

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of  
November 2016**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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Galatians – introduction (c)

(review of last week)

4. The fourth and last question we posed at the beginning of this introduction to Paul's letter to the fledgeling Churches in Galatia was: for what reason did he write?

Of course this is fairly clear already. But here it is in verses 6-10.

If you look at his other letters recorded in the New Testament, Paul includes a thanksgiving. Not this time because he can't thank God for the Galatians as they are at the moment.

At this stage in a normal letter by Paul there's a prayer. There isn't one here! Not because he isn't praying for them, but because he wants to get right down to business straight away.

So he tells them now the reason he is writing the letter. There are two reasons: (1) to show them what they had done. And (2) to show them what they must now do.

What had they done? 'What you have done', he says (verse 6), 'has astonished me'. He marvels, but not in a complimentary way, at what they have done so quickly. What have they done? Verse 6: 'God has called you', he says. Not just knowledge and understanding had been theirs. Not just an intellectual calling. This was a 'call' of God, which came and was recognised in their hearts. Now, only true believers with a Spirit changed heart can discern or recognise God's call. They were of the elect and had a true conversion. God had called them into the grace of Christ. They had experienced the kindness and overflowing love of Christ, by the call of God by the Gospel. Paul marvels that they, having experienced that, have so soon abandoned Christ.

They had had a recent experience of the grace of God in their lives, yet so soon they had deserted Him. They had turned their backs. The Greek tense of the verb used was in the present. They were still in the act of turning their backs, abandoning, deserting ... Him! And where had they turned? To another Gospel, which is no gospel at all.

Into the Churches at Galatia had come preachers: One might ask them. "What do you preach?". 'We preach the Gospel', they reply.

There's nobody more dangerous than people who use the same words, but in a different sense. That's why Barthianism<sup>1</sup> is an absolute curse.

[However, in a more contemporary context, to which ordinary people are regularly exposed, on their doorsteps, is the 'cloak' of Christianity and references to a bible which are used by the anti-Christian, cult – the (false) Jehovah Witnesses.]

The same words but in a different sense: The false teachers in Paul's day said that they taught the Gospel. But the message they were preaching wasn't the message that Paul and Barnabas were preaching. It was a different message! There were some common features, but the message was distorted and that's why Paul says that you've gone to a different Gospel, which is not a Gospel at all. There can only be one Gospel, because it is the Gospel of God through, as it says in verse 7, Christ.

If the Gospel were a man-made message, there could be lots of gospels and they could all be equally valid. There could be lots of points of view and they could all carry the same weight in our minds. But the Gospel that Paul preached was the Gospel of God. God gave the Gospel. God gave the content. Content that can be stated in a few simple sentences. And the 'message' that these false preachers were preaching was another message. That's why Paul is so vehemently against it. Because once people start believing another message, apart from the one which saves people, then they are believing a message that cannot save them. Once people begin to believe a message that can not save them, they are damned!

Paul is writing this letter so forthrightly and bluntly because the salvation, the everlasting salvation of men and women depends on it. And if they start believing something else, they will go somewhere else. That is the issue! That's why Paul is so forthright. AND why Luther went across that square, less that a year short of 500 years ago. Because both knew that if people believed what they were hearing, then such people would be eternally lost, and would be under the torment of their sins. The wrath of God being poured on them justly because of the lives they lived.

There being no other message that could save them except the message that God

1 Karl Barth: Barthianism originates with this late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Swiss Theologian. He began under the influence of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century liberal theological curse, which had a humanised view of Scripture and of God. Was disillusioned when his earlier teachers (professors) betrayed their principles to condone world war. However his evolving theology was also man centred and has led to promoting universalism and denial of the fundamental understanding of Reformed Theology as expressed in the Confessions.

“Some of the critique of Barth's teaching is expressed as follows:

It sounds very pious to say, that God has to let His Word become real to us. It sounds even experiential, to say that a text of Scripture is applied; but this is something totally different than what Barth tries to say. By saying that the Bible is not God's Word, but has to become God's Word, one is completely undermining the authority of Scripture. It sounds pious to say that God is high and great and that He, therefore, will never give His Word away, but this betrays a wrong view of the relationship between Word and Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspires God's Word. That Word is true and objective. It remains for ever. The Lord is the truth and He speaks the truth.”

“He refers to Calvin and to terminology which sounds familiar but he changes the content of these expressions in such a way that by using the same words, he comes to a completely different meaning.” [frcna.org/resources/student-society-speeches?download=21](http://frcna.org/resources/student-society-speeches?download=21)

Himself had revealed.

Yet the false teachers were saying the Paul had it wrong!

But not everything that calls itself the gospel is the Gospel. You don't examine (judge) a gospel message by its title. Or by who preaches it. You examine a gospel message by its content. So Paul tells them what they'd done. They had turned from the only Person who could save them, turning from the only message that could save them. To turn from the Gospel is to turn from God. To turn from the message is to turn from the Saviour. To turn from the truth is to turn from Him! Any man who claims to be a Christian, be he ever so high in the ecclesiastical hierarchy: if he believes or preaches another message, he has turned from God.

Paul then, in showing them what they had done, now shows them what they must do. So we go on from verse 7: *... but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*

Messages must be judged, not by who brings them, but by what they say.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Modernism<sup>2</sup> swept through the Churches. Man after man got up and preached: ... Oh they were so plausible. The weapon the Devil used was that those preachers were the most pleasant, well mannered, amenable, thoughtful, caring, considerate, kind, open-hearted, sincere people you could ever hope to meet. People listened to them. They listened to the nicest persons they had ever encountered. But as we might be reminded it doesn't say 'blessed be the nice'. Congregations said, "Oh isn't he nice". "Isn't he lovely". And the (false) message was swallowed, 'lock stock and barrel'. Churches became 'modernistic' in a decade! Because the people who preached damnable error, were so nice. (And the Western Church, by and large hasn't recovered!)

This was what was happening in Galatia. These false teachers appeared:

"Where have you come from?"

"We come from Jerusalem the great mother church!"

So instead of examining the message they ask where did they come from.

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2 A S Peake: When it comes to the matter of revelation and inspiration, these terms are always defined and described on the basis of the individual writer's presuppositions. For instance, Arthur S. Peake, a typical liberal theologian, gives the following description of inspiration:

If the devout and serious reader finds in Carlyle or Ruskin, in Tennyson or Browning, a richer nourishment than he can gain from many a page of the Old Testament and some pages of the New, why should he not boldly say that the modern writer has experienced a deeper and fuller inspiration?

According to Peake, inspiration is not determined by the supernatural influence exerted on the writers by the Spirit of God, "by virtue of which their writings are given Divine trustworthiness." For him, inspiration is determined by the favorable effect the author's writing has on the reader. Here naturalism stands out in bold relief against supernaturalism. **The determining factor is human rather than divine.**

<http://www.truthmagazine.com/the-attitude-of-modernism-toward-the-bible>

“Do you know Peter?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know James?”

“Yes.” (The Apostle (one of the 12) was probably dead by then)

“Do you know John?”

“Oh yes, we know John!”

“Who else do you know?”

And they go through the whole list of famous preachers. They know every famous preacher.

“Well they must be right. Every famous preacher we've heard of ... they know them!”

“What books have you read? Where did you study?” All the credentials are right! Therefore they listened to them and were led into damnable heresy.

Paul on the other hand says, “If I Paul, as an Apostle came back and preach a different message; even if the angels Michael or Gabriel or any other angels preaches any other Gospel (which is different from the one you first heard from me); whoever he is; however nice he is; however well credential he is; no matter who he knows; wherever he came from: let him be accursed.”

Too harsh? No! It's there in 'black and white' at the end of verse 9.

Personalities don't matter. There can be no co-existence between a false gospel and a true one. There can be no evangelism from people who believe a different message. There can be no co-operation, no mutual acceptance of people or groups who hold a false gospel with those of the true Gospel.

Christians when they encounter a false gospel have one clear duty, given to them by God: cut themselves off from that false gospel. Christians are told by their God and Saviour that they are to have nothing to do with false messengers. Whether they come from Westminster Theological Seminary or mother church Jerusalem.

Any false messenger. Have nothing to do with him. Because it's not the messenger that makes the message valid, but the message which makes the messenger valid.

How can you recognise a true Gospel preacher? On no other basis that he preaches the true Gospel.

So says the Apostle Paul: the test is not the personality, origin, manner, or credentials of the messenger. The test is the message. If he doesn't preach the Apostolic, revealed, God-given Gospel, you're to part company with him. Separate from him. Not recognise him. Finish with him. Excommunicate him. Anathematise him. ... *let him be accursed!*

And one can say, with Paul, verse 10, that that doesn't please you much. But our job

is not to seek man's approval, because it's not man's gospel. Our job is to seek God's approval. Because it's God' Gospel.

The moment we become men pleasers, and are afraid to offend men we cease to be the servants of Christ. A slave can only have one master. If you are a slave and you obey that master you are no longer slave of another. If you go through your Christian life obeying what you think will please men – that's your criterion – you cease to be a servant of Christ. The clear teaching of verse 10!

You have to choose: will I please God or will I please them. That's the choice he puts before the Galatians, because their whole future as Christian churches, and their very salvation depends upon it. They have to put those false teachers: OUT. And if they can't because sometimes this becomes impossible: then they must put themselves OUT. In either event they are not to have any contact at all with false teachers. It really is an epistle of 'dynamite'! And this is only how it opens.

Your not surprised then that there was a Reformation and Bible believing Christians came out of the Roman church in their droves. Because they knew that they could not reform the current church. As it stood. Therefore there was only one alternative and that was to leave it.

Notice:

No church is immune from the danger of false teachers. Paul had to say to the Ephesian Elders – and he had been in Ephesus several years – from their own selves the false preacher would come. In Galatia, which had an Apostolic foundation, false teachers had managed to get an entry. Don't think that a Reformed Presbyterian Church, with a clear Confessional standard and a series of overseeing courts, is immune from false teaching arising in it.<sup>3</sup>

Vigilance and constant vigilance is the price of your freedom. There are many churches which have a thoroughly evangelical, Reformed, Biblical basis for their faith yet don't preach the Gospel. Because they thought that the basis of faith – their Confessions and Polity (church governance) – would preserve them and it hasn't. It's constant vigilance that's needed.

When the false teachers came to Galatia, these teachers were not put OUT, error was tolerated and by the time of Paul's writing it had become the order of the day. No church is immune. The greatest danger is Gospel PLUS.

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<sup>3</sup> The Presbyterian Church of Australia in Western Australia. in the first ¾ of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, was lead astray by false teachers of the Barthian school. Particularly from the 50's by elements in the Theological Hall , which affected a generation of local Ministers.

We must pray that people found in this situation, will have God's guidance and blessing as they respond in obedience to the teaching of this first chapter of Paul's letter to the errant churches in Galatia. Who do we serve, men or Christ? If men, we can not also be servant's of Christ.

[2568 – 2036 without footnotes]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

Further notes.<sup>4</sup>

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4The plumb line by which you measure and identify false teaching from true teaching is the teaching of the Apostles. There is no other.

You can't say, "He's nice he must be OK. Or this other is not so nice so he must be not OK." It's an unfortunate anomaly of life that people who preach damnable heresies are a lot nicer than some of those of the truth. [As the little girl prayed, "Oh make the bad people good and the good people nice."]

So the plumb line is the Apostolic teaching and this is only found in the Scriptures. If it doesn't weigh up to the Scriptures it doesn't weigh at all according to God's reckoning. And if you can't get the false teaching and teacher's out you must get out.

False teachers have to be treated in a Biblical manner. The Biblical manner is that we have nothing whatever to do with false teachers. Note the epistles of John. There we are forbidden to have false teachers into our house or, even to say, "Hello", to them in the street. Also read Romans 16

(verses 17-19) where the Apostle says, "Watch out for them and keep away from them". We're to have nothing to do with them. Imagine this: false teachers come into or develop in the local church, and practise their pernicious teaching. (Not talking here about people who believe false things, but those who teach false things.) What are we to do? We're to bring to bear all the God given church discipline to ensure that these false teachers have no voice, are completely muted, within the local congregation and are not considered to be part of it. As much as possible we have nothing to do with them. [Because a church meeting is public they can come and sit in a pew.] We can't prevent being in their presence, but in every other way refuse to have anything to do with them. Not tolerate them, nor listen to them. This is the Biblical way.

But what happens when you are in a Church set up which has associations with other church groups. Like the World Council of Churches. Although there may be no false teachers in your own congregation there are in others of the group. Groups you may have accepted as Christian. Their Ministers may be authorised because of their membership of the group. But there are false teachers there.

It's unthinkable! You have nothing to do with false teachers at the local level, but fraternise with them in your inter-church relationships. Our Biblical duty here, is to reform our inter-church relationships, and if we can't, to secede from that group of Churches. This means specifically that for the Christians in the Church of Rome their Biblical duty in practical terms can only be to leave. As was the case nearly 500 years ago. Similarly for any other church grouping that harbours false teachers and false teaching.

**Delivered Sunday 13 November 2016**

*Sermon delivered by Rev Ross Fraser (no record available)*

**Delivered Sunday 20 November 2016**

Galatians – Chapter 1: 11-24 (a)

(review of last week)

Regrettably there are very few Christians in Turkey today. But once part of Turkey, was Galatia. In Galatia large numbers of people had come to Christ through the preaching of Paul and his missionary team. In those New Testament times when men or women were converted they immediately were gathered into Churches. Not to buildings. Converts came together in a local area and such groups were call Churches. There's no such thing in the Bible as a Christian, who is not committed to a Church. And there should be no such thing today.

Into these new Churches, (although the Apostle had founded these Churches), came false teachers.

That is a very stern warning to us. The fact that a Church that had been founded by the preaching of an Apostle, did not mean that that Church was exempt, or immune from false teachers. False teachers can creep in anywhere, even in the most surprising situation.

These false teachers were saying something like this: “That Paul! He's not a real Apostle. He's an apostle of his own making. You don't need to listen to him. In fact he's misled you! He's told you that faith in Christ is enough to be saved. And he's wrong.” said the false teachers. “You don't just need to come to Christ in a personal way with repentance and faith. But if you're a man you must be circumcised, and whoever you are you must submit to the Jewish Ceremonial Law. And if you don't, you won't be saved!” said the false teachers.

So into these early churches came people preaching the Gospel PLUS. This was the heresy.

Even though these churches had been founded by the Apostle Paul and his missionary team, the new converts were completely swayed and persuaded by these false teachers. Therefore Paul 'takes up his pen' and his missionary team join him in composing the letter which he writes to these young churches in Galatia. In the first 10 verses over the last three weeks we have seen some of the things he had to say:

“It's not true.” he says, “that I'm a man-made Apostle. I was appointed to be an Apostle directly by Jesus Christ and by God His Father. And it's not true that these people preach the true gospel. In fact they preach a false Gospel. They're perverting the true

Gospel. And you.” he says to the Churches in Galatia, “because you've turned to their message, you have turned from the true Gospel, and as a consequence, you have turned from Christ Himself.

“You have to weigh up,” he says, “who is a false teacher and who is a true one,” “And you don't ask, 'Where did they come from?' That's irrelevant. And you certainly don't ask, 'if they're nice'. That's irrelevant. What you ask is: 'what do they teach?' And if any body teachers any other gospel than we first preached to you. You are to have nothing ever to do with him.” That's what Paul said in the first 10 verses.

Now we come to verses 11 to 24. (11 to the end of the Chapter.)

If Paul were here this morning and you had read the first 10 verses, it's almost certain you would want to ask him a question. “Paul, how can you be so certain, that the Gospel you preach is the only true Gospel? How can you be so certain? Don't you think it's rather arrogant, Paul, in saying that you alone are right and these other people are wrong. How can you be so certain that you alone are right?”

Well it's precisely that question which Paul answers in verses 11 and 12.

Paraphrasing verses 11 & 12 he says something like this: “Brothers, let me make something clear to you right from the beginning. The Gospel that I preached to you was no human invention. I didn't think it up. My missionary team didn't think it up. No man thought it up.”

“The Gospel I preached to you was no human tradition.”

The Jews had certain beliefs that were passed down from father to son. “The Gospel which I preached doesn't fit into that category.”

“The Gospel that I preached to you”, he said, “I didn't learn in any school or college.” In other words Paul didn't go to the Jerusalem Bible College where the Apostle Peter was the Principal. He didn't go there. He didn't go to any catechetical class, any school of instruction.

“The Gospel I preached to you,” said Paul, “didn't have a human origin at all!”

“It came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. In other words the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, revealed the Gospel to me!”

So Paul is not only saying in verse 1 that his mission has come from Christ, but he says in verses eleven and twelve, that his message also came directly from Jesus Christ.

Let's read again these verses: <sup>11</sup> *For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.* <sup>12</sup> *For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

That's how Paul got his Gospel. That's how he knew that it was the only true Gospel. Because it was personally revealed to him from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ASIDE: What Paul says to us here is very helpful to Christians in the second decade

of the third millennium – 2016/7 for example, here in Mary Street, BUNBURY. ]  
How can you? How can I? How can we together? Know what is the true Gospel? Go to any preacher. In any church and ask the question, “Do they preach the Gospel?” and he/she will always say, “Yes!” Any preacher tells the congregation that it is the Gospel that is being preached.

BUT, get any five or six of them together and compare their messages and you will find them poles apart. How can you tell who is preaching the true Gospel?

Friends, the true Gospel is what Christ has revealed. And if you want to know what this is, you must ask the question: which message is the one Jesus Christ Himself revealed? And the answer is not hard to find, if you read the Scriptures. Here you find the true Gospel and you can then recognise the false ones.

Once you find a false preacher, by this test, you must do what the earlier verses demand and have nothing to do with them!]

Paul in verse 12 is claiming that the Gospel he preaches is not his Gospel but Christ's. He's claiming the the message he brings is not his message, but Christ's. The rest of the chapter is Paul, backing up this claim.

He talks about himself:

1. before his conversion,
2. at his conversion, and
3. after his conversion.

Showing that he never had an opportunity to learn the Gospel from human lips! Thus he proves to you that as it was impossible for him to learn the Gospel from human lips before, during or after his conversion, his claim is true. That the Gospel he preaches comes as revelation, directly and only, from Jesus Himself. That's what this whole passage is about.

In verses 13 & 14 we read what happened before his conversion.

Here he says to the Galatians, “You've already heard, of the sort of life I lived in those days.” No doubt they had. The false teachers had probably, said things like this: “That Paul he's not a true Apostle. Do you know that he actually used to persecute the Apostles (and all Christians)? Was only later converted. Not converted in the earlier days with the others.”

<sup>13</sup> *For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.* “That group of people that had been chosen by God as THE church. I persecuted them.” He used the word 'persecute', the very same word Jesus used on the road to Damascus: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4 and Acts 22:7)

We recognise a desperate sense of shame and regret in this Apostle's heart as he recalls those days when he was so set against the Christian Church, and some sense of his former wickedness when he recalls that the people he persecuted were God's People. In fact in verse 13 he tells us that beyond measure (violently, ESV) he

persecuted the church. In the Acts of the Apostles we learn that he did it with violence. Not even too strong to say savagely! (I persecuted this Way to the death, ESV.) In verse 13 of Galatians 1: he says, “. I tried to destroy it.”

He had one mission in life and that was to destroy the Christian Church!

“Yes,” he says in verse 14, “*so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.*” One might say fanatical! So fanatical that he actually outstripped his contemporaries. He was a member of the strictest party, and he lived accordingly.

What he lived for was the Jewish faith, he couldn't bear to see people departing from it.

The Jews today have an old saying: the Scripture is water; the Mishnah is wine ; and the Gemara is spiced wine. Jews have a regard for Scripture, but in addition to the Scriptures the Jews have a book called the Talmud. Which is a book of traditions and regulations, which is totally man-made. The Mishnah and Gemara are sections of the Talmud.<sup>5</sup>

Paul was like that. He loved the Scriptures but he cared even more for those Jewish traditions. And was a zealot for them. He couldn't bear to see them trampled on or despised or forsaken. He was burning with his anger against the Christian Church as a result.

Why is he telling us all this?

Paul was a native of Tarsus (also in modern day Turkey). But he was reared and educated in Jerusalem. Saul was certainly in Palestine when our Lord was preaching. Just as others in the Jewish religious hierarchy heard and saw Jesus during His Ministry – in fact the Scriptures show that they deliberately sought Him out – Paul most likely did also. Like the others he would not have been neutral towards Christ, nor was he to the Christians after Christ's Ascension. His mind would have been set against Christ and the Christians who 'followed' Him. Hence his vigour in seeking to destroy this new sect, as he thought it to be (the Way). There was no chance that he open his ears, even partially, to those early Christians. Hotly opposed to them there is absolutely no chance that he learnt the Gospel from them! Because he never stopped to listen to them. He just hounded them (sometimes) to death.

It's part of the marvellous, glory of God that this greatest opponent of the Christian faith became its foremost preacher. **Is anything too hard for the Lord?** (Gen 18:14)

Would any early Christian have ever imagined it? Here was a man whose mind was completely closed to anything they could have said. If they tried to witness to him, he wouldn't listen. Instead he hounded them to death. He was pitiless in his treatment. You could be sure that time and time again they must have thought that there was no

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<sup>5</sup> The Talmud was derived from the 'Oral' Tradition that was passed from the Temple based priests from generation to generation and the principles adapted for contemporary situations. With the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, the disappearance of the governing body, the Sanhedrin, and the dispersion of central based Jewish scholars during centuries of persecution, it was undertaken by the new religious rulers, the Rabbis, that these traditions were to be committed to writing. Most of this was done in the second and third Centuries AD. In the time of Paul, these traditions – the additions to the Scripture – were part of the Oral Law of which he would have been a custodian.

hope for such a man. Who was so completely against everything that the Christians stood for.

Yet he's the very one that the Lord saved.

As we finish: today, we should be encouraged by this example. In many ways we encounter people who in some points, could be compared with the unconverted Paul. Relatives, friends, acquaintances, – whose minds are completely closed to anything you may say about the Gospel. They will not consider it. Perhaps you come to the point where you cease praying for them! And give up witnessing to them. Humanly speaking they are beyond redemption.

But as long as the conversion of a one like Paul remains on a page of Scripture. You keep on praying for that person. You keep witnessing to that person. Because who can tell? In the grace of God, that that person may become the foremost Christian witness of our time: to the glory of God!

**Is anything too hard for the Lord?**

[2072]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

*Delivered Sunday 27 November 2016*

Galatians – Chapter 1: 11-24 (b)

(review of last week)

Previously we considered Paul, before his conversion.

Now: Paul at his conversion. Gal 1:15 and part of verse 16.

What was it that changed? The foremost persecutor. That fanatical persecutor. Into a humble Christian.

In verse 15 Paul gives no credit for himself. What effected the change was the good pleasure of God. When it ... pleased God. All conversions are attributable to the good pleasure of God. "God," he says, in verse 15, "Set me apart before I was born." Just like God had set Jacob apart before he was born and set his love upon him and not Esau; and Jeremiah before he was born. – So God had set apart Paul, before he was born.

Now think about that today. Some enemy of the Christian faith, say, is at the moment an enemy of the Christian faith. How do you know that God hasn't set apart that person since the foundation of the world? How do you know that God's everlasting and saving love is not upon that person? You don't, do you! Therefore keep praying and working for the conversion of that person. Because everyone who is converted, comes to understand that God loved them before they loved God. It is taught plainly on the pages of Scripture but they also come to recognise it themselves. In themselves. All Christians as they look back over their pre-Christian conversion days can see thousands of little things that they didn't understand at that time, but they all mean something now. We see God at work in our lives, even before we came to Him in Christ. God who at last brought you to the Gospel and to submit to it and now to rejoice in it.

God did that because He is God and He did it before you were converted because he loved you. Even, and especially, then! He loved you before you were born.

You say that you don't understand it. None of us do. But you can't say that you don't believe it! Because it's clearly there in God's word.

How was it then that the man who was actually loved by God came into the experience of salvation? Verse 15: *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, . . . .* There he was. Going up the Damascus road and Jesus Christ stopped him in his tracks. "Saul, Saul, why persecute me?" He was arrested by a word from Christ.

Same as every Christian! You weren't arrested directly by a voice from heaven. But you were never-the-less arrested by God's Word. In your tracks; brought to recognise the Lord Jesus Christ and His Saviour-hood; and brought to prostrate yourself at His feet alone; and brought to put all your trust and hope in Him. He called you by His Grace! Grace! You didn't deserve that. You didn't even seek that. But He did it. That's what calling is. It happened to Paul.

He goes on in verse 16. He talks about, "God revealing His Son in me." Now that, in its essence, is what conversion is. When the 'scales' seem to fall off your eyes and you suddenly 'see' who Jesus Christ is. And you suddenly see what He did. And what He is doing. The thing that was all mixed up – you couldn't make head nor tail of it – suddenly becomes clear and you see it.

But you don't just see it as a truth out there somewhere – you see it as a truth that must be embraced in your heart. You have a sense of drawing close to that Son of God. As you grow in Christian understanding you become aware that the Son of God is within you, by His Spirit and the Son who has been revealed **to** you is now the Son of God revealed, **in** you. That's essentially what conversion is.

It happened to Paul. He was also commissioned. Right at the moment of his conversion (verse 16), to preach the Gospel (as we read in Acts chapter 9 and elsewhere. Paul attributes all that to God. In verses 13 and 14 he says, "I did this. I did that". But in verses 15 & 16 he says, "God did that!" He believes that it was a work

of Sovereign Grace.

We do believe in "Sovereign Grace". Not as a sort of 'catch word', that describes what camp we belong to: we believe in Sovereign, Grace because like Paul, we have experienced, Sovereign Grace. God conquered us. Kindly. That's what Sovereign Grace means. Paul was conquered: kindly. Don't miss the continuing point: "My conversion's all the work of God," he says. "It wasn't the work of man." "My mission has come from God. My message has come from God" "Because my conversion came from God"

"So I didn't learn the Gospel from before I was converted from human lips, and I didn't learn the Gospel from human lips at the moment of my conversion!" So, alright Paul, perhaps then you learned the Gospel from human lips after your conversion.

Look now at the second half of verse 16 to the end of the chapter:

Where he tells us that he didn't learn the Gospel even after his conversion. The latter part of verse 16 is a summary of what follows to the end of the chapter. "... *I did not immediately consult with anyone.*"

It's true that Ananias came to him and said, "Brother Paul .." But he didn't discuss the content of the Gospel with Ananias. It's true that he spent a little time in the Damascus church. But it was only a 'little' time, just enough for him to preach publicly that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. But he didn't discuss the content of the Gospel with the Damascus church. He didn't go up to Jerusalem for theological training at the 'feet of the Apostles'.

He now advances three proofs: that he didn't get the Gospel from human lips.

Proof number one (verse 17): After his conversion he went into Arabia.

<sup>17</sup> *nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. But I went away into Arabia.* Now why did he go to Arabia? He went to confer, but not with flesh and blood – not with men, but as Verse 18 shows, for the best part of 3 years, with the Son of God. That's when and where he had his revelation of Jesus Christ! There were others who were Apostles before him he says in verse 17. They had spent three years with Christ, listening to his teaching and His parables while witnessing His miracles. Paul elsewhere describes himself as an Apostle *untimely born* (1 Cor 15:8) – *out of due time (NKJV)*. And as a deliberate compensation, by the Lord Jesus Christ, he's given his three years alone with Christ in the Arabian desert! What a school that was. The Apostle Paul conferred with the risen Son of God; meditated on the Old Testament Scriptures; in communion with Christ for nearly 3 years.

He didn't learn his Gospel by human lips it came by revelation from Jesus Christ.

His second proof is from verses 18,19 and 20:

When at last he went up to Jerusalem it was much later and only, briefly.

After the period in the desert of Arabia, he returned to Damascus. [Where in Acts 9 we learn that he had to leave secretly by being lowered down in a basket from an upstairs

window on the city wall. This because his life was in danger due to political trouble caused by his bold preaching of the risen Christ.]

Then he did go to Jerusalem, but this was some years since his conversion; and it was simply to get to know Peter. To become acquainted with him and some of the details of what was happening in the church. He certainly wasn't there long enough to 'learn the whole counsel of God'. Only 15 days and he didn't see any other Apostles only the step brother of Jesus, James. [not the Apostle James] Possibly because the Apostles were out preaching elsewhere – as they did. But more likely for the reason given in Acts 9: People were still suspicious that he really was converted – perhaps a spy seeking to sneak into the Christian Church. If it hadn't been for Barnabas, nobody would have spoken to him. They couldn't believe that this fanatical persecutor really had become a Christian. Not even this three years later. So Christians steered clear of him – for a while.

He says, with emphasis: <sup>20</sup> *(In what I am saying to you, before God, I do not lie!)*

That being the case it is clear that he did not obtain his gospel from human lips.

The third proof is from verse 21 to the end of the Chapter:

Immediately after that, the short visit to see Peter in Jerusalem, he went up to Syria and Cilicia. [You'll remember again from the Acts of the Apostles, that even in Jerusalem his life was in danger. The Christians who had got to know (and trust) him had said, "Get out quickly!". He went to Caesarea and shortly after back to Tarsus (in modern day Turkey) and then to help with the work at Antioch in Syria. In the next chapter we learn that he then spent 14 years in Syria and Cilicia.]

As we read on in Galatians chapter one we find that whilst in Syria, Paul (vv 22 and on) reports that he was personally unknown to the churches of Judea (Jerusalem and surrounds). Generally, even the Apostles, didn't know him by sight even. But they heard about him. Not: as the persecutor who had changed and now had become a heretic. Not: that he was preaching a false Gospel! What they heard was that the persecutor, who had become a Christian was preaching THE Gospel! He was preaching the faith that he had tried to destroy, and although they hadn't met him nor, could then, recognise him by face, everybody knew that Paul had been converted and was preaching the true message. [We already know that the way you tell a true preacher from a false one is by the truth of the message.] He was preaching a message of which the content was accurate and true. And to seal this understanding they glorified God because of him and his true message. Note once again: not thanks to Paul, but thanks to God.

They recognised that the former anti-Christian zealot was now an exceptional trophy of God!

Paul's point is made. He's learned his Gospel not from human lips but from Christ Himself. He's given to us evidence that makes it plain that he could never have learned the Gospel from human lips: before, or at, or even after his conversion. He certainly didn't learn his Gospel from the Jerusalem Apostles. Circumstances prove that his claim is correct: that he did receive his Gospel from Jesus Christ.

You might find this very interesting, but so what?

The importance is this: Paul's message was not his own; Paul's message wasn't somebody else's; Paul's message was Christ's.

Therefore to reject Paul's message, is to reject Christ! That's the importance of what he is saying to all those early Churches, who were misled by false teaching. The message to the modern Church today is just as strong:

To reject Paul's message in the Epistle to the Galatians is still to reject Christ. That's what he is saying. That's why the Galatian heresy was (and is) so serious. In turning from Paul's Gospel they were turning from Christ's Gospel. Because Christ's Gospel is the Gospel which Paul preached. Because Paul learnt his Gospel from, and only from, Christ.

If you don't submit to the teachings of Galatians, you are not submitting to the teachings of Christ! This is the necessary point of paramount importance.

As we continue to study this Epistle over the coming weeks.

[2016 ]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

**<http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-i-distinguish-between-the-gospel-and-false-gospels>**