

Set Apart from Birth to Preach the Gospel

Galatians 1:11-24)15-17)

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I. Historical Background and Biblical Context

Paul's letter to the Galatians sought to expose the error of the Judaizers' gospel and their impure motives. The term "Judaism" meant the Jewish way of life, which was based on the Old Testament and additional traditions of the fathers or leaders of the people (Matt. 15:2). Since Paul's last visit to Galatia, some false teachers came through the region teaching a different gospel. Not only did they preach something that was untrue, but they challenged Paul's apostolic authority in order to undermine what was true. After making it clear that there was no other gospel, Paul explained in this chapter how he was called to preach the true Gospel. Paul's ultimate goal was to prevent the people from embracing a false gospel and to encourage them to retain their spiritual freedom in Christ. The apostle did not want his dear converts to be tied up with all the now abolished rules and regulations of the Mosaic Law, which would lead them into legalism. This letter from Apostle Paul was addressing the churches of Galatia and its members who were Galatians. The central theme of the letter was justification by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul had led the Galatians to Christ. They had made a good start in their Christian life and were doing well spiritually.

Later some Jewish teachers (called Judaizers) taught the Galatians that to be saved one must not only believe in Christ, but must obey the Mosaic Law, the sign of which is circumcision. In preaching this heresy, they also attacked Paul's apostleship and Gospel. Their false gospel had a detrimental effect on the Galatians. It was beginning to hinder their obedience to God. They were beginning to observe some parts of the law, and they were considering a complete acceptance of the law.

II. The Lesson

1. vv. 11-12.

In Verses 6-9, Paul implied that his Gospel was the only true one. The message he preached was the yardstick by which all others were to be measured. The reason for this was that his Gospel was human neither in nature “not according to man” (V. 11), nor in origin “I neither received it of man” (V. 12). The apostle’s Gospel was genuine because he received it directly from the risen Lord: “...neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (V. 12). Thus, Paul emphasized that both his conversion and his commission owed nothing to man but were of God. How else could such a transformation from persecutor to preacher be explained?

2. vv. 13-14.

Paul confirmed his assertion of receiving the Gospel straight from God and not from man. Neither before nor after his conversion did Paul obtain a knowledge of salvation from any human resource. Prior to conversion, he was an enemy of the Gospel, interested not in hearing or learning about it but only in destroying it. Paul’s credentials as a zealous Jew who persecuted Christians was beyond doubt (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). During the fourteen years following his conversion, Paul was not with the apostles long enough to have been adequately instructed by them in the Gospel. As he stated in verse 14, Paul progressed in Judaism ahead of many of his contemporaries in his nation because he was far more zealous for ancestral traditions. He loved the Law and no doubt spent much time studying the Law of Moses and the Rabbinical traditions.

3. vv. 15-17.

Paul was being clear that God was the One who directed his life. Paul spoke of how God set him apart from his mother’s womb. God set Paul apart from birth as a proclaimer of the Gospel, called him by grace and thirdly, God was pleased to reveal His Son to Paul. Since Paul’s conversion to Christianity was due to God and not man, and since he did not consult with men subsequent to his conversion, then the apostle could not possibly have received the Gospel from any but the Lord: “To reveal his son in me...” (V. 16). Paul made it clear that he was saved for a purpose. He was called by Jesus to be the instrument used to

preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). The divine disclosure to man of the person and work of Christ is the essence of the Gospel. Therefore, no one could accuse Paul of not being acquainted with the teachings of Judaism when he knew better than the Judaizers.

God's intervention in the life of Saul of Tarsus was life-changing. Paul did not come to Jesus because any man decided that he should. It wasn't at the pleasure of any man, but when it pleased God. God did not choose Paul because there was something in Paul that pleased Him; God called Paul through His grace, God's unmerited favor. We know this call wasn't because of anything Paul did because he said that he was called from his mother's womb (V. 15). Therefore, God called Paul before Paul did anything to deserve it. Blinded as he had been to the deity of Jesus Christ, God gave Paul an outward vision of Christ on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). In words echoing the calling of the Messianic Servant (Is. 49:1) and Jeremiah the prophet (Jer. 1:15), Paul related that God had chosen him to be an apostle before his birth. It was part of God's eternal plan to share the good news with the whole world.

For many of us, the setting apart or calling of God comes when we were not expecting it. There came a point when we began to see things clearly. That itself is the work of God. Even though we might have heard the Gospel many times before, at some point we begin to understand it. Job testified, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee:" (Job 42:5). Since Paul emphasized that he had not received the Gospel from man, he affirmed that he was free from human influences as well. Following his Damascus Road conversion, Paul made no trips to Jerusalem where the apostles were but spent approximately three years in Arabia. If he had been uncertain about the Gospel, he could have readily gone to Jerusalem for a meeting with the apostles, but he did not.

4. **vv. 18-24.**

When Paul did first go to Jerusalem as a Christian, the purpose of his visit was to see Peter. While there he saw the brother of Jesus whose name was James. He was not a disciple of Jesus prior to the crucifixion and resurrection but became a leader and disciple of the Jerusalem church after Jesus' ascension. Paul knew that his opponents would challenge him, and in Verse 19, he added that he

was being truthful about the Gospel. Paul was serious about defending himself. He understood that it would be a sin to make statements that were not true.

During the period Paul was in the regions of Syria and Cilicia, he preached the faith which he once tried to destroy. Because Paul had spent some time away from Jerusalem, he was unknown by face to the Judean churches. Even though he had met with Peter and James, He was still unknown to the disciples of the Judean churches. The disciples did not know Paul by sight but were aware of his reputation as a persecutor of the church. They glorified God for transforming the former persecutor into a disciple and an apostle.

III. Conclusion

Paul began his letter to the churches of Galatia by reminding them of the true Gospel that they have turned away from. He established his authority as an apostle and demonstrated how he received the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not from man but from God. Paul used this as a foundation to build his case against the twisted message that these churches had come to believe, a message that they received from competing Jewish authorities. He left his old life behind as soon as he met Jesus Christ. God setting him apart, calling him and revealing Christ to him overcame Paul's resistance, changing the way he saw everything from that point forward.

God can use sinful people to carry out His plan and He can decide that even before they are born. Every Christian must ask if their gospel has come from God or if they made it up themselves. Only what comes from God can really save us and make a lasting difference in our lives. When we receive Christ as our Savior, we must give God the glory and seek to know Christ as He is revealed in the word.

As followers of Christ, we have been commissioned by Jesus to go make disciples. We must be about the work of the kingdom wherever we are.