

Galatians 1:11-24

The Judaizers, Jews who claimed to be Christians, and who wanted Christians to submit to the authority of the Mosaic Law and its institutions, had challenged Paul's authority as an apostle. Paul now presents arguments in defense of both his message and ministry as an apostle.

What did Paul say was the origin of his message (vv.11-12)? Paul's message was a direct revelation from Jesus Christ. Both his gospel, and his commission to preach it, came directly from Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road (vv. 15-16). It did not come to him from any intermediary human being. To the Judaizers Paul is essentially saying, "How dare you question my authority and message when they have come as a direct revelation from Jesus Christ?"

What was not the origin? It did not come from any fallible human being. Paul was trying to convince his readers that the gospel he had preached to them was the true gospel. What the Judaizers were presenting, on the other hand, was heresy and was not brought by God.

In contrast to the different gospel brought by others, Paul's message was not a version of man's attempt to reach up and understand God; it was a version of God's effort to bow down and communicate with man.

Paul's relationship to this gospel was unique. Most everyone hears the gospel from someone else; this is God's most common way of communicating the gospel (Romans 10:14-15). But Paul received the gospel in a dramatic, direct revelation when He encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9).

What subject is discussed (vv. 13-24)? His "*previous way of life in Judaism.*" This passage is an autobiographical sketch. The value of a personal testimony is not restricted to those who have a dramatic conversion story like Paul did. We can see the glory of God's work just as much in those who think they have a boring testimony.

What is Paul's purpose in discussing his past? To establish religious credibility with his Jewish audience which would help him to convince his readers that the gospel he had preached to them was the true gospel. What the false teachers/Judaizers were presenting, on the other hand, was heresy.

How had Paul acted toward the church before his conversion (v. 13)? He had intensely persecuted Christians in an attempt to destroy the church.

How did his behavior prove that he did not receive his gospel from men (vv.13-14)? As a violent opponent of the gospel before his conversion, he was under no Christian influence whatsoever. Mere men could not have convinced Paul of the truth of the Gospel message. He did not have a teachable heart when it came to the Gospel.

Secondly, Paul had been an unusually promising young man, "*advancing in Judaism*" just before his conversion: Paul was at that very time surpassing his "contemporaries": he was then an "up and comer." Paul had been in such a frame of mind as to make reception of the gospel impossible. The trajectory of his former life was aimed in the exact opposite direction from what it was now.¹

Paul's main point in vv. 13-14 was to show that there was nothing in his religious background and preconversion life that could have in any way prepared him for a positive response to the gospel.

What did God do for Paul (v. 15)? His grace set Paul apart from birth (or from his mother's womb) and called him. God had taken the initiative, completely "by His grace," to call him and Paul had simply responded to that grace.

Why did God call him (v. 16)? God's larger purpose for Paul was to manifest Christ through him ("*was pleased to reveal His Son in me*"), which is His purpose for every believer (2:20; 4:6).

What was God's specific purpose? For Paul to preach the gospel message to the Gentiles. God's purpose was that Paul would become an evangelist to "the Gentiles" (Galatians 2:8). This calling had been God's intent from the time of Paul's birth: "from my mother's womb" (Isaiah 49:1-6; Jeremiah 1:5).² Clearly Paul did not receive "another gospel" from other men. Since his calling had been undoubtedly supernatural and abundantly clear, Paul did not need to "consult" with any man.

In Galatians 1:12, Paul wrote of how Jesus was revealed *to* him (*revelation from Jesus Christ*). But here is something different and perhaps more glorious: Jesus revealed *in* Paul (v. 16). God wants to do more than reveal Jesus *to* us; He wants to reveal Jesus *in* us.

Application: Do you realize that God wants to reveal His Son *in us* so that we may represent the Lord Jesus to the world? He reveals Christ to our hearts (v. 16) in order that He may display Christ through us (vv. 16-23) in order that God may be glorified in this display (v. 24).

What did Paul do after Jesus was revealed to Him? Where did he go and where did he not go (v. 17)? What is the point? He did not go to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles to discover the content of the gospel. He didn't need to, because the gospel was revealed directly to him by Jesus and he needed no stamp of approval from any human being. Paul's revelation was just as authoritative as any the apostles had received. Instead, he went to an undefined area of "Arabia."³ The product of those Arabian days was to develop his Christian theology not by consulting with others but independently by seeking God's guidance.

Every servant of the Lord needs a time of seclusion and meditation. Moses has his 40 years on the backside of the desert. David was alone with God while he tended sheep on the hillsides of Judea.⁴

When and where did Paul finally meet another apostle (vv. 18-19)? After being in Arabia for three years, Paul met up with Peter, the leader of the apostles. Paul proved here that he did not learn the gospel from the apostles, because he had been a Christian for three years before he even met Peter and James. If he had needed to work out a theology consistent with the teaching of the other apostles, extended meetings with all of them, rather than a mere fifteen days, would have been necessary.⁵ Paul was *not* commanded to come to Jerusalem to give an account to Peter or the other disciples, but he came of his own accord and visited as a tourist to get personally acquainted with Peter. He seemed to be on perfectly equal footing with these apostles.

Who else did Paul see at the time? James. What else do we know about James? He was Jesus' brother.

Where did Paul go next (v. 21)? Paul did not even spend time in "Judea," where he might have heard the same gospel that he himself was preaching from the other apostles or Christians. Instead, he went north into "Syria" and "Cilicia," the province in which his hometown of Tarsus stood. He was there when Barnabas found him later (Acts 11:25). He ministered in Syria and Cilicia for seven years (A.D. 37-43).⁶

What did the other churches know about Paul (v. 22-23)? They didn't know him personally. They only knew about him by way of reputation. All they really knew was that he used to be a persecutor of Christians but had been dramatically converted – for which they glorified God. After his conversion, Paul was an anonymous Christian for many years.

What effect did this have on these other churches (v. 24)? They praised God for what He was doing through Paul. **What does that say about their perspective on Paul and his reputation?**

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Galatians, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 17

² Ibid. p. 18

³ Ibid.

⁴ Believer's Bible Commentary, William MacDonald, 1995 Edition, (published by Thomas Nelson Publishers), p. 1877

⁵ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Galatians, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 20

⁶ Ibid.