

“Paul’s Testimony”

January 26, 2025

Galatians 1:11-24

I. Introduction

False teachers, called Judaizers, had come to the churches in Galatia and were causing confusion and controversy in those churches. They taught that Christianity was a part of Judaism and as such needed to include the Mosaic ceremonies, laws, and practices—things like circumcision and eating kosher foods. They accused Paul, as well as the other Apostles, of diluting the truth by removing the strict requirements of Judaism. These Judaizers claimed that Paul did this so that Christianity would be more appealing to the Gentiles and Jews.

In order to discredit Paul’s message, these false teachers recognized that they had to discredit Paul and his supposed Apostleship. They spread the idea that Paul was a self-appointed apostle with a self-appointed message. They said that his message and ministry were not really from God; his motivation was to elevate himself and to create a following for himself.

The sad and disappointing thing that we have already seen earlier in Galatians is that many believers had been persuaded by these false teachers to question Paul’s motives and to doubt his apostleship. Such questions and doubts were causing them to desert the faith and turn to, as Paul wrote earlier, a “different gospel—which is really no gospel at all.” In today’s Scripture Paul responded to this attempt at character assassination.

II. Paul’s Theme: His Message and Ministry Were from God

In **verses 11 and 12**, Paul stated his theme: his message and ministry were of divine origin—they were from God. He didn’t invent the Gospel. He didn’t receive it from men. He received the Gospel from Jesus Christ. Paul wrote about this to the Corinthians, **turn to 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**. Contrary to what the false teachers were saying, Paul’s message and apostleship weren’t contrived by the Apostles; they were divinely given—**“I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”** To support his claim of having

a God-given apostleship and a God-given message, Paul gave his personal testimony. He began with his life before Christ.

III. Paul's Testimony

A. Paul's Life before Christ Paul began his testimony by describing his “previous way of life in Judaism.” He described his standing and activities while he was an unconverted Jewish rabbi called Saul of Tarsus. His “Life before Christ” was centered totally in the Law and tradition; grace was unheard of. He was a hostile person who “persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.” Turn to Paul's speech to a mob that tried to kill him in the Temple in Jerusalem—turn to Acts 22:1-5.

Before his conversion, Paul actually thought that Jesus was an impostor and His message of salvation a lie. He was sure that God had spoken through Moses, but that He had NOT spoken through this Jesus of Nazareth. Filled with Jewish traditions, Saul of Tarsus became a zealous persecutor of “the followers of the Way,” i.e., those who followed Jesus Christ who had said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Because of his passion, Paul had been on the way to become a very influential leader of the Jewish faith. His personal life, his scholarship, and his zeal in attacking these false religious faiths made this Jewish fanatic one of the most respected young rabbis of the day.

There was nothing in the life of Saul of Tarsus which even hinted of a gospel of salvation by God's grace working through faith. Looking back at his life before Jesus Christ, he said in Phil. 3:4-6, “If anyone thought he had reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” Nothing in Paul's previous life would have led to the Gospel of grace that he was now preaching. Following the death of Stephen, Acts 8:2-3 says, “Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.” The commentator John Stott wrote, “Now a man in that mental and emotional state is in no mood to change his mind, or

even to have it changed for him by men. ... Only God could reach him—and God did!” Paul’s conversion had to be a spiritual miracle. For the Judaizers to deny Paul’s apostleship and the Gospel was the same as denying his conversion. The dramatic change from *persecutor* of the church to *champion* of the church was proof that Paul’s message and ministry were from God. Paul preached the same message he had believed—the truth that had changed him.

B. Paul’s Conversion Paul then explained his conversion, this was the critical turning point in his life. Turn to the record of Paul’s conversion, **turn to Acts 9:1-19**. Saul, soon to be called Paul, had experienced the Gospel of grace through faith, any other so-called “gospel” was a perversion. Paul gave some characteristics of his conversion and, for that matter, every conversion.

1. First, God called Paul. Back in Galatians, Paul wrote, “**But when God . . . called me . . . to reveal his Son.**” Paul’s conversion wasn’t the result of his searching for God—he thought he knew Him already. *God called Paul*. Paul didn’t initiate the choice to be saved, much less the choice to be an apostle. In **1 Corinthians 1:1** he wrote, he was “**called as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.**” At Paul’s conversion, his values were reversed, everything was turned upside down. Only God could do that—as **Jonah 2:9** says, “**Salvation comes from the Lord!**”

2. Second, God did it by grace. Salvation is by God’s grace, not man’s efforts or man’s character. Paul wrote that “**God called me by his grace.**” In **John 6:37** Jesus said, “**All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.**” The mysteries of God’s sovereign will and man’s responsibility to obey aren’t totally understood, but what is understood is that as **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, “**It is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.**” Beyond any doubt, Paul’s conversion—anyone’s conversion is through God’s grace alone.

3. Third, God did it through Christ. On that road to Damascus, Paul saw his own self-righteousness as rags compared to the righteousness of Christ; in **Philippians 3:7** he wrote, “**But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.**” The Jewish religion had been a religion of

rituals and practices—outward “*things*,” but faith in Christ brought about an inward change. In [Gal. 2:20](#), Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” It was no longer about Paul, but about Jesus Christ.

4. Fourth, God did it for the sake of others. Paul wrote, “God called me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles.” God chose Paul, not only to save him, but also to use him to win others. As we read in [Acts 9:15](#), God told Ananias, “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.” This was another proof that Paul’s conversion was of God—no prejudiced Jewish rabbi would ever decide by himself to minister to the despised Gentiles!

5. Finally, conversion brings glory to God. As the fanatic who was persecuting Christians, Paul had all the glory of man that he could want; he wasn’t doing it for God’s glory but his own. Similarly, the Judaizers were interested in their own glory and their own following. But when one experiences God’s grace and mercy and love, values are changed. In [Galatians 1:24](#) Paul wrote, “And they praised God because of me.” Now the motivation of Paul and all Christians is to bring glory to God—as [Romans 11:36](#) says, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!”

C. Paul’s Life after Christ Paul finished his testimony with what happened in his life after his conversion, i.e., life after Christ. The logical thing for Paul to do would have been to return to Jerusalem, introduce himself to the church leaders, and be instructed by them. But God had other plans.

1. He went to Arabia. [Acts 9:19-20](#) says, “after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.” But after those first few days, instead of consulting with any man, he “went immediately to Arabia.” It was here that Paul was able to study, meditate, and pray and meet with the Lord alone. He may have spent close to 3 years in Arabia. (The 12 Apostles had received 3 years of teaching and training from the Lord Jesus and now Paul was able to have his own opportunity to be taught

by the Lord.) The Gospel that Paul preached wasn't something that had been taught to him by other Apostles; it wasn't something he had been taught by Ananias and other Christians in Damascus. The Gospel that Paul preached came from God. As [2 Timothy 3:16](#), “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

2. He went back to Damascus. After his three years in Arabia, it would seem that now would be the time for Paul to go to Jerusalem and meet with the leadership there, but God had other plans. Paul went back to Damascus. Here he encountered persecution. The Jewish leaders who had looked to him as their champion against Christianity were now after his blood. It was probably then that the “*basket incident*” took place—[turn to 2 Corinthians 11:32-33](#).

3. Then, he visited Jerusalem. Paul finally visited Jerusalem; “Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem.” His main purpose was to visit Peter. But [Acts 9:26](#) adds, “When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.” Paul’s reputation had preceded him, and he had a difficult time getting into the church fellowship. If Paul’s message and ministry had been from the Apostles, this would never have happened. Since the Apostles were suspicious of him, Paul stayed in Jerusalem only 15 days and he saw only Peter and James (the Lord’s brother). For these reasons, he received neither his message nor his apostleship from the Jerusalem church. There simply wasn’t the time or the opportunity. He had already received them both from God anyway. To give his readers the greatest possible confidence in what he was writing, Paul made a common Jewish vow: “I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.” Anyone at the time could check and see if what Paul wrote was true.

4. Finally, He returned home. After Paul left Jerusalem, he “went to Syria and Cilicia”—he returned home to Tarsus a city in Cilicia. As Paul went his way through Syria until he reached Tarsus of Cilicia, he most likely preached the Word. [Acts 11:19-26](#) records that he remained in Tarsus for about 7 years until Barnabas recruited him for the work in Antioch.

IV. Conclusion

Paul's testimony was proof that his Apostleship and his message were not from man or by man but were from God. The Gospel he taught was a revelation from Jesus Christ. We must be careful what we do with this Gospel; it isn't the invention of man; it is the very truth of God. As inspired words, Paul's letters to the churches are on the same level with the words of Jesus Christ. Peter wrote in [2 Peter 3:15-16](#), "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." Peter was emphasizing that Paul's words were the words of God and thus were Scripture.

There are people today who are the modern Judaizers—they try to undermine the Gospel which Paul preached. In Paul's day their message was "the Gospel plus Moses." In our day it is the "Gospel plus" whatever some religious leader or religious book or religious organization decrees: "You cannot be saved unless . . ." ([Acts 15:1](#)); and that "unless" often includes joining their group and obeying their rules. Others try to undermine the authority of Paul as they try to eliminate parts of his teachings as being out-of-step with the times or not being politically correct or written by a mere man. If someone dares to mention the Gospel of grace as preached by Jesus and Paul and the other Apostles, they reply, "*But God has given us a new revelation.*" Paul has an answer for them in [Galatians 1:9](#), "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" To reject Paul's teachings is to reject God's Word. Neither the testimony of Paul himself nor of the other apostles allows another conclusion. One must be careful how he handles the Word of God. As Paul wrote in [2 Timothy 2:15](#), "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." Study this Book—learn and apply what it says and don't "so quickly desert the one who called you by the grace of Christ and turn to a different gospel" ([Gal. 1:6](#))