

Paul Defends His Apostolic Authority

Galatians 1:11-24

Galatians 1:11-24: *“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. ²⁰ (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) ²¹ Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea that were in Christ. ²³ They only heard, “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.” ²⁴ And they glorified God in me.”*

Background Notes

The apostle Paul included some details of his early days as a Christian in the epistle to the Galatians. These additional facts add to the record of Paul’s conversion and early ministry that were given in the book of Acts.

The conversion of Saul (who became the apostle Paul) was recorded in Acts 9. At the direct command of the Lord, Ananias, a disciple who lived in Damascus, came and laid his hands on Saul. *“And he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.... Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose...But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 9:18-22).*

Most likely, the events of Paul’s early Christian life that were recorded in Galatians 1 fit immediately after Acts 9:21: *“Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?”*

Now come the events of Galatians 1:17-24, including a brief visit to Jerusalem and then a return to Damascus. And then Acts 9:22 continues: *“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.”* So it’s clear that the apostle Paul was involved in quite a bit of ministry even before his first missionary journey.

Tarsus, where Saul was born, was in the region of Cilicia (Galatians 1:21). Paul of Tarsus went back home and shared the gospel - as we should do when we’re saved. Paul related these details of his conversion and early Christian life for a special reason. He wanted to emphasize that the gospel that he was proclaiming as an apostle came ***directly from the risen Lord Jesus Christ.***

The Judaizers, who were distorting the pure gospel of Jesus Christ by adding the necessity of human works, were trying to undermine Paul’s authority as an apostle. So here in Galatians 1 Paul defended both his authority as an apostle, and the pure gospel he was preaching. Both the gospel and his authority came directly from the Lord Himself.

Doctrinal Points

1. The gospel of Jesus Christ was not invented by man.

Verses 11-12: *“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

The apostle Paul did not invent or “make up” the gospel. Although Peter and the other disciples were preaching the same gospel, the Paul did not receive it from them. Paul received the gospel of Jesus Christ independently - by revelation from the Lord Himself. The biblical concept of revelation means receiving a direct communication of divine truth from God.

Sometimes when we study Galatians we say that we are studying “Pauline theology.” That can be very misleading, because the theology in Galatians was not devised by Paul! The gospel was communicated by revelation from the Lord Himself. The gospel is supernatural in its origin and power. The apostle Paul did not invent the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus Christ certainly does not have the characteristics of a man-made religion. Man-made religions have high standards, but the standards are not so high that people can’t attain salvation if they work really hard. Look at all the religions in the world today. They are all “human good works oriented” - except for biblical Christianity. Biblical Christianity is different. In fact, it’s unique! The gospel - the good news of Jesus Christ - is that man does not need to do anything to receive salvation. God has done everything, because His standard is too high for man to achieve. God’s standard is perfection – and mankind cannot attain perfection!

So salvation is a gift from God, and we just receive it by faith. That doesn't sound like a doctrine or a gospel that was made up by a human, does it? The gospel of Jesus Christ was **not** invented by man!

2. The life of a believer is not programmed by man.

From verse 13 on to the end of the chapter, Paul gave several logical reasons why his readers should believe him – and not believe the false teachers who were distorting the gospel and trying to undermine Paul's apostolic authority. In verses 13-14 Paul wrote that it was obvious that he didn't make up the gospel because it was certainly contrary to his former way of life. In the past, Rabbi Saul had been completely religious-works-oriented.

In verses 15-17, Paul mentioned that he could not have learned the gospel from the other apostles (or from any other person) because Damascus was not near any of the apostles, and he did not consult with anyone. When he left Damascus, he went to Arabia by himself.

Paul emphasized that when he finally did go up to Jerusalem three years later, he only stayed for two weeks. At that time he met only briefly with Peter and James to get acquainted - **not** to get the gospel from them (v18-24)! All the rest of the time he was out doing missionary work. He was essentially unknown in Jerusalem and Judea, and the churches there were not dictating to Paul what gospel he should preach. All they knew was that Saul, the former religious zealot who had persecuted Christians, was now Paul, the Christian, who was now leading others to Christ! And in this the believers in Jerusalem rejoiced!

How does all that fit into our doctrinal point – that the life of a believer is not programmed by man? Look at verse 15: *“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...”* Paul then proceeded with his argument by revealing how the Lord led him step by step.

Paul indicated that God Himself had programmed his life - including his birth, his conversion, and his ministry. The prophet Jeremiah said essentially the same thing in reference to his call to the ministry. Jeremiah 1:4-5: *“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”*

As believers, we too can say the same things. Our birth, our conversion, our area of service or ministry – these things may *appear* to be determined by man, but **God is ultimately in control**. God has a plan for our lives. The life of a believer is not programmed by man.

Practical Application

Have you had a “Damascus Road” experience and an “Arabian Retreat” experience?

The apostle Paul was dramatically converted as he traveled along the road to Damascus, Syria. Paul was extremely “religious” before his conversion - but he was not saved. After his Damascus road experience, he was saved. He now had a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Do you have a personal relationship with the Lord - or are you just “religious”? You’ve heard the gospel - that Jesus died for your sins, and thus He provided a way of salvation for you, so you could escape eternal death and have eternal life with the Lord in heaven. Now you’ve got to have a Damascus Road experience. To become a true Christian, all you have to do is believe the gospel by faith, and trust in the Lord as your Savior.

Have you had your “Damascus Road” experience? The apostle Paul did - and all of us must have this personal conversion experience, too.

After Paul’s conversion, he went to Arabia for a long retreat – to spend time alone with God. We don’t know exactly where. Look at a Bible map, and you’ll see that Paul could have crossed the border into the 1st century region of Arabia within fifty miles of Damascus.

In Arabia, Paul spent time alone with the Lord. During his Arabian experience, Paul was studying the Scriptures, getting his theology straightened out, and looking to the Lord for His guidance.

All believers need an “Arabian Retreat” experience. In fact, maybe we need more than one! Moses spent time alone with the Lord in the land of Midian, before the Lord used him to lead His people out of Egypt. David spent time alone with the Lord as a shepherd, before the Lord called him to fight Goliath and become the king over God’s people, Israel.

We all need to spend some serious quality time with the Lord after our conversion – getting to know Him through His Word, and asking for His direction for our lives. Have you had your personal “Arabian Retreat” experience? The apostle Paul did - and we should too!

Have you had a “Damascus Road” experience **and** an “Arabian Retreat” experience?