

**Title:** Paul's Autobiographical Defense: The Divine Origin of Paul's Gospel and its Evidence

**Text:** Galatians 1:10-24

**Theme:** Paul's conversion was the single greatest support for the divine origin of the message he preached.

Introduction: Remembering the larger outline of the epistle being autobiographical in chapters one and two, doctrinally in chapters three and four and applicational in chapters five and six, we now find ourselves in the autobiographical section of Paul's letter. The paragraph division for this section is 1:11-17, 18-24 and 2:1-10.

### **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:**

The gospel of God is divinely sourced in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the absence of Him, there is no gospel.

### **The Problem:**

Often we fail to fully appreciate the divine origin of what we call "the Bible." We are equally reliant on the opinion of people in the handling of the biblical text. What would happen if we actually stood up for what the Bible appears to be so clear about? As a pastor and student of Scripture I am confronted by this weight every time I come to the biblical text.

### **The Storyline:**

In the unfolding of God's eternal purpose God has given us a sure word that is reliable and certain. The story of God is about the person and work of Jesus Christ in behalf of His people whereby they will enjoy Him forever. Such a message comes from God and is not fabricated by the thoughts of man.

### **Questions:**

1. Who was Paul seeking to please? Why? (10)
2. What two thoughts are opposed to each other in verse 10?
3. Is this an absolute truth?
4. How does the "for" of verses 11, 12, and 13 function?
5. How does Paul distance himself from the idea of the gospel being of human origin?
6. How does Paul describe the uniqueness of His gospel (vv. 11, 12)? What does Paul stress about the gospel he preached? (11-12)
7. What did Paul remind them concerning his former conduct in Judaism? (13-14).

What do verses 13 and 14 establish? Notice the relationship between verses 13 and 14 and that of 23. Twice in this passage Paul reminds the Galatians of his past. What is his purpose in doing so? How can we explain Paul's transformation?

8. What do you feel Paul means by "advancing in Judaism"?
9. Why did God call Paul and reveal His Son in him? (15-16). How does verse 15 begin and how does it function with what preceded?
10. Paul says in vs. 15 that God set him aside from birth and called him to preach. What well-known prophet was also called from birth? (Jeremiah 1:5)
11. Does God know you from birth? How about today? (Psalm 139)
12. If you felt called by God to preach, what would you do first? Why?
13. Paul tells the Galatians that when God called him to preach among the Gentiles, he "did not receive [the gospel] from any man, nor was I taught it" (v.12) and that he "did not consult any man" (v.16). Why is that information important in the context of this chapter?
14. Paul says in vs. 16-17 that he did not consult any man or go to Jerusalem, but went immediately to Arabia to preach. Was this appropriate?
15. Where did Paul NOT go after his conversion? (17) Why does Paul bring this point in about the apostles (v. 17)?
16. What would you think if a person came up to you in church and told you that God had revealed to her that, for example, people who dance are not really saved? What would you say to her?
17. Do you know anyone who was once hostile to Christ but is now His follower?
18. If you had to convince someone that Christ is real by giving an example from your own life, what would you say?
19. How long was it before Paul saw any of the apostles in Jerusalem? Which ones did he see? (18-19)
20. Where did he go then? (21)
21. What three things are said about Paul's connection with the churches of Judea? (22-24)
22. What did Paul's conversion to the gospel produce? What was its consequence (v. 24)?
23. How does Paul's response to his calling apply to our lives in Christ, today? Who should call us? Whose approval do we need?
24. Do you feel any humans have the authority to say whether someone is called by God? Give a reason for your answer.
25. Is Paul saying James is not an Apostle?

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 divine origin of the gospel we hold to.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose His good pleasure over the opinions of men.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of living in the good pleasure of God rather than in the fickle thoughts of men.

### **Introduction:**

“Paul, in the strongest terms, asserts the message he preaches was given to him personally by the resurrected Jesus. Paul builds the case for believing him on three facts. [1] **The first fact** is that he preaches his message even if it isn't popular. It strains credulity to believe someone would preach an unpopular message for a messiah he didn't believe existed (vv. 10-12). [2] **The second fact** that Paul points out is that his perspective had been completely reversed from what it was originally; from a person persecuting Christians to one evangelizing [the non-Christian]. Apparently this reversal was commonly known in the Christian community. The implication is that only encountering the resurrected Jesus would've been sufficient to change his life so dramatically (vv. 13-16). [3] **Finally**, Paul points out, in the continuing narrative, that he preaches the same thing as the other apostles even though he had never been taught what to preach by them. The only way this could occur is if he had been taught by the same person as the original apostles even though he had not been one of Jesus' disciples prior to encountering the resurrected Jesus (vv. 18-24).” [http://members.cox.net/qjpe/gal\\_1\\_10-24\\_2\\_6.htm](http://members.cox.net/qjpe/gal_1_10-24_2_6.htm)

### **Outline:**

- I. The Origin of Paul's Communication (1:10-12)
  - A. Paul's Pleasure (v. 10)
  - B. Paul's Proclamation (vv. 11, 12)
    1. The gospel is not a human invention
      - a. It is not taken from man
      - b. It is not taught by man
    2. The gospel is a divine revelation

“To preach the gospel (v. 11) was to preach Christ (v. 16). God the Father was the revealer, Jesus Christ was the revealed and in that revelation Paul received his gospel.” (Bruce, *Galatians*, 89). **We err if and when we separate Christ from the gospel or from grace.** For Paul, in Galatians, all three ideas are synonymous.

### II. The Evidence of Paul's Conversion (1:13-14)

“Paul here begins an autobiographical summary which continues to 2:14; it occupies nearly one-fifth of the whole letter.” (Bruce, *Galatians*, 87).

**The gospel's strong antagonist becomes its mightiest champion.** How do we explain this away? There is a power behind the transformed life.

The “for” of verse thirteen is a *gar*. This is probably providing more evidence as to why

Paul's gospel was not of human invention. He was the most unlikely candidate to bring a gospel of grace in Christ to the world. "Nothing short of a divine intervention could have turned such an audacious opponent into an outspoken champion of the faith he had tried so hard to destroy." (Wilson, *Galatians*, 22). "He had been a fanatic for the law; and now the dominant centre of his life was grace. This man, who had with passionate intensity tried to earn God's favor, was now content in humble faith to take what he lovingly offered." (Barclay, *Galatians*, 12). Your testimony is a powerful tool in the hands of God for the defense of the truth (cf. John 9:25, "Blind, now I can see" and John 12:9-11, "Kill Lazarus").

A. Paul had zeal without knowledge (Rom. 10:2).

1. He hated the truth of God.

His hatred for the church of God is seen in three statements.

a. He persecuted the Church of God

The word is **dioko**. It is a strong word. Every time Paul spoke of his conversion he used this word to describe his actions toward the church of God (Acts 9:4, 5; 22:4, 7, 8; 26:11, 14, 15). Paul pitted himself against the very body of Christ. **Consider the impossibility of the task to which he gave himself; the finite against the infinite, the impotent arm of man against the omnipotent finger of God.** It was Paul's "religion" that drove him to persecute the church of Jesus Christ. Many atrocities have been done in the name of organized religion (i.e., the Christian crusades, the armed advances of Islam). "The two verbs (persecute and destroy [both are imperfect tense]) actually reveal that these actions were part of his constant lifestyle." (Gromacki, *Galatians*, 38).

b. He went beyond measure

The word is **hyperbola**. It is used only seven times and all by Paul. The verb form is used 5 times and all by Paul. And it means, "To excel, to exceed." The word picture is that of overflowing the boundaries, of exceeding normal. **He went beyond the call of duty.** Why do you think Paul was so adamant in his quest to silence the church of Jesus Christ? His conscience cried out against him. **He fought against the Spirit's call until his strength and stamina were exhausted. His breaking included his atrocities against the body of Christ.**

c. He tried to destroy it.

The word "destroy" is **portheo**. It means, "To waste or destroy." It is used for sacking a city. The verb is used only three times in the NT (Acts 9:21; Gal. 1:13, 23). **Paul sought to destroy that which the forces of hell cannot prevail against.** He was trying to destroy the very body of Christ.

In Paul's concentrated attacks against the body of Christ we are to take heart. Neither Paul nor present antagonists can stop God from advancing His Kingdom through the church. God has secured His victory at the cross and nothing will stop Him from fulfilling His purpose.

2. He loved the traditions of man

His love for the traditions of man can be seen in two statements.

- a. Advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries
- b. Being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

Paul was the valedictorian of his class. “**Advancing** is from prokopto, which literally means to chop ahead, as in blazing a trail through a forest.” (MacArthur, *Galatians*, 27). He was the one who received the perfect score on his ACT and SAT. He was the one selected by his classmates as the most likely to succeed.

“More extremely” is a power word (perissoteros). He describes himself as being a zealot for the traditions of his fathers. Tradition is not wrong, but becomes wrong when it takes precedence over the Word of God. Tradition of men has no authority or precedence in the church of God. The word “tradition” is used in thirteen verses. It was the embracing of the traditions of men that allowed the Pharisees to “transgress” (Matt. 15:3), “make none effect” (Matt. 15:6; Mark 7:13), “lay aside” (Mark 7:8), and “reject” (Mark 7:9) the very Word of God. Paul warns us against being “spoiled” by the tradition of men (Col. 2:8).

Yet on the other hand, he does, however, exhort us to “keep” (1 Cor. 11:2), “hold” (2 Thess. 2:15) and to withdraw from those who do not walk after the tradition which they had received from him (2 Thess. 3:6). Such as the gospel.

Such statements force me to ask the question, “What is a proper tradition?” **A tradition is proper when it built on the Word of God and not the preference or opinion of man.** Celebrating the Lord's Table is a tradition that is squarely built on the Word of God. The way it is done and how often it is done is a tradition of men not built on the Word of God. Setting aside Sunday for the celebration of God and His Word is a tradition squarely built on the Word of God. The way it is done and when it is done during the day is defined more by culture and context than by the Word of God, though the Word does address it.

**Let us be careful that in our zeal for the old we do not hold back the Word of God and in our desire for the new we do not go beyond the Word of God.** You cannot help but notice the passion in which Paul lived his life. He was a driven individual. Through his actions Paul tried to silence the voice of God. Perhaps this narrative can give us great hope. Where in the world do we see the greatest opposition to the Word of God and the body of Christ? Perhaps those are the places where God is working the

“most” (I hesitate to give a qualitative or quantitative idea to the working of God. He works everywhere at all times in everyone yet each of us are at different stages in His working and in this way it is different) and instead of showing pity to the church of Russia or China we are to give God the glory. It has been said that the greatest concentration of Christians in the world is China and currently more “missionaries” are being sent by third-world nations than by the Western nations.

B. God has grace without boundaries (1:15-17).

Paul now makes several comments concerning His conversion experience. Throughout verses 13, 14 Paul uses the first person pronoun, then he begins verse 15 with an emphatic/intensive conjunction.

Before we break down the passage note five quick thoughts.

- The motive (“Pleased God”)
- The Manner (“Separated Me”)
- The Means (“Called Me”)
- The Message (“Reveal His Son in Me”)
- The Method (“Preach Him”)

Now let us consider three thoughts from the passage proper.

1. It pleased God to separate Paul (1:15-16a)

God always acts according to His good pleasure (“when it pleased God”). What I am is because of His gracious dealing with me. It pleases Him to make me what I am (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 12:8-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). God is doing what pleases Him in His church. Because this is true, it is foolish for me to compare myself with anyone else.

What is the Father seeking? He is seeking worshippers according to John 4:23, 24. The word “seek” is used of Herod “seeking” to destroy the Christ child (Matt. 2:13, 20). The believer is exhorted to “seek” the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33). We are to “seek” answers to prayer (Matt. 7:7, 8). It is used of a merchant “seeking” goodly pearls (Matt. 13:45), of a shepherd “seeking” his lost sheep (Matt. 18:12), of the Jew “seeking” to kill Jesus Christ (Matt. 21:46) and of Judas “seeking” an opportunity to betray the Son of God (Matt. 26:16). It is a labor that is intensive and focused.

God may do what He wants with what is His and when He does it, it is always right. God is the author of life in time (“from my mother’s womb”). “Divine separation in time is an evidence of divine selection in eternity.” (Gromacki, *Galatians*, 42).

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah the prophets were set apart prior to their birth (Isa. 49:1, 5; Jer. 1:5). This was also said of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:15, 41). I do not believe these are exceptions to a rule. I believe this is true of all humanity. You are what you are because God set you apart from your mother’s womb. I find it an exercise in futility to always

live with “regrets” or “I wish I had done this or that.” Friend, we are exactly where God wants us to be. Every choice we make as free moral agents is an outworking of God’s eternal purpose. I cannot even begin to understand all of the implications of this in every area, but I do know that my God is in absolute control. Our present circumstances might not make a lick of sense to us and we may be hurting deeply (almost to the point of perishing) but God will fit all of the various pieces together and when we step out of it and look back and start connecting the dots we will find that it spells C-H-R-I-S-T.

2. It pleased God to save Paul (1:15c).

“God does not force salvation on an unwilling sinner. Every person that God sovereignly calls will accept Christ as his Savior, but every one who believes does it because he wants to. The call is gracious in that no sinner deserves to be called to salvation. The sinner who has not been efficaciously called has no right to complain because he simply gets what he deserves.” (Gromacki, *Galatians*, 42).

We have already noted from Psalm 19, Romans 1 and 10 how God’s invitation is universal and timeless, but it is only through special revelation that the invitation takes on a very personal and direct appeal.

“The intentions of God’s good pleasure are not conceived at the time of their execution but long before, so long in advance that he shapes and directs all things toward the good end he has in view. **How the divine and the human factors are combined in attaining the good outcome is beyond mortal insight.**” (Lenski, *Galatians*, 55).

What He does with me is always grace based (“by His grace”). It is “on account of” or “by means of” grace that God did what He did with Paul and with you and me.

3. It pleased God to send Paul (1:16b).

It pleased God to send Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles. This statement is huge. When I think of Paul’s conversion experience I am reminded of Ephesians 3:20, “God does exceeding abundantly above all that we could possibly ask or think.” How many people were praying for Paul to stop killing Christians? Some were even so bold as to pray for his salvation and perhaps fewer still were praying that he would become the next “Peter.” God did abundantly above all that we could ever have imagined. I think of my own “experience.” Who are those whom we believe are beyond hope and beyond the reach of God to save? Who are those whom we consider to be so far gone that we do not even entertain the idea that somehow in the purpose of God they might be saved? Perhaps it is a religious figure or a political figure or an athlete or an entertainer or maybe our next door neighbor or even someone within our own family. When did we stop believing God for the impossible? **Let us pause right now and pray for these images of strong holds and pray for God to smash them and bring them to Himself.**

You must remember how Jesus Christ went first to the Jews and it wasn't until His rejection by the religious leaders that He then turned to the Gentiles. Matthew's gospel is clear in this regard. God set Paul apart to be His servant to the non-Jewish world.

Paul's response is always interesting because we are so prone to become enslaved to the opinion of man. If God wants you to do it, then do it. Paul's obedience is seen in his various missionary journeys. When Paul got saved he did not seek the counsel of man but rather (**alla**) went into the backside of the desert (v.17). **Paul sought isolation and instruction.** Paul had to be reeducated by God in the things of God. He had to see the shadow of truth in light of the substance. There is a time and place for quiet instruction in the things of God. God is not in a hurry. His purpose unfolds according to His time schedule and not ours.

C. Paul had boldness without fear (1:18-24).

In considering the chronology of Paul's life it is important to remember "that even the best biblical scholars are not agreed on [it]." (Wiersbe, *Galatians*, 32).

1. He went first to Arabia.

This was after his initial ministry in Damascus (Acts 9:19-20). Paul went to Arabia to be alone with God. "What Paul needed was not conference with men but communion with God." (Wilson, *Galatians*, 25). He may have spent the greater part of three years in Arabia. "He had to speak with God before he spoke to men." (Barclay, *Galatians*, 14). "Have you ever noticed how many of God's beloved servants had their finishing courses in the university of the wilderness (i.e., Moses, Elijah, and David)?" (Ironsides, *Galatians*, 52).

2. He then went to Damascus.

He then went to Damascus. Do you remember where Paul was headed and what he planned to do when he was saved? I do not think we feel the enormity of what is happening here. Paul was crushing the church of God now he wanted in and became its most passionate soldier. The idea is like a pedophile who gets saved and wishes to head up junior church or a converted kleptomaniac who becomes the church treasurer or a man who gets saved after being divorced several times only to teach a class made up of newly married people.

"That was a courageous thing to do. He had been on the way to Damascus to wipe out the Church when God arrested him and all Damascus knew that." (Barclay, *Galatians*, 14). "The Jewish leaders who had looked to him as their champion against Christianity would definitely be after his blood. Apparently the 'basket incident' of Acts 9:23-25 took place at this time."

3. He then went to Jerusalem (for the first time).

Their greatest defender became their most feared opponent. “Again he took his life in his hands. His former friends, the Jews, would be out for his blood, because to them he was a renegade.” (Barclay, *Galatians*, 14).

When Paul went to Jerusalem for the first time the only apostles he saw were Peter and James. “The word ‘see’ in the original is very interesting. It is the Greek word from which we get our English word ‘history,’ the telling of a story, talking things over, and so Paul says that after three years he went up to Jerusalem to relate his history to Peter, to talk things over with him, to tell him what the Lord had done. Peter told his story and Paul told his.” (Ironsides, *Galatians*, 54).

4. He finally went to Syria and Cilicia.

“It was there that Tarsus was. It was there that he had been brought up. There were the friends of his boyhood and his youth. They would no doubt regard him as quite mad; they would meet him with anger, and, worse, with mockery. But he was quite prepared to be regarded as a fool for the sake of Christ.” (Barclay, *Galatians*, 15).

I am impressed with the statements of verses 23 and 24. **Salvation changes us from what we were to what He is.** It is a movement from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. We are a part of the new creation of 2 Corinthians 5:17. Paul was a testimony to the grace of God in the life of the sinner.

Verse 24 arrests my attention, “And they were glorifying God because of me.” God uses His people to bring glory to His name. This is why Ephesians 2:10 calls us, “His workmanship” or as the NLT puts it, “His masterpiece.” We are trophies of His grace that declare His glory.

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

1. Paul was the most unlikely person (cf. 1 Cor. 1; David and his brothers) to be preaching the gospel of grace in Christ Jesus.
2. Paul’s conversion **by** the gospel of grace **to** the gospel of grace speaks of its inherent power to change lives. “**That gospel has lost none of its power.** It can work just as wonderful miracles today for men who will put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.” ([emphasis added] Ironsides, *Galatians*, 57).
3. What the world needs is not another program but a person and His name is Jesus.
4. We are what we are by the grace of God. Comparison kills contentment. We must learn to live each day as recipients of His grace. Do not wish for what you are not or want what you do not have, but rather live with thanksgiving for what you are and with contentment for what you have.