

GALATIANS

Lesson 3

The Divine Origin of the Gospel Galatians 1:11-24

INTRODUCTION

Where did the Apostle Paul get the message of the gospel of grace? Was it a product of his own mind? Was it a device of his wild imagination? Was it mere tradition based on myth and legend? Did Paul get his message from someone else?

In Galatians 1:11-24, the Apostle Paul defends his apostolic message and office, claiming they both had their origin in God, not man. He defends the supernatural origin of his apostleship, showing his gospel and position were given to him by Christ Himself.

THE GOSPEL IS OF DIVINE ORIGIN 1: 11-12

“I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up.”

Paul dogmatically asserts the gospel of grace which he preached does not have any human source at all. The form, content and source of his gospel are in no way influenced by men. Paul’s gospel is not measured by any human rules or standards and is not human in its character.

“I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”

Paul claims his gospel did not derive its content from men nor was he taught it from any man, including the original Twelve Apostles. Paul’s gospel was not a tradition handed down from previous generations but it was given to him directly from Christ. Neither his mission nor his message was derived from man; both came to him directly from Jesus Christ. We are not told how Paul was taught by Christ but we assume Christ revealed Himself to Paul.

For Paul to state he received the gospel directly from God is a fantastic claim. He is saying his gospel is God’s message and his words are God’s words.

The burden of proof is on the Apostle Paul to prove his gospel was apart from any human means and was given directly from God. He will prove this from the history of his own life, giving a sketchy autobiography of his first fourteen years of ministry.

PAUL’S CONDUCT BEFORE HIS CONVERSION PROVES THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL 1:13-14

“For you heard of my previous life in Judaism.”

Before his conversion to Christ, Paul was a Pharisee and wholeheartedly committed to the Jewish religion of that day which was corrupt and apostate. The Jews added many man-made traditions in the *Halacha* to the Old Testament teaching. The supernatural Jewish religion of the Old Testament was degenerated because of ritualism and was corrupt and dead. Paul knew nothing of a supernatural religion. Judaism in Paul’s time was apostate, basing salvation on good works and the Old Testament concept of salvation by grace through faith was a lost concept.

Paul’s previous education would in no way enable him to think up the gospel of grace through faith in Christ, for Judaism as he believed it, was opposed to the liberty of the gospel.

“How intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.”

Paul had such zeal for Judaism that he persecuted Christians in the name of God, being fully persuaded he was doing God's will. He went from house to house in Jerusalem, seizing any Christians he could find, dragging them to prison (Acts 8:3 **"But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison."**). Paul even voted for the death of Christians (Acts 26:10 **"And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them."**). He was determined to destroy the church and wipe it off the face of the earth.

Paul, in his pre-conversion days, could not have received his gospel from the church because he was persecuting it.

"I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers."

Paul, in his fanatical zeal for Judaism, outstripped his Jewish contemporaries in Jewish religion, culture, zeal and activity.

Paul was better acquainted with Judaism than most men of his day. He certainly did not get the gospel of grace from his Jewish contemporaries, who were steeped in legalism.

Paul was in no mental or emotional state to change his mind about Christianity. So deeply was he brainwashed with Jewish traditions that no conditioned reflex or other psychological devices could convert him to Christ. Only God could reach him—and God did! When Paul was converted to Christ and given his appointment of apostle, he broke completely with all his Jewish background, traditions and religion. When he made this break, it cost him everything in the Hebrew culture: fame, power, influence, wealth.

As Christians, we often have to break with our pagan or religious-works past which was not Christian. It is never easy to make this break, but it is necessary if we are to be effective for Christ.

PAUL'S CONDUCT AT CONVERSION PROVES THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL 1: 15-16a

"But when God, who set me apart from birth."

Now Paul begins to talk about what God did for him at his conversion. God intervened into Paul's life in a supernatural way so as to change the whole course of his life.

God's dealings with Paul here are related to God's eternal counsel, which no human completely grasps. It was God in His good pleasure who overruled Paul's Jewish background, education, fanaticism and blindness to Christ. God can and does do the impossible every time a person is converted to Christ, and Paul was an extra difficult nut to crack.

Paul could only explain his conversion by tracing it back to God's sovereign purposes. At birth, or even while he was still in his mother's womb, God set him apart to salvation and apostleship. Before Paul made any human choices, God had a plan for his life. The word "set apart" means "to, put a boundary around" or "to mark out." From God's standpoint, Paul's whole life was marked out from the moment of his birth, and we must conclude that his conversion and apostleship were planned by God.

Because Paul's conversion and conversion were planned by God, he was independent of all men in the receiving his apostolic message and office.

"And called me by his grace"

God's prenatal choice of Paul led to his historical call. It was the pure grace of God that called Paul to salvation and to his apostleship. Paul in his pre-conversion state deserved nothing from God. He was an enemy of God, Christ and Christians. He neither deserved grace nor asked for it. Yet grace found him and saved him. Paul's conversion was supernatural from beginning to the ending (Acts 9:3-6 **"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard**

a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”)

Paul had no problem understanding the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10 **“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain: but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”**).

Paul’s historical conversion and commission were supernatural and he in no way was dependent on man for his message and office.

“Was pleased to reveal his Son in me”

Paul saw the resurrected Christ and this was an objective revelation to him, but he also had an inward revelation where in a subjective sense he understood the spiritual meaning of Christ, His death and resurrection. When his eyes were opened by God, he saw Christ as the Son of God flashed the truth into his heart.

Paul, in his unsaved state, had the basic facts about Christ. He surely knew the central truths of the gospel as he heard them from Stephen and other Christian martyrs in whose persecution and death Paul had a leading role. Paul regarded the facts of Christ’s death and resurrection as blasphemous and foolish. He rejected the truth. He knew Christians claimed Jesus was the Son of God and the Savior of sinners but these were just facts with no validity or authority to Paul. It was not until God supernaturally intervened and Paul really believed that he had spiritual understanding of Christ.

Notice the contrast between verses 13-14 and 15-16. Paul said **I** persecuted the church, **I** advanced in Judaism and **I** tried to destroy the church. He had a life built on self rather than God. But then, after his conversion, he says, **God** set me apart, **God** called me and **God** revealed His Son in me. His life became God-centered rather than self-centered.

“That I might preach him among the Gentiles”

There was a purpose for the conversion and commission of Paul and that was that Paul should preach Christ to the Gentiles. Paul’s personal relationship with Christ was so great that he was able to make it known to others. He received his gospel directly from Christ and preached it directly to the Gentiles.

The end of conversion is service for Christ. God has saved us not to sit, soak and sour but to serve.

PAUL’S CONDUCT AFTER CONVERSION PROVES THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL 1:16b-24

“I did not consult any man, 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.”

The Judaizers might still accuse Paul of receiving his message of grace from other men after being converted to Christ, so Paul gives a brief history of his first 14 years of ministry after his conversion to show that this was impossible.

As soon as Paul was saved, he talked to no man but went into Arabia for quiet and solitude. Paul had a lot of wrong thinking to undo so God put him in solitary confinement for three years. Arabia is for the most part a desolate area. It was in Arabia that God revealed himself to Israel through Moses, and, also in that region, Elijah received his revelation of the grace and power of God. It was to this region Paul went that he might give himself to meditation and prayer.

In this three years of solitude, Paul was learning the gospel of grace from Christ. In this time of seclusion, he meditated on the Old Testament scriptures, on the life and death of Christ and on the experiences of his conversion. He was forming a new theology, for all his learning of the past about works had been shattered by his new discovery of

grace. He had been steeped in law, legalism and good works for salvation and it took teaching by Christ Himself to change his mind.

Before any Christian can have an effective ministry, he must spend time learning the gospel of grace. Grace is the key to really understanding and appreciating salvation and is the great motivator for service for Christ. Since God took three years to teach Paul the doctrines of grace, how can we justify putting up new converts as elders, deacons, preachers and teachers? It takes time to be an effective instrument of grace.

“Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.”

After three years, Paul finally went to Jerusalem, but his stay was only for fifteen days and he saw only two of the apostles. It was therefore ludicrous to suggest that he obtained his gospel from the Jerusalem apostles.

Paul put himself under oath to show he was telling the truth. Biblically to break an oath has serious consequences. Paul took this drastic step to prove he was not lying.

“Later I went to Syria and Cilicia.”

For the next ten years, Paul ministered in the areas of Syria and Cilicia and had no contact with any of the Apostles from Jerusalem. He was completely isolated from the Jerusalem Church. Therefore, his message could not have come from any person in the Jerusalem area.

Ten years of Paul’s life are passed by in silence. Yet they were important years in God’s plan for the Apostle Paul. We know that Barnabas went to Cilicia and contacted Paul and brought him to Antioch of Syria to do ministry among the Gentiles there. Actually Barnabas was discipling Paul for ten years, getting him ready to become the greatest evangelist the church has ever known.

Paul’s ministry for the first fourteen years was not very significant in the eyes of men, but God was using these years to train and teach this man many things about grace and life. Paul’s main ministry came when he was about forty five years old, and he would be used mightily because God had taught him much in the school of hard knocks.

“I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: ‘The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.’ And they praised God because of me.”

None of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem knew the Apostle Paul by face, but they heard of Paul’s changed life and his preaching of the gospel of grace and glorified God because of it. It is impossible to calculate the power and influence of a changed life.

Jewish Christians loved Paul and did not disagree with what he was teaching in the doctrines of grace. It was important for the Judaizers to understand that Paul did not have a different gospel than the Apostles, but he got his gospel directly from Christ not the Apostles.

Notice carefully that these early Christians did not glorify Paul but they glorified God who did a great spiritual work in Paul’s life. We must be careful about exalting men in Christian circles.

CONCLUSION

Since the gospel of grace came from God and not man, it is authoritative and, therefore, to be obeyed. The gospel good news is that Jesus Christ died for men and was resurrected from the dead to declare men righteous. Christ’s death was a substitution for sins and sinners. All who receive Jesus Christ by faith shall have their sins forgiven and be granted eternal life.

It is possible to have an intellectual understanding of the facts of the gospel and still not be born of the Spirit of God. You must be inwardly committed to Jesus Christ and only the Holy Spirit can enable you in grace to have a genuine commitment to Christ. Ask God to grant you the grace to receive Christ as your Lord and Savior. The Bible says, **“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life”** (1 John 5:12).