

In the late 1970's one of my first jobs out of college was a manager of a store... which was owned by a former college professor of mine. We had several employees... and it became obvious that someone was stealing merchandise from the store. ... The owner hired a company that administered lie detector tests... and had every one of us submit ourselves to this process.

Now... in college... I had obtained a psychology degree... and therefore I was very familiar with bio-feedback machines. I knew how they worked... and I knew how to defeat them. ... Since I was not the thief they were looking for... I decided that I would have a little fun with the technicians when they called my name to go out and be tested. I sat in a chair of the private motorhome they drove to the store... and they hooked me up to their machines.

They asked me my name... and I answered truthfully. They asked for my age... and I honestly gave it to them. I think they asked me one or two more basic questions... such as what my father's name was. This is so they can observe what the machine did with such softball questions. With each of these answers they would pause and look at the graph paper scrolling out of their machine with several squiggle marks. Eventually they asked me where I was born. I said, "I was born on the planet Venus..." They looked at the scrolling graph paper... and waited... and waited. They asked me again... "Where were you born?" ... "I was born on Venus, but my Mom is from Mars." After several more moments of watching the results... they unhooked me from the machine... and we spent the rest of our time in the motorhome talking about bio-feedback.

The initial lie-detectors of the 1970's... as well as today's high tech machines... can be defeated... . . . A team of British scientists have developed a sophisticated new camera system that tries to detect if someone is lying. According to an article from BBC News, "*The computerized system uses a simple video camera, a high-resolution thermal imaging sensor, and a suite of algorithms.*" Just like the older bio-feedback machines... the new device relies on the fact that we give our emotions away through bodily cues — heart rate, breathing patterns, eye movements, small twitches, etc.

The researchers conclude, "*We bring together all this well-established work on expressions, these recent developments in thermal imaging, techniques for image tracking of subjects, and our new algorithms into one operational system.*" However, they also acknowledged that all of these scientific discoveries aren't 100 percent accurate. They admit that they could discriminate between truth and lies in only about two-thirds of cases.

In our verses today of our study in Galatians... the Apostle Paul submits himself to a lie detector test of the first century. He applies logic and reasoning... and a very direct appeal...

Galatians 1:20 (ESV)

(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!)

The argument between deception and truth is at the heart of the first chapter of Galatians. We saw in the last week's passage of study (verse 1-10 of Galatians 1)... that Paul spoke of enemies... who would seek out his friends in Galatia... claiming to have another gospel... which was not

another gospel but a lie. They promised greater truth and a greater spiritual experience... they said the Galatians could experience... but it was all a lie. So Paul had quite a battle.

In the passage we're going to study today... there is a LOT of practical instruction... that we can glean for our own living today. ... But there are two main ideas.... That I don't want us to lose sight of... as we dig up these insights. ... The first idea for us to keep hold of... is the argument Paul will make... declaring that the God-breathed truth that sets us free... (the true gospel)... is self-authenticating. ... We can depend on it. ... You and I need to spend more time DECLARING it... rather than thinking or trying to DEFEND it. Our gospel is self-authenticating!

The other important insight that Paul will give us... and we need to cling to... is that Paul is the most unlikely person to be given a revelation of God... and therefore we can conclude that God is at work. ... It is frequently the pattern we see in the Bible... for God to choose... from our perspective... the wrong person... wrong place... wrong circumstance... and wrong voice to reveal himself. ... *“Lord... I am the wrong person to declare Your truth to others...”* is not appropriate for you.

Both of these truths come forth from today's passage... along with a host of other nuggets... but these two... I think... should be our primary “take-away's.” ... So... Let's begin with our first primary take-away.

Self-authenticating truth

Let's return to Galatians 1:10, where we ended in the last message:

Galatians 1:10

There is definite tension between truth and lies. Those who tell lies ultimately want the approval of the human circle they are in. ... They tell lies for man's approval. (*"Please keep liking me...! If I told you the truth... you probably would not like me as much..."*) ... Those who tell the truth... even if it means there may be adverse consequences... they do so because they want the approval of God.

Galatians 1:11-12

Perhaps these strong denials are Paul's refutation of accusations that he got his message secondhand... from the original apostles. ... It would seem from what Paul writes... that the troublemakers in the Galatian churches... had been suggesting that **they** had a more complete version of the gospel... from the original apostles... and that the gospel Paul had preached... was abbreviated or cut short without mentioning the law. ... So Paul affirms in the strongest terms possible that the essential nature of the gospel is God-made... not man-made... ... Paul simply pulls the rug right out from under them... by declaring that the origin of the gospel is the *revelation from Jesus Christ*... not from human Jewish tradition... or even from any of the original 12 men Jesus selected to be close to Him.

HERE IS SOMETHING FOR YOU AND I TO CONSIDER FROM THIS:

Truth is not enhanced because it is declared by someone who has an impressive degree... who speaks eloquently... or who is otherwise impressive in the world's eyes. ... What should impress you is the self-authenticating truth. ... The Bible. Whatever spokesman declared it... the

gospel is the direct revelation of Jesus Christ... and for that reason alone... it can be trusted. "...*Billy Graham said...*" "*John MacArther says...*" "*Chuck Swindoll preaches...*" ... does not automatically settle the matter for me. ... I love these guys and I respect their scholarship... But... "*What does Scripture say?*" – Now **that** is what counts.

Galatians 1:13-17

Having been challenged about his authority and message... Paul calls their attention to what he was before Christ changed his life. ... The evidence was **indisputable!** ... A major change had taken place in Paul.

When Peter and John were brought before the High Priest... Caiaphas... and his crowd... because they had been preaching the gospel... and they had healed a lame man... Caiaphas and his boys held a little conference with each other...

Acts 4:16 (ESV)

saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it."

They could argue with Peter and John's theology. ... They could argue with their methods of ministry. ... But they **couldn't** argue the results. ... The same was true of Paul. ... His life served as a clear illustration of the power of the gospel. His life was proof of a true gospel.

We might expect... after reading in last week's passage... where Paul rebuked the Galatians for desertion... that he would next challenge them to recommit themselves to Christ. ... Eventually he does command them to "stand firm" (We will see this when we come to Galatians 5:1). ... But

before he challenges them... he prepares the way for such commands... by telling his own story. ... He does not call for his readers to do anything that he has not done himself. ... He does not simply point to the way... he has lived out the way of faithfulness to the gospel of Christ. ... The best way to challenge others to live for Christ... is by our own example.

Paul's desire and intent was to completely eradicate the Church. This is what he lived for. ... And everything was "going his way." ... Paul was rapidly being recognized as an influential spiritual leader in Israel. ... Everybody knew that this brilliant student of Rabbi Gamaliel (which is equivalent today to being a Rhode Scholar)... was scholarly **and** zealous in his actions.

The contrast between Paul... and the Galatian believers... stands out in stark contrast here. ... As a Jew... Paul had turned from his preoccupation with the distinctive Jewish way of life... to serve the risen Christ. ... And as Gentiles... the Galatians were turning from their focus on Christ... to a preoccupation with the distinctive Jewish way of life.

Then something happened to this Saul of Tarsus... the zealous persecutor of the church. ... He became Paul the Apostle... the preacher of the Gospel. This change was not gradual... it happened suddenly and without warning (We read the story in Acts 9:1-9). ... Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians... a few days later he was in Damascus... preaching to the Jews that the Christians are right. ... How could the Judaizers explain this sudden transformation?

Was Saul's remarkable "about-face" caused by his own people - the Jews? Unthinkable! The Jews were encouraging Saul in his program of persecution... and his conversion was an embarrassment to them.

Was Saul's change caused by the Christians he was persecuting? Certainly the believers prayed for him... and no doubt the death of Stephen — and especially the glorious testimony he had given — affected Paul deeply. ... But the Christians ran from Paul... and, as far as we know... they had no idea that the young rabbi would ever become a Christian.

But if the amazing change in Paul was not caused by the Jews or the church, *then who caused it?* It had to come from God!

No matter how you look at it... the conversion of Paul was a spiritual miracle. ... It was humanly impossible for Rabbi Saul to become the Apostle Paul - apart from the miracle of God's grace.

He was a bigot and a fanatic, whole-hearted in his devotion to Judaism and in his persecution of Christ and the church. Now a man in that mental and emotional state is in no mood to change his mind, or even to have it changed for him by men. No conditioned reflex or other psychological device could convert a man in that state. Only God could reach him—and God did!

God did so by setting Paul apart before he was born... and by calling him by God's grace. (Verse 15)

The emphasis is again on God's initiative. ... Paul was not called because of anything he himself accomplished. He hadn't done anything yet... he

hadn't been born. And then to make sure we got it... Paul adds... "by His grace" (unearned... unmerited favor.)

God had chosen Paul even before he was born. God's designs on Paul's life clearly began before his birth. Similarly, Jeremiah was divinely informed that God had called him even before he was born to do special work (Jeremiah 1:5). Paul's expression recalls the profound awe described by the psalmist in Psalm 139 in recognizing the scope of God's awareness of us. The context indicates that Paul was humbled by God's grace in calling him to be an apostle rather than proud about any personal qualifications that made him noticeable to God. The fact that God would accomplish his work through any of us ought to inspire deep humility.

The understanding that Paul and all believers are chosen before birth by God is referred to as the doctrine of election. This was a key part of Paul's theology (for example, Romans 8:29-30; 9:11-29; Ephesians 1:4-5).

Believers may wonder why... or how... they could be chosen... while others might be rejected. ... God is sovereign and... in reality... no one has any claim on His mercy. ... It is completely undeserved. ... He prepared us in advance by His gift of salvation... and He will reveal His glory when we are finally with Him for eternity.

Instead of focusing on God choosing some and rejecting others... we should stand in awe at God's offer of grace to any of us. ... No one can demand that God explain why He does what He does. He makes all the rules... but He loves to show His mercy to us. ... What an amazing God He is! ... Before Paul was born... God chose him. ... While Paul was trying

to destroy the people of God... God called him. ... That is the meaning of grace - undeserved love.

Galatians 1:15-16a

God chose Paul... not only to save him... but also to use him to win others. In the Bible... the doctrine of election is never taught with a view to producing pride or selfishness. ... Election involves responsibility.

Long before Paul... God appointed Jeremiah to be his spokesman... even before Jeremiah was born (Jeremiah 1:5). ... And make no mistake... God knows you intimately as well... and He chose you to be his even before you were born (Psalm 139 shows us this). He wants you to draw close to Him and to fulfill the purpose He has for your life.

Paul was converted in order to preach primarily to non-Jews. And you were saved for a reason God had as well.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

God called Paul as a vessel to reveal Christ to the Gentiles. ... God's primary call to Paul... was the same as it is for every believer - to reveal His Son Jesus Christ... both *to him...* and *through him.* ... God wants the believer both to know Christ... and to make Christ known. ... We are chosen to fellowship and commune with the Lord more and more... and to

let Him be seen in us more and more. ... The believer is a mere vessel in and through whom Jesus Christ lives.

God's revelation of His Son was a personal... inward experience of the heart... to Paul. The same might be said of you. ... But it is never meant to be kept private. ... The purpose of revelation is evangelism. ... The fruit of true conversion is mission. ... Evangelism is not some optional extra... an elective course that may or may not be taken. ... It is the inevitable result of real conversion. There is a God placed force... that is a part of the experience of conversion... which compels the truly converted to participate in God's mission to the world. ... Too often in testimonies... the only results of conversion we hear about... are the personal benefits: *my* peace, *my* fulfillment, *my* freedom. ... But we learn from Paul... that God's primary purpose for our conversion is to send us out into the world... with the good news about Christ. Our involvement in God's mission in the world is the best testimony to God's gracious work of conversion in our lives.

Galatians 1:16d-17

Paul was converted; he needed time to rethink his former position against Christianity in light of the truth of the gospel that had been revealed to him. During this interim, Paul probably studied the Scriptures, prayed, and thought about the meaning of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection in relation to the Old Testament that he knew so well. God revealed to Paul the meaning of the gospel, and from Paul's time of study, we today have the New Testament letters that focus on explaining God's plan (especially the doctrinal book of Romans). Paul's point in explaining this itinerary was to show that he formed his theology, not from consulting with any other

believers, but alone, with God's guidance. After his time in Arabia, Paul later returned to the city of Damascus.

In our day, when celebrities are converted, the religious media rush to publicize their conversions for the widest possible audience. Put them on TV; feature them in prime-time talk shows. But this immediate publicity can be dangerous to the spiritual health of new converts. Under the harsh, glaring lights of the media they have no space to think through the implications of their new faith, to work through their inconsistencies and to listen to the Lord. They sometimes feel used and abused. They need time, as we all do, to be hidden from the public eye in order to grow and deepen in their faith. Hidden years seem to be part of God's plan for his servants. Moses spent forty years in the desert before his day of fame in Pharaoh's court.

When Paul was converted, he had a dire need to be alone with God. He did not need the counsel and help of men; he needed the presence and help of God and His Spirit. He already knew the Scripture. He had studied them at the feet of the greatest religious teachers of his day, but he had not known God nor Christ, not in a personal way. Paul had no knowledge of God, not a personal knowledge. What he had known about God had been twisted and corrupted, misapplied and misused. He desperately needed...

- time to learn how to live with Christ day by day, drawing confidence and strength from Him.
- time to learn the real meaning of the Scriptures: how they applied to Christ.
- time to accurately handle the Word of Truth (the Scriptures).

- time to learn how to fellowship with Christ in daily worship (devotions, quiet times).
- time to learn how to walk in the presence and communion and fellowship of Christ all day.
- time to learn the commandments and will of Christ.
- time to think through how to go about making Christ known to a world steeped in dire need and sin and darkness.

Apparently, he spent about three years in Arabia ... Imagine spending three years seeking the Lord and learning how to live and serve Him! What a lesson for believers and ministers! What power would be in our lives and ministries if we sought to know Christ as Paul did!

When all of this is added up, it means that Paul spent less than three years in the desert. It is interesting how God has trained His men. He trained Moses in the desert. He put Abraham in a rather unique place to train him, and Elijah had that same type of experience. It has been God's method to put His man out on the desert to train him. David was trained outdoors in the caves of the earth while he was running away from King Saul. Remember that he cried out to God that he was hunted like a partridge -- it was open season on him all the time. The Lord used the same method with Paul. God sent him into the desert for less than three years. Then he went to Jerusalem, saw Peter, and stayed with him for fifteen days.

Galatians 1:18-24

Paul declared that he was an apostle – BEFORE – he met the other apostles... and when he did finally meet them... he was received by them as an equal.

Paul's changed life had brought praise from those who saw him or heard about him. ... His new life had astonished them. They had praised God because only God could have turned this zealous persecutor of Christians into a Christian himself. We may not have had as dramatic a change as Paul, but when people look at you... do they recognize that God has made changes in you?

In the light of Paul's conduct... his conversion... and his contacts... how could anybody accuse him of borrowing or inventing either his message or his ministry? ... We simply must leave room for the fact that he *did* receive his Gospel by a revelation from Jesus Christ. ... And we must therefore... be careful what we do with this Gospel... because it is not the invention of men... but the very truth of God.

What is the false gospel in our setting that is analogous to the situation that prompted the writing of Galatians? ... What do we have today that looks a lot like the invention of men... that the true gospel was being traded away for...? In what ways do we focus on externals and court the approval of people rather than that of God?

Sometimes the gospel of man gets taught in the church... and influences people to think that Christians who have never experienced a moral failure in their life... are better suited for leadership... than those who have been forgiven of such sins. ... But God doesn't prefer people who have a more respectful sinful past... to those who have extremely rough ones.

The gospel of man has us imagine that we HAVE to maintain the appearance of uprightness... and perfection. Looking as though we have

no faults... is preferable to the unthinkable act... that Scripture says we are to do... of confessing our sin and failure to one another. ... We think we're a lot better off if everybody in our circle of faith can simply hide... and no one tells the truth about their current struggles. ... Meetings are shorter... events are more predictable... and it's easier to get things done... when you don't have to stop and deal with life's messes that are being stuffed inside.

The gospel of man teaches us that it is more important to oppose fellow believers who like to drink beer with pizza... than it is to confront gossip and factions in the church. It puts undue focus on matters like whether or not it is OK to wear T-shirts to Sunday worship services.

LISTEN... the self-authenticating Word of God does not say anything about such issues...

Finally... I want to briefly speak of the second important "take-home"... which I mentioned as we began. ... In Paul's defense of his apostolic credentials... he declares, "The gospel I preached...I received from Jesus Christ."

It is clear that Paul is as surprised as anyone to find himself an apostle of Christ. His opponents had better pedigrees. They had likely spent time in the Jerusalem church and could claim to quote the first apostles in addition to the legal doctrines of Judaism. Paul had no Christian catechism. His fervor for Judaism led him to persecute believers; his conversion was an astonishing act of grace spoken from heaven.

Let's observe some of the details that Paul gives. First of all, he says, "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age...." Most of the men who were disturbing the Galatian believers would once have been his contemporaries in Jewish studies in Jerusalem. He outdid them. He well knew that pride of accomplishment in religion can lead to hardness of heart.

He notes that he had been chosen from before his birth and called by God--at the least likely moment. On an errand of persecution he was claimed by Christ.

He received no Christian instruction from the apostles, having spent only two weeks with them during the years he was being fashioned into a spokesman for Christ. He describes a lonely three-year stint in the Arabian desert.

Paul's argument is remarkable: "*Do you want to know why you should believe in me? Not because I have historic or academic credentials. I don't have any.*" His apostleship was a miracle, his teaching a "revelation of Jesus Christ," his credential from heaven, his message filled with self-authenticating power. But this should not surprise us. All revelation from God is a miracle.

What kind of people speak for God? ... Let's start with God's own Son. ... He was born on this planet as a poor man from Galilee -- in the wrong place... unappreciated... without fanfare. Abraham was an idolater in the land of Ur. ... Sarah,...who would be the mother of multiple nations... was barren until very late in life. ... Or consider Israel's most revered prophet...

the Lawgiver himself – Moses. He was a murderous rebel who didn't believe he could speak. ... David's father cared so little about him that he didn't present him to the prophet Samuel along with his other sons. ... Later David committed adultery and murder and almost destroyed his nation. ... Peter... at the most crucial moment in his discipleship with the Lord... abandoned Jesus and cursed Him as he left. ... James, the brother of Jesus, thought he was insane and tried to get him locked up.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation. May it persuade you and I to resist the voices of distortion... that would have us treat it as a human invention... or to believe that better credentials (than what we have) are necessary for us to share it with others.