

Title: Paul's Autobiographical Defense Part 1: The Divine Origin of Paul's Gospel

Text: Galatians 1:10-12

Theme: God's revelation is unique among all forms of verbal or visual communication.

Introduction: Remembering the larger outline of the epistle being **autobiographical** in chapters one and two, **doctrinal** in chapters three and four and **applicational** in chapters five and six, we now find ourselves in the autobiographical section of Paul's letter. It would appear as if Paul is expanding on the foundation he laid in the opening salutation. He establishes the source of his authority in 1:1 and 2 and now expands on those opening thoughts in the three paragraphs before us. The paragraph division for this section is 1:10-17, 18-24 and 2:1-10.

"Galatians is the second most autobiographical of Paul's Epistles, next to 2 Corinthians." (Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 233).

THE BIG PICTURE:

In considering the book of Galatians we can note a three-fold division.

- Chapters 1-2 = Personal/Biographical/Authorization/Vindication
- Chapters 3-4 = Doctrinal/Biblical/Presentation/Exposition
- Chapters 5-6 = Practical/Behavioral/Application

Its Eternal Value:

In the absence of God's special revelation, we would not have a word from God that is absolute and binding. The Bible gives the only information in existence that can lead mankind to a saving knowledge of who God is, what He has done, and who His people are in Him.

The Problem:

How do we justify the uniqueness of the Bible against *The Book of Mormons* or *The Koran* or even *The Hebrew Scripture*? Is the Bible a stand alone book or is it simply one among equals? The Bible does not allow us to place it on a level playing field with other great bodies of literature. It is so unique that nothing outside of God can compare to it. Although we do not worship the book, we fully recognize that the book of God contains His imprint unlike any other book in all of history.

The Storyline:

The God of all things created, chooses to speak with mankind in a manner that is both sure and absolute. This revelation is two-fold: general and special. General revelation bears the imprint of God upon it. It is a lesser shadow of His greater substance. Although a "lesser" shadow it is still a true shadow. Special revelation is His communication with His creation that is from Him and bears His character. Thus, it is perfect and complete.

Questions:

1. What two thoughts are opposed to each other in verse 10?
2. Is this an absolute truth?
3. How does the “for” of verses 11, 12, and 13 function?
4. How does Paul alienate himself from the idea of the gospel being of human origin?
5. How does Paul describe the uniqueness of His gospel (vv. 11, 12)?
6. Do you worry too much about pleasing other people and what they might think of you? How important is it to be true to yourself and to seek what God wants in your life (v. 10)?
7. What do you say to people who argue that we should make the Christian Gospel more palatable and acceptable to non-Christians in the modern world?
8. Is there a distinction in Psalm 19 between verses 1-6 and verses 7-14?
9. How does Psalm 19 describe general revelation?
10. How does Psalm 19 describe special revelation?
11. Can general revelation (vv. 1-6) do what the same “thing” as special revelation?
12. How is the uniqueness of special revelation set against that of general revelation?
13. What are your thoughts concerning the salvation of those who have never had special revelation? Can anyone be saved apart from believing in the promise of God concerning the lamb of God?
14. If special revelation compels us to go, how do we make this real in our immediate community, nation, and world?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the veracity (truth) and certainty of God’s Word.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose the truth of God through His Word.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in His promises as communicated to us in the His Word.

Outline:

- I. Paul’s singular devotion to his Master (v.10)

Verses 10-12 act as a catalyst between that which precede it and follow. Paul says what he says because of who his master is. Paul is not a pleaser of men but a servant of Christ. If that is our mindset, then it changes everything. We are so prone to worry about what other people think of us that there is a subtle willingness to sell out the truth and in so doing betray our Lord.

Paul’s language is strong. Some may ask, “Where is Paul’s love?” But in standing for God and against error Paul did the loving thing. If someone attacked the object of your love, how would you respond? The loving thing would be to defend your loved one

against the false attack. If you spoke poorly of my wife or children, the loving thing would be to confront. Paul loved God and grace and he will defend it against the onslaughts of the distorter. Paul's intent is to remain true to the gospel, not to please man's itchy ears.

II. The Divine Origin of Paul's Gospel (1:11-12).

A. The gospel is not a human invention

In verse eleven Paul notes how the gospel he preached was not with respect to, or with reference to man (**kata** with the accusative – “reference or respect”). The “for” (**gar**) of verse twelve is explanatory. He notes three reasons as to why his gospel was not man made. Two of the three are negative the third is positive.

1. It is not taken from man

He first uses the word **paralambano**. A compound word used extensively throughout the NT. The good news of grace is not found in man. Man did not come up with this. Religion is works oriented.

2. It is not taught by man

His second word is **didasko**. “To receive” is an aorist active indicative whereas “To teach” is an aorist passive indicative. Paul did not actively or passively receive his gospel from man.

B. The gospel is a divine revelation

Paul uses a strong contrastive conjunction, “But.” The gospel Paul preached came on account of special or direct revelation (**apokaluthiapokaluthis**). The good news of grace was revealed to Paul by a revelation from Jesus Christ. There are two types of revelation: General and Special.

The Doctrine of Revelation

Revelation is the communication of the facts and ideas that God wanted to be made known to mankind. All special revelation is authoritative, but not all special revelation is necessarily inspiration (Rev 10:3, 4 [remember, inspiration deals only with the written record]). Since much has been said that was never recorded (such as the prophets and apostles). And not everything in the Scripture is revelation (such as Luke 1:1-4 and the Chronicles). Everything in Scripture is inspired.

To facilitate a discussion on the doctrine of revelation I would like us to consider Psalm 19.

III. General Revelation (Ps 19:1-6).

- A. It is informational (v.1 “The heavens declare”)
- B. It is perpetual (v.2 “Day after day, night after night”)
- C. It is global (vv.3, 4 “Their voice goes into all the earth”)
- D. It is judicial (Rom. 1:20 [READ Romans 1:15-24])

What is general revelation (Ps 19:1-4 [comp. w/ Rom. 10:18 {READ Romans 10:12-21}] Rom. 1:19, 20)? “General Revelation is God’s communication of Himself to all persons at all times and in all places.” (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 153). General and Special revelation are like a two volume work. Volume one is incomplete without volume two. Volume two completes the story. Volume two explains the evidence provided in Volume one.

What I find interesting is the idea of “gospel” in Romans 1 and 10 and how this “gospel” is directly tied into general revelation. Some might conclude that there is a “gospel in the stars” (Joseph A. Seiss, *The Gospel in the Stars*, 2005). This requires too much on the part of the natural man to discern the loose ends of creation. What ever “Christological” weight we assign to creation is our ability to look back and place such evidence into it. We know the significance of the shadow only because we now know the reality of the substance. For example, if we did not have a New Testament document we would not have understood the temple or the sacrificial system to be a “type” or shadow of something greater. It is the New Testament revelation that enables and allows us to see them as types. It is “honest” for us to see all creation as a shadow, but we do not have the same absolutism or certainty that the “gospel in the stars” carries the same weight as the “gospel in the temple and sacrificial system.”

Psalm 19:1-4 tells us the inclusive quality of nature’s witness. It is without boundaries. Nature trumpets forth the existence of God. This witness is so clear that Romans 1:19, 20 says the humanity shall therefore stand before God without excuse or defense. The revelation of God in nature is sufficient enough that the unsaved man can be, not only held accountable, but without excuse. The revelation of creation is judicial and condemnatory.

Some would argue for the possibility of being saved through general revelation only. Popular author Max Lucado and theologian Millard Erickson both argue for the possibility of being saved only through general revelation (*In The Grip of Grace*, 23; *Christian Theology*, 173). Creation shows the power of God’s sovereignty, but not the provision of God’s salvation. John Calvin said, “This, therefore, is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers (visual/creation), but also opens his own hallowed lips (special/verbal). *Institutes*, 1:70.

It is said that general revelation is judicial and condemnatory. Mankind from nature is incapable of reasoning up to God. It is the depravity of man that blocks him from coming to God independent of His special working. Romans 1 tells us that left to himself he turns from God to make gods after his own image. Nature simply declares God's existence. General revelation is not inviting or compelling men to come. It is not calling men to repent and believe.

It is impossible to construct a totally objective natural theology apart from the Bible. Why, primarily because of total depravity (cf. Rom. 3:11). **God's greatness is revealed in creation, but God's grace is only to be seen at Calvary.** This is where special revelation comes into the picture.

IV. Special Revelation (Ps 19:7-14)

Notice how the author creates a cause and effect pictures in Psalm 19.

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| A. | Scripture is perfect | Revives the soul (v.7a) |
| B. | Scripture is trustworthy, sure | Makes wise the simple (v.7b) |
| C. | Scripture is right | Gives joy to the heart (v.8a) |
| D. | Scripture is radiant, pure | Gives light to the eyes (v.8b) |
| E. | Scripture is clean, pure | Endures forever (v.9a) |
| F. | Scripture is true, sure | Altogether righteous (v.9b [same word family at verse 7b.]) |
| G. | Scripture is priceless | (vv.10, 11) |
| | 1. | It is priceless because of its origin ("God breathed") |
| | 2. | It is priceless because of its content ("warned and rewarded") |

There is nothing like the Word of God for the soul of man. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to work hope, healing, and wholeness in the people of God. We must not look at the Bible like a "rabbits foot" or "good luck charm" but we would be equally remiss if we did not see its uniqueness and place in our lives on a regular, if not daily, basis.

The Psalmist closes with a prayer (vv. 12-14). Notice the contrast between the two. General revelation leaves me without excuse. It is only special revelation that revives the soul, makes wise the simple, etc. Special revelation is the truth that apart from God revealing Himself man would be incapable of knowing (Luke 24:27,44; John 1:45; 5:39;

Acts 10:43; 1 Peter 1:10,11). Special revelation is salvific in nature.

Special revelation was given in “many ways” (Heb. 1:1), some of which were direct words (Ex. 33:11); direct writing by God (Ex. 31:18); dreams (Dan. 7:1); visions (Ez. 1:1), etc.

Special revelation as found in the Bible furnishes the CONTENT (what we need to know) and EXTENT (all we need to know) of God's message to the world (cf. John 20:30, 31 [READ]). There is more, much more, but what we have are the essentials for a relationship that is real and vital.

John Murray made this insightful comment. “We have no encounter with God, with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit in terms of saving and redeeming grace *apart from Scripture*. It is the only revelation to *us* of God's redemptive will. That it its uniqueness.” (*Collected Writings*, 1:12, “The Infallibility of Scripture.”).

Without special revelation mankind could never know God in detail or intimacy. “The Scriptures come to us as divine self-disclosure. In the Bible He reveals Himself.” R.C. Sproul, Knowing Scripture (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 25.

Paul is placing the “gospel” he received in line with this great tradition. To tamper with the content and the extent of the gospel places man in peril and is worthy of our strongest resistance. Thus, it continues to compel us to make sure we are getting the gospel right both in the areas of justification, sanctification, and glorification. It is this gospel that control and colors all of our waking moments.

SHEPHERDING THE PEOPLE: (What is the NEXT STEP?)

1. What we have in the Scriptures is the very Word of God. When it speaks, God speaks.
2. We are not at liberty to tamper with the text. The gospel of grace in Christ is not our message but His.
3. No one will believe in Him for salvation unless they are told of Him from the Scriptures.
4. If I understand Romans 10:9-17 correctly, it is imperative that as we are going (Matt. 28:18) we are telling all who have an ear to hear the gospel of grace in Christ.
5. This revelation compels us to go and tell (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 10:42-43; 16:30, 31; Rom. 10:9, 10; 1 Timothy 2:5, 6; Matt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:45-49; John 20:21, 22; Acts 1:6-8; Rev. 5:8-10).
6. Friend, we must regain our sight for the eternal. “We must not rest until every Uttermost becomes a Jerusalem.”