this is how I used to be before I met Christ, this is how I met Christ, this is what I have been changed to now that I know Christ, and ask God to prepare you to be ready to give to any man that asks you the reason of the hope that lies in you, and do it with reverence and with respect. God wants you to share your testimony. God wants you to tell somebody what Christ has done for you. You don’t have to be a theologian or have to understand Bible prophecy, all you have to understand is, “I was lost, I was found, now I can see. I was blind, now I can see. God has changed my life by His grace.” Amen? Your testimony is just as miraculous as Paul’s. Open your mouth and tell others about Jesus. Let’s pray.