

Galatians: No Other Gospel

Part 2. Paul's Divine Commission

As we continue our journey through the book of Galatians, we will be focusing on verses 11-24 in Galatians chapter 1. In these verses, Paul shares his testimony, underscoring the divine origin of his gospel and the transformative power of God's grace in his life. His story is a powerful reminder that the gospel is not man-made but divinely revealed, and it has the power to radically change lives.

Galatians 1:11-24 *"I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*

But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles - only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.

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

Paul begins this section by asserting that the gospel he preaches is not of human origin. This claim is crucial because it establishes the divine authority and authenticity of his message.

Revelation, Not Tradition

Paul emphasizes that he did not receive the gospel from any human being, nor was he taught it by any man. Instead, he received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. This revelation came via a direct and personal encounter with the risen Christ, which transformed Paul from a persecutor of the church into its most passionate advocate. In Acts chapter 9, we read about Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, where Jesus Himself appeared to Paul and commissioned him as an Apostle to the Gentiles. This direct revelation sets Paul apart and reinforces the divine origin of his message.

The Authority of Revelation

The concept of revelation is fundamental to understanding the authority of the gospel Paul preached. Revelation implies that the message comes directly from God, without human mediation. This divine origin gives the gospel its ultimate authority and guarantees its purity. Unlike human traditions or teachings, which can be flawed or corrupted, divine revelation is perfect and unchanging. Paul's insistence on the revelatory nature of his gospel serves to reassure the Galatians that his message is trustworthy and authoritative.

The Uniqueness of Paul's Calling

Paul's calling was unique in that it involved a direct encounter with Christ. This encounter not only changed the course of his life but also confirmed his Apostolic authority. Paul's testimony serves as a powerful reminder that God can use anyone, regardless of their past, to accomplish His purposes. It also underlines the transformative power of the gospel, which can turn even the fiercest opponent into a devoted follower.

2. Paul's Past Life and Radical Transformation (Verses 13-14)

Paul continues by recounting his past life in Judaism and his radical transformation through God's amazing grace.

Paul's Zeal in Judaism

Paul describes his former way of life in Judaism, emphasizing how intensely he persecuted the church and tried to destroy it. He was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his peers and was extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers. Paul's passion and reputation in Judaism highlight his deep commitment to his religious beliefs and his active role in opposing the early Christian movement.

Paul's background as a zealous Jew and a persecutor of the church is significant because it reinforces the dramatic nature of his conversion. He was not a passive observer but an active opponent of Christianity. His transformation, therefore, is a powerful testimony to the grace of God and the truth of the gospel.

Persecution of the Church

Paul's persecution of the church was intense and relentless. In Acts 8:3, we read that Paul began to destroy the church, going from house to house, dragging off both men and women and putting them in prison. Paul's actions were driven by his zeal for the Jewish law and his genuine belief that the Christian movement was a threat to the purity of Judaism. His persecution was not just an intellectual disagreement but a violent and determined attempt to completely eradicate the followers of Christ.

Advancement in Judaism

Paul's rapid advancement in Judaism and his zeal for the traditions of his fathers indicate that he was highly regarded within the Jewish community. He was a rising star, likely destined for a prominent position within the religious establishment. This background adds weight to his testimony, as it shows that he had so much to lose by converting to Christianity. His willingness to abandon his prestigious position and embrace the gospel, demonstrates the profound impact of his encounter with Christ.

3. God's Sovereign Call and Revelation (Verses 15-16)

Paul then highlights the divine initiative in his calling and the revelation of Jesus Christ.

God's Sovereign Choice

Paul states that God "*set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace.*" This language echoes the Old Testament calling of prophets like Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5) and Isaiah (Isaiah 49:1). Paul's use of this language emphasizes that his apostleship was not a matter of personal ambition but a divine calling. God had a specific purpose for Paul's life, and He orchestrated events to bring Paul to the point of conversion and commission. The idea of being set apart from birth highlights the sovereignty of God in salvation and ministry.

It also reminds us that God has a plan and purpose for each of our lives, even before we are born. Our calling and destiny are not accidents of history but part of God's eternal design. This truth provides assurance and confidence as we seek to follow God's will for our lives.

Revelation of Christ

Paul explains that God was pleased "to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles." The revelation of Christ was not merely an external vision but an internal transformation. Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus was a turning point that radically changed his identity, his mission, his message and his whole life. This revelation was not for Paul's benefit alone but for the purpose of preaching Christ among the Gentiles. The phrase "reveal his Son in me" suggests a deep, personal, and transformative experience of Christ. It speaks to the intimate and powerful nature of Paul's conversion. This internal revelation equipped Paul for his mission to the Gentiles, demonstrating that true ministry flows from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

Immediate Obedience

Paul's immediate response to this revelation was not to consult any human being or seek validation from the apostles in Jerusalem. Instead, he went into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. This period of retreat and reflection highlights Paul's reliance on God's guidance rather than human approval. It also emphasizes his immediate obedience to God's call, without hesitation or delay.

Paul's journey into Arabia and subsequent return to Damascus indicate a period of solitude and preparation. This time alone with God allowed Paul to deepen his understanding of the gospel and prepare him for his future ministry. It serves as a reminder that sometimes, God calls us to step away from the busyness of life and spend time in His presence, seeking His guidance and preparing for the work He has planned for us.

Application

These verses provide significant insights into Paul's understanding of his role and the nature of the gospel. Several key applications can be drawn. Just as Paul was set apart for a specific purpose, every believer is called by God for a unique role in His kingdom. Understanding and embracing this calling is crucial for effective ministry. Paul's calling (and ours too) was grace centered - not based on our own merits but on God's grace. This fosters humility and dependence on God. The personal and transformative nature of encountering Christ is essential for genuine faith and ministry. This transformation empowers believers to share the gospel authentically.

Paul reminds us that the gospel's authority comes from God, not human institutions. This highlights the importance of divine revelation and the sufficiency of Scripture in guiding our faith and practice. Paul's mission to the Gentiles teaches us about the inclusivity of the gospel. It challenges us to reach out beyond our comfort zones and cultural boundaries to share the message of Christ with all people.

4. Paul's Independent Ministry and Validation (Verses 17-20)

Paul further elaborates on his independent ministry and subsequent validation by the apostles in Jerusalem.

Independence from Jerusalem

Paul's decision not to go to Jerusalem to see the apostles immediately after his conversion underlines his independence. The gospel he now preaches did not come from the apostles but directly from Christ. This independence is important because it emphasizes the divine origin of his message.

Paul did not need human endorsement to validate his apostleship; his authority came from Christ Himself. This independence also highlights the universality of the gospel. The message of salvation through Jesus Christ is not confined to a particular group or location but is meant for all people, everywhere. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles reveals the inclusive nature of the gospel, breaking down barriers and extending God's grace to all nations.

Visit to Peter and James

After three years, Paul went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas (Peter) and stayed with him for fifteen days. He also saw James, the Lord's brother. This visit, though brief, provided an opportunity for mutual recognition and fellowship. It also demonstrated that Paul's gospel was in harmony with the message preached by the other apostles.

Paul's visit to Peter and James serves as an important moment of connection and affirmation. While his gospel was independent, it was not isolated. The fellowship and recognition by these key apostles validated Paul's ministry and highlighted the unity of the early church. This visit also reveals the importance of relationships and collaboration in ministry, even as we maintain our distinct callings.

Integrity and Honesty

Paul assures his readers that what he is writing is no lie, emphasizing his integrity and honesty. This assertion is important because it counters any accusations that Paul's gospel was fabricated or deceptive. His testimony is truthful and reliable, grounded in his personal encounter with Christ and consistent with the message of the other apostles.

Integrity and honesty are essential qualities in ministry. Paul's assurance of his truthfulness serves as a model for us today. In a world where trust is so often compromised, maintaining integrity and honesty in our words and actions is crucial for effective witness and ministry. Our lives should reflect the truth of the gospel we proclaim, demonstrating the transforming power of God's grace.

5. Paul's Ministry in Syria and Cilicia (Verses 21-24)

Paul concludes this section by describing his ministry in Syria and Cilicia and the response of the Judean churches.

Ministry in Syria and Cilicia

This region included his hometown of Tarsus, indicating that Paul returned to familiar territory to preach the gospel. His ministry in these areas was likely focused on establishing and strengthening churches, as well as evangelizing both Jews and Gentiles. Paul's ministry in Syria and Cilicia highlights the geographical spread of the gospel at that time. It was not confined to Jerusalem or Judea but extended to the broader regions of the Roman Empire. This expansion revealed the missionary nature of the gospel, which calls us to go beyond our comfort zones and reach people in diverse contexts with the message of Christ.

Unknown to the Judean Churches

Paul notes that he was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They had not met him face to face but had only heard reports about him. This anonymity revealed the humility and focus of Paul's ministry. He was not seeking personal recognition or fame but was dedicated to preaching the gospel and serving Christ.

The churches in Judea only knew Paul by reputation, having heard the remarkable reports of his transformation and ministry. This serves as a reminder that our impact is not always measured by personal recognition but by the faithfulness of our witness and the fruit of our ministry. God can use our lives and testimonies to inspire and encourage others, even if we remain unknown to them.

Praise to God

The Judean churches praised God because of Paul. They heard the report: *“The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.”* Paul’s transformation and ministry were powerful testimonies to the grace and power of God. The response of the Judean churches was not to elevate Paul but to give glory to God for His work in Paul’s life. Paul’s transformation from persecutor to preacher was a cause for praise and worship. It highlighted the power of God’s grace to change lives and the truth of the gospel he proclaimed.

The response of the Judean churches reminds us that our ultimate goal in ministry is to bring glory to God. When people see the transforming work of God in our lives, their response should be to praise and worship Him.

Conclusion

As we reflect on Galatians 1:11-24, we are reminded of the divine origin and transformative power of the gospel. Paul’s testimony reminds us that the gospel is not a human invention but a divine revelation, given by Jesus Christ Himself. It has the power to radically change lives, turning persecutors into preachers and opponents into advocates.

The Apostle Paul’s life and ministry serve as a powerful example of God’s grace and sovereignty. He was set apart from birth, called by grace, and transformed by the revelation of Christ. His independence from human authority and his immediate obedience to God’s call demonstrate his unwavering commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In our own lives, we are called to embrace the gospel with the same passion and dedication. We are to guard its purity, proclaim its truth, and live out its transformative power. We should seek to please God above all, relying on His grace and power to fulfill the calling He has placed on our lives. May our lives, like Paul’s, be a testimony to the grace and power of God, bringing glory to Him and advancing His kingdom.