

LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works**Part four - Teaching #2135****Sunday, October 17th, 2021 - 10 a.m.****Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON****WHEN IT FEELS NICER JUST ACCEPTING EVERYONE'S VIEWS**

Galatians 1:11-24 - "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. [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."

This whole first chapter of Galatians is full of wonderful, edgy Christian insights. This whole chapter is an expanded statement of Paul's stunned surprise over the reaction of these Christians to those who would challenge the truth claims of the gospel. Paul is amazed that these Christians are actually turning from truth to error - **Galatians 1:6 - "I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel..." - IPAD TEXT**

Just as an aside, I find it interesting that Paul frames their tolerance for other views as "**deserting**" Christ. We usually just think of our inclusivist inclinations as **being accepting of others**. Paul describes it as a **desertion of God in Christ**.

Paul can't understand why these people hadn't reacted as strongly as he did to these false teachers - **Galatians 1:8 - "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!" - IPAD TEXT**

Think about it. **We** are amazed that Paul could ever utter such strong words against these false teachers. **Paul** is amazed that we wouldn't! Paul can't understand how anyone who claims the gospel as precious can remain emotionally and intellectually unmoved when it is belittled or distorted or compromised in any way. In Paul's world view, allegiance to Christ **means** defending an absolutely uncompromised gospel.

Paul is not ready to let go of this theme yet. Today's text continues his argument for the truth and authority of his message:

1) **PAUL'S GOSPEL IS NOT "ACCORDING TO MAN"**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:11-12 - "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."

"Not from a human source...." Everything hinges on this fact. Paul builds his whole argument - his whole case - around this declaration. He probably means two things here - one more *primarily* and the other *secondarily*.

- a) ***Primarily, Paul means his message wasn't his own mental concoction.*** It came out of God's heart, not Paul's head. This is the way Paul repeatedly describes his message. Notice his strong words in **Romans 1:1 - "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...."** - IPAD TEXT

This is the only way Paul thinks of the gospel. The only proper way to label it is ***“the gospel of God.”*** There is simply nothing human about its ***origin***. Its ***authority*** outstrips anything else on earth. It can't be lined up with any other religion or philosophy

- b) ***Secondarily, Paul probably means his message wasn't tailored to meet with human desires and instincts.*** It comes with a certain offensiveness to human pride and learning.

The implication is that these false teachers have ***“tuned”*** the gospel to better harmonize with fallen human inclinations -

Galatians 6:12 - “Those who want to make a good impression in the flesh are the ones who would compel you to be circumcised — but only to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.” - IPAD TEXT

In other words, their gospel was much more attuned to human pride and humanly accomplished righteousness. It left people with their own religious rituals and work efforts intact. In fact, Paul says this is ***why*** their words had such appeal. Paul's gospel, on the other hand, left him persecuted and maligned by the religious leaders of his day. Truly, his gospel was ***“not according to man.”***

2) PAUSING TO GET THE BIG PICTURE FROM GALATIANS ONE

Take a minute and catch the impact of what we've been studying these past few weeks. It's not complicated if you skin it all down to the big picture:

Two different messages are competing for these people's minds and hearts. Both are ***claiming*** to be true. But Paul won't leave us with the impression that both ***are*** true. Two conflicting messages can't possibly ***both*** be true. And more, it is always of infinite value and importance to ***discover*** what the truth is and where it is to be found.

This alone is a bold message for today's church. I say this because we are not pressed to dig for truth at all in our world. We are ***bombarded with opinions*** about everything. Look at the television programs and the magazines. Everyone has a message to sell you. They will tell you which toothpaste really does whiten the best - which antacid will relieve your gas most effectively - which diet will take the weight off most effectively - this list of pretend truth is endless.

But there's an important mental shaping that is taking place in our society. I understand most of us know full well how the media and advertizing works. I know we don't actually ***believe*** everything we're constantly being told. That's ***not*** my issue here. I think there is something much more ***important*** and much more ***sinister*** taking place in all our minds.

Here it is. As all these empty opinions are bombarded at us over and over again, thousands of times each week, my concern is not that we actually ***believe these things are all true***. My concern is we come to think ***nothing is actually true - that truth itself isn't that important***. Nobody ***fights for truth on television or radio***. Most schools, colleges and universities have long given up the belief in absolute, objective, non-relative truth, especially in the realm of philosophy, religion, and the formation of values and world-views.

In 1978 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn prophetically spoke these words at the commencement address at Harvard University: ***"Truth eludes us as soon as our concentration begins to flag, all the while leaving the illusion that we are continuing to pursue it."***

In his classic work, **The Screwtape Letters**, C.S. Lewis writes these words of instruction from a senior to a junior devil on how to keep thinking people from following Jesus Christ: ***"Your man had been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible ideas dancing about together inside his head. He doesn't think of doctrines primarily as "true" or "false," but as "academic" or "practical," "old fashioned" or "contemporary." Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from Christ and the church."***

The prophet Isaiah may have been thinking about the church of the 21st century when he lamented that “**Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far off. For truth has stumbled in the public square, and honesty cannot enter.**”(Isaiah 59:14). - IPAD TEXT

Listen, care about truth *more* than you care about unity. Care about truth *more* than you care about peace. Care about truth *more* than you care about love. ***And if those words shock you, you need to think about them again, because the only way we have any hope for peace and love and unity in Christ is through the absolute, objective truth of the gospel!***

Adding to the Christian’s dilemma is the fact that, for most of us, what we do every day to earn our living, has nothing to do with our capacity to know and prove absolute, ultimate truth. You can earn a great living in this world, and enjoy a great deal of pleasure and leisure, with absolutely *no* commitment whatsoever to absolute truth. ***But you can’t follow Jesus Christ without a passionate, informed commitment to absolute truth.***

My point is ***this is the kind of world you and I must live our Christian lives in.*** We are to be ***lights in this dark world because we hold on to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*** And it is precisely our commitment to the ***absolute truth*** of the divine message that is so offensive to the world around us. And that means our grasp of truth cannot be tenuous or frail in any way. We must be ***marked*** by a commitment to non-relative, historically factual truth.

So the next issue from our text is this: ***how will Paul defend these grand statements about the truth of his message?***

3) **PAUL OUTLINES HIS LIFE BEFORE AND AFTER HIS CONVERSION TO JESUS CHRIST**

In support of his strong claim that neither his ***message*** nor his ***office*** was of human origin Paul describes the circumstances of his life both ***before*** and ***after*** his conversion to Christ:

- a) ***Before his conversion Paul was a violent persecutor of the Christian faith - Galatians 1:13-14 - “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.”- IPAD TEXT***

It wasn't merely the case that Paul was *uninterested* in Christianity before his conversion. Most pagans aren't interested in the Christian faith before their conversion. But Paul was diametrically *opposed* to all things Christian. He *went after* any who professed faith in Jesus. He hunted them down. He had them executed. He plundered their homes and property. We would say he was fanatically carrying out a *holy war* against Christianity.

Because Paul was such a zealous Pharisee he naturally viewed the Christian faith as destructive of the regulations and ordinances he viewed as absolutely holy and essential. Paul actually viewed Christianity as the *arch enemy of true godliness*.

Now, what is the **reason** for all of this information of Paul's past? Why all these ugly details? Notice how he builds his argument. You will see it most clearly when you read verses 12 and 13 together:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:12-13 - "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. [13] For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it."

Verse 13 is the **proof** of verse 12. Paul is using his past to prove his gospel wasn't something he received from human teachers or sources.

"Look at the change in my life! Do you honestly think I was so radically turned around because of some conversation I had with some teacher or religious leader?"

That's the point Paul is making here. He was turned 180 degrees. He had gone from gladly killing those who named Christ to gladly dying for Christ. He had come to embrace a faith that totally demolished the passionate religious training of his whole adult life. ***There had to be an adequate cause for such a dramatic effect.*** To say that the change in Paul's life came from some information - some conversation he had with some other religious teacher is to grasp at a straw.

The better explanation for Paul's transformation is given in clear testimony by Paul himself:

IPAD TEXT - Acts 26:12-19 - "I was traveling to Damascus under these circumstances with authority and a commission from the chief priests. [13] King Agrippa, while on the road at midday, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me. [14] We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice speaking to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'"

[15] “I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “And the Lord replied, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. [16] But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. [17] I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them [18] to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ [19] “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.”

- b) *After his conversion Paul refused immediate consultation with any of the other apostles - Galatians 1:15-24 - “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.”

The obvious point Paul intends us to see is that he wasn't just *copying* what he learned from the other apostles in Jerusalem because he never even *went* to Jerusalem after his encounter with Christ. In other words, Paul's witness is an *independent* witness to Christ. The origin of his message can only be explained *supernaturally*. Paul confirms this fact again in **verse 22** when he states that the churches in Judea didn't even *know* Paul personally. They wouldn't have recognized him even if they had seen him:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:22 - “I remained personally unknown to the Judean churches that are in Christ.”

So we come back to the issue of truth. Paul's message is to be received and the false teacher's message is to be rejected. Paul backs up his claims with historic evidence. Truth can stand up to examination. And heaven and hell hang in the balance of knowing and embracing the truth of Jesus Christ.