

## Lesson 2

# Apostolic Credentials

## *Galatians 1.10-24*

### Introduction

The Judaizers aimed to undermine Paul's authority in the Galatian churches. They suggested that Paul was not a genuine apostle and had self-serving motives. Their main accusation was that Paul deviated from Mosaic traditions to make the gospel more appealing to both Jews and Gentiles by removing certain Jewish practices. Due to these allegations, many Galatians began questioning the source of Paul's message and authority.

Paul wasn't one of the original apostles chosen directly by Jesus. This raised questions: Did he borrow his teachings from other apostles or invent his own? How could he, as he frequently asserted, speak on God's behalf?

The original twelve apostles had an established credibility. They were chosen by Jesus and had been promised that the Holy Spirit would guide their words. This divine guidance was exclusive to them, as they were the primary conveyors of Christ's teachings before the New Testament came to be. After the events of Pentecost, believers valued the teachings of the apostles because of their divine appointment and the miracles attributed to them.

However, during these events, Paul was not only absent but actively opposing the young church. This made it easier for the Judaizers to plant doubts about him among believers, especially in his absence. Paul's self-identification as an "apostle of Gentiles" may have also alienated some Jewish believers, given their prejudices against Gentiles. His frequent defense of his apostolic status indicates it was a common point of contention.

It must have been hurtful for Paul to learn that many in Galatia were swayed by these misrepresentations. However, instead of making an emotional plea, he presented factual evidence to

#### **Galatians 1:10–12 (CSB)**

**10** For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

**11** For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin.

**12** For I did not receive it from a human source and I was not taught it, but it came by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

counter the accusations. Paul's main focus was not on regaining personal popularity but on safeguarding the truth of the gospel he had spread throughout Galatia and beyond.

### **Paul's Basic Credentials**

#### ***Understanding Galatians 1.10-12***

OUTLINE:

- A. 1.10: Paul did not seek to please people.
- B. 1.11: Paul's message was not by human origin.
- C. 1.12a: Paul's message did not come by a man.

D. 1.12b: Paul's message came by revelation of Christ.

The meaning of the word *for* in 1.10 is often determined by its context. Usually it means “because,” “certainly,” “what,” or “why.” It can also be translated “there,” which might help us to better understand what Paul is trying to get across. *There*, referring to the strong condemnation of the two previous verses, *does that sound like I am a people pleaser?*<sup>iv</sup> His pronouncing a curse of people certainly would not lend him to be concerned about how others felt about him.

It was actually Paul's Jewish critics who were more concerned with pleasing people than with truth. They pressured Gentile believers to undergo circumcision to maintain their image, hoping to avoid persecution for their belief in Christ (Galatians 6:12). In contrast, Paul's primary goal was to be faithful to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:9). This devotion meant that he could strongly oppose anyone who tried to undermine the Savior's complete grace with a doctrine based on works (see Galatians 2:21). Paul's secondary aim was to lead people to salvation, necessitating a forceful rejection of any misleading teachings that could deceive and harm them.

The gospel Paul preached was not by human authority. He didn't conceive it, modify it, have it influenced by any human hand. Its source was entirely divine, untouched by human intervention or interpretation. Therefore, Paul's gospel acts as the standard against which all misguided human interpretations of salvation are assessed and rejected. Had Paul shared a gospel rooted in human understanding, it would have been heavily laced with the idea of earning salvation through deeds, as is the case with most religions shaped by human hands. Human pride struggles with the notion that only divine mercy and grace can redeem us, leading many to believe they must contribute to their own salvation. The fact that Paul spread a doctrine of salvation where deeds held no bearing further solidifies that his teachings were divinely inspired rather than humanly constructed.

Paul's teachings didn't have earthly origins. The gospel wasn't a creation of man or passed down to him by any human entity. This counters the accusations of the Judaizers, who asserted that Paul had learned his teachings from the apostles in Jerusalem, those who had left Judaism behind. Rather, Paul says *it came by a revelation from Jesus Christ*, (1:12b). The gospel that Paul shared was not crafted by human minds or passed down through tradition. Instead, it was a divine message bestowed upon him directly by God, unveiled through a revelation from Jesus Christ. The term “revelation” signifies the disclosure of something previously hidden. In this context, Jesus Christ stands as the focal point of this profound revelation.

## Paul's Autobiography

### *Understanding Galatians 1.13-24*

#### OUTLINE:

- A. 1.13-14: Before his conversion.
- B. 1.15-16a: His conversion.
- C. 1.16b-24: After his conversion.

**Galatians 1:13–24 (CSB)**

**13** For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it.

**14** I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.

**15** But when God, who from my mother's womb set me apart and called me by his grace, was pleased

**16** to reveal his Son in me, so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.

**17** I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who had become apostles before me; instead I went to Arabia and came back to Damascus.

**18** Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, and I stayed with him fifteen days.

**19** But I didn't see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

**20** I declare in the sight of God: I am not lying in what I write to you.

**21** Afterward, I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

**22** I remained personally unknown to the Judean churches that are in Christ.

**23** They simply kept hearing, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy."

**24** And they glorified God because of me.

It's evident from Paul's past that when he resided in Jerusalem, where the apostles were, he was fervently committed to tearing down the church. His passion for Judaism was overwhelming, to the extent that it made him unyielding and closed to learning from others. In the realm of Judaism, no one could claim to be a more diligent student, a more proficient scholar, or a fiercer proponent than he was, Philippians 3.1-7.

God had a design for his life from the very beginning. From the time he was born, it was God's intention, by grace, to call him into service. God's purpose was twofold: firstly, to unveil Jesus to him, and secondly, to entrust him with the mission of preaching the good news about Jesus, especially to the Gentiles.

When he had the life-changing revelation of Jesus Christ, he did not immediately rush to Jerusalem seeking instruction about the gospel from the apostles. Instead, he went from Damascus to Arabia. After spending time there, he then journeyed back to Damascus.

It wasn't until three years after his conversion that he made his inaugural trip to Jerusalem. During this trip, he specifically sought out Peter, spending fifteen days in his company. Although he also met James, who was Jesus' brother, he didn't meet any of the other apostles during that time. He assured them, that he was recounting this truthfully. After his visit with Peter, he ventured into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

However, it's worth noting that during this period, the Christians in Judea were unfamiliar with him on a personal level. Had they come across Paul, they wouldn't have been able to recognize him. Yet, they had heard the story of his conversion and knew that he had turned from being a persecutor to a preacher for Christ. His transformation was a source of joy for them.

## **What's in This for Us?**

From this detailed account of Paul's defense against the Judaizers and a summary of his journey from a staunch

opponent of Christianity to a devoted apostle, the following three main points of application can be made:

### **Authenticity and Integrity in Ministry**

Paul's defense illustrates the importance of authentic ministry grounded in genuine revelation and calling. Leaders and believers alike should always ensure their actions and teachings align with the genuine message of Christ and are not swayed by popular opinion or external pressures. Standing firm in truth, even amidst opposition, speaks to one's integrity and dedication to the gospel.

### **The Transformative Power of God's Grace**

Paul's dramatic transition from a fierce persecutor of the church to one of its most influential apostles underscores the transformative power of God's grace. This transformation serves as an encouragement to all believers that no one is beyond the reach of God's love and redemption. It reminds us to approach others with compassion and hope, understanding that anyone's life can be changed by an encounter with Christ.

### **The Importance of Personal Testimony**

Paul's autobiographical account underscores the significance of personal testimony in establishing credibility and defending one's faith. Sharing personal stories of transformation, encounters with God, and experiences in faith journey can be powerful tools in ministry. These testimonies not only provide evidence of God's active presence but also inspire and encourage others in their own journeys.

Wrapping up, we find that Paul's defense against the Judaizers and his recounting of his own journey serve as vital lessons in staying true to one's calling, believing in the transformative power of God's grace, and harnessing the power of personal testimony when we share our faith.

## **For Thought and Reflection**

1. How did the Judaizers attempt to undermine Paul's authority in the Galatian churches? What were their main allegations?
2. Given that Paul wasn't one of the original apostles chosen directly by Jesus, how did this affect the perceptions of his teachings and authority among the early Christian communities?
3. How do you think Paul felt upon learning that many in Galatia doubted him due to the allegations spread by the Judaizers? What evidence did Paul present to counter these accusations?

4. Paul stresses that his gospel is not of human origin. Why was this distinction so important for Paul to make? How did this counter the accusations of the Judaizers?
  
5. Paul's critics were described as being more concerned with "pleasing people" than with the truth. How did this contrast with Paul's approach, and what lessons can be drawn from this in modern contexts?
  
6. Considering Paul's fervent commitment to Judaism before his conversion, how does this illuminate the power and profundity of his transformation to Christianity?
  
7. Paul mentions that after his conversion, he didn't immediately seek instruction from the apostles in Jerusalem. Why might he have chosen to journey to Arabia and Damascus before finally visiting Jerusalem?
  
8. What role did personal testimony play in Paul's defense and how might personal stories of faith be influential in today's religious or spiritual conversations?
  
9. Reflecting on the transformative power of God's grace in Paul's life, how does this encourage believers to view others who may be staunchly opposed to their beliefs?
  
10. In the context of ministry and spreading faith, how can one ensure authenticity and integrity, taking cues from Paul's defense and life story?

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<sup>iv</sup> MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Galatians*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1983, p. 22.