

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 5 – “Jesus and the Gospel of Grace”
Galatians 1:11-24
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I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me. (Galatians 1:11-24 NIV).

Over the past twelve years it has been a privilege of mine to visit in many churches over a wide range of denominations. Some of those were in a consultant's capacity, though many were just as a "visitor." There are many observations that I have had in each of these fellowships. However, one was of particular interest. It seemed to me that there were more sermons from the pastors of these churches about Paul than Jesus!

Of course a part of the reason for this is that Paul was *humanly responsible* for so much of the New Testament. In fact, since he has authored over 25% of the New Testament, it does stand to reason that we should be in his writings at least that often. Additionally, so much of his writing is autobiographical we find a great deal of the history of the early church through these letters. Galatians is a good example of this. The six chapters of this letter are equal parts autobiographical and instructional. **Out text today is a part of the autobiographical portion of the letter in which Paul defends his apostleship. He does this by reminding his readers that he was an apostle before he went to Jerusalem or met with the other Christian leaders. His apostleship was independent of all human and religious authorities.**

This passage has much more interest for us today than merely informing us of the history and progression of the Apostle Paul's work. Woven into his personal experiences are some things that give us crucial insight into the very nature of the Christian gospel. Since the Gospel is at the heart of our faith this is very important. There are two truths in this passage that we need to understand.

FIRST, JESUS CHRIST IS THE SOURCE OF THE GOSPEL OF GRACE (vv. 11-12).

These first two verses of our passage today are very revealing. *The Message*, a contemporary version, accurately translates these verses:

Know this—I am most emphatic here, friends—this great Message I delivered to you is not mere human optimism. I didn't receive it through the traditions, and I wasn't taught it in some school. I got it straight from God, received the Message directly from Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11-12 The Message).

1. **First, the Gospel is not human in its character, source, or standard.** When the apostle starts with “know this” it is much the same as when I say, “Listen, don’t miss this!” It is means of drawing his audience in very closely to make sure they do not get lost in the rest of the writing and somehow miss the importance of what he will immediately reveal. This truth he is about to write is both wondrous and remarkable. *This Gospel is much more than human idealism.* It does not originate in human wisdom. Do you see the great truth here? Our faith is not something put together by human device or wisdom. It was not developed through someone’s ideas or understanding. The Gospel is not something put together by a religious genius or charismatic figure. *Further, it did not come to Paul as some tradition passed from generation to generation.* Paul did not learn it from the other apostles or any religious hierarchy. It was *directly from Jesus Christ.*
2. **Second, the Gospel was a revelation.** The word translated “revelation” is familiar to us. It is also used in the introduction of the last book of our New Testament. As John begins the writing he says it is the *“the revelation from Jesus Christ”* (cf. Revelation 1:1). A “revelation” is an unveiling, an unfolding, or a making known of something previously hidden or shrouded. That which is revealed in this case was the good news of the salvation by grace through faith plus NOTHING! And the one responsible for this revelation was Jesus himself. He was the one doing the revealing. This completely removes all other sources from the action, whether natural or supernatural.

NOTE: Paul makes it very clear that he received this revelation from Jesus in his experience on the road to Damascus (vv. 13-17). In that experience, not only did Paul see the risen Christ, he also saw the only way to salvation was through faith in Christ. Paul shares a lot of his past with the readers in this bit of autobiography. He wanted to make sure they understood that this gospel he preached to them was not his. *It is not Pauline theology, or early Christian interpretation of the Christ event, but rather a revelation which Jesus himself personally delivered to Saul of Tarsus!* Surely this means it is trustworthy and true! **THEREFORE,** if the teachers who had come to Galatia did not like the gospel Paul was preaching, they did not like the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus. Their argument was not with Paul, but with Jesus. This adds a deep and profound element of seriousness to their actions.

SECOND, JESUS CHRIST IS THE SUBSTANCE OF THE GOSPEL (vv. 15-16).

The Gospel is more than a plan that Jesus delivered to Paul to be shared with the Gentile world. Jesus is the heart of the plan. I really like the translation of *The Message* for these verses:

*I'm sure that you've heard the story of my earlier life when I lived in the Jewish way. In those days I went all out in persecuting God's church. I was systematically destroying it. I was so enthusiastic about the traditions of my ancestors that I advanced head and shoulders above my peers in my career. **Even then God had designs on me. Why, when I was still in my mother's womb he chose and called me out of sheer***

generosity! Now he has intervened and revealed his Son to me so that I might joyfully tell non-Jews about him. (Galatians 1:13-16 The Message).

It was God's design from the very beginning that Paul should receive and give this message of Christ to the Gentiles. This says something very important about *WHAT* we should be preaching. There are many good things we can learn from the Scripture; and, all of them are important for us as we seek to live lives that bring glory to God and peace and joy to us and those around us. **However, the central message is not something we learn to do, but someone we come to believe.**

SOME CONCLUSIONS:

First, the nature of the Gospel is rooted in the glory of Christ. It is something Jesus gave to us himself; therefore it is a creative work. Just as the original creation was spoken through the Word of God, so this new creative work of redemption came through His will and purpose, spoken in glory and finished on the earth.

Second, the message of the Gospel is one of the final victory of God, as he has promised. There is so much we can say at this point in our discussion, not the least of which is the perseverance of God with His children. No matter how badly we may have gone off the path designed for our lives, He does not give up on us. He has promised victory and will bring it to bear in our lives. I have often talked about "the A-path" in the Christian's life. That is the path God has chosen for us, which brings us into the center of his will and purpose. The "B-path" is the direction we most often find ourselves traveling however. This is that direction that can be either intentionally or unintentionally out of God's will. It may be a choice that is sinful, or is simply unwise. In any regard, God does not abandon us in either case. He will continue to call to us to "work all things to our good" (cf. Romans 8:28).

Third, the message of the Gospel must be shared from the perspective of personal experience. The message of the Gospel is not an academic exercise. It is intended to personally affect others and us!