

## Galatians 1 v 11 – 24 Paul's Testimony Littlebourne

**Verse 11 (ESV) For I would have you know brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.**

I love it that Paul calls his readers 'Brothers'. This word speaks of family, kinship, equality. Paul was the one who brought the gospel to their region, but he is not putting himself above them, although he is writing with apostolic authority.

**that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.**

What an odd thing to say! Why does he say this?

**Verse 12 For I did not receive it from any man. Nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.**

Paul was different. Apart from James, who was the Lord's half-brother, the other apostles were Jesus's disciples while He walked on earth.

This was a Jewish tradition: a rabbi would have 'talmudim' – disciples – who would come under his teaching – which was referred to as being 'under his yoke'. It could be what Jesus was referring to when He said, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' (Mt. 11 v 29, 30). Being a talmid under a Pharisee with their interpretation of the Law, with its extensive list of proscriptions, had become a crushing burden. But being a disciple of Jesus meant simple commitment to Him and salvation through faith by grace, not through works of the Law.

Paul was not one of those disciples, so I think he needs to establish his apostleship so that he can correct what has gone wrong in the churches of Galatia.

Let's look again at what he claims here:

**Verse 12 For I did not receive it from any man. Nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.**

Paul was different. The usual way for people to hear the gospel then, as now, was through believers telling them.

In those days the believers who were spreading the gospel were Jewish – Jews who had come to believe that Jesus is Messiah and had put their trust in Him. What we call today, 'Messianic Jews'.

Paul did not receive it that way – the usual way – he received it by revelation direct from God.

What? He got it in a vision??!! Yes, and I believe there was a reason for that – which we will come back to.

Then Paul recounts his testimony. We have three other accounts of Paul's dramatic Damascus Road conversion in Acts, but here is his story as it is relevant to what he wants to say in this letter.

**Verses 13, 14 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism**

Paul was born in Tarsus, a major trading centre, with Roman and Greek influences. There was a university there where Paul could have studied stoicism, but he didn't! His Jewish parents

evidently saw his potential as he studied in the local synagogue school and sent him off to Jerusalem to study under the rabbis there. Acts 22 v 3 tells us that he studied at the feet of the revered Pharisee, Gamaliel; he was one of Gamaliel's talmudim and he was a high-flier :

**V 14 and I was advancing beyond many of my own age in Jerusalem, so extremely zealous was I for the tradition of my fathers.'**

He was so zealous for the traditions of the fathers that he became obsessed with the Jews who had accepted Jesus as their Messiah and were following Him. They annoyed him so much that he actually dropped the yoke of Gamaliel who had advised the rest of the Sanhedron (Jewish council) against persecuting the Believers in Jesus, because if this movement was not of God, it would naturally die out, but if it is of God they shouldn't oppose it. (Acts 5 39)

Paul wanted to oppose this movement; he wanted rid of all Jesus's followers. His zeal was such that he went from house to house dragging believers away to prison. He voted for Stephen's execution and witnessed it. Then he went over Gamaliel's head and asked the High Priest for permission to take his murderous campaign to the synagogues of Damascus. (Acts 9 v 1). Note that the believers-in-Jesus were still worshipping in the synagogues.

Paul, the zealous Jew was headed for a place on the Sanhedron, but God had other plans.

**v. 15 But when He who had set me apart before I was born**

Before Paul became a high-flying Talmud-student; before he showed his keenness at synagogue; before he was born to Jewish parents in a prestigious city; while he was still a foetus in his mother's womb, God chose him for a particular work. There was nothing that Paul did, no advantage in his birth or circumstances that influenced God to choose him. It was all of God's grace.

Paul was not the only person to be chosen from the womb. Other foetuses were affected by God's call or responded to the Holy Spirit. May I say gently and sensitively, because I do not know your experiences, that to kill the unborn is a terrible thing to do. They are known to God and surely, He who cares about the death of sparrows, cares at least as deeply about the unborn humans. I don't know if anyone here has been involved in any way with abortion, please come and talk to me or Patricia, so that we can pray with you.

God had His hand on Paul from the start.

**v.15b and who called me by His grace**

It was all of grace. Paul did nothing to deserve this – quite the reverse, in fact. He was saved by grace on the Damascus Road and In Acts 22 he tells how, after Ananais prayed for him to receive his sight and prophesied over him that he would be a witness to everyone, he was baptised and he returned to Jerusalem and in the Temple, he fell into a trance and God commissioned him: 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'

Paul's commission from God was to preach to the Gentiles. It had always been God's plan that His good news should go out to all nations.

It is significant that Paul did not then confer with the other apostles (who would not have been keen to meet with this man who was known to be persecuting believers).

The gospel that the apostles were preaching at this time was that Jews and Gentiles could be saved through faith in Jesus and then Jewish believers continued with their Jewish practices and

Gentile believers would, and should, become Jewish. This was the teaching which had reached Galatia.

After receiving his call to the Gentiles, Paul didn't go to meet with the apostles, to receive their teaching from them. He did not preach 'man's gospel'. He went off to the area of Arabia around Damascus for three years.

And in those three years, he was working things through; God was recalibrating his mind-set, so that he now had a gospel to preach. And preach it, he did, until he had to escape in a basket over the city walls, from a Jewish plot against him. (Acts 9 v23)

In his letters, Paul several times refers to 'My gospel' as in v. 11 'The gospel preached by *me*.'

The gospel he received from the Lord was one of salvation totally of faith through grace; it was not necessary for Gentile believers to become Jewish. The Judaising influencers were saying to believers, 'You must become Jewish', But Paul's gospel was, 'No, this is not the way; do not bring yourself under those rules.'

After his dramatic escape from Damascus, Paul did meet with Peter and James for fifteen days, but not the other apostles or believers in Jerusalem. Then he went off to Syria and Cilicia.

**Verse 22, 23** **And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.**

What an amazing thing it is that even someone like Paul, who was so opposed to the gospel and believers in Christ; in fact, Jesus told him that he was in effect persecuting the Lord Jesus, Son of God, Himself; someone like this, could, by God's grace and plan, meet with the Saviour and be thoroughly converted and born-again. Whose natural zeal could be refocussed to preach to the gentiles. No wonder God was glorified – it was all of Him.

Glory to God!