

A GOD-GIVEN TESTIMONY Galatians 1:10-24

Martin Luther once said, “Wherever God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel right next door.” That was certainly the case in Paul’s life and something we see today. Wherever God is doing a great work the cults are right there to follow it up and set up shop. Wherever Paul went planting churches, false teachers were closing in right behind him to try and stop it or disturb it and tear it back down, **not from next door, but from within**. In fact, if you were to search for Satan today, you wouldn’t look for him in the darkest places of the world or even places where he is worshipped, but you would look for him inside a happening church somewhere, behind a pulpit, maybe dressed in a suit, wearing a big smile and using eloquent words to tell people what they want to hear. Chapter 2:4 talks about how false teachers were **secretly brought in to spy on the Christians’ liberty, with the goal of bringing them into the bondage of a works-based mentality in their relationship with God. To accomplish their goal, they went after the leadership**. That’s what you do in war – you go after the opposing leadership, the opposing president or king – and cut the head off of the snake. You want to get through the army lines to the commander-in-chief. That’s what the Judaizers did. These guys walk in off the street, having not lifted a finger to plant the church and sounding super spiritual with their works, try to make the leadership look like they don’t know what they’re talking about – men like Paul and Barnabas who had labored and toiled and sacrificed their time and lives for the flock. Judaizers from within were going after the apostles and trying to pit its own congregation against them, when the apostles wanted nothing but God’s best for them. They tried to convince the believers that Paul wasn’t a genuine apostle because if they could do that, then the people wouldn’t sense the need to listen to him and his message of free grace anymore and they would be successfully bound by the false teachers.

When we come to this part of chapter 1 Paul begins to argue his apostleship by sharing his testimony. His testimony is proof that only God could take a man as religious as he was and make him into what he is today. He lists several proofs from **his current life and ministry** in verses 10-12; from his **former lifestyle** under Judaism in 13-14; from **God’s work of conversion in his life** in 15-16; Then lastly from his **post-conversion** in the remaining verses of chapter 1.

- **Paul’s Current Life (vv. 10-12)**
- **Paul Pre-Conversion (vv. 13-15)**
- **Paul’s Conversion (vv. 15-16a)**
- **Paul Post-Conversion (vv. 16b-24)**

From these **four stages** of his life we see several proofs for his apostleship. The first stage he refers to is...

I. PAUL’S CURRENT LIFE

From Paul’s current life, he argues...

A. PROOF #1 – Paul is not a man-pleaser. (vv. 10)

When he begins with ‘for’ (“For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God?”) it is in connection with the universal and eternal curse he just proclaimed which condemned anyone who would willingly participate in teaching or believing a gospel other than the one Paul preaches. He basically said, “I don’t care if it’s an apostle, a holy angel, a priest, bishop, cardinal, pope, Sunday school teacher, pastor, or president of a seminary... if they preach another way to be saved other than by grace through faith in Christ, let them be damned to hell.” You can’t read that curse and come away

with any ideas that Paul is out to please men for the sake of gain or some other ulterior motive. I think Paul is accused of being a man-pleaser the reason that,

1. His message was accused of being too simple.

I think some of these false brethren were accusing Paul of being a man-pleaser because **his message was so simple**. Because grace is so hard to believe sometimes, he's actually accused of telling people what they want to hear. Grace is too easy isn't it? It's too free isn't it? **Won't people mistake it and use it as a license to sin? That they do. It's risky in that sense but we don't stop preaching it (Swindoll-Grace Awakening)**. It's only when someone understands the free and undeserving grace in Christ that our hearts are supernaturally softened and obedience begins to spring forth from it. Grace is hard to believe because men, in their pride, want to do something tangible. They want to try and earn their salvation by doing something. In reality, that makes the false teacher the real man-pleaser who are telling men they can earn salvation by keeping a list of do's and don'ts. And to add to that...

2. The persecution that Paul's message brings reveals the real man-pleasers.

Galatians 6:12 says, "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ." If we preach works, the world just loves that stuff. It fits right in. But if we preach the cross, this proud world can't accept that. There's going to be confrontation and persecution to varying degrees for that. And you know these fake brothers wouldn't go through that persecution like Paul was. They would only show up to places where free grace was already established and ruin it. Several times the Bible describes salvation as a free gift. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the **free gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 5:15-17 describes the righteousness of Christ that's bestowed on us through grace, as a free gift **5 times**. Gifts are something that are free. You don't work for gifts. At any moment you begin to work for something, it's no longer a gift but something you've earned. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the **gift** of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

That kind of message is often attacked today and called "cheap grace." But if you think about it, that kind of message that describes man as a sinner who is helpless to save himself, is not a man-pleasing. It's offensive to his pride. If we're accused of preaching cheap grace in this church, that's good thing! Grace isn't cheap, it's FREE, because Christ paid for it on our behalf. I don't know about you but I want to be like Paul and be accused of preaching not just cheap grace, but free grace. **The second proof from Paul current life is that...**

B. PROOF #2 – Paul is a Christ-pleaser. (v. 10)

He's a slave for Christ, willing to do anything for His Master. After all the hardships and battles that he has been through in preaching the gospel, nothing about his life says that he's in it to please anyone but Christ. It's almost comical to say that Paul was out to please men. Remember, he was riddled with scars for his testimony of Christ and missionary experiences. In 2 Corinthians 11 he says he was, "imprisoned for Christ... beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"

To say that Paul was a man-pleaser was **absurd**. Paul's priority above all else was to please God by preaching the gospel to all men. If we are going to please God, we can't be man-pleasers at the same time because it requires the sharing of some offensive truths. And grace allows us to do because grace frees us from caring so much about what other people think of us. Living under law makes you a man-pleaser because you perform in order to look good or look spiritual or obey some manmade rules. Grace frees you from all of that. When you care more about what God thinks of you than anybody else thinks of you, you're free to be yourself and to be His spokesman without caring whether or not they accept you. You just want them to accept His message.

C. PROOF #3 – Paul's preaches Christ's message. (vv. 11-12)

1. It is not derived from man, but Christ. (v. 11)

The idea that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ is **God's idea. It is not in any way, shape or form, man's idea. Man, in his philosophy, would never have come up with such an idea.** It's too simple. It's too free. Man just wouldn't have ever thought of it. Anywhere you find some "gospel" according to man, there is always works involved – some sort of way to perfect yourself or protect yourself through your own efforts of morality or rule-keeping – but only God could come up with such a brilliant and powerful plan to save sinners when they put their faith in Christ. Such a message roots out the original source of sin in us by getting to the heart of the original rebellion that took place in the garden of Eden, where man wanted to do without God. It crushes that sinfully independent idea by revealing the fact that **we do need God** and are actually **helpless without Him**. We are sinners who need a savior. 1 Corinthians 1:18-21 speaks to this, saying, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." No worldly-wise man or scribe or debater would have ever come up with this message. It is God's foolish message and it's a message that He loves.

2. He was not taught it by man, but Christ. (v. 12)

Not only did men not make it up, Paul says he didn't receive it from another man, nor was he taught it by another man, some middleman. Men had nothing to do with his incredible apprehension of the gospel and all the doctrines of grace that come with it. He got it directly from Christ through revelation. I had a person say to me once that they thought we spent too much time studying Paul's words and not enough of Jesus' words. And I didn't respond very wisely at the time but if I could back I would tell her that what Paul teaches is directly from Christ and a great majority of Christ's teaching are actually for Israel and not primarily for the Church (It wasn't until later on in His ministry, actually the night He was betrayed in the Upper Room Discourse of John 15 that He spoke much about teachings directly applying to the Church). I would remind her that all Scripture is God-breathed. It's equally inspired by God. I like the words in red in my Bible because they help me navigate for studying but there is a tendency for some to place those red words above the rest.

What I enjoy about verses 11 and 12 are that it reminds us that the gospel is not bound. According to 2 Timothy 2:9, it is not imprisoned! It's not something that belongs to man but ultimately **belongs** to God! We've been entrusted with it, yes, but no one church body can claim they alone have the gospel. No church establishment or fellowship can claim

some sort of special exclusivity from the rest by saying that there is no salvation outside their church because the gospel was handed down by leaders of their church. Jude says it was handed down to the saints, not to the papacy or clergy. The gospel is not bound by such a manmade system. Salvation is of the Lord through His message.

The next stage of Paul's life from which he argues for his apostleship is...

II. PAUL'S FORMER LIFE

A. PROOF #4 – Paul's former life under Judaism validates his message. (vv. 13-14)

There are **three evidences** he uses to further his claim.

1. Evidence #1 – He used to persecute the Church of God. (v. 13)

It used to be Paul's joy to go around and make Christian's lives miserable. He was the point man that spearheaded the first persecution of Christians. Acts 8:3 says, "Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison." He wanted them thrown in jail and even executed if possible. He couldn't stand those "Law-rejecting, false-messiah accepting" Christians! In its beginning stages, Christianity was called 'The Way' and Paul wanted it completely "out of the way". Even when Stephen was being stoned, Paul was the one who watched over their coats. Men took off their coats, you know, so they could get a **better wind up**, having **less restriction** when they threw, so they could really **zing 'em** at their target.

2. Evidence #2 – He was advanced above his contemporaries. (v. 14)

Vine's Dictionary said the word for *advanced* means to literally "strike forward" or "cut forward a way" – like wielding a machete and cutting a trail through the forest. He was cutting down everyone in his way on his path to the top. His proud and **sharp, young mind** knew the Law and had it down pat. I bet he could recite it word for word. He knew teachings of the Rabbis that were handed down. He even went beyond his teacher Gamaliel, who took a more reserved approach to "The Way". Gamaliel basically said if it was not of God, it wouldn't last, so leave it alone. But he also said, if it is of God and you fight against it, you'll find yourself fighting against God (Acts 5:34-40)– and that's exactly what Paul found himself doing when Jesus arrested him on the way to Damascus and asked him why he kicked against the goads or the Shepherd's prod.

3. Evidence #3 – He was zealous for his ancestral traditions. (v. 14)

You want to talk about a religious man tied to traditions? He was as religious as they come! He took the system to the extreme and he loved it. He loved Judaism. It was what he lived for. It was his identity. It was his life! He'd kept the Law to a T! Blameless! And it's his love for Judaism that motivated him to stand diametrically opposed to Christ. You see this same misguided zeal for religious tradition today. David Thompson wrote, "Many love their religion. Many love their denomination. Many love their church. That does not mean they love Jesus Christ. People will shave heads, crawl down streets, sell things and live in a compound. People will carefully follow their religious traditions. That does not mean they are right with God. Paul did all of that." And out of all the different kinds of people to reach – from the rebellious atheistic sinner, to the good and moral person, and to the religious... **the hardest ones to reach are the religious**. Religion keeps people in unbelievable bondage and only God can free them from that by His Word and Spirit.

Can you imagine how hard it must have been for some of these Jews who had believed in Christ to leave all of Judaism behind them? They were leaving their identity behind. Literally maybe their **career** as a priest or scribe – what they've trained for their entire life! Even just laying aside the **garments** they wore, leaving the **smell** of incense burning, the

sound of sacrifices bellowing, the **taste** of the showbread and the meat, the **sight** of gold, ornate décor and **utilizing** the ancient instruments handed down from their fathers to perform religious ceremonies (what a privilege!), and **no longer visiting the Temple** for worship. **Religion and tradition tend to draw folks through its tangible appeal to the senses. A lot of false religion appeals to the senses with their beautiful buildings and ceremonies.** Grace was something totally new that left it all irrelevant. Jesus said we worship in Spirit and Truth. You can't sow new cloth on an old garment without ripping it or pour new wine into an old wineskin without it bursting. This was difficult. I applaud any Israelite who was able to make the switch to Christianity and any Messianic Jews today. They're dealing with new cloth and new wine. A lot of them had the idea that the old wine is good enough, so why change? It's always hardest to reach the religious. But with God, anything is impossible. In fact, God changed Paul – the most-religious man of his day! That brings great comfort to those of us with a loved one trapped in the bondage some religion, whom we wonder will ever escape.

The next stage is...

III. PAUL'S CONVERSION

A. PROOF #5 – God transformed Paul's life. (vv. 15-16a)

God took him from a religious zealot to the point where he counts all of his hard works as Pharisee as loss. Rubbish even. Literally, dung is the word used there. More than that, he counts all religious things men do to be loss. He puts zero confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3). What changed this man? God did, who showed him the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith in Christ. Notice the transition that takes place in the subjects of the sentence where Paul just got done talking about himself and his pre-conversion lifestyle – **I** used to persecute; **I** tried to destroy it; **I** was advancing in Judaism; **I** was more extremely zealous for traditions – Now in verse 15 to **GOD**. “But when **GOD**...” – **GOD** stepped in. God set me apart and called me and made me an example of grace and a preacher of grace. God took him from a persecutor of the church to a church planter. And he points to 3 main divine actions on God's part:

1. Divine Action #1 – God set him apart from his mother's womb. (v. 15)

That means what it says. That's how sovereign our God is over our lives. Before Paul was even born, God had plans to use to him for the purpose of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles! What's that say about abortions? God has plans for unborn children. Be aware of that if you're considering having one. Psalm 139:16 says, “Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me when as yet there was not one of them.” Outside of time, in His omniscience, the all-knowing God set him apart (me aphorisas): carries the idea of pastureland that is shut in by a boundary; it's fenced off; marked off as belonging to a certain owner. Long ago, God marked out Paul for this, fenced him in for this purpose, choosing him before he was even born. The same was said for Jeremiah and Isaiah and John the Baptist. They were consecrated to be prophets before they were even born, according to the Scriptures. What's different from those prophets is that God **let** Paul wallow around in the muck of performance-based religion all those years and then at His appointed timing, plucked him up from the mire and into grace when he was just ripe for God's purpose. God knew when He was going to use Paul and what He was going to use him for. Paul realized that God was the sovereign designer over his life who prepared him for this apostolic ministry.

Keep in mind that what He did with Paul He does with us too. We've been chosen like him, before the foundation of the world even (Eph. 1:4)! We've been gifted spiritual gifts to fulfill a ministry of good works God has prepared in advance for us to do for such a time

as this (Eph. 2:8-10). No one becomes a Christian and then is just left with nothing to do. We're all to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and share that with others. What is that specifically for you? That's between you and God but I bet it involves making disciples... maybe looking back like Paul... Each of us can look back and see how **God has used everything we've been through – the good, the bad, and the ugly – to prepare us for a ministry in our lives. God uses our pasts.** Aren't you glad that Paul was previously so zealous for Phariseeism? It made him who he is and gave him a voice! Because he's been there and done that, the people could trust him over the Judaizers and we can listen to him knowing that this guy knows what he's talking about. You too, have a voice in the areas of life you've been through.

2. Divine Action #2 – God called him through His grace. (v. 15)

God calls us through the gospel of grace. What Paul says here lines right up with what he said in Romans with **the sequence of God's saving work** in that those whom he predestines, He calls, whom He calls, He justifies and will ultimately then glorify. Paul was **predestined**, set apart by God beforehand, and then was **called** through the gospel and was **justified** when he put his faith in Christ. But Paul is unique from us in God's calling him through that the gospel because the gospel didn't come to him through other Christians witnessing to him, but directly from God. We could say Jesus took the initiative to witness to him on the Damascus road, whether he wanted to be or not. Even his conversion was not influenced by man and it amplifies God's grace more than any other testimony as far as I can tell. It's a perfect demonstration to us of God's sovereign, undeserving grace. Paul did not deserve mercy from God, but God showed it anyway. He shows mercy to whom He shows mercy. And if He can save and transform Saul to Paul, the chief of sinners and likely the greatest human enemy God had at the time, then we have no doubt in our mind that He can save and transform anyone! If God can save Saul of Tarsus, he can save anyone! His arm is not so short that it cannot save. Don't give up on the person you've been praying for, for so long. Maybe God's preparing them right now for ministry later on like Paul. He's changing lives all around the world every day.

3. Divine Action #3 – God is revealing Christ through Paul's life. (v. 16)

In verse 16 it says it pleased God to reveal His Son in Paul. Some of your translations might say "to me." Is it *in me or to me*? Based on the context I think "in me" makes the most sense, not that the other couldn't work or isn't true, but Christ is abnormally revealed in Paul and his testimony in that he wasn't even seeking for Christ when Christ stepped in. Paul is a test case for grace, displaying how great and unconditional it is! Christ has been revealed in Paul as an outward display to everyone. This sort of thing I like to refer to as **redemptive revelation**. God revealing Himself and making Himself known through the transformative effect He has on peoples' lives. It's when we look at someone before and after Christ, and can't explain it other than to say, "God did it. Jesus Christ transformed that life." Is Christ being revealed in you? Is there a before Christ and after Christ in your life?

4. Divine Action #4 – God tasked Paul as a preacher to Gentiles.

Think about that for a minute. God took the most religious Hebrew zealot and made him a preacher to Gentiles. Gentiles were dogs to Pharisees! People that they were to be separated from! But God uses this ex-Pharisee to prove that wall between the Jew and Gentile has been broken down in Christ. There is no distinction in Christ between Jew and Gentile in Christ. Secondly, don't forget Paul was a preacher. Preaching gets belittled a lot these days

but God saves men through the preaching of His Word. Preaching is one of the main ministries through which God saves men.

The last stage of Paul's life that we look at is...

IV. PAUL'S POST-CONVERSION LIFE (vv. 16b-24)

In the rest of our passage from 16b-24 Paul defends the fact that his message and apostleship was directly given by God and not man, by giving a time-lapse of his relationship with the other apostles or, we could say, lack of fellowship with the apostles early on after his conversion. Notice **the 7 post-conversion steps** listed on your outline.

1. Paul did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. (v. 16b)

He went straight to the Lord and asked the Lord for guidance. He went where the Lord told him. In 2:2 he says the only reason he went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles years later was because of a revelation from God telling him to go. This is kind of a side-principle, but I think we need to **remember to go to the Lord first and not men**. When you're sick, pray first, then go to the doctor. When you come to the Scriptures and have a hard time understanding something, go to the Lord in prayer. Ask Him for wisdom to understand that text. Seek His guidance before you google it or open a commentary. Whatever you do in life, go to the Lord for guidance first.

2. Paul did not go up to Jerusalem where the apostles were. (v. 17)

Step 2 furthers his points in verses 11 and 12 that what he got, he got directly from God, not men.

3. Paul went away to Arabia. (v. 17)

Very rarely is a lack of fellowship ever a good thing, but between being in a situation **where the Jews wanted to take his life for his radical conversion** and being so **blindsided with the thought that he missed the Messiah**, it makes sense he went away for a few years. He probably spent most of his time studying the Word of God all over again and seeing how it all lined up with Christ's life. I don't know if we can say he was out in the middle of the Arabian desert by himself but as Charles Ryrie said, it doesn't really matter. "Paul's intent is not to pinpoint the location but to emphasize that it was a place (in contrast to Jerusalem) where there was no apostle to instruct him." We don't know who he was with or exactly what he did but I imagine he was mainly alone studying and received the gospel revelation there. He knew the Word of God before, but now it was really clicking, like gears when they line up. He saw the Messiah and grace in OT Scripture.

4. After Arabia, Paul returned to Damascus. (v. 17)

This is displaying the fact that he was not in a hurry to meet the apostles.

5. Three years later, he went to Jerusalem where he met with Cephas for fifteen days. (v. 18)

Three years later! Again, no rush. I imagine they shared testimonies and talked deeply about grace theology. Peter probably shared about all Christ did during his three-year ministry and how he failed Christ and yet how Christ showed him incredible grace, and Paul probably shared about the Damascus road experience and all that Christ had been revealing to him in the Scriptures through his time in Arabia. Peter said in his second letter that Paul was given wisdom by God and to the extent that some things he says are hard for God's people to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). Peter probably began to notice that God's grace was with Paul during this fifteen days with him.

6. Paul met no one else in Jerusalem besides James, the Lord's brother. (vv. 19-20)

James, the half-brother of Jesus, was a pillar in the church in Jerusalem. And Paul, here, because it should seem so unlikely that he would only meet Peter and James and no one else, **even swears under oath by it** and assures us he is not lying. It's sad this was necessary for him to do this to a church he founded, that was doubting his words.

7. After that, he went to Syria and Cilicia, still unknown to the Judean churches. (vv. 21-24)

Judea is the mostly the southern part of Israel centered around Jerusalem and where the apostles were. Instead of hanging around and getting to know everyone in the churches, he left again. He was still unknown in and to the churches of Judea around Jerusalem, but the churches were praising God because they kept hearing that Paul, who used to persecute them, was now preaching Christ as well and God was glorified by that.

In summary, all of this discussion of his life and testimony and travels (where he went and even where he didn't go) demonstrates that it was God who gave him his ministry and message and it was impossible for him to get it from men. This is incredibly relevant for us because many have denied Paul's authority and teachings, even today, and he wrote many of our New Testament books and teaching on grace.

V. MAJOR APPLICATIONS TO REMEMBER:

A. GOD USES OUR MESSED UP PAST.

Nothing's wasted with God, not even the bad and the ugly parts of our past. God will use the combination of circumstances that you have been through in life as your main and most-effective areas of ministry. Those who have lost a spouse or a child can really minister to those who are going through that too. Only those who have been to war can really minister to vets who've been there. Those who were freed from religion can share their testimony to help free others from religion's grip. You have a voice based on your past, like Paul does with his. Where's your voice?

B. WE ARE SET APART TO REVEAL CHRIST.

Christ was revealed through the apostle Paul's life and He should be revealed through ours as well. He is revealed through the transformative effect He has on our lives. Can people tell there's something different about you? When they study your life, would people say there's something different about you or do you just fit in with the rest of the world? In part of our being chosen by God before the world, Ephesians 1:4 says we have been chosen to be blameless and holy before Him in love. God set us apart, like Paul was set apart, to be set apart from the world.

C. SHARE YOUR TESTIMONY!

Through this last portion of chapter 1 we have basically heard Paul's testimony of God's grace at work in his life and it should make us consider our own testimonies. Have you ever thought about your testimony? Have you written it out and got to know it so that you can share it with other people? Have you shared it recently? I love testimonies. Testimonies are important to the child of God. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. If you haven't thought about what your testimony is, a good place to start is by writing it out or typing it out, keeping in mind the basic question of "How did I come to Christ? What has God done in my life?" And a basic outline would be, "who I was before Christ, how God worked in my life to save me by His grace, and now who I am today." Pre-conversion, conversion by God's grace, and who God's grace has made me to be today.