

Galatians - Part II – How to Be a Catalyst for Glory – Galatians 1:13-24

FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, February 2, 2020 – A.M. Message

Description

- We all have sins, failures, hardships, and tragedies in our lives. And it is easy to look at these as things as black marks or unfair circumstances that take away from life. But, because of the gospel, these can also be catalysts for the glory of God. In this message we will see how this was true in the life of the apostle Paul and it can be true in our lives as well.

Introduction

- Turn in your Bible to **Galatians 1**.
- Review of last week...
 - Really, why is the gospel good news?
 - Because your goodness and best efforts are worthless for salvation.
 - Because salvation is not about God giving you a second chance.
- Today, we will learn one more amazing truth about the gospel.
 - **Like a fine diamond...**
 - **You look at it and see its beauty.**
 - **But you turn it just slightly and it catches the light differently and you see more of its brilliance.**
- Today, we will learn more about the good news of the gospel message.
 - You are going to fall in love with the book of **Galatians!**
 - Martin Luther considered Paul's letter to the Galatians to be the most important book in the Bible.
 - I hope you agree that it is at least one of the most important by the end of our time in this book.
 - Last week, in the first half of **Galatians 1**, we learned to marvel at the gospel.
 - Today, in the second half of **Galatians 1**, I want us to be inspired by the gospel to do something that really matters.
 - Most things we do don't really matter.
 - The gospel inspires us to do the one thing that matters most!
- Let's read **Galatians 1:13-24**.
 - Setup
 - Paul is about to give an autobiographical sketch, the longest and most detailed we have in the Bible.
 - It stretches from **Galatians 1:13** to **Galatians 2:14**.
 - **1:13**
 - Paul was a terrorist!
 - He approved the martyrdom of the Christian servant, Stephen (**Acts 8:1**).
 - He dragged Christians to prison (**Acts 8:3**).
 - In fact, Paul was on his way to persecute Christians further when Jesus spoke to him on the Damascus Road.
 - Listen to his own description of his activities against Christians...
 - **Acts 26:10-11** | ... in Jerusalem... I locked up many of the saints in prison, since I had received authority for that from the chief priests. When they were put to death, I was in agreement against them. In all the synagogues I often punished them and tried to make them blaspheme. Since I was terribly enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities. (CSB)
 - The word *intensely* is **ὑπερβάλλω** in Greek.
 - Compound word: Hyper + Throw
 - Louw and Nida define it...
 - A degree which exceeds extraordinarily a point on an implied or overt scale of extent.
 - Same word used...
 - To describe how much better heaven is than our worldly struggles.

— **2 Corinthians 4:17** | *For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory.* (CSB)

— To describe how much greater God's power is than ours.

— **2 Corinthians 4:7** | *Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us.* (CSB)

— Paul's violence and brutality were as bad as God's power is good.

— Paul's anger, hatred, cruelty was as terrible as heaven is wonderful.

— Paul was a nasty, cruel, hate filled man.

— Paul was in no way inclined to accept Christianity.

— **1:14**

— Notice two important lessons here...

— First, Paul was sincere.

— But sincerity is not enough.

— God is not pleased with sincerity but in truth.

— Second, Paul was doing something that was accepted and even lauded in his peer group.

— Just because others approve doesn't mean you are right.

— Just because you are in the crowd doesn't mean you are right.

— **1:15-16a**

— *But...*

— The most important word in Paul's story.

— What happened here?

— Salvation!

— He is talking both about his salvation and his call to ministry.

— Let's walk through the parts...

— It started with God.

— *From my mother's womb...*

— Paul was not searching for Jesus. Jesus found Paul.

— **Acts 9:1-5** | *Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul said. "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting," he replied.* (CSB)

— It was consummated with his response.

— **Romans 10:9** | *If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* (CSB)

— How wonderful is salvation?

— Remember last week...

— Because your goodness and best efforts are worthless for salvation.

— Because salvation is not about God giving you a second chance.

— It is so interesting to read all of Paul's several descriptions of how he came to know the Lord.

— He describes it in every instance as something that happened to him.

— That is so true of a genuine experience with Jesus.

— I think of my favorite parable in Scripture and know that is what happened with me.

— **Matthew 13:44** | *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.* (CSB)

— **1:16b**

— Why did God save Paul?

— **Galatians 1:16b** | *... so that I could preach him among the Gentiles...* (CSB)

— Paul was not converted just for his own benefit.

— And neither were we!

— **1:16c-18**

- Why do we care that Paul didn't first go to the apostles to learn the details of the gospel message?
 - It seems like going to Peter, James and John would have been a pretty good idea.
 - This figures into the argument and accusations of the Judaizers which we will get to in later weeks.
 - But here is lesson for us at this point...
 - The gospel comes from revelation not deliberation.
 - The gospel is not what a bunch of people come together and agree on.
 - So, what does that mean for us?
 - Well, we do go to the apostles for truth because the gospel has been once for all delivered to the saints.
 - **Jude 3** | *Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. (CSB)*
 - What we don't do is deliberate.
 - Too often now when you read about theological questions or controversies you hear people say...
 - Well, it seems to me...
 - Well, this school of thought takes this approach...
 - Well, the majority of people believe...
 - Well, we must find an interpretation that lines up with...
 - No!
 - The truth comes from what has been revealed.
 - If it offends my sensibilities or stands contrary to popular cultural views then there is a problem with my sensibilities and with the popular views, not with revealed truth.
- The timeline gets a little confusing here.
- However, we know that Paul spent three years in Arabia (east of Damascus).
 - What Paul was doing there has almost evenly divided interpreters for centuries.¹
 - The consensus of opinion still holds that Paul took time away to consolidate the changes God had brought into his life.²

— **1:21-24**

- **1:24** is the most important part of this story!
- In the end, nothing we do is more significant than glorifying God.
 - Everything else is temporary.
 - Everything else is trivial.
 - Everything else is ultimately a distraction.
- What I want you to see in these dozen verses is what I'm calling the gospel road.
 - The start of the road...
 - Paul was a terrorist.
 - The journey along the road...
 - Paul is saved and transformed.
 - The destination...
 - Paul's life is the cause of people glorifying God!

How to Go Down the Gospel Road

I. Confess and believe.

- I shared the one-verse parable earlier about the treasure and the field.
 - That parable is followed by a two-verse parable with a similar message...
- **Matthew 13:45-46** | *The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it. (CSB)*
 - If you don't know Christ as your Savior, then hopefully in today's message you have found the priceless pearl!
 - Confess, believe, surrender...

II. Be transformed.

- Paul was transformed.
 - Terrorist to an evangelist

- Persecutor to a preacher
- Hater of Christ to a lover of Christ
- Paul wrestled with this for three years.
 - But in those three years God transformed him.
 - **Romans 12:2** | *Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. (CSB)*
- Let God transform you through...
 - His word
 - Washed by his word...
 - Worship
 - Fellowship

III. Be a catalyst for glory.

- This is the goal!
- We all have difficulties, obstacles, tragedies, failures...
- Our marvelous task, our greatest assignment is to see those things become a catalyst for glory.
- What can become a catalyst for the glory of God?
 - **Your well-known sin...**
 - **Your public failures...**
 - **Your hardships...**
 - **Dyslexia**
 - **Poverty**
 - **Being downsized at work**
 - **Your tragedy/pain...**
 - **Infertility**
 - **Cancer**
 - **Death of a child**
 - **Early death of a parent**
 - **Divorce**
 - **Abuse**
- **Watch this video about a man who has seen his sin and public disgrace become a catalyst for the glory of God.**
 - <https://summitchurch.com/message/a-freedom-that-could-only-come-from-god>
 - **Starting at 42:03.**

Conclusion

- Isn't the gospel great!
- Here is my favorite quote from Paul Manning...
 - **Quote: "It is interesting to see how God has taken something very evil, very wrong, and turned it into something that can be used for his glory and the advancement of his kingdom."**
- Notice how it matches the quote from Paul, the apostle...
 - **Galatians 1:23-24** | *They simply kept hearing: "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me. (CSB)*
- How can you embrace the gospel and be a catalyst for the glory of God?

Discussion Guide

Connect

- Can you think of a modern-day example of someone who experienced a tragedy or a public sin or failure, but turned that black time into a catalyst for the glory of God? Explain.

Discover

- Which statement or experience stood out to you from the worship service?
- Read Galatians 1:13-14.
 - Why do you think Paul was so passionately opposed to Christianity before his encounter with Jesus?
- Read Galatians 1:15-19 and Jude 3
 - According to the end of verse 16, for what purpose did the Lord save Paul?
 - Why did Paul not first go to the apostles in Jerusalem?
 - What is our authority? Where do we turn when we want to know the truth? How does the world often struggle with the revealed truth of God's word?

- Read Matthew 13:44-46.
 - What is the one big message these two brief parables teach?
 - What, if any, is the difference in what the parables communicate?
 - How is your experience like the first parable? Second parable?
- Read Romans 12:1-2 and Ephesians 5:25.
 - Why is the verb “transform” in Romans 12:2 in the passive form? Who does the work of transforming our minds?
 - What is God’s primary tool (at least the one mentioned in these passages) for transforming our minds?
 - What are the connections between “renewing your mind” in Romans 12:2 and “washing” in Ephesians 5:25?

Respond

- If someone shared with you their disappointment and shame connected to their failure, sin, or tragedy, how would you counsel them in light of Paul’s story in Galatians 1?
- How can we make our failure, sin, or tragedy a catalyst for others to glorify God?

Bonus for Thinkers

- What did Paul really do in Arabia for three years? Why three years? What was the purpose? What was the value?

Outline Ideas

— #1

- Lessons from walk-through...
 - Sincerity is insufficient...
 - God was pleased...
 - Salvation finds you...
 - Saved so that...
 - The gospel must come from revelation...
 - The gospel is...
 - From revelation
 - Consistent
 - Fully revealed
- The Gospel Road...
 - Terrorist
 - Transformed
 - Cause of glory
- How can you move down the gospel road?
 - Admit
 - Surrender
 - Be transformed
 - Three years...
 - Long game
 - Radical!
 - Glorify the Lord
 - Let even your sin and rebellion be for the glory of God!

Thoughts

- How someone goes from a persecutor to a point of praise...
- Want to know how amazing the gospel is? Listen to this!
 - Look what happened to Paul. Notice he didn’t stop until he was a point of praise.
 - Where are you in this journey? Are you a point of praise?
 - Who are you going to share your story with this week?
- Paul took his sinful past and used it as a key piece of his life bringing honor to the Lord.

— The same thing could be done with any sin, tragedy, failure, struggle, misfortune...

General Notes

- Martin Luther considered Paul's letter to the Galatians to be the most important book in the Bible.
- It's as simple as this: **Imagine taking a final exam that counts for your whole grade you don't study at all for it because you are out the whole night partying, and so you fail. Sitting beside you is the perfect student who aces the exam. But when it comes time to turn the grades in, he takes your failing exam and gives you his perfect one.**¹
- **Jesus last' words on the cross were not, "I got it started, now you go finish it up." His last words were: "It. Is. Finished."**²
- Greear: **Some churches emphasize...**³
- Do not trust in the law of the Pharisees, who "tie up heavy loads" and place them on people (**Matt 23:4**). Instead, trust in the One who said, "Come to Me . . . and I will give you rest" (**Matt 11:28**).⁴
- Modern-day "Judaizers," like their ancient counterparts, reject the authority of Paul and try to undermine the Gospel which he preached. **In Paul's day, their message was "the Gospel plus Moses." In our day it is "the Gospel plus" any number of religious leaders, religious books, or religious organizations.** "You cannot be saved unless ..." is their message (**Acts 15:1**); and that "unless" usually includes joining their group and obeying their rules. If you dare to mention the Gospel of grace as preached by Jesus, Paul, and the other Apostles, they reply, "But God has given us a new revelation!"⁵

Notes on Galatians 1:11-24

- These verses contain the **longest and richest autobiographical material we have from the pen of Paul.**⁶
- Paul gives us a **picture of God's transforming grace by relating his own story, the story of a terrorist-turned-evangelist.**⁷
- Two themes dominate this section: the origin of Paul's message and the transformation of Paul's life.⁸
- The apostle was naturally doing what Peter encouraged all believers to do: **"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15 niv).**⁹

Notes on Galatians 1:11

- If you think about it, you have to admit that we would not make this gospel up. **If we were given the power to determine how one earned God's favor and a place in heaven, we would make up a scoring system,** something that emphasized human works. Why? Because **the natural default mode of the human heart is works-righteousness.** The message of grace—that the work has already been done—is counter-intuitive. Grace offends our natural sensibilities.¹⁰
- **The gospel of grace is like water: people did not invent it, and people cannot live without it. We are spiritually thirsty creatures in need of the living water of the gospel.**¹¹
- J. Bligh comes close to the correct sense of this expression in his paraphrase of the verse: "My gospel (and my preaching of the gospel) do not belong to the purely human level of existence: the gospel message did not come to me through human channels—it was not mediated to me through any man; and my preaching of the gospel has not been guided by human motives and ambitions."¹²

Notes on Galatians 1:12

- Revelation means a truth that is shared by God to man, a truth that man never knew.¹³
- Paul clearly was contrasting the way he received the gospel from the normal pattern of catechetical instruction commonly practiced in rabbinic Judaism. In that system the citation of venerable sources and the piling up of

¹ Greear, A Freedom Worth Fighting For" // Gal 1:6-10

² Greear, A Freedom Worth Fighting For" // Gal 1:6-10

³ Greear, A Freedom Worth Fighting For" // Gal 1:6-10

⁴ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 689.

⁶ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 106.

⁷ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁸ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁹ Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, *Life Application Bible Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 26.

¹⁰ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

¹¹ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

¹² Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 108.

¹³ Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *Galatians-Colossians*, *The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1996), 18.

numerous “footnotes” were integral to the learning process: Rabbi so-and-so says this, but Rabbi so-and-so says that, and so forth. Paul here claimed an unmediated divine authority for the gospel he proclaimed.¹⁴

- J. T. Sanders, among others, claims to have found “an absolute contradiction” in what Paul claimed in **Gal 1:11–12** and his statement in **1 Cor 15:3**, where he said that he passed on to the Corinthians the gospel that he too had received. Both verses employ the same Greek word for “receive” (*paralambanein*), a technical term for the transmission of religious tradition.¹⁵
 - However, **what Paul was arguing in Galatians was not that his gospel was different from that of the other apostles but rather that he had received it independently of them.**¹⁶
 - It is certain that **Paul knew a great deal about the Christian faith even before his conversion.** It is inconceivable that he would have invested so much energy in trying to stamp out a movement he knew nothing about. No doubt the very Christians he persecuted witnessed to him of their faith.¹⁷
 - Paul’s point in Galatians is not that he was opposed to or ignorant of this developing Christian tradition, but simply that he was not dependent upon it for his knowledge of Christ. The Jesus traditions which he later learned, incorporated into his letters, and passed on to his churches only served to confirm what he already knew by direct revelation to be true.¹⁸
- The word for “*revelation*” (*apokalypsis*) literally means “unveiling, a laying bare, the removal of that which conceals or obscures, a disclosure.” It is used only once in the Greek Old Testament (**1 Sam 20:30**) but occurs frequently in the New Testament, where it carries at least three nuances: (1) the coming or manifestation of a person, especially the coming of Christ (**1 Cor 1:7**; **2 Thess 1:7**); (2) the disclosure of the true character of a person or truth (**Luke 2:32**; **Rom 2:5**); (3) the content of that which is unveiled or manifested (**1 Cor 14:6**; **Eph 1:17**).¹⁹
 - Two other texts in the New Testament help to illumine this passage.²⁰
 - The first is Jesus’ comment about Peter’s surprising confession at Caesarea Philippi, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,*” to which Jesus replied, “*This was not revealed to you by men, but by my Father in Heaven*” (**Matt 16:16–17**).²¹
 - Obviously Peter was well acquainted with Jesus before receiving this great insight. He knew well the bare facts of his earthly ministry. He had heard Jesus teach and had seen him do great miracles. None of this sufficed, however, to bring him to a true awareness of who Jesus really was until the veil was lifted in the moment of divine disclosure.²²
 - From this we learn that only God can truly reveal himself. **We may preach, teach, and share the good news of Christ with others; but only God can soften a hardened heart and bring the light of divine truth to a darkened mind.**²³
 - The second passage is Paul’s own description of how “the mystery of Christ,” unknown in earlier generations, was “now being revealed (*apekalyphthē*) to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (**Eph 3:5**, RSV).²⁴
- Five essential elements of the gospel made known to Paul...²⁵
 - (1) God has raised from the dead Jesus, the crucified Messiah, vindicating his claim to be one with the Father.²⁶
 - (2) Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Father but is still vitally connected to his people on earth.²⁷
 - (3) The risen Christ will come again in power and glory to fulfill all the messianic prophecies of the old covenant, bringing history to a climactic closure in a display of divine judgment and wrath.²⁸
 - (4) In the meantime, God has opened the door of salvation for Gentiles as well as Jews.²⁹
 - (5) The basis for acceptance with God, for Jews and Gentiles alike, is justification by faith apart from the works of the law.³⁰

¹⁴ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 109.

¹⁵ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 109.

¹⁶ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 109.

¹⁷ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 110.

¹⁸ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 110.

¹⁹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 110–111.

²⁰ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 111.

²¹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 111.

²² Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 111.

²³ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 111.

²⁴ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 111.

²⁵ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 112.

²⁶ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 112.

²⁷ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 112.

²⁸ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 112.

²⁹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 112.

³⁰ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 112.

Notes on Galatians 1:13

- In these verses the apostle shows that **previous to his conversion he was not at all under Christian influence and was in no way inclined to the acceptance of Christianity.**³¹
- How had the Galatians *heard* this? In the book of **Acts**, Paul often told the details of his conversion as part of his testimony (see **22:1-10; 26:2-18**). The Galatians probably heard about his previous lifestyle from Paul himself. But Paul's reputation may have preceded him on occasion. The news may have been passed along by Jews through the Mediterranean grapevine; the conversion of a powerful man who had set out to destroy believers certainly would have spread quickly. Another source may have been the Judaizers who, in their attempts to discount Paul's authority, might have mentioned that Paul used to persecute Christians.³²
- **Paul was a terrorist.** He approved the martyrdom of the Christian servant, Stephen (**Acts 8:1**). He dragged Christians to prison (**Acts 8:3**), and he cast his vote against Christians (**Acts 26:10**). In fact, Paul was on his way to persecute Christians further when Jesus spoke to him on the Damascus Road.³³
- Paul's **main point in vv. 13-14** was to show that there was nothing in his religious background and preconversion life that could have in any way prepared him for a positive response to the gospel.³⁴
- Paul was transformed by his encounter with Jesus. He was not just tweaked by it. Like Paul, we need more than a minor adjustment when we come to Christ; we need transformation.³⁵
- **Intensely persecuted**—Paul persecuted the church of God 'beyond measure' (av). The phrase seems to indicate the violence, even the savagery, with which he set about this grim work.³⁶
- **In saying he "wasted" the church, Paul uses a word which means "to devastate," "to destroy," "to ruin."** The *av* renders it "made havoc"; Coneybeare, "strove to root it out." The tense of the verb emphasizes the continuing and intensive character of the action—he was "continually trying to destroy" the church.³⁷
 - **ὑπερβάλλω; ὑπερβολή, ἤς f:** a degree which exceeds extraordinarily a point on an implied or overt scale of extent—'extraordinary, extreme, supreme, far more, much greater, to a far greater degree.'³⁸
 - **πορθέω:** to attack with the intent or result of destroying—to attack, to destroy.³⁹
- **"and tried to destroy it"** This verb phrase is IMPERFECT TENSE, meaning **repeated action in past time.**⁴⁰

Notes on Galatians 1:14

- The word *Judaism* refers not only to nationality but also to religion. To be fully Jewish, a person must have descended from Abraham. In addition, a faithful Jew adhered to the Jewish laws.⁴¹
- The word *traditions* refers to Paul's life as a Pharisee. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees (**Phil 3:5; Acts 26:5**). This meant that he wasn't just following Old Testament traditions, but also other traditions that developed over time.⁴²
- **the traditions of my fathers.** This rabbinic teaching was the foundation of Jewish life in the first century a.d., particularly for the Pharisees (cf. **Mark 7:3-5**).⁴³
- **Paul is a classic example of a person who was sincere in his misdirected beliefs before becoming a Christian. Sincerity cannot bring you to salvation if you do not sincerely believe in the truth.** You can be sincerely wrong. You can be consumed with religion and miss Jesus.⁴⁴
- What had the Christians done to elicit this sort of fanatical response? It is important to remember that, as A. D. Nock noted, "When Paul first learned of the body which was the germ cell of later Christianity, there was no title 'Christian': that came into being at Antioch, and perhaps as a nickname." What Paul did encounter was a sect within Judaism that, because of their devotion to Messiah Jesus, was redefining the boundaries of the community of Israel in ways that were profoundly disturbing to such a strict Pharisaic leader as Paul.⁴⁵
 - Two aspects of the early Christian message must have been especially galling to Paul. ⁴⁶

³¹ Curtis Vaughan, *Galatians*, Founders Study Guide Commentary (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2005), 27.

³² Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 25.

³³ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

³⁴ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 113.

³⁵ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

³⁶ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 31.

³⁷ Curtis Vaughan, *Galatians*, Founders Study Guide Commentary (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2005), 27.

³⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 688.

³⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 232.

⁴⁰ Robert James Utley, *Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians*, vol. Volume 11, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1997), 12.

⁴¹ Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 26.

⁴² David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁴³ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2246.

⁴⁴ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁴⁵ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 114.

⁴⁶ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 115.

- Not merely the claim that Jesus was the Messiah, but the triple assertion that this Messiah had been publicly condemned and crucified, then raised from the dead, and now exalted to heaven with the status of deity, which demanded the kind of worship only properly given to God—all of this amounted to the perpetuation of the same “blasphemy” that had led to Jesus’ death in the first place (**John 10:33**).⁴⁷
 - Paul’s devotion to “the tradition of my fathers” also would have prompted him to regard as dangerous the Christian message that Christ had displaced the law as the means for right standing before God.⁴⁸
 - The point to be made in this discussion is that **Paul’s persecuting activity, carried out with great energy and dispatch, arose out of sincere religious convictions and high moral expectations.**⁴⁹

Notes on Galatians 1:15

- What changed Paul’s life from persecutor of the church to preacher of the faith? The little phrase *but* ... *God* reveals what happened.** God got hold of Paul’s life. Paul did not expect it, did not deserve it (in fact, he described himself as the *last* person worthy to deserve God’s grace—see **1 Timothy 1:16**), and did not seek it but rather fought against it.⁵⁰
- Verses **15–17** constitute one long and rather difficult sentence in Greek.⁵¹
 - Verses **15–17** comprise one sentence, with a long subordinate clause describing Paul’s conversion—*ὄτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν ... ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί (hote de eudokēsen ... apokalypsai ton huion autou en emoi*, but when [God] was pleased ... to reveal his Son in me)—and a compound main clause indicating what Paul did (or did not do) after his conversion—*εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱερουσόλυμα ... ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν (eutheōs ou prosanethemēn sarki kai haimati oude anēlthon eis Hierosolyma ... alla apēlthon eis Arabian kai palin hypēstrepsa eis Damaskon*, immediately I did not consult with flesh and blood, neither did I go up to Jerusalem, ... but I went away into Arabia and again returned to Damascus).⁵²
- Someone who has had a genuine experience with Jesus usually feels less like it was a decision that they made, and more like something that happened to them. Less something that they took up, and more something that took them up.**⁵³
- We might break [Paul’s conversion] down into four parts.⁵⁴
 - Conversion involves God’s intervention.**⁵⁵
 - The gospel is a rescue mission! God intervened in the life of Paul, and He has done the same for all believers.**⁵⁶
 - See this gospel in a conjunction: the word “but” is a word of rescue. We use it a lot to describe the good news of certain situations (Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?*, 59). For instance,⁵⁷
 - The other team scored a touchdown, but there was a flag on the play!**⁵⁸
 - I got in a car wreck, but no one was hurt.**⁵⁹
 - He got hit in the face with the ball, but nothing is broken.**⁶⁰
 - You have cancer, but it can be treated.**⁶¹
 - I was at my wits’ end with this kid, but God changed him.**⁶²
 - I was on the verge of suicide, but God kept me alive.**⁶³
 - Conversion is the act in which our stories receive the holy conjunction, “but.”⁶⁴
 - Conversion involves God’s eternal planning.**⁶⁵

⁴⁷ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 115.

⁴⁸ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 115.

⁴⁹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 116.

⁵⁰ Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 27–28.

⁵¹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 117.

⁵² Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 102.

⁵³ Greear

⁵⁴ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁵⁵ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁵⁶ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁵⁷ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁵⁸ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁵⁹ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁶⁰ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁶¹ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁶² David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁶³ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁶⁴ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁶⁵ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

- Conversion involves God's gracious calling.⁶⁶
- Conversion involves seeing the glory of Christ.⁶⁷
- Paul described the sovereign initiative of God in terms of three distinct acts, all of which are governed by the verb in the clause translated "he was pleased" (*eudokēsen*).⁶⁸
 - 1. Paul was set apart.
 - 2. Paul was called.
 - 3. God revealed his Son through Paul.⁶⁹

Notes on Galatians 1:16

- We also share in the responsibility of making Christ known to others (vv. 16-24). Paul said the purpose of his calling was "so that I could preach Him among the Gentiles" (v. 16). Notice the purpose clause, "so that." Paul was not converted just for his own benefit. His conversion came with a commission (cf. Ps 67:1-2)⁷⁰
- We derive the English word "ethnic" from this Greek word for "Gentiles."⁷¹
- "Gentiles" (*ethnesin*) were non-Jews, whether in nationality or in religion.⁷²

Notes on Galatians 1:17

- **Jerusalem ... Arabia ... Damascus.** Rather than immediately travel to Jerusalem to be instructed by the apostles, Paul instead went to Nabatean Arabia, a wilderness desert that stretched E of Damascus down to the Sinai peninsula. After being prepared for ministry by the Lord, he returned to minister in nearby Damascus.⁷³
- **Why did Paul go to Arabia?** In the history of interpretation two possible answers have been given to this question.⁷⁴
 - Some have claimed that he withdrew to Arabia for an extended time of prayer, meditation, and reflection on the tremendous experience he had just gone through. The word "Arabia" occurs again in Gal 4:25 as the location of Mount Sinai. On the basis of this allusion, some have speculated that Paul withdrew far away into the Arabian Peninsula to Mount Sinai itself, where the law originally had been revealed to Moses. However, in the days of Paul the word "Arabia" referred to the Nabatean Kingdom, a vast expanse of territory stretching southward from Damascus toward the Arabian Peninsula. At the time of Paul's conversion this kingdom was governed by Aretas IV (9 b.c. to a.d. 40), a monarch connected by marriage to the Herodian dynasty. Paul did not say where within this territory he went or how long he stayed. A visit to Mount Sinai, while not impossible, may be considered unlikely given its far distance from Damascus, Paul's home base during his earliest days as a Christian.⁷⁵
 - A second reason has been advanced for Paul's visit to Arabia: he went there to continue the preaching ministry he had already begun in Damascus. Recent excavations have shown that the kingdom of Nabatea (*Provincia Arabia*) encompassed a thriving civilization centered around the cities of Petra and Bostra. No doubt Paul would have had ample opportunity to preach the gospel among many Gentiles in these places. We have no record of Christian communities in this territory which sprang from Paul's activity there, but there is a shred of evidence in one of Paul's own letters that his word did not go unnoticed by the governing authorities. In 2 Cor 11:32-33 Paul referred to the fact of his being lowered in a basket from the city wall of Damascus following a plot against him engineered by King Aretas (cf. Acts 9:23-25).⁷⁶
- **Did Paul go to Arabia on a preaching mission or for a spiritual retreat? There is no reason why we should be forced to choose between the two alternatives.** We know that Paul's preaching activity began immediately after his baptism in Damascus, although he was still a new Christian at that time. However, as J. Bligh has put it, "If the illumination he had received on the road to Damascus was enough to equip him to preach in the synagogues of Damascus, it was also enough to enable him to preach to the Arabs." We can safely assume that Paul would be just as anxious to herald the good news of Jesus Christ to whomever he met on his journey to Arabia. However, the plausibility of this scenario should not obscure the fact that even so brilliant and well-trained a thinker as Paul would also require a period of intensive preparation for the life work to which he had been called.⁷⁷

⁶⁶ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁶⁷ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁶⁸ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 117.

⁶⁹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 119.

⁷⁰ David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁷¹ Robert James Utley, *Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians*, vol. Volume 11, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1997), 13.

⁷² Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 31.

⁷³ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1789.

⁷⁴ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 124.

⁷⁵ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 124.

⁷⁶ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 124.

⁷⁷ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 124-125.

- Paul explained that he went away from all human contact for several years in order to spend time alone with God. This was vital for the newly converted Jewish Pharisee and persecutor of Christianity. Paul was converted; he needed time to rethink his former position against Christianity in light of the truth of the gospel that had been revealed to him. During this interim, Paul probably studied the Scriptures, prayed, and thought about the meaning of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection in relation to the Old Testament that he knew so well.⁷⁸
 - The region of *Arabia* probably means the vast desert area northeast and southeast of the city of *Damascus*. Some scholars, among them Luther, have suggested that Paul's time in Arabia was actually an initial preaching journey wherein he took the gospel to the Gentiles there. Others have wondered if Paul's Arabia was the Sinai Peninsula, where Paul would have taken in the atmosphere of Mount Sinai as he pondered the teachings of Moses and Elijah in the light of Christ's revelation.⁷⁹
 - The consensus of opinion still holds that Paul took time away to consolidate the changes God had brought into his life.⁸⁰
- What Paul was doing there has almost evenly divided interpreters for centuries.⁸¹

Notes on Galatians 1:18

- Three years of silence is a long time, right? Some of you think you are in a desert. Remember that others in the Bible like Moses, Nehemiah, and even Jesus endured "silent years." Waiting time is not wasted time. God wastes nothing in the lives of His servants.⁸²
- Paul did not need to be taught the gospel from Peter (1:12); he had already received this message along with his commission from the risen Christ himself. Still, he must have been vitally interested in Peter's account of the earthly life of Jesus, his miracles and teachings, his death and resurrection.⁸³

Notes on Galatians 1:19

- Probably he meant something like this: "During my sojourn with Peter, I saw none of the other apostles, unless you count James, the Lord's brother."⁸⁴

Notes on Galatians 1:24

- God used every part of Paul's life, even prior to his conversion, to prepare Paul for the ministry.⁸⁵
- When they heard how Saul, the persecutor, was now Paul, the preacher, they praised God.⁸⁶
- All other religions, you see, glorify man; the gospel glorifies God.⁸⁷
 - You say, "How do other religions glorify man?" Well, every other religion teaches that you save yourself by how good you are: **If you are good enough**—you observe the 5 pillars of Islam, the 8-fold path of Buddha, confess enough and do the sacraments enough, be good enough to create good karma— then you'll be saved. They **all have in common** that if you are saved it is because of what *you* did. You are the Savior! You get glory.⁸⁸
 - **The gospel glorifies God! Because** it says that God saved you when you were unworthy solely because of his grace and he alone deserves all the glory. Rather than raising himself up and **crushing those who sinned against him**—and rewarding the victorious righteous—God **lowered himself** and died for them. And that's a special kind of **glory, unique** to Christianity and **demonstrates that the gospel** is different than all the other religions of the world that glorify man.⁸⁹
- Most of the English versions here translate "they glorified [or praised] God *because of me*." However, although this rendering is on the right track, it is easily susceptible of a misinterpretation, as if the people were praising God for something inherent in Paul himself. The sense, rather, is that people were praising God "in Paul's case" (BDAG 329.8), or that "they found in me an occasion" for praise (Burton 1921: 65; cf. Mussner 1988: 99, who sees the construction as equivalent to an accusative of reference). As Lagrange (1918: 21) puts it, they were praising God "because of that

⁷⁸ Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 32.

⁷⁹ Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 32-33.

⁸⁰ Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 33.

⁸¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 106.

⁸² David Platt, Tony Merida, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014).

⁸³ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 127.

⁸⁴ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 128.

⁸⁵ Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 28.

⁸⁶ Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 9.

⁸⁷ Greear

⁸⁸ Greear

⁸⁹ Greear

which happened in me and was done by me.” Perhaps the NJB, “They gave glory to God for me,” best captures the idea.⁹⁰

- Brothers and sisters, may you and I so live that Christian people may glorify God in us! May they often wonder at the mighty grace which has wrought such a change in us. And as they see us zealous and fervent, may they marvel at the amazing grace of God that has brought us to be so consecrated to Christ!⁹¹
- **An architect rears a building. It is admired for its beauty in detail, and its grandeur as a whole; but the praise belongs not to the building, but to the builder. A tutor takes a youth under his care, and sends him forth to attain eminence and distinction in the early struggles and in the highest positions of life, but the tutor is glorified in the pupil.**⁹²

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 106.

² Bruce B. Barton, *Galatians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 33.

⁹⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 115.

⁹¹ Charles Spurgeon, *Galatians*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), Ga 1:24.

⁹² Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Galatians* (New York; Chicago; Toronto; London; Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 67.