

## Galatians 1:18-24 - "A God-Transformed Life"

GAL 1:18-24 "Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles -only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."And they praised God because of me."

This rather lengthy autobiographical insert here in this letter is designed by Paul to assure the Judaizers that the gospel he preached was not the result of some other apostle coaching or teaching him the way of the Lord. And yet, it also shows how he is on the same team as the rest of the apostles.

Paul has set the foundation that his gospel is the direct result of the risen Jesus Christ personally teaching him the truth. And again, by way of reminder, these Judaizers in Galatia were trying to make the case that Paul had received his message from the apostles in Jerusalem and therefore he does not have the authority he claims to have.

They do not want to submit to his apostolic authority as they are trying to promote a gospel which includes the law of Moses as an addition to the finished work of Christ on the cross. As Jews, these Judaizers wanted to nationalize the Gentiles into their Jewish world, so as to be identified with Israel, and the laws of Israel, as a prerequisite to being saved.

Unless they can prove that Paul is just another "wanna-be" apostle his word stands as the final authority concerning what this gospel is and what the will of the Lord is as Jesus Christ has revealed it to Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's whole premise here is to give a chronological order to the events in his life that led up to him embracing Christ, and what the risen Jesus did in his life which made him a unique servant under unique circumstances, which in turn proves his apostleship to the Gentile world.

Who would have thought that a Jewish Pharisee, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a keeper of the law, would end up serving a segment of the world which the Jews of that day viewed as Gentile dogs.

Discrimination and bigotry has been around a long long time, and it's not limited to any one particular group. Every race and nationality has got its bigots. And many Jews of that day were taught early on that unless you were born a Jew you were a second class person.

And so, you can also see how these Judaizers were incensed at this former Pharisee not placing much stock in the law of Moses in regards to salvation. As far as they were concerned Paul was a traitor to the religion of their fathers, and they would do anything to make a case that he couldn't be trusted. And so, he continues to give them the reasons why he can be trusted.

He mentions in verse 17 that after he was saved he didn't go up to Jerusalem. You see, this would have made all the sense in the world. If you wanted to make sure your gospel was the same as that of the apostles who walked with Christ it would behoove you to go to Jerusalem where they were located and compare notes.

But that's not what Paul does. Why? Because he thought he was better than the apostles, or that he felt he didn't need to have fellowship with them? No, not at all. The reason is so that Jesus Christ will show Himself to be true in Paul's life as a sanctioned apostle who does not need to go to some apostolic school of higher learning to qualify as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

In other words, it is God who is saying to the Christian world that He can train His own apostles without the aid of other apostles and prove that when they do finally come together and compare notes they will all be on the exact same page because their teacher is none other than the same Jesus who called them all.

And so, instead of Paul going to Jerusalem after his conversion what does he do? He goes to Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Now, what is he doing during this time? He is spending some time with other disciples of Christ, but he's also taking what he has personally learned from Jesus Christ and applying it to his ministry.

He's out sharing this gospel he learned from the risen Jesus who appeared to him on the road to Damascus, and he's sharing it with those people in Damascus and later in Arabia. And evidently, he was creating some enemies in the process among those Jews, some of whom were probably with him in his original campaign to destroy the church.

We know this to be true of what we read in the book of Acts.

ACT 9:19-25 "... and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall."

Now, in the account in Acts, after Paul leaves Damascus, the scene cuts to Jerusalem, but here in our text Paul fills in the gaps before going to Jerusalem because after he is forced out of Damascus he goes into Arabia and spends some time there.

If you were to look on a map of the Palestine area in those days you would see that Damascus was located a good 150 miles north, northeast of Jerusalem as the crow flies. Arabia would be east of that location. How far he went into the Arabian desert we don't know, but he probably stayed somewhere near towns where he could preach the gospel.

And so, it wasn't as though he became a hermit and found some cave in the desert and just hung out with the Lord. Here was a man who couldn't contain himself after his conversion in Damascus, as he enthusiastically preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, when he went into the area of Arabia he was in all likelihood doing the same thing as he traveled into the different towns in Arabia.

He did this for three years. For three years he was tutored by the Lord and was given opportunity to be His servant as an apostle to those who were probably, by and large, Gentiles. After all, he was Christ's apostle to the Gentile world. Again, during this time he had no contact with the other apostles.

GAL 1:18 "Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days."

This is the first time Paul goes to Jerusalem after his conversion. This is the first time the other apostles get a chance to meet this

former persecutor of the church. Now, keep in mind that Paul is three years old in the Lord, and yet those in Jerusalem don't believe it.

ACT 9:26-28 "When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord."

It was during this stay in Jerusalem that Paul finally meets some of the apostles. In fact, the reason for Paul going to Jerusalem was specifically to meet Peter. He simply wanted to meet him and get to know him.

Now, this all took place in the span of 15 days. This is important because of what Paul is trying to accomplish as he recounts his life to these Galatians and primarily the Judaizers in Galatia.

Fifteen days is not enough time to learn all of the intricacies of the gospel and the teachings of Jesus Christ so as to qualify him as a seasoned apostle. And of course this was not the reason for him going to Jerusalem. He was already a seasoned apostle. This is the point he makes when he had said earlier that he didn't receive his gospel from men, but from the Lord Himself.

So, what could he accomplish in fifteen days? Well, imagine being able to sit with Peter for two full weeks and have him recount the times of ministry of Jesus Christ during that three year span leading up to His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection.

Imagine getting firsthand the story of how Peter denied Jesus three times and how he then was restored and given the commission from Jesus to go out as an apostle to the Jews and feed the sheep of Christ.

Imagine Paul sitting around a fire with Peter and the other disciples and going long into the night as he recounted all of those times when Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead and then watching Peter as his face lit up describing these events as he was there.

And then imagine Paul sitting on the edge of his seat as Peter recounted in great detail how he and John ran down to the tomb of

Jesus after they learned from the two Mary's that our Lord was no longer there. I wonder if Peter brought up the fact that the younger John raced and beat Peter to the tomb.

I can see Paul nodding his head in agreement when Peter related what Jesus then taught the disciples during those forty days prior to His ascension back to the Father. Paul may have chimed in, "yes, that's exactly what Jesus taught me in the desert area of Arabia during these past three years; that's amazing."

And then they may have gone off into some lengthy theological discussion of how the O.T. Scriptures had been true to those prophecies regarding the Messiah and how Jesus fulfilled all of those prophecies. Those 15 days had to have flown by as Paul also had the opportunity to get the personal testimony of Jesus' own half-brother.

GAL 1:19 "I saw none of the other apostles -only James, the Lord's brother."

I can see Paul asking James about Mary his mother. Was she still alive? What was life like with a perfect brother who never sinned? Did all of you embrace your brother as the Messiah during His earthly ministry? You didn't? How is that possible?

I'm sure James expressed a sense of remorse over the fact that he thought his brother, Jesus, was nothing more than a misguided zealot. And there's a chance that James may have told Paul that he was still praying for others in his family who may still not have embraced Jesus as their Messiah.

After all we're only told of two people in that family, other than Mary, who were recognized as believers; James and Jude, both of whom wrote parts of the New Testament which bears their names.

There was so much to talk about and so little time. But you can bet that that short period of 15 days were spent encouraging each other in their respective ministries, and being built up in their faith as they were amazed at how Jesus Christ was still active and personally involved in all of their lives despite the fact that they had never met prior to this time. What encouragement.

And it was during this short period of time that Peter and James were able to examine Paul to see if what he was preaching was right despite the fact that they never got a chance to personally disciple him.

But you know, Paul didn't close himself behind the doors of some apartment with Peter and James and just discuss old times and new adventures to come. Paul was still excited about the truth and the need to reach out to the lost after three years and this was a working vacation for him if you will.

ACT 9:28-31 "So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."

Paul couldn't wait to get out into the city there in Jerusalem and teach about Jesus Christ. But notice that in Acts 9:29 it says that he talked and debated with the Grecian Jews. The Grecian Jews are also described as the Hellenists. These would be Greeks who became Jews. They were not Israelites in the strict sense.

Here we see Paul going to a group of Greeks, former Gentiles, now Jews by religious conviction. This is not to suggest that the other disciples and apostles in Jerusalem overlooked these people because they weren't full blooded Jews. But, because Paul has been given a burden to the Gentile nations this would have been very natural for him to gravitate to them.

But evidently, they were not very receptive because we're also told in Acts 9:29 these same Grecian Jews tried to kill him. This was Paul's lot in life, to suffer for Christ, not because he was naturally abrasive, but only because he brought people the truth in love, a truth they were not willing to accept.

And I'm sure Peter and James, along with the rest of the disciples there in Jerusalem may have cautioned Paul to be careful how he shares his faith, but I'm also certain they were impressed with this man who would not compromise when it came to that life giving gospel he was personally given by Jesus Christ.

They not only accepted Paul as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, they also accepted him as an apostle to the Gentiles which is brought out when the Holy Spirit commissions Paul and Barnabas in Antioch to go out on their missionary journeys as the apostles to the Gentile world.

Here again is Paul's point to the Judaizers in Galatia who were trying to make the case that Paul was a lone ranger assuming authority he was not given by the rest of the apostles. He is saying to them, "just ask the apostles in Jerusalem yourselves." "They will confirm that I have been called by Jesus Christ and given the same gospel they received from Jesus, though none of them taught me such a gospel; Jesus Himself did that."

GAL 1:20 "I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie."

The language here in verse 20 of our text is the language of an oath or a vow. It is often suggested that Christians are commanded by Jesus never to use such oaths or vows.

MAT 5:33-37 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

This seems to be clear and yet Paul is in fact making an oath to these Galatians. Why the contradiction? Well, there really is none. What Jesus is addressing is in the context of the sermon on the mount where he is addressing all of the abuses of the law. And the thrust of Mat. 5:33-37 is not to use an oath or a vow when your word is good enough.

If you need to call on God as your witness for everything you say and do, then there's something wrong with your life where you feel you need to call on the Lord to verify and testify to your every word and move.

Jesus teaches us to live the life He's given us in the power of the Holy Spirit without having to make continual oaths and vows. All of this to say that oaths and vows have a place for Christians under certain circumstances. If this were not the case Paul would never have used such language.

In fact, there are many instances where Paul takes a vow or an oath throughout his ministry under certain circumstances. And keep in mind that essentially both oaths and vows are instruments of

verifying something to be true as you call on God to witness that transaction or truth.

ROM 1:9 “God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 10 in my prayers at all times;...”

PHI 1:8 “God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

1TH 2:5 “You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed - God is our witness.”

There are many other examples in Paul’s life, but the point is that such oaths and vows are permitted by the Lord, so long as they don’t begin to get in the way of just having our lives demonstrate a yes or a no, when that’s all we need.

Paul’s point here in our text is to give weight to what he has given in the way of testimony which is true; that he is an apostle, and that the apostles in Jerusalem can verify this and bear witness that Jesus is the one who gave Paul his gospel and his apostolic ministry.

GAL 1:21-24 “Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they praised God because of me.”

After Paul left Jerusalem he left on a mission. His mission is to follow Christ and do the work the Lord called him to do. Syria and Cilicia includes the area in which he grew up, in the city of Tarsus, which was located on the southeastern part of modern day Turkey just off the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

In other words, he went home, probably using Tarsus as a home base to reach out to Cilicia and Syria. We don’t know if his parents were still alive, but if they were, along with any other relatives he had in the region, you can bet he shared his faith with them and encouraged them to embrace the Messiah Jesus as Lord and Savior.

And yet, even at this point in his ministry many people didn’t recognize him, except to recognize his reputation.

GAL 1:22-23 “I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: “The man who



formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."

His reputation did precede him. As he traveled throughout Judea the churches there had certainly heard about him. And it appears that because of the way in which the Lord was working in his life there was a certain recognition that God was doing something special in his life.

The report was, that "the man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." Notice how these churches include themselves in this report; "the man who formerly persecuted us."

Some of them may have personally been touched by the wrath of Saul, and yet this language probably includes the idea that when Saul persecuted the church anywhere in the world, it touched them personally even as Jesus was touched personally when on that road leading into Damascus Jesus asked Saul, "why do you persecute Me?"

And so, in one sense, when you persecute the church-at-large, you persecute the risen Christ whose church it is, together with the individuals who make up that church. But the report is clear. Saul was a bad man, an evil man who came against Christ, but who has now done a 180 degree turn because of what the risen Lord did in his life.

GAL 1:24 "And they praised God because of me."

For these Christians to praise God because of what He had done in Paul's life should speak volumes to these Judaizers in Galatia who were trying to discredit Paul and his ministry. In fact, just as Paul once persecuted the church and in turn Jesus Himself, these Judaizers, by calling into question Paul's apostleship are personally calling Jesus Christ into question who chose and commissioned Paul.

And this is exactly the point Paul is trying to make to these people. Don't come against Jesus Christ and His work by coming against me. Don't call Jesus into question by calling my apostleship into question. The Lord will not hold you guiltless if you continue to come against Him with a false gospel, all the while calling me a false apostle.

Paul's concern was that the church in Galatia would be adversely affected by these false teachers. But he was also concerned with

these false teachers which is why his warning is actually an act of grace to shock them into reality.

GAL 1:8-9 “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”

Even in his rebuke of these Judaizers, he’s still extending love and grace because he knows the false gospel he once subscribed to when the law was the all-encompassing part of his life prior to him coming to Christ.

But instead of being a persecutor of people, Paul was now a lover of people. Instead of trying to destroy, he is extending life through the gospel. What a dramatic change. And this is what the churches in Judea had heard about him. His life was now one of serving Christ.

And notice who they praise. They don’t praise Paul, they praise God. And this is where the praise should always go. Had it not been for Christ reaching out to us, we’d still be in our sins. Had it not been for the Holy Spirit of God opening our eyes we’d still be blind and seeking our own way.

God is to get all the glory. But, like Paul, we are always to submit to God as His grace is working in our lives and that should demonstrate itself in changed lives. We may not have had a Damascus road experience, but to suggest that we are no different now than we were before accepting Christ by faith is to contradict the reason He saved us in the first place.

EPH 2:8-10 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Earlier in that same letter to the Ephesians Paul puts this eternal plan of God’s into perspective.

EPH 1:4 “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

We are not saved by our good works, but are certainly saved to exemplify His life and light which He has placed there, all with the

purpose of bringing glory to His name. May our lives always demonstrate that, even as did Paul's, and may the world around us be able to praise God for the work He has done in us and continues to do in us through Christ.