



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 1:1-24

Spring 2021

"The Origin of Paul's Gospel"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth. We are continuing our studies in the book of Galatians and we are in chapter 1. And we are going to look at verses 11 through the end of the chapter, verse 24. Paul writes,

¹¹ For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹³ For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴ and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. ¹⁵ But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure

you before God that I am not lying.), [I like the King James translation here, "I lie not".] ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; ²³ but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they were glorifying God because of me.

Galatians 1: 11-24

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and our time of studying it together.

(Message) It's not unusual to hear people dispute the historicity of the four gospels and the life of Christ—and say that, 'Christianity is the invention of the apostle Paul.' I've heard that more than once in my life. I remember one-time, years ago in Jerusalem—it was at night and we were at the Wailing Wall; and some friends engaged a man in conversation about the Gospel. His responses was, "No, no. Paulos, Paulos. The invention of Paul."

Well, that's not a new idea. In the 19th century German theologian Ferdinand Christian Baur taught it was under Paul's influence that Christ was deified, and due to him the Gospel became 'Justification by faith'.

Before that Thomas Jefferson, our third president, (who publicly claimed to be a Christian), wrote in his private letters that the apostles had corrupted the teachings of Christ, and he called the apostle Paul the first corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus.

For many today that is the explanation of Christianity. It is human in its origin and it's an invention of Paul. That charge didn't originate during the enlightenment or with German liberalism. Paul, in fact, had to answer that very charge early in his own ministry. Teachers of the Law, called Judaizers, came to Galatia and accused Paul of preaching a truncated gospel that he invented—the message of salvation through faith alone. They said Paul was a 'second-tier', or second-rate apostle who was under the authority of the true apostles, the twelve in Jerusalem. He'd gotten his authority from them and he had received his Gospel from them. But, they claimed, when he went out preaching to the

Gentiles, he modified the message to suit the audience. He neglected the Law to make his message more acceptable to people.

So, Paul now defends his Gospel and his ministry. He begins in verse 11 and 12 by stating that he didn't invent the Gospel he preached, nor did he receive it from men—he received it from Christ. Now that's the main point that he makes—that's the theme of all that he has to say in the rest of this chapter. But in verses 13 through 24, he gives proof of what he's saying and he proves that from his own experience. The origin of Paul's Gospel is Christ—its origin is divine—that is Paul's claim. And then he adds to that in verse 20, "I lie not." So in the rest of the chapter, Paul begins to build his case in defense of the Gospel of grace—and he does it forcefully.

The Book of Galatians has been called a "Fighting Epistle". But it is not only a fight to defend the Gospel from error, it was also a fight to deliver the Galatians from error. Even though they had greatly disappointed Paul by following false teachers, still, he considered them to be real believers. So he begins, in verse 11, by calling them "brethren", showing that he had not given up on them—that he had a real concern for them, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man." (vs11). Now that's the point that Paul seeks to prove here, that his Gospel is not an invention of man or of human ideas.

Men have many ideas about religion, but the Gospel of grace is not one of them. Men naturally think in the opposite way: of works, of human merit, of earning God's acceptance—that's natural religion. What those Galatians heard from the apostle Paul was very different from that. "For," he writes, "I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I *received* it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." (vs12).

Now there's nothing wrong with receiving the Gospel from men. That's how most of us learn the truth about Christ; by a friend or family member, our father, our mother. But Paul didn't. He came from a line of Pharisees but didn't get it from them. He received it directly from Christ—just as the other apostles did. And that is significant for two reasons. First, it shows that he is an equal with the apostles in Jerusalem. He's not

an apostle of secondary importance to them and he can speak the Gospel with full apostolic authority. They were peers—not betters. They were equals with him. And secondly, the fact that he received the Gospel directly from Christ shows that it is true. It must be. It came from Christ. Who can argue with that?

Paul doesn't leave it at that, though. He goes on in the rest of the chapter to make his case for the divine origin of his Gospel by giving a brief autobiography. It's as though he's saying, "I received the Gospel from Christ. If you doubt that, let me give you some history." And he begins with his former life in Judaism, to show that there was nothing in that, nothing in his former life as Saul of Tarsus, that had influenced him in any way toward Christ and inventing the Gospel that he preached. Just the opposite, everything about his former life was contrary to the Gospel. In fact, everything about his former life in Judaism proves the truth of the Gospel. Only grace in divine intervention could explain Paul's conversion to Christ. He was 'a brand snatched from the burning'.

Paul was completely devoted to the Law that the Judaizers promoted in those days and he was a fervent persecutor of the church. That's where he begins, with his life as a persecutor, as the grand inquisitor of the church, as the representative of the Sanhedrin. He states in verse 13 that he persecuted the church "beyond measure, and tried to destroy it." 'Lay it to waste'—that's the idea. In fact, this word "destroy" is used by Homer, of sacking cities. And so Paul describes himself as that kind of a man—a man at war with the church and the Gospel.

Luke records it in Acts chapter 8, verse 1. After Paul approved the stoning of Stephen he began a "great persecution", Luke calls it, "against the church in Jerusalem." The apostles stayed in the city, but many of the saints fled in fear, while Paul, (Saul), was entering houses, dragging men and women out, throwing them in prison, and putting some of them to death. The effort with which he did that was done out of absolute conviction that Christ was a false Messiah, that Christians were heretics, and they were a threat to the true religion of Judaism.

So there's nothing in his life at that time to show that he was in any way open to Christianity or the teachings of the apostles. He was trying to blot out the Gospel and

the very name of Christ. Grace had no appeal to Saul of Tarsus. He was devoted to the Law of Moses and to the traditions of Judaism—he was a convinced legalist. It was that fervent zeal for his religion that aroused his hot opposition to the church. As he says in verse 14, he was “extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions”.

Luke fills in some details later in the Book of Acts. In Acts 22 verse 3, Paul states that he studied “under Gamaliel”, one of the greatest rabbis of Jewish history. And he was a gifted young scholar. Paul was Gamaliel's prized student. He says, "...I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries." (vs14). He was a rising star. He told the Philippians that he was “a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the Law a Pharisee...as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.” (Phil 3:5-6). In other words, no one could find fault in Paul's behavior. The point is, he was not under any Christian influence. There was nothing in his life in Judaism to account for the Gospel that he was preaching—no influence that would have explained that.

So, how do we explain Paul's embrace of grace? Something dramatic must have happened. —And, of course, it did; Christ revealed Himself to him. He writes, in verse 15 and verse 16, "But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me..." —that's when the change occurred, on the Damascus road. Paul normally described his conversion as an external revelation; ‘Christ spoke out of a bright light’. But here he described it as an internal revelation; Christ was revealed “in me”. (vs16).

The two occurred at the same moment—when he saw Christ with his eyes, he heard Him with his ears, he understood Him with his mind—Christ was at that moment revealed to him in his heart. The external revelation became an internal illumination at the same moment. And Paul's description of his conversion makes it clear that it was God's work completely. Paul didn't reason his way to Christ; he wasn't ‘seeking’ to find ‘the answer’; he wasn't studying things to learn who Christ was. He was going in the opposite direction. He was implacably opposed to Christ when Christ found him.

You see that in the change of subject here, in what Paul is saying in verses 13 and 14—it's all Paul: "I used to persecute". "I was advancing my ancestral traditions". But in verses 15 and 16, God alone is the subject. He alone is the doer because the work is all His. The whole emphasis here is on grace. Paul writes that God did three things for him. First, He 'set him apart', he says, "*even* from my mother's womb." That's an old expression. It's one that goes back to Jeremiah, whose calling God says was before his birth. In Jeremiah, chapter 1, verse 5 He said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you..."

That's how the Book of Jeremiah begins, God saying, 'it's all of Me, not of you.' It's a way of describing God's unconditional election. He "knew" him, meaning He loved him before time, meaning He elected him and "consecrated" him, meaning He "appointed" him to be a prophet.

And Paul learned on the Damascus road that God had chosen him 'from his mother's womb', from the foundation of the earth apart from any good works in him. Now that's the first thing God did—goes back into eternity.

The second thing occurred in time. The second thing He did for Paul was 'call' him. Paul uses the word 'call' consistently. He uses it of the "effectual call" of God, the "irresistible call of God to salvation". God spoke internally to him and said, "Come," and he came out of darkness into light. That was God's work. That was not man's work. God called him to salvation, brought him to faith in Christ "through His grace", Paul says.

And thirdly, God revealed His Son 'in him'. Paul realized immediately what God had done for him, He had joined him to Christ. And Paul understood his union with Christ. We, as believers in Jesus Christ, are "in Christ". That is our position—our standing before God. And Christ is in us—that is our power. And Paul knew this, that God had joined him to Christ, and He had put Christ's life in him. And he tells it here as proof that he received his Gospel directly from Christ, and received his apostleship directly from Christ. His Gospel is not from men, but from God. But also he tells this because his own experience is clear proof that the true Gospel is a message of sovereign grace.

Salvation is all of the LORD—from beginning to end. That's the message he preached, (and the message that the Judaizers contradicted). It is based on divine election—unconditional election. That is the basis of salvation. It's grounded in the unshakable mercy of God, apart from the works of the Law altogether—apart from anything that we may do.

Now, I know that upsets people. I know that this is a doctrine that is, with some, controversial, but it should not be that at all. Election is a great comfort. In fact, without it, there is no comfort—because there is no assurance. If salvation is not sovereignly determined, if it's not accomplished and given, then ultimately it depends upon us, upon our insight and upon our performance. —And there can never be any assurance in that. We can never know we've done enough—and we can never know, (and we can certainly always know that what we've done is not perfect), it can't be if it depends upon us, that's the case and we have no assurance.

But of course it does not depend upon us. Our salvation, from beginning to end, depends upon God—and He is always faithful. There is reason for comfort to us, for humility in us, because of those great doctrines—and for glory to God. It is necessary to believe in the doctrine of election for those reasons.

But it's also necessary to believe in it because, quite simply, it's what the Bible teaches—what the Bible is teaching here. The Bible teaches divine, unconditional election. And what Paul was showing here, in addition to the fact that he got his Gospel from God, is that his own experience proved that to be true—that proved that to be the message of the Gospel, the message of grace. Grace alone, not faith plus works, which really puts the emphasis, not on faith, but on works. This is the message that Christ sent him to preach to the Gentiles—grace!

After his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, he was led blind into the city and to a house where he sat for three days without sight. Then God sent Ananias to him, to lay hands on him so that he would regain his sight and to baptize him. The LORD told Ananias that Paul is “a chose instrument of Mine.” Notice that, “a chosen

instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel." (Acts 9:15). Now you might think that the next thing Paul would do after his conversion and his call to apostleship, is go up to Jerusalem and meet the other apostles—introduce himself to them and explain what had happened. —But he didn't. He states in the rest of verses 16 and 17, "...I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus."

Paul doesn't explain why he went to Arabia. Some have suggested that he went there to preach. And that may be, but that does not seem likely to me. There are very few people in Arabia, though I don't doubt that Paul gave the Gospel to those there that he met. But chiefly it seems to me that the reason he went to such a desolate, isolated place was to get alone with God and think—meditate on what he had learned, and to have quiet fellowship with God. Paul had been trained, well trained, and well-grounded in the doctrines of the rabbis. He knew the Old Testament—but he understood it according to Jewish tradition and he had a lot of relearning to do. So he went out to Arabia to reorient his understanding of Scripture—to be retrained and discover Christ in the Old Testament. And he found that He's all through the Old Testament.

You know, there's great wisdom in doing what Paul did. We should all be good students of the Bible. We should all understand the theology of Scripture. But to do that we have to spend time alone with God. We all need to routinely go to Arabia—to get alone, to get alone for prayer and Bible study and meditation—reflection on the Word of God. That's what Paul needed, so he isolated himself for a time to learn the faith.

After that he says he "returned once more to Damascus." He still didn't go to Jerusalem, and that's the point that Paul is making in all of this. He didn't get his Gospel from men. He didn't go up to Jerusalem and sit at the feet of the apostles and learn from them. He had no contact with Jerusalem. It wasn't until three years later, he says in verse 18, that 'he went to Jerusalem'. And then he went only to become "acquainted" with Peter—not to learn the Gospel. In fact, he left Damascus because he had been debating

the Jews and preaching the Gospel so effectively that a plot was formed against him and he had to escape the city to save his life.

Paul didn't need anyone to teach him the Gospel and he didn't need the approval of the other apostles in order to act as an apostle. He had received both from Christ three years before. But he went to Jerusalem to meet Peter. It was the proper thing to do, to become acquainted with his fellow apostles. He adds in verse 19 that he also met with James, the brother of our LORD, but not any of the others. And he only stayed with Peter for two weeks, "15 days" he said in verse 18, which wasn't a very long time. But it was long enough for Paul to get acquainted with Peter, and also with James, and to learn through them important facts about Jesus' life and ministry firsthand from those who were there, who knew Him, and were witnesses to all of these things. He was able to gain important information about the LORD's teaching and His miracles, about His death and His resurrection. Peter was there, went into the empty tomb. He could describe all of that, which would have been valuable for Paul's personal knowledge of Christ, and for his ministry.

Two weeks was a sufficient amount of time for that, but certainly not enough time to suggest that Paul had become Peter's disciple. Paul was an apostle in his own right based on God's election and calling of him. And the Gospel was revealed to him directly by Christ, just as it had been revealed to the other apostles. Now that is the crux of Paul's argument. And to reinforce it he states, in verse 20, "I assure you before God that I am not lying." You can almost sense the emotion in Paul's words as he wrote that out.

These teachers of the Law had accused him of deceit. They'd come to Galatia and they had called Paul a second-rate apostle, which was really to say, 'He's no apostle at all', and accused him of teaching a false gospel. So Paul answered the charges with evidence from his own life before his conversion, at his conversion, and after his conversion to prove the Gospel was divinely revealed to him and not received by him from men.

But he wasn't finished. He gives further proof of that in verses 21 through 24. After his brief visit with Peter, he left Jerusalem and he went far away into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. He went to Cilicia first, which is a region in southeastern Asia Minor, or southeastern Turkey. Its capital was Tarsus. So Paul went back to his hometown, and he ministered there.

The Scriptures are silent, for the most part, about his activities there and during this period of time. It's been suggested by some that the hardships Paul described in 2 Corinthians 11, many of them which don't fit within the Book of Acts, something other than what we find in that book—the beatings, the imprisonments, and of being shipwrecked may have happened at this time, during this period of his ministry. The point is, though, he was involved in ministry. We know that because Luke records in Acts 11, that the church in Antioch, (they knew about Paul and they knew about his ministry that had been going on), sent Barnabas to find him there and bring him back to Antioch—which Barnabas did. And it was from there, from the church of Antioch where he had ministered for some years that he went on his missionary journeys.

All those years of ministry and experience in Damascus and then in Tarsus, and later in Antioch were years of preparation for his greater ministry to the Gentile world. So there is another side to what I said a moment ago: Ministry not only involves a lot of preparation, but also involves participation—doing the ministry and putting into practice what we learn. It's what Mike (*Black*) was teaching in his lesson this morning in the Proverbs about learning and then doing and then practicing; and that leads to destiny. Well, that's true in our lives as well, we must learn and then we must practice.

Now that too, is training, and it was for Paul. He wasn't idle in those years leading up to his first missionary journey to southern Galatia. He learned, he taught, he grew in his knowledge and experience—he was very active. This is the point here; he was far removed from the apostles in Jerusalem during that period of his life, which was a lengthy period of some 14 years. During that time he was not under the authority or supervision of the apostles. He ministered independently of them, in his own authority

as an apostle. Luther wrote, "Obviously he is proving that he did not have the apostles as teachers anywhere but was himself a teacher everywhere."

In the final verses he records the reaction of the churches of Judea to his ministry. They had not seen him. He was far away from them. But they "kept hearing" about his ministry; that, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." (vs23). And he says, "They were glorifying God because of me." (vs24). So in contrast to the Judaizers who came from Judea and Jerusalem, the churches of Judea and Jerusalem praised God for Paul, and for his ministry. —They praised God for God's transforming power. It wasn't the Law that changed Paul's life; that made a persecutor into a preacher. It wasn't the Law that transformed their terrorist into their champion—it was God's sovereign grace. It is sufficient to save the very worst of sinners, without the help of circumcision or any ceremony, whether it is baptism or the LORD's Supper. Paul's life is proof of that.

So, the praise that came out of the very region, the very region from which these Judaizers came, was proof that Paul's ministry was genuine and should be acknowledged as right and true and genuine by the Galatians. In all of this Paul, in effect, puts the question to the Galatians, 'Who will you believe, the Judaizers or me, the one who brought the Gospel to you originally, or these people who have come later? They say my Gospel is from men. I say my Gospel is from God!'

And that's the question that this passage puts to us. Who will we believe? President Jefferson, who said Paul corrupted the doctrines of Jesus; or Professor Baur who said Paul invented justification by faith; or liberal preachers who deny the truth of all of it? Or will we believe Paul who said of the Gospel, 'I received it through revelation, the revelation of Jesus Christ.' The Judaizers said Paul was lying. Paul said, "I lie not."

Who do you believe? I believe the apostle Paul. Is that what you believe? If not, I hope God will open your mind to that truth, that Paul's Gospel is the Gospel, and the Gospel is Good News that God saves sinners. He doesn't save them by their good works,

otherwise it would be man who saves himself. God saves us freely based on His grace, based on the work of Christ at the cross and through faith alone. It's simply a gift that we receive.

So if you want salvation, if you know that you need salvation, then look to Christ. Believe in Him who is God's eternal Son and man's Savior and He will receive you, He will save you; you'll be justified and then you will be sanctified. He will change and transform your life from now until He glorifies you. May God help you to look to Him.

And you who have, may God help you to rejoice in what you have in Christ. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for this text of Scripture, this autobiographical portion of the Book of Galatians, which is interesting in its own right. But it's particularly instructive to us as we consider the life of this great apostle. He is what he is, he is what he became, all by Your grace. He truly was 'a brand plucked from the burning' and transformed. We too, are that. We marvel over what You did with a man like him, but it's the same grace and the same power that changed us, and it can change the "Chief of sinners". That's the power of Your grace.

And You're changing us still. We thank You for that. Continue, Father, to sanctify us. We know You will, You must. We look forward to the day of our glorification. It's all because of Christ. We thank You for Him. It's in His name we pray. Amen.

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