
An Unlikely Pedigree

Overview

The Apostle Paul points towards the origin of his own gospel message in order to display a contrast between himself and the Judaizers, whom he intends to confront. Paul also reminds the Galatian believers of his own conversion, call to gospel ministry, and his motivation for toiling in such ground. His story brings believers hope for their own acceptance before God, purpose for the difficult road that they have already traveled, and encouragement for their future usefulness in the grand plan of God.

Contrast

- Judaizers are pointing to Jerusalem, a common human place of authority, to claim a foundation on which to stand and bring *the traditions of men* to the Galatian Christians.
- Paul appeals to a divine revelation from the risen Savior, and draws a distinct line in the sand between the authority of his message and that of his opponents.

Consider this...

The Apostle Paul sought with all his might to be acceptable before God through his own adherence to the traditional customs of his culture (what he believed to be the law of God). His posture was self-righteous and insecure at the same time. He knew that obedience was essential; he knew he was better than most, but he was not obedient enough.

Passage: Galatians 1:13-24

Application

- The content of the Gospel is rational and continually useful
- Christians should desire to live in light of the Gospel truth, not in succession of great men or women
- You are sinful and underserving of grace, as was Paul, BUT GOD saves because He delights in doing so

Ephesians 2:4-7

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace.”

Galatians 1:13-24

Intro: At the end of the first chapter of Galatians we find a peculiar story from a man greatly used by God. It is peculiar, not because it was strange for him to say what he said, nor because he said something that is hard to understand. It is peculiar precisely because it is plain and straightforward. It is peculiar because it is the opposite of what one might expect from the mouth or pen of a contemporary American Christian leader (or follower). Paul goes out of his way to list his lacking connections and his tremendous social baggage, and this to prove his Gospel authority. He is uninterested with people of prestige, unhindered by absent acclaim, and only concerned with the congruent content of the Gospel message. Professing Christians today might learn a thing or two from Paul's example here.

15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus...

- **Paul immediately lived out the implications of what he had come to know.**
 - **Acts 9:19b-22** - "19b For some days he [Saul/Paul] was with the **disciples** at Damascus. 20 And immediately he **proclaimed Jesus** in the **synagogues**, saying, "**He is the Son of God.**" 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" 22 But Saul **increased** all the more **in strength**, and **confounded** the Jews who lived in Damascus by **proving** that **Jesus was the Christ.**"
 - Notice First: Paul preached a message of rational content that was *compelling* and *confounding* (v22).
 - Yet again we are presented with the idea that the Gospel message is one of particular content, that its picture is painted with brush strokes of rational propositions, and that the response (if presented accurately) may be the contorted faces of those whose tongues have just tasted bitter poison or the welcoming candor of those whose ears have just heard the sweetest melody.

- Notice Second: Paul “preached Christ” with boldness in front of exactly the group that would be most offended by the message (“in the synagogues” v20).
 - With a seeming disregard for his social status or previous prestige, Paul sides with Christ and finds an entirely new identity!
 - Paul not only doesn’t avoid those who would be his cruelest faultfinders, he walks right into their domain and offers them all of the ammunition they might possibly want.
- Both of these are quite the opposite of many professing Christians in our culture today.
 - Professing Christians in our day want to speak of a subjective feeling or experience rather than understand and proclaim a Gospel that is both compelling and confounding (persuasive and impenetrable, winsome and intellectually honest).
 - Professing Christians in our day also want to only speak when asked and only say what will cause the least disruption or draw the least attention.
- On a side note: Addressing the “different” accounts of Paul (Galatians) and Luke (Acts)
 - “The fact that Luke does not make mention of this trip is not strange. Neither Luke nor Paul is trying to give us a complete biography of Paul... Since Paul, in all probability, did not carry out any preaching mission in sparsely settled “Arabia” ... it is not surprising that Luke omits mention of Paul’s visit to that largely desert region. Surely, no one, not even the most confirmed Judaizer, would dare to claim that in Arabia Paul had received his gospel either from men or through man! And, on the other hand, the thought suggests itself that withdrawing to Arabia for rest, prayer, and meditation was exactly what Paul needed, so that his mind, violently shaken, would have time and opportunity to ponder the implications of the words which the Lord had spoken to him at the moment of his unforgettable experience.”¹

¹ Hendriksen

15 *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus... 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. 20 (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.*

- **Paul's point is that he was NOT connected with those of notable reputation.**
 - *"I did not immediately consult with anyone"* – He did not seek affirmation from other men. He was not interested in peer praise or social support.
 - *"nor did I immediately go up to Jerusalem to the apostles"* – He did not seek endorsement from notable Christian leaders. He did not chase the approval of those in prestigious positions.
 - *"I saw Cephas and James, but none of the other apostles"* – When Paul mentions the two names of prominent Christian leaders here, it is in concession and not for his own commendation. Paul is adamant that he has NOT come from or served these other men.
 - *"I was still unknown to the churches of Judea"* – Lastly, when Paul mentions the gathered churches of high repute, he does so with a negative.
- Notice, again, the stark contrast between Paul and many professing Christians in our day.
 - "Tell me how it was that you came to know and believe the Gospel."
 - My pastor, father, mother, sister, brother, friend...
 - I was baptized at First Church of the frozen chosen...
 - My father, uncle, granddad, friend is a pastor, evangelist, Christian...
 - I am a good friend of pastor so and so...
 - I am a member of such and such church...
 - I served as a deacon, Sunday school teacher, committee chair...
 - I was in the choir, served in the nursery, helped with church activities/events...
 - "Oh, that's nice... But you must not have understood the question."

*“13 For you have heard of my former life in **Judaism**, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. 14 And I was **advancing in Judaism** beyond many of my own age among my people, so **extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers**. 15 **But... he [BUT GOD!]** who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...”*

- **Paul was totally sinful, but God is supremely gracious.**

- Paul was violently opposed to Christ and His Church.

“Paul here pictures himself in his pre-conversion state as a dedicated enthusiast, filled with Pharisaic zeal... Elsewhere Paul describes himself as persecuting “this Way unto death” (Acts 22:4), and as being “exceedingly mad” against the saints (Acts 26:11). Luke writes that Saul of Tarsus “was breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1).”²

- The Judaism of which Paul speaks here is not the holy law of God, as revealed in the Old Testament (Exodus 20), but described well as “*the traditions of my fathers.*”

- “This Jewish religion was not that of Old Testament revelation, whose lines – historical, typological, psychological, and prophetic – converge at Bethlehem, Calvary, Olivet. No, the Jewish religion in which Paul had been pushing his way forward was that in which God’s holy law was being buried under a load of human traditions... the entire ‘*halakah*’ of body of Jewish oral law which supplemented the written law... By means of obedience to the entire Mosaic law as interpreted by all these traditions, many of them trivial and at times even directly contrary to the very intention of the commandment as originally given, the Jews, including Paul before his conversion, tried to work their way into ‘the kingdom of heaven.’”³

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- Saul was who he was, BUT GOD did what HE does!

- Genesis 8:1 – “**But God** remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.”

² Hendriksen

³ Hendriksen

- Psalm 49:15 - "Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell. **But God** will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me."
- Psalm 74:12 - "**Yet God** my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth."
- 1 Corinthians 3:7 - "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, **but only God** who gives the growth."
- 1 Corinthians 15:57 - Paul speaks of death, the final and ultimate foe of all sinners, and says, "**But** thanks be to **God**, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
- 1 John 4:10 - "In this is love, not that we have loved God **but** that **he** [God] loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
- Galatians 1:15-16 - "**But... he** [God] who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me..."
- Ephesians 2:4-5 - "**But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..."
- 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 - "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **But God** chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; **God** chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **God** chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, **so that no human being might boast** in the presence of **God**. And **because of him you are in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from **God**, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

23 They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24 And they glorified God because of me."

- **God is to be glorified in the salvation of sinners.**

- Paul, on the first 2 points, has provided a contrasting example; but here he gives us all great hope. Even a sinner such as Paul is easily brought into the family of God and commissioned by Him for loving service and self-sacrifice! God is truly glorious in His saving work!

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