

# THIS IS NOT MAN'S GOSPEL

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*Galatians 1:11-24*

## Introduction:

Turn with me to Galatians chapter 1 – read vv. 11-12. One of the first things you need to notice about this passage is the similarity between v. 12 and what Paul said in v. 1 – read it.

In verse 1, Paul was defending his apostleship, his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ. In v. 12 he is defending his message—the source and the truth of his message—the gospel he preached. Paul's apostleship is not from man, and his gospel is not from man. On the contrary, the risen Christ—who is much more (though not less) than a man—had commissioned Paul as an apostle and had revealed to him the gospel.

As one commentator pointed out, this is critical because his apostleship and his message stand or fall together. If Paul was not truly an apostle, then his claim to authority and the truth of his message collapses. Likewise, if his gospel proves to be only a human fabrication—something created by his own mind—then he forfeits the right to be called an apostle.

So in a very real sense he is defending his calling and his apostleship by defending the truth and veracity of his message—the gospel that he preaches. And the reason he needs to do this is in v. 7 – “...there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” There are men who have come in to the churches, proclaiming a different gospel. They have a message they claim is the truth, but it is different from the message Paul preached to them. By contradicting Paul's message, these Judaizers are calling into question Paul's message and his authority. Paul is not willing to let that go. He is determined to show them that his message and his authority come from Jesus Christ.

So the underlying theme of this passage this morning is found in that statement in v. 11 – This is not man's gospel. In v. 12 Paul is very clear that it did not come from his own mind or thinking, nor from any other man, but it came directly through a revelation from Jesus Christ.

## Paul's Personal Testimony

The heart of Paul's argument defending the authority of his apostleship and his message is in his own personal testimony and the timeline of his life during the years following his conversion. Verses 13–24 are Paul's argument for the truth of his apostleship and his gospel. I want to spend some time looking at how he makes his case.

Verse 12 said that the gospel had come to Paul by a revelation of Christ. He stakes the truth of his gospel on the fact that the risen Christ appeared to him and commissioned him personally to preach the gospel. He begins his argument in verses 13 and 14 by recounting how relentlessly anti-Christian he was before his conversion. Read vv. 13-14.

“...you have heard of my former life in Judaism...” This was common knowledge. Anyone could ask around and find the truth about Paul's former life. Let's just take a few moments and look at what we know about Paul's former life.

We know that Paul was born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, in the south-central part of modern Turkey. Paul, himself, testified before a crowd of people in Jerusalem, in Acts 22:3 – “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.” His name at birth was Saul.

The first mention of Saul in the NT is in Acts 7 as Stephen was being stoned to death. Turn and read Acts 7:54-8:3. It does not appear that Saul was actively involved in the murder of Stephen, but he clearly supported what took place that day. And it seems that this was a kind of turning point in Saul's life as he became enraged at this upstart group of Jesus-followers. He became violently opposed to these people who would later be called Christians. He did everything he could to persecute the church and to stop this movement from spreading any further.

Go back to Gal. 1:13-14 - Paul was a very zealous individual. However, he was zealous not for the truth, but for the traditions of his fathers. Those traditions were threatened by this upstart group of Jesus-followers and he lashed out with all his might against this movement that seemed to threaten everything he believed in and stood for.

So, why did Paul bring up the sordid nature of his past life? This is the basis for his argument that the gospel he preached was in fact the true gospel revealed to him by Jesus Christ. A clue to his purpose is found in vv. 22-24 – read them. Paul closes this section by pointing out how complete and astonishing his conversion was. From persecutor, to preacher. He went from being one who was ready to kill Christians, to one who was ready to be killed as a Christian. The real question in all of this is: Was this change in attitude and behaviour a work of man or a work of God?

Paul wanted to be sure they understood that the change from his old life to his new life was not the result of a change of mind. He did not suddenly become attracted to the message of the apostles and decide to join them and accept their views and ideas. It literally took an “act of God” to turn him around. It took a revelation from Christ himself to change his life and give him the message he was now preaching everywhere he went.

From v. 15 onwards, he points out God’s calling on his life and goes through some details from his early Christian life to bolster his argument that the gospel he preached came by direct revelation from Jesus Christ. Let’s have a look at the timeline Paul gives us.

vv. 15-16 – everything was in God’s own timing and according to his perfect will

- Set apart by God before he was born (from my mother’s womb)
- Called by God’s grace
- Christ was revealed to him – Damascus Road experience
- Commissioned to preach to the Gentiles

Then, in the following verses, Paul lays out his argument that he did not receive his message or his gospel from any of the other apostles, because he did not even meet with the other apostles for a number of years after his conversion.

He spent most of the next 14 in God’s classroom, alone in the wilderness, being taught by Jesus Christ himself. He had a very unique Bible College and Seminary education with Jesus as his professor, revealing the truths of the OT Scriptures and the message of grace.

I want to briefly go through the timeline, using a chart from the ESV Study Bible as a guide.

### Paul’s Visits to Jerusalem in Galatians and Acts

Galatians	Event	Acts	Event
<a href="#">1:15–17</a>	Paul’s conversion	<a href="#">9:1–25</a>	Paul’s conversion
<a href="#">1:18</a>	three years after conversion, first visit to Jerusalem	<a href="#">9:26–30</a>	with Barnabas in Jerusalem
<a href="#">2:1–10</a>	14 years after conversion (or after first trip?), Paul meets with “pillars” of the church	<a href="#">11:29–30</a>	famine relief visit to Jerusalem
<a href="#">2:11–14</a>	dispute in Antioch	<a href="#">15:1–2</a>	dispute in Antioch

Paul’s argument was that his message could not have come to him from the other apostles because he had not spent time with them to learn the truths of grace and glory from them. Next week we will look at the further argument that his message did not just come from his own imagination either.

So, what is the point of all of this in the context of Paul’s concern for the churches of Galatia. As he sets out to address the heresies coming into the churches and leading the people into error, he wants to establish the fact that he speaks with the authority of Jesus Christ. His message is not his own message, nor something thought up or designed by men, but it is indeed God’s message. So he describes and defends the source of his message and his authority as an apostle.

### **Conclusion:**

The other question we need to address before we close is this: What difference does any of this make for us? What are the lessons for us today in this account of Paul’s life and his defense of the gospel he is preaching? I would like to mention a couple of things.

1. No one is beyond the reach of God's grace and God's calling. Paul made a point of the wretchedness of his old life. If ever there was someone whom we would classify as being unreachable, it would be Saul. He was absolutely committed to the destruction of the church and the eradication of those who called themselves believers. Yet God had a plan and purpose for him and He called Saul, confronted him, saved him and commissioned him to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. Certainly he can save those for whom you are praying.
2. Truth is important – a second lesson. Paul was concerned for the truth. Authority and truth are the central issues in this passage. Two messages are vying for our allegiance: Paul's and the Judaizer's. According to verses 8 and 9, heaven and hell are at stake. Only one of these gospels is true. Believing the true one is the most important thing in the world for every one of us. Paul is forcing upon us the issue of truth.

We live in a society where we are bombarded with all kinds of messages—all kinds of claims about what we need to live a full life. But do we ever ask about the veracity of those claims. Do we look for any kind of solid statement about the *basis* of the opinions and ideas?

Piper - "Does not this barrage of unfounded opinions communicate that *truth* does not really matter? That one opinion is as good as the next? When was the last time you heard someone make an effort to clarify and defend his foundational understanding of reality which might make his convictions plausible?"

Paul was concerned not only about presenting the truth, but being able to defend the foundations on which that truth is based. Truth matters and it should matter for each of us.

There is just one more thing. We have been looking at the truth of Paul's gospel. But we must not miss the content of Paul's gospel. It is a gospel of grace. If you are here this morning and you have never surrendered to God's call on your life, God is offering his grace to you this morning. Will you accept it?

Salvation application and invitation.