

Galatians 1:11 - 2:10

Galatians 1:11-12 – Origin of Paul's Message

It's clear that Paul's message was derived from God's Revelation, not human imagination. He says that his gospel is not received "from any man, nor was he taught it." Paul could say that he received his message directly from Jesus.

Man did not invent or come up with the Gospel, but rather it's from God. This should be the standard by which we evaluate or measure any set of thoughts or ideas or any other religions or philosophies.

There is no way that we could come up the Gospel. We have to remember that our natural default mode as humans is to focus on our works and how we can earn salvation. The Gospel of Grace goes against everything we know as humans. Grace is about love, not works. We do not naturally trust grace, because we may seem to think it's too good to be true, or that we need to earn it. But it's all about God and how he created grace.

"I would have you know" – strong and emphatic introduction to this section.

The gospel of grace is like water: people did not invent it and people cannot live without it. As believers we often think that there is more to Christianity than Grace and move on as if there is something more important. We need to keep drinking more of Grace. We often look for the latest self-help or improvement books, but what we really need is more Grace, which is the good news from God about new life in Jesus.

The Origin of Paul's message is crucial. We must get our beliefs from the right source. We rely on many things to provide direction in our life, but Jesus is the right source for all of our problems or questions. Trust in the One who said, "Come to me...and I'll give you rest." (Matt 11:28).

Galatians 1:13-24 - Transformation of Paul's Life

Paul uses this section of scripture to offer a brief biographical sketch of important events in his life to defend further his apostleship and also prove that His gospel of Grace came from God.

The Best way for Paul to prove his point about the Gospel being from God was to reach into his past and remind the Christians in Galatia about the way that God had dealt with Him. I believe that Paul gave us a great model of how to tell our story to others about the way that God has transformed each one of us.

There should be three parts to your transformation story. Those parts should include: pre-conversion, conversion, and post-conversion.

Pre-conversion: In Need of Grace (vv. 13-14)

The first part of your transformation story should be about pre-conversion, or what your life is like before you encounter Christ. Paul is living proof that God changes lives (see 2 Cor. 5:17). He knew that his testimony was powerful evidence not only of the reality and relevance of God but also of the credibility of his ministry. Paul began his testimony by reminding the Galatians of who he had been

This section talks about Paul's past and how he **persecuted the Church**. Basically, Paul calls himself a Terrorist. Many people would call him an "Extremist," because of his actions of trying to stamp out Christianity. He approved of the killing of Stephen (Acts 8:1), approved of many Christians being thrown in to jail (Acts 8:3) and he would go against anything that favored Christians (Acts 26:10). Paul was persistent and continual in his efforts to hurt and exterminate Christians because he convinced that he was doing a good thing and that Christianity was a false religion.

Paul belonged to **zealous traditions**. He knew all the right answers and was quick to follow the traditional actions, such as persecuting believers. Paul thought he was a modern-day hero for the Pharisees. He was sincere in his beliefs, but the problem was that he had misdirected beliefs. Being sincere in your beliefs does not lead you to salvation, unless you are sincere in your belief of the truth. Paul was sincere but sincerely wrong in his beliefs.

So what caused his change? It couldn't have been the Christians because so many of them ran from Paul (Acts 8:1; 4; 9:10-16), and as far as we know the church did not even know that Paul ever became a Christian. Then who caused the change in Paul? Only person was God.

His Conversion (vv. 15-16a)

The Second part of your transformation story is your conversion experience or how you encountered Christ. Warren Wiersbe writes that Paul uses this section in Galatians 1:15-16a to describe the characteristics of his conversion experience.

God did it – Paul exclusively gives the emphasis and credit to God. He shares that it is God who did the work. "It pleased God...to reveal his Son in me." We do know that God is "not willing that any should perish." (2 Peter 3:9).

“But” – it's a word of rescue. We must remember that the Gospel is a rescue mission of God's grace intervening into our life. We use this word to describe the good news certain situations, such as – “other team scored a touchdown, but there was a flag on the play.” Or “I got into a car accident, but thankfully no one got hurt.

God did it by Grace

Salvation is by God's grace, not by any man's works or character. Paul was not searching for God; in fact Paul was actually an enemy of God. Paul describes in this passage that it was God who interrupted his life by giving him Grace. God called Paul powerfully and effectively, just as He called us to Himself. This idea of Grace is an all-important subject in the book of Galatians and we see reference to this idea in each chapter. The Bible is filled with countless stories of people who received God's grace and blessing, not because of anyone's goodness or works, but rather because of the grace of God. We the church are the company of redeemed sinners, people who have been saved by Grace.

God did it through Christ

Paul's entire mission was based on revelation. God had shown Jesus Christ to Paul. This was the basis of his apostolic office, for only one who had witnessed and could personally testify to Christ's resurrection could be an apostle (Acts 1:22). On the Damascus road, Jesus appeared to Paul in person.

“was pleased to reveal his Son to me” - Paul saw his own self-righteous rags contrasted to the righteousness of Christ, and he realized what he was missing. God revealed Christ to Paul, in Paul, and through Paul. God helped Paul realize an inward experience of reality with the Lord. On the Damascus road, the wonderful reality of Jesus Christ – crucified, risen, and reigning – was made known to Paul.

Paul knew about the teachings that Christians were learning, but he wouldn't accept them. He was repulsed by the idea of a crucified Messiah, but when Jesus was revealed to Paul, everything changed.

Post-Conversion (vv. 16b-24)

So, what do we apply from what Paul learned to our own life? How did Paul apply them? The last part of Chapter 1 talks about what Paul's life was like after his conversion experience. We also see more of why God brought salvation to Paul's life, which was for the sake of others and for God's glory.

Like Paul, we can say that Christ now lives in us. There is the phrase “to me” in the ESV that is also translated in the HCSB as “in me.” Either way that phrase is translated, we know that Christ dwells in us based on other parts of Paul’s letter to the Galatians (2:20). Once you become a Christian, you do not then try to live in your own power, but rather we live by the Spirit, who is dwelling inside of you. The opposite is true, as it says in Romans 8:9 – “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”

God did it for the sake of others

Paul said that the purpose of his calling or salvation experience was “so that I could preach Him among the Gentiles.” Just like Paul, our conversion experience comes with a commission. Peter wrote (1 Peter 2:9, emphasis added) – “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so *that you may proclaim* the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

God chose Paul to preach among the Gentiles the same grace that he had experienced. This was evidence that Paul's conversion was of God, for certainly a Jewish rabbi, who despised the Christian teachings and way of life, would never decide on his own to minister to the despised Gentiles!

Each day as we spend time with our family and friends, as we rub shoulders with work associates, as we talk to people around our towns and cities, as we go to church, we are in a missionary field. We, who know Christ, can tell them the plan of salvation and thereby put the right key in their hand. Are you concerned about the spiritual plight of people? Do you have a passion to see people delivered from the emptiness of legalism? Are you endeavoring to put the key of salvation in others' hands so that they can unlock the door that leads to a personal relationship with Christ and a future in heaven?

God did it for God's Glory

Paul was a man who had everything, and he had the praise from people. What more could he want? But the problem was that what he was doing was not bringing Glory to God. Each one of us is created to glorify God, and man is saved to glorify God. If Paul was interested in receiving all the glory from man, he would have stayed a Jewish rabbi. But it was the glory of God that motivated Paul, and this out to motivate our lives as well.

Chapter 2: 1-10 – Fight against Legalism

To Paul, his spiritual liberty in Christ was worth far more than popularity or even security. He was willing to fight for that liberty. His first fight took place at the

Jerusalem council. Had he not been willing to fight for this liberty, the church in the first century might have become only a group that preached a mixture of law and grace. But because of Paul's courage the gospel was kept free from legalism.

2:1. In Galatians 2, Paul continues to defend himself. Apparently, his critics had not only attacked the authority of his gospel but had also said he was a renegade, opposed to and independent from the apostles in Jerusalem. After responding to their first charge, he responded to the second charge by pointing out that the **Jerusalem** apostles had, in fact, endorsed his message. They affirmed that he was part of their team. **Many scholars believe this meeting with Paul and the Jerusalem apostles was the Jerusalem Council meeting recorded in Acts 15.** Paul is accompanied at this meeting by **Barnabas** and **Titus**.

Barnabas – “son of encouragement”. From the earliest days, Barnabas was associated with the Gentiles in Antioch. He was enlisted by Paul to help minister at the church in Antioch and the two of them worked together not only in teaching, but in helping the poor. (Acts 11:25-30)

Titus, being a Gentile, was a test case to see if the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem would require him to be circumcised. A product of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and was taken to the Jerusalem conference as “exhibit A” from the Gentile Churches. Titus also assisted Paul by going to some of the most difficult churches to help them solve their problems.

2:2. Paul's second trip to Jerusalem following his conversion was in response to a revelation. The purpose of this meeting with the Jerusalem apostles was to clarify the apostles' position on the Christian's relationship to the Jewish law. Jerusalem did not force Paul to come to them for their official stamp of approval. God sent Paul to Jerusalem to bring unity in the mission of the church. If the leaders in Jerusalem sided with the legalistic, false teachers who required Gentile Christians to be circumcised and keep the whole law, then Paul said he would have **run my race in vain. It would be futile for him to preach a grace message if the Jerusalem leaders preached a legalistic one.** He talked to those **who seemed to be leaders.** Paul's reference to these leaders becomes more clear in verses 6 and 9.

2:3-5. The purpose for bringing Titus to Jerusalem is now revealed. Titus was a test case to see if the Jerusalem leaders would allow a Gentile to be a Christian without being circumcised. The false teachers (Judaizers) said he must be circumcised and Paul adamantly said, "No!" Paul knew that both Jews and Gentiles were accepted into the church by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Paul won this battle, for Titus was **not. . . compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. The Judaizers wanted to make Christians slaves by requiring them**

to observe the Old Testament laws' rules and ceremonies, especially circumcision. There was discussion between Paul and "false brothers" over whether or not Titus would need to be circumcised. Judaizers said that in order to be saved, you needed to follow the Jewish law, most notably, the requirement of circumcision. **Paul stood absolutely firm because the truth of the gospel was at stake. To impose circumcision on Titus would be to deny that salvation was by faith alone and to affirm the law as the means to God's acceptance.**

2:6. The Jerusalem leaders **added nothing to his message.** They recognized that it was from God. They approved its truthfulness and completeness. They endorsed Paul and received him as a fellow apostle. We do not know Paul's tone of voice here as he spoke of **those who seemed to be important.** We do not know if he was simply acknowledging his lack of information or whether there is a subtle "put-down" in his voice. He may have been making the point to the Judaizers that his authority for what he preached came from God, and therefore, he was not intimidated by the Judaizers who, to bolster their own bluster, appealed to the Jerusalem apostles as their authority. It need not have been a slight of the apostles themselves, however. They may have been totally unaware of the controversy between the Judaizers and Paul.

2:7-9. Several times Paul refers to the leadership in the Jerusalem church. In verse 2, he refers to "those who seemed to be leaders." In verse 6, he refers to "those who seemed to be important." In verse 9, he talks of **those reputed to be pillars.** Each time, the reference seems to be, according to our modern American intuition, more indignant. We sense a rising temperature in Paul's rhetoric. We ought not to jump to this conclusion, however.

On the one hand, Paul may have been voicing his dissatisfaction and even indignation with the leadership of the church in Jerusalem over several issues. First, he may have been angered by those who wanted Titus to be circumcised, feeling that the leadership of the apostles was inadequate on this issue. Or he may have been put off by Peter's handling of the Jew/Gentile controversy (see vv. 11-14). Paul may have felt that the leadership, whom he now names as the apostles Peter, James, and John, had caved into pressure from the Judaizers and legalists in the church.

On the other hand, his indignation may have been directed solely at the Judaizers working among his beloved Gentile churches. The Judaizers may have tried to diminish Paul's authority by emphasizing the apostolic authority of Peter, James, and John. In doing so, they could support their own opposition to Paul's teaching, tearing him down by lifting up the Jerusalem apostles. Indignant at the Judaizers' presumption and opposition, Paul may have been saying, "You claim that these Jerusalem apostles are the big shots around here. Well, listen up. My authority comes from God and is just as valid. I'm just as much a leader as they are."

James, Peter, and John recognized that God had called Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles just as he had commissioned Peter to take it to the Jews. The approval of the Jerusalem leadership silenced the false teachers' accusations that were seeking to discredit both Paul and his message. The acceptance and approval of the Jerusalem leaders was sealed when they extended to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. Paul knew that his words had not convinced the Jerusalem apostles of his ministry. Rather, they saw God's grace in his ministry.

2:9 Right hand of fellowship (v. 9)

Fellowship translates the word *koinonia*. *Koinonia* means "association," "fellowship," or "close relationship" (BAGD, 439). You have fellowship or partnership with those with whom you have commonality. We speak of fellowship over coffee or a meal. No closer Christian fellowship compares to participating in spreading the good news to unbelievers about Christ. Shaking the right hand was a sign of friendship and trust (BAGD, 174). Ralph Earle adds: "Not only were James, Peter, and John displaying a good spirit of Christian fellowship towards Paul and Barnabas, but they were shaking hands as partners in a business enterprise. Wisely they decided on a distribution of labor. The first three were to minister to Jews; the latter two were to go to the Gentiles" {*Word Meanings in the New Testament*, vol. 4, 185}.

The Jerusalem apostles gave Paul the "right hand of Fellowship", not to establish his authority but to endorse his ministry in recognition of the grace he had received for his work among the Gentiles.

2:10. The apostles only request was that Paul **remember the poor** who were among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem leaders may have surmised that after their approval of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles he would not feel a responsibility to aid the poor in the Jerusalem church. On his third missionary journey, however, Paul raised a large offering from the Gentile Christians for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-3). Such giving promoted love and unity among the Gentile and Jewish Christians.

Today our problem may not be circumcision or Jewish law, but there's a host of things we might do that fall into this right behavior with wrong belief category: having a quiet time, studying the Bible, avoiding certain sins, coming to worship, helping other people. All these are good things, but when we do them thinking that we are earning God's favor, we are becoming legalistic. All of us have this tendency; we are all recovering legalists. We are all born with a sinful nature, thinking we can earn our way to God; this legalistic mind-set carries over even after conversion. Paul's words, then, should serve as a warning to professing Christians. We must avoid this kind of legalism.