

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON FOURTEEN)

“THE BELIEVER AND PREACHER” (PART 4)

GALATIANS 1:18-24

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and get information from him, and I stayed with him fifteen days.

19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother.

20 I assure you that, before God, I am not lying about what I am writing to you!

21 Afterward I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

22 But I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

23 They were only hearing, “The one who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the good news of the faith he once tried to destroy.”

24 So they glorified God because of me.

Last week, we considered verses **16-20**. In these verses Paul continues to relate his personal experiences in an effort to defend the divine nature of his ministry and message.

In verse **16**, he informs his readers that when God revealed His Son, Jesus Christ in him, he *“did not go to ask advice from any human*

being.” Paul is saying in effect here, “I did not consult with anyone in order to learn the opinion of others as to this revelation I received, or to obtain instruction from them, or guidance, or advice.” He is asserting that his apostolic commission and message came to him directly from God, and that neither his commission nor his message was affected in any way by human intervention.

In verse **17** he explains that he had no personal contact with any of the Apostles right after his conversion. Instead of going to Jerusalem to consult with the twelve original Apostles, Paul “*departed to Arabia.*” As **Kenneth Wuest** comments, “He needed to be alone with God. He needed time and isolation in order to think. The revelation of the Son of God had blasted away the foundations of the Pharisaic thought structure which he had been building up with such consummate skill and zeal, and it had come tumbling down in ruins about his head. This revelation also furnished him with another foundation upon which to build a new theological structure. But the replacement of the ruined structure with a new one could not be the work of a day or a month. There in Arabia, isolated from all human contact, alone with God, the great apostle restudied his Old Testament scriptures...Out of all this study emerged the Pauline system of doctrine as we have it presented in **Romans.**”

When he eventually left Arabia, Paul did not go to Jerusalem. Instead, he “*returned to Damascus.*” His return to Damascus and the danger it brought to his life are further evidence that the Jewish leaders considered Paul an enemy, and therefore that his experience with Christ was an authentic one.

During all this time he had never met with one of the Apostles, nor does it appear that he had intercourse with any individual of note among the Christians.

In verses **18** and **19**, Paul speaks about his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion to Christianity.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and get information from him, and I stayed with him fifteen days.

19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

The main purpose of his visit to Jerusalem was to meet with Peter. The phrase “*after three years,*” clearly indicates that he did not go to Jerusalem in order to receive any commission from Peter. He had been with the Lord for three years before he ever saw the face of an Apostle. The only other Apostle he saw was James the half-brother of Jesus. Clearly Paul did not receive either his ministry or his message from the Jerusalem church. There simply was neither the time nor the opportunity for that. In any case, he had already received both directly from Christ.

In verse **20** Paul writes, “*I assure you that, before God, I am not lying about what I am writing to you!*” These words refer primarily to what he had just written in verses **18** and **19**, as these were facts that clearly showed Paul's independence from those who had been Apostles prior to his call. The strength of Paul's language is explained by the insidious falsehoods of the Judaizers regarding his supposed dependence upon the original twelve Apostles. The logical inference is that they had circulated statements to the effect that Paul had spent much time at Jerusalem with the Apostles there. He denies this charge most vehemently in this verse.

In **Acts 9:26-30**, Luke gives us a summary of the events surrounding his visit to Jerusalem:

26 When he arrived in Jerusalem, he attempted to associate with the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, because they did not believe that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took Saul, brought him to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, that the Lord had spoken to

him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

28 So he was staying with them, associating openly with them in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

29 He was speaking and debating with the Greek-speaking Jews, but they were trying to kill him.

30 When the brothers found out about this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

(New English Translation)

After escaping the assassination attempts in Jerusalem, Paul went to his birthplace in Tarsus in Cilicia. He informs his readers of this in verse **21**: “*Afterward I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia.*” Scripture is silent about the time Paul spent in Tarsus and the surrounding regions. In all probability, he preached the Gospel there until Barnabas called for him to come to Antioch in Syria. Here again, Paul is showing how far he traveled away from all Judean influence and recognition.

Kenneth Wuest writes, “Here we have about ten years of Paul's life passed over in silence, between his flight from Jerusalem to Tarsus and his return to the former city for the Apostolic Council. These years were spent around Tarsus and Antioch, in Cyprus and Asia Minor.”

In **Acts 11:19-26**, Luke gives us an account of the spreading of the Gospel beyond the region of Judea. He informs us of the pioneering work among the Gentiles in Antioch and the ministry of Barnabas and Saul (Paul) there. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

19 Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews.

20 But there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene among them who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks too, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus.

21 The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

22 A report about them came to the attention of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts,

24 because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a significant number of people were brought to the Lord.

25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to look for Saul,

(The words "look for" are the translation of a Greek word which means, "to seek up and down (back and forth) for, to seek carefully, to search for, to try to locate, to discover, or to investigate." The word was often used in the context of hunting for criminals or fugitive slaves.)

26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught a significant number of people. Now it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

In verse **22**, Paul writes, "*But I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.*"

Paul's statement here makes it clear that his first visit to Jerusalem, mentioned in verse **18**, did not include visits to the churches that were in Judea, the region around Jerusalem. And in Tarsus, he would have been almost 600 miles north of Jerusalem. This explains why he was personally unknown to the churches of Judea. The Greek word translated "*unknown*" is in the **present tense**, emphasizing a continuous state. Paul

says literally, “I remained personally unknown to the believers in Judea.”

He speaks of the churches of Judea as distinct from the church at Jerusalem. He had left Jerusalem so suddenly that the Judean churches, even though they were close to Jerusalem, would have had no opportunity to become acquainted with him.

Paul is making the point here that he had left Jerusalem after only a short visit. Had he been there for a long time under the authority of the other Apostles, he would certainly have visited the surrounding churches of Judea. The fact that the believers in Judea did not know him personally shows that he was an independent missionary, and that he was not operating under the supervision of the Jerusalem church and the Twelve.

No doubt, the believers in Judea would have heard of Paul’s conversion, but their only knowledge of him would have been by report only. This is confirmed by Paul in verse **23**: “*They were only hearing, ‘The one who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the good news of the faith he once tried to destroy.’*”

The Greek word translated “*hearing*” is in the **present tense** which indicates that the churches in Judea were continually hearing about Paul. The emphasis is not on the fact of the hearing, but on the **continual** hearing. The word “*only*” limits the whole statement. The only exception to the ignorance of the Judean believers concerning Paul was the information that, “*the one who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the good news of the faith he once tried to destroy.*”

To what is Paul referring when he speaks of “*the faith?*” Is he referring to the entire **body of truth** that comprises the Gospel message, or is he referring to the **belief** that a person exercises in the Gospel message? Some theologians argue that the phrase “*the faith*” is used here in the sense of the **Gospel message** inclusive of the doctrine of justification by faith apart from circumcision or works. Others are of the view that Paul

is referring to the **act of believing** the Gospel message and not the message itself.

For my own part, I do not see why it is a necessary to choose between the two. It is possible that Paul may have meant the phrase “*the faith*” to be understood as referring to both the Gospel message and the act of believing the message. Before his conversion Paul’s aim was the extermination of the Church and its message of salvation by faith in in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. This he tried to accomplish by the ravaging of the faith of individual Christians. He set out to destroy both the message of the Good News and those who believed the message of the Good News. He hated both the message and those who believed it!

The word “*destroy*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to ravage, to overthrow, to make havoc.” The word is in the **imperfect tense** which speaks of continuous action in past time. It is not the fact of having destroyed the faith, that is in view here, for Paul was never able to accomplish that. What he is referring to here is his continuous process of ravaging and making havoc of the Church.

In verse **24** we learn that Paul’s conversion, the unique manner of his apostolic commission and of the revelation of the Gospel message to him, his absolute independence of the original Apostles and his own personal sufferings, were all for the glory of God! He says concerning the believers in Judea, “*So they glorified God because of me.*”

Here we have another confirmation of Paul’s authority. The Jewish Christians in Judea, even though they did not know Paul personally, gave glory to God because Paul was now preaching the Gospel of grace, the very message he had tried so hard to destroy.

Donald Campbell comments that, “This was a telling blow to the false teachers. The Jewish Christians in Judea rejoiced in the same gospel the Judaizers sought to undermine.”

The warm and friendly attitude of the Judean believers towards Paul, even though they had never met him personally, contrasted greatly with the hatred which the Judaizers displayed in their antagonism against him.

It is important for us to note that the believers in Judea were not glorifying Paul. They were glorifying Paul's God! The Judaeen churches found in Paul an occasion and a reason for glorifying God. The verse may be translated as follows: "And so in me they found that for which to glorify God."

The Judaizers were interested in their own glory. That is why they were attempting to steal Paul's converts and lead them astray. If Paul had been interested in glorifying himself, he could have remained a Jewish rabbi. As a fanatical rabbi and persecutor of the church, he had received all the glory that an individual could want, but his life was not glorifying God. After his conversion however, his only motivation was the glory of God!

In **Galatians 6:12-14**, Paul contrasts his ministry motivation from that of the Judaizers:

12 Those who want to make a good showing in external matters are trying to force you to be circumcised. They do so only to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

13 For those who are circumcised do not obey the law themselves, but they want you to be circumcised so that they can boast about your flesh.

14 But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
(**New English Translation**)

The very first, and the most famous question in the **Westminster Shorter Catechism** is "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer is "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." It is my

fervent hope and prayer that the chief end of every person who attends The Grace Workshop Ministries will be the same, **“To glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”**

We will conclude our Lesson this evening with the words of **Warren Wiersbe**:

“Modern-day 'Judaizers,' like their ancient counterparts, reject the authority of Paul and try to undermine the *Gospel* which he preached. In Paul's day, their message was 'the *Gospel* plus Moses.' In our day it is 'the *Gospel* Plus' any number of religious leaders, religious books, or religious organizations. 'You cannot be saved unless . . .' is their message...and that 'unless' usually includes joining their group and obeying their rules. If you dare to mention the *Gospel* of grace as preached by Jesus, Paul, and the other Apostles, they reply, 'But God has given us a new revelation!'

Paul has the answer for them: 'If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed!' (**Galatians 1:9**) When a sinner trusts Christ and is born again...he is 'born free.' He has been redeemed - purchased by Christ and set free. He is no longer in bondage to sin or Satan, nor should he be in bondage to human religious systems... 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed' (**John 8:36**)."

