

Galatians 1

A Translation with Interpretation by James Garriss

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Introduction

Galatians 1:1-10

Limits of the Text

This is Paul's introduction to his letter; the first paragraph specifies the author, recipients, and greeting, and the second paragraph gives his purpose for writing.

Translation

1 *From Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through a man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him up from the dead ones,* 2 *and all the brothers together with me to the churches of Galatia:* 3 *grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,* 4 *the one who gave himself for the sake of our sins, so that he himself might set us free from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father,* 5 *to whom is glory forever. Amen.*

6 *I am astonished that you are so quickly abandoning your loyalty to the one who called you by the grace of Christ for another gospel,* 7 *which is not another gospel, except that some exist who are throwing you into confusion and desiring to pervert the gospel of Christ.* 8 **But** *even if we ourselves or an angel from heaven preach a gospel to you contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be cursed.* 9 *As we have said before even now I am saying again, if anyone is preaching a gospel to you contrary to that which you received, let him be cursed.*

10 *For am I now persuading men or God? Or am I seeking to please men? If I were still pleasing men, then I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*

Interpretation

The first five verses are a single sentence in Greek.

1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν,¹ 2 καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοὶ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας,

1 *From Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through a man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him up from the dead ones,* 2 *and all the brothers together with me to the churches of Galatia:*

An apostle (ἀπόστολος) was one who was sent; this word might have been used of an envoy or an ambassador. In the New Testament the word apostle took on new

¹ The Greek text is the NA27.

meaning, referring to one who had a “special commission from Christ.”² Paul immediately emphasized that he was such an apostle, one with the authority of a Christ-given commission to preach the gospel where it had not been heard (Ro 15:20).

Paul's introductions often gave a preview of what he would be discussing in his letter, and this is true of Galatians. Apparently some of Paul's opponents were questioning the source of his authority, so he used his introduction to warn his readers that he would be clearing up this matter in the body of the letter. Paul asserted that the source of his apostleship was not a human organization (ἀνθρώπων),³ such as the church at Jerusalem, nor was it conferred by a person (ἀνθρώπου),⁴ such as Peter or James. In strong contrast (ἀλλὰ) to these possibilities, Paul asserted his apostleship came directly from Jesus and God (διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ), which probably referred back to his Damascus road experience (Ac 9:1-19; 1 Co 15:8,9). Although Paul stated that he was an apostle by the will of God in other books (e.g., Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 & 2 Timothy), this is the strongest statement he made about his apostleship in any of his introductions; he placed his apostolic authority at the same level as that of the Twelve Apostles.

Paul described God as the one who raised up (ἐγείραντος) Jesus from the dead. To raise someone up in this context means “to cause someone to live again after having once died,”⁵ and refers to the resurrection. Why did Paul describe God in this fashion? He did it because if Paul received his apostleship from Jesus, then it was necessary for Jesus to be alive! God raised him from the dead ones (νεκρῶν); that is, Jesus was dead and thus among the dead ones, but God raised him, which separated him from them. After his resurrection Jesus appeared to Paul and gave him his apostolic commission.

When Paul wrote this letter, he was with a group of brothers, fellow believers. If the date proposed in the introduction (approximately A.D. 48) is correct, then Paul probably wrote Galatians from Syrian Antioch (Ac 14:26-28) before heading south for the Jerusalem council (Ac 15:1-29). Even if this reasonable guess about his location is correct, no details are known for certain about these brothers who were together with him. Then again, it was not really important in Paul's mind to specify who they were. His point here was unity; he emphatically noted that he was not a “lone-ranger Christian”⁶ making up his own view of the gospel. He was working with other believers who shared a common faith and endorsed what Paul was saying.

Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia. Churches (ἐκκλησίαις) referred to specific groups of local congregations, but their details are also unknown. They were probably

² Bruce, 72.

³ Genitive of source.

⁴ Genitive of agency.

⁵ Louw, 1:262.

⁶ George, 42.

ethnic Galatians living in the major cities in the southern portion of the Roman province of Galatia.⁷

3 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

3 grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

Paul began his salutation with his typical greeting of grace and peace. Letters in the Hellenistic culture included a traditional greeting, the word *chairein*, which simply meant “greetings;” using a play on words, Paul changed this greeting by substituting the similar-sounding word *charis* (χάρις), which is grace, and added to it the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, which has the idea of peace (εἰρήνη), tranquility, satisfaction, and contentment.⁸ “Grace is God’s unconditioned good will towards mankind which is decisively expressed in the saving work of Christ...peace is the state of life...enjoyed by those who have effectively experienced the divine grace.”⁹ “‘Grace’ and ‘peace’ seem to be Paul’s...shorthand way of epitomizing the essence of the gospel, with particular reference to its cause and its effect.”¹⁰ Although the idea of God’s grace and peace is rooted in the Old Testament (Nu 6:24-26), Paul affirmed that both come from God and Jesus equally.

4 τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέλῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,

4 the one who gave himself for the sake of our sins, so that he himself might set us free from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father,

In 1:1 Paul gave a preview of his defense of his apostleship, and in 1:4 he similarly gave a preview of what he would argue after his apostleship was defended, the nature of salvation.

The one who gave himself (τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν) is a participle modifying Jesus (in 1:3); it's appositional, meaning Jesus is the one who gave himself for the sake of our sins. This agrees with what Jesus said about himself in Mk 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NET). In this verse (1:4) Paul gave an indication of the seriousness of sin and the magnitude of mankind's separation from a holy God; only the sacrifice of Jesus allows sin to be forgiven and man to be rightly related to God. “The death of Jesus Christ was primarily neither a display of love, nor an example of heroism, but a sacrifice for sin.”¹¹ Paul would later write that Jesus “gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do

⁷ See the introduction to Galatians for a fuller discussion of the recipients.

⁸ Swanson, DBLG 1645.

⁹ Bruce, 74.

¹⁰ Longenecker, 7.

¹¹ Stott, 17.

good” (Ti 2:14; NET).

“So that” (ὅπως) begins a purpose clause that specifies the reason why Jesus gave himself; he gave himself so that he might set us free (ἐξέληται). To set free means to rescue or set someone free from danger.¹² Paul emphasized Jesus' personal participation in this rescue;¹³ he himself set us free. The danger from which Jesus set us free is the present evil age. The noun age (αἰῶνος) has a wide semantic range; it may refer to a world system, thus semantically overlapping the word *kosmos* (κόσμος),¹⁴ but it more likely refers to a unit of time. Which age is it? It is the present (ἐνεστώτος) age. Present is a participle acting as an adjective; its lexical form (ἐνίστημι) is translated “I am present.” Thus the present age is the age that Paul and his readers were present in (or perhaps the age they were presently living in), an age that will continue until the return of Jesus. Jesus died to set mankind free from the present evil age; the preposition “from” (ἐκ) denotes a separation from the evil age that Paul and the Galatians were living in. Salvation did not remove them from the world but rather from the power of sin, which dominates this age, this period of time. It delivers every believer “from the realm in which sin is irresistible.”¹⁵

Paul’s statement about Christ giving himself to set us free places the emphasis of salvation right where it belongs: On God. Salvation is not something a man can earn or accomplish (Ro 3:20); it is something that God initiates and to which man can only respond. God’s plan for redemption has always been for Jesus to give himself; thus Jesus acted in accordance with God’s will (κατὰ τὸ θέλημα). “Will” can refer to a desire or a wish, but here it refers to God's purpose or decision.¹⁶ Jesus gave himself for the purpose of setting free, and this was done in accordance with a standard, the standard of God's will. God did not force Jesus to do this; they have always been in complete harmony. “He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!” (Php 2:8, NET).

MacArthur has chronologically summarized the events of the introduction. First, God willed to save man. Second, Jesus died for sins. Third, the apostles testified of his death and resurrection. And fourth, God gives grace and peace to those who believe.¹⁷

5 ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.

[5 to whom is glory forever. Amen.](#)

In response to this quick summary of the gospel, Paul gave a doxology of praise: God alone possesses glory, beauty, and splendor! There is no verb in this clause, so one

¹² Louw, 1:240.

¹³ Intensive middle.

¹⁴ This is the position that MacArthur (6) and Bruce (77) take in their commentaries. See John’s use of the word *kosmos* in 1 Jn 2:15-17.

¹⁵ Bruce, 75.

¹⁶ Swanson, DBLG 2525.

¹⁷ MacArthur, 7.

must be supplied. Most translations add “be,” making it a prayer: We pray that God will get more glory forever. Although this would be a theologically correct prayer, I think the proper verb form is “is” (or perhaps “belongs”), making this a statement of fact: God has glory forever.

Glory (δόξα) has a wide semantic range, including praise, honor, and greatness, but according to Kittel, when this word is associated with God in the New Testament, it tends to refer to who God is, not to what he deserves.¹⁸ God *is* glory; he is beautiful and resplendent. He possesses glory into the ages of the ages (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων), which is an idiomatic use of the word age to mean eternally or forever.

6 Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, 7 ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, εἰ μὴ τινές εἰσιν οἱ ταρασσόντες ὑμᾶς καὶ θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly abandoning your loyalty to the one who called you by the grace of Christ for another gospel, 7 which is not another *gospel*, except that some exist who are throwing you into confusion and desiring to pervert the gospel of Christ.

At this point in the letter Paul's readers would have expected to find a prayer of thanksgiving for them,¹⁹ but Paul gave no thanks; this is his only letter that does not have such a section. It appears that Paul was frustrated and mad. The situation in Galatia was dire, and there was nothing to be thankful for. So instead he jumped right in by stating the purpose of his letter—he wanted to correct their belief about the gospel. The typical “I am thankful” section of the letter was replaced by the “I am astonished” section of 1:6-10.

Paul began this section with “I am astonished” (Θαυμάζω). This verb means to be amazed, in wonder, and surprised.²⁰ “Whether the reaction is favorable or unfavorable depends on the context,”²¹ and it was clearly an unfavorable reaction in this verse. Idiomatically one might say, “I’m shocked!” or “I can’t believe it!” Longenecker asserts that the use of this verb to open a section of an ancient letter was a common literary device that signaled a wide range of semantic meanings all at once—astonishment, rebuke, disapproval, and disappointment.²² It’s not hard to imagine all of these emotions jumbled together in Paul as he responded to the news he had heard about his spiritual children. Notice that Paul was not astonished that there were false teachers, only that the church believed their teachings.

¹⁸ Kittel, 2:248.

¹⁹ Such as the one in Php 1:3-11 or Ep 1:15-16.

²⁰ Swanson, DBLG 2513.

²¹ Louw, 1:311.

²² Longenecker, 11.

Paul was astonished because the Galatians were so quickly abandoning their loyalty (μετατίθεσθε). This verb can mean to change or depart, but Paul used it here to mean to abandon an association, to abandon one's loyalty to someone,²³ or to become apostate.²⁴ This word was used to describe a national traitor or a military deserter; in a sense, the Galatians were spiritual turncoats.²⁵ The verb is in the middle voice, which might have been used in a permissive sense (i.e., you are allowing yourselves to be turned away), thus placing the responsibility primarily on the Judaizers (although they haven't really been mentioned yet in the letter). It might have been used in a reflexive sense (i.e., you are turning yourselves away), which would have emphasized the turning itself, not who was doing the turning. But most likely the middle voice was used in an intensive sense (i.e., you yourself are turning away), which would have placed the responsibility for turning away completely on the churches. False teachers might have led them, but they had chosen to follow. The present tense of "are abandoning" would imply that the Galatians had started the act of desertion, but had not completed it yet. They were in the process of apostatizing; as there was still hope, Paul wrote.

Paul noted that this abandoning of loyalty had taken place "so quickly" (ταχέως). The exact length of time that it took the Galatian churches to abandon their loyalties to Jesus is not known, but the shorter the time the more poignant this sentence would be. On the other hand a similar phrase was used of the Israelites when they worshipped the golden calf at Sinai (Ex 32:8) and during the time of the judges (Ju 2:17), so it may have been a rhetorical device instead of a chronological device.²⁶

The Galatians were abandoning their loyalty to God, the God who had called them by the grace of Christ. Grace (χάριτι) is the means by which God calls people,²⁷ and this grace is the grace of Christ²⁸ (Χριστοῦ),²⁹ his saving work on the cross. God calls people into salvation, or more succinctly, God saves. By what means does God save? He saves by the grace of Jesus (Ep 2:7-8). This is in contrast to works of law, which Paul discussed in later chapters.

The Galatians had not only abandoned their loyalty to God, they had exchanged it for loyalty to something else, another gospel. Paul used gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) in the generic sense of good news; the Galatians had abandoned their relationship with God for another good news. The pronoun "another" (ἕτερον) refers to another of a different kind or class, so this "other gospel" was a different kind of gospel.

²³ Louw, 1:448.

²⁴ Kittel, 8:161.

²⁵ George, 91.

²⁶ Longenecker, 14.

²⁷ See 1:3 for an explanation of what grace is.

²⁸ This could have been translated as Christ's grace, emphasizing that this is the grace belonging to Christ (possessive genitive).

²⁹ There are textual variants that do not include "of Christ" (hence the brackets around Χριστοῦ in the Greek text), but either way grace refers to salvation.

As the gospel of Christ is the only means for salvation, Paul said in reality there is no other gospel. When this Greek word for “another” (ἄλλο) is in close association with the other Greek word for “another” (ἕτερον), it means another of the same kind or class. The gospel of the different kind (ἕτερον, 1:6) was not a gospel of the same kind (ἄλλο, 1:7); in other words, the Galatians had been led to believe that Paul's gospel and this new gospel were very similar, but in fact they were totally different. Paul would develop this difference later in the letter.

When it came to the nature of this other gospel, the Galatians were confused. Why were they confused? Paul knew exactly why, so he began his explanation with “except” (εἰ μὴ), a marker of contrast designating an exception.³⁰ The contrast is between what he was astonished about (i.e., they were quickly abandoning) and what he was not astonished about (i.e., some were throwing and desiring). “The idiomatic use of εἰ μὴ...suggests that no one would ever think of calling the Judaizers’ message a ‘gospel’ *except* with the intention of confusing the Christians of Galatia.”³¹

In no uncertain terms Paul characterized the motives of this group of Judaizers³² in two ways by using a pair of adjectival participles. Their first characteristic is that they were throwing the Galatians into confusion (ταράσσοντες). The root meaning of confusion is to stir up, but it has many nuances such as to disturb or trouble.³³ Given that the Galatians were abandoning their loyalty, “throwing into confusion” perhaps best describes what the Judaizers were doing. Their arguments were persuasive, and the Galatians were unable to perceive the falsehoods in them. They were waffling back and forth between two positions, uncertain exactly what was right and what was wrong; they were confused.

Their second characteristic is that they were desiring to pervert (θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι) the gospel. They had a will to accomplish something, and the purpose of their desiring was to pervert. This verb means to cause a change of state with emphasis upon the difference in the resulting state and could be translated as “to change to,” “to turn into,” or “to transform;”³⁴ since the object of the change is the gospel, the best translation is “to pervert.”³⁵ The worst kinds of heresies are not those that are blatantly against the Biblical view of salvation, but those that take large quantities of truth and mix in a few lies; this is the kind of perversion the Judaizers taught.

ὁ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐὰν ἡμεῖς ἢ ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται [ὑμῖν] παρ’ ὃ εὐηγγελισάμεθα ὑμῖν, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.

³⁰ Louw, 1:794.

³¹ Longenecker, 16.

³² And apparently there were a group of them, since the indefinite pronoun “some” (τινές) is plural.

³³ Strong, 5015.

³⁴ Louw, 1:155.

³⁵ Swanson, DBLG 3570.

8 **But** even if we ourselves or an angel from heaven preach a gospel to you contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be **cursed**.

Having described the Judaizers' gospel as a perversion, Paul then answered the question, "What if the preachers have great credentials? Can they preach another gospel then?" Apparently the Judaizers presented themselves as having great authority, being in the line of Old Testament giants like Abraham, Moses, David, and Isaiah. But Paul offered a strong contrast (ἀλλὰ) to what the Judaizers said: It is not acceptable for anyone to preach an "improved" gospel. "Preach a gospel" (εὐαγγελίζηται) is in the subjunctive mood, meaning that it is possible, however unlikely, that Paul himself (ἡμεῖς) or angel coming from heaven (ἐξ οὐρανοῦ)³⁶ might preach a gospel that is contrary to the one he has already preached. "Contrary to" (παρ') is a preposition with a wide semantic range; a good translation here is one that emphasizes the contrast Paul is making, such as "in opposition to" or "not in accordance with."

Why did Paul use himself and an angel as his examples here? MacArthur believes Paul "was reaching for the most fanciful possibilities imaginable to make his point that absolutely no messenger...should be believed or followed if his teaching does not square with God-revealed apostolic doctrine."³⁷ The accuracy with which the message of the gospel is taught is tantamount, even more important than the messenger.³⁸ It's not that character doesn't matter, it just that the message matters most. No one is allowed to alter the message, not for any reason. Luther said, "That which does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if Peter and Paul be the teachers. On the other hand, that which does teach Christ is apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate or Herod should propound it."³⁹

So what should happen if a preacher preaches a contrary gospel? The first imperative (ἔστω) of the book commands him to be cursed (ἀνάθεμα),⁴⁰ which refers to someone delivered up to the judicial wrath of God because of his sin.⁴¹ The result is eternal separation from God.⁴² Paul said anyone who preaches a gospel other than salvation by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus will be judged and condemned to hell by God, and the church has the authority and responsibility to recognize and judge such false teaching. The Cotton Patch Bible's paraphrase is crude but accurate: "To hell with him!" These are strong words from Paul, among the strongest in the New Testament, affirming the exclusivity of the gospel. Anyone who preaches any other way of salvation is going straight to hell, no exceptions. There is a sense in which Christianity

³⁶ It might be a heavenly angel (attributive genitive); it doesn't make much difference exegetically.

³⁷ MacArthur, 16.

³⁸ Longenecker, 16-17.

³⁹ Quoted in Bruce, 83.

⁴⁰ The English word anathema comes from this word cursed.

⁴¹ Read the story of Horemah in Num 21:3, where the LXX uses this word.

⁴² Kittel, 1:355.

is a narrow-minded religion, perhaps the most narrow-minded.

9 ὡς προειρήκαμεν καὶ ἄρτι πάλιν λέγω· εἴ τις ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελίζεται παρ' ὃ παρελάβετε, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.

9 As we have said before even now I am saying again, if anyone is preaching a gospel to you contrary to that which you received, let him be **cursed**.

The verb “we have said before” (προειρήκαμεν) means to speak in advance; Paul used it in the perfect tense, so what he said previously was still in effect, but he repeated his imperative anyway for emphasis.⁴³ One minor difference between the two verses is the mood of the verb preach. In 1:8, it is subjunctive, because Paul thought it was unlikely that he or an angel would do this; in 1:9, it is indicative, because Paul knew that’s exactly what was happening as he wrote this letter; that is, he knew the Judaizers were preaching a contrary gospel.

10 Ἄρτι γὰρ ἀνθρώπους πείθω ἢ τὸν θεόν; ἢ ζητῶ ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκειν; εἰ ἔτι ἀνθρώποις ἤρεσκον, Χριστοῦ δοῦλος οὐκ ἂν ἦμην.

10 For am I now persuading **men** or God? Or am I seeking to please **men**? If I were still pleasing **men**, then I would not be a **bondservant of Christ**.

The relationship of 1:10 to the previous and following verses is not entirely clear. It seems to be somewhat related to the previous curse,⁴⁴ but it effectively functions as its own paragraph, a response to the accusations of the Judaizers and a summary of Paul's position. The Judaizers had claimed that Paul had not consistently taught the gospel, and that he had done this for the wrong reasons. They argued that Paul had presented them with a partial gospel to please the Galatians and to win their favor;⁴⁵ now they were going to teach the Galatians the rest of the gospel. While it may have been true that Paul presented the gospel in a different manner to Gentiles than he did to Jews, it must be understood that the gospel itself remained unchanged wherever Paul preached it, thus the obvious answer to Paul's rhetorical question is “no!” He was not looking to please men. He had just consigned the lot of them, the Judaizers, to hell; that doesn't sound like a people-pleaser.⁴⁶

Paul summarized his position with a conditional sentence. The “if” clause (the protasis) expressed a possibility; it is possible that Paul was pleasing men. It is true that Paul at one time was trying to please men; this was the Saul who was fast climbing the Jewish rabbinic ladder, willing even to persecute The Way⁴⁷ (1:14). But that was not Paul now;

⁴³ Longenecker asserts that this is a typical literary device that serves to remind the readers that the author is going over previously covered ground (Longenecker, 17).

⁴⁴ Note the “now” in 1:9 and 1:10 and the connective “for” at the start of 1:10.

⁴⁵ Longenecker, 18.

⁴⁶ MacArthur, 22.

⁴⁷ George, 100.

he was now a bondservant. Since the “if” was not true, the “then” clause (the apodosis) was absolutely true. The particle ἄν combined with an imperfect tense verb (ἤρθεσκον) indicates certainty.⁴⁸ It would be incongruous for Paul to set out to please men and be the bondservant of Jesus at the same time; it just can’t be done. Why not? It cannot be done because a bondservant has only one goal: To please his master.⁴⁹ Pleasing men is an unworthy motivation for ministry.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Louw, 1:669.

⁴⁹ Bruce, 86.

⁵⁰ George, 101.

Structural Diagram

I am astonished
| that
| you are...abandoning your loyalty to the one who called you
|
except that
some exist
who are throwing you into confusion
| and
| desiring to pervert the gospel
|
But
|
| even if we
| | or
| | an angel preach a gospel contrary to that which we preached
let him be **cursed**.
|
| if anyone is preaching a gospel contrary to that which you received
let him be **cursed**.
|
For
am I now persuading **men** or God?
Or
am I seeking to please **men**?

If I were still pleasing **men**,
then I would not be **a bondservant of Christ**.

Tracing the Argument

Internal—Paul was astonished that the Galatians would abandon the gospel, though he was not astonished that the Judaizers were perverting it. To respond to the Judaizers claims, Paul asserted that the message was primary and the messenger was secondary. To summarize the entire introduction, Paul asserted he was bondservant of Christ, trying to please him alone.

Textual Outline

1. Paul greeted the Galatians (1:1-5).
2. Paul was amazed that the Galatians had so quickly abandoned their loyalty to the gospel (1:6-7).
3. Paul cursed anyone who preached a contrary gospel (1:8-9).
4. Paul asserted that he only lived to please Christ (1:10).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Galatians 1:1-10 in order to express his astonishment that the Galatians had accepted a contrary gospel.

Teaching Outline

God's people should never follow anyone who preaches a contrary gospel, and I want to help ensure that you never follow anyone like this. From our text today in Galatians

we are going to find 3 reasons why God's people should never follow anyone who preaches a contrary gospel:

1. Reject those who preach a contrary gospel, because they add to grace (1:1-5).
2. Reject those who preach a contrary gospel, because they do not have another gospel (1:6-7).
3. Reject those who preach a contrary gospel, because they are going to hell (1:8-9).
4. Reject those who preach a contrary gospel, because they are man-pleasers (1:10).

Paul Defended his Apostleship

Galatians 1:11-24

Limits of the Text

In 1:11 Paul began a long autobiographical section of the book, one that lasts through chapter 2. He presented it as a defense of the assertion he made in 1:1, that he preached with the authority of Jesus. Once he established his authority, he could expound upon the message of faith in Jesus. In 1:11-24 Paul described the origin of his apostleship.

Translation

11 For I am telling you, brothers, that the gospel which was preached by me is not of man's origin; 12 for I myself neither received it from man nor was taught it, **but I received it** through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 For you heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I was excessively persecuting the church of God and attempting to destroy it, 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many *of my* contemporaries in my nation, being exceedingly zealous of my ancestral traditions. 15 But when God, who set me aside from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me, so that I might preach him to the nations, I did not then submit *it* to other people for judgment 17 and did not go to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles, but I went into Arabia and then returned again to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas, and I stayed with him fifteen days, 19 but I did not see the other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord. (20 And the *words* I am writing to you: I swear before God that I am not lying.) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, 22 and I remained unknown by sight to the churches of Judea who are in Christ. 23 And they kept hearing only *one thing*, "The one formerly persecuting us now preaches the gospel of faith which he was formerly attempting to destroy." 24 And they kept glorifying God because of me.

Interpretation

11 Γνωρίζω γὰρ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον·

11 For I am telling you, brothers, that the gospel which was preached by me is not of man's origin;

Paul began this autobiographical section with "I am telling you" (Γνωρίζω...ὑμῖν). This verb can mean to know something, but here Paul wants to make something known; he

wanted to share some information with the Galatians. George identifies this opening statement as a literary device known as a disclosure formula, which was used to signify the solemnity of the statements that followed.⁵¹

In 1:1 he had referred to those who were with him as brothers, and here he referred to his recipients as brothers. Paul knew they were genuine in their faith and reminded them of their common relationship with Jesus. To be fair, at other points in his letter he did not sound so sure of their salvation (3:4; 4:11, 19-20).

So what were these solemn statements that Paul had for his brothers in Christ? They were the origins of the gospel he preached (1 Co 1:23). Paul gave a one-sentence summary in 1:11-12, stating the origins negatively (i.e., not from man) and positively (i.e., from Jesus).

Paul wanted the Galatians to understand that the good news he preached was not a message of man's origin (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον). Literally it was not "according to man;" that is, man was not the source of his gospel. Why was this important? It was a matter of authority. If his message came from man, then it was simply his opinion, and as such the opinion of the Judaizers was at least as good and probably better, since the Law of Moses came directly from God at Sinai.

12 οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐγὼ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου παρέλαβον αὐτὸ οὔτε ἐδιδάχθην, ἀλλὰ δι' ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

12 for I myself neither received it from man nor was taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The "for" (γὰρ) lets his readers know that he will explain how it is that the gospel he preached was not of man's origin. Paul was emphatic that he personally (ἐγὼ) did not receive it from any man nor did any man teach it to him. Having been trained in the traditions of rabbinical schools, Paul knew that no one was expounding this kind of gospel.

The conjunction "but" (ἀλλὰ) is a strong contrast. In total opposition to what the Judaizers claimed, Paul received a revelation of Jesus Christ (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).⁵² "Of Jesus Christ" can be understood a number of different ways. First, it might mean that Paul learned about Jesus by means of a revelation. Second, it might mean that the content of his revelation was Jesus. Third, it might mean that Jesus gave him a revelation. Considering 1:15-16, which says that God revealed Jesus, I think that choices two and three are both true; God gave Paul a revelation about Jesus (Ac 9:17).

Did Paul not know about the Christian faith before his Damascus road experience?

⁵¹ George, 105-106.

⁵² The clause after the conjunction does not contain a subject or a verb. It is implied that they are repeated from the previous clause. Thus I have supplied "I received it" to clarify the meaning of the clause in English.

Surely he did! He could not have worked so hard at stamping out the Way without knowing anything about it. So what changed his mind about the truth of the message? It was a revelation of Jesus Christ. Concerning Peter's confession of the Christ, Jesus said that a similar thing had happened to Peter, "You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven!" (Mt 16:17). Peter knew Jesus, but it was God who changed his mind about the truth of Jesus' claim.

The basis for Paul's defense of his apostleship is one of authority. What gave Paul his authority? Paul preached his gospel message because God revealed it to him. He had Jesus' authority, not man's authority. This was probably a direct contradiction to what the Judaizers were teaching the Galatian churches.

Having made this bold claim of a personal revelation, Paul set out to prove it.

13 Ἡκούσατε γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ, ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐπόρθουν αὐτήν,

13 For you heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I was excessively persecuting the church of God and attempting to destroy it,

In this verse Paul began to defend his apostolic claim. The first defense of Paul's claim to apostleship was that only a "supernatural intervention"⁵³ could account for his radical change from Judaism to Christianity.

"For you heard" is another disclosure formula, reminding the recipients about something they already knew; it covers the facts of verses 13 and 14.⁵⁴ What was that his readers already knew? They knew about his former way of life (ἀναστροφὴν), which refers not to a specific action but to his former lifestyle. Paul's way of life was in Judaism, or to say it another way: Judaism determined his lifestyle and dominated everything he did. Paul described two aspects of his way of life in Judaism.

The first aspect of his way of life in Judaism was that he had killed people. Paul said he was persecuting (ἐδίωκον) the church. The tense of this verb⁵⁵ indicates that this was an ongoing action in the past; Paul's persecution of the early church was something he had done again and again. The word for persecuting has several meanings, but given Paul's intentions in Ac 9:1 — Saul was breathing threats and murder — the applicable meaning is "to systematically organize a program to oppress and harass people."⁵⁶ And this was no ordinary persecution; Paul was excessively (καθ' ὑπερβολὴν) persecuting the church.⁵⁷ This is a prepositional phrase acting like an adverb. The idea is that Paul's persecution was beyond a normal standard of measurement or comparison; it was

⁵³ George, 117.

⁵⁴ Longenecker, 26.

⁵⁵ Imperfect tense.

⁵⁶ Louw, 1:498.

⁵⁷ Accusative of standard.

excessive, immeasurable, and surpassing.⁵⁸ Excessive persecution was the means by which Paul planned to accomplish his goal. Paul was also attempting to destroy (ἐπόρθουν) the church. This verb means “to attack with the intent or result of destroying,”⁵⁹ and it reveals Paul’s goal, the complete destruction and annihilation of the early church, which is why it is translated “was attempting to destroy”⁶⁰ rather than “was destroying.” So to summarize, Paul’s goal had been to wipe out the early church, and his means of doing so was systematic, continuous oppression and harassment, even to death (Ac 8:1-3; 9:1-2; Php 3:6).

It is interesting to note (although perhaps not exegetically significant) that Paul had already developed an understanding of the universal church at this time. In this context church (ἐκκλησία) does not mean a particular local church (as it typically does in the New Testament), but the sum total of all churches in all times in all places.

14 καὶ προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου, περισσοτέρως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων.

14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my nation, being exceedingly zealous of my ancestral traditions.

The second aspect of his way of life in Judaism was that he had been rapidly advancing in the Pharisaical religious system. Paul was progressing (προέκοπτον) in Judaism. One might say idiomatically, “he was climbing the corporate ladder.” The tense is still the imperfect, meaning this was an ongoing action sometime in Paul’s past.

But Paul wasn’t just advancing, he was advancing rapidly beyond his contemporaries. Beyond (ὑπὲρ)⁶¹ means he was advancing to positions above and beyond those that his contemporaries (συνηλικιώτας), people of the same age, were advancing to. The particular contemporaries in question are those in his nation (γένει). This word has a broad semantic range; it could mean family, nation, race, or even type, kind, or class. The meaning here is probably nation; Paul advanced beyond the other Jews his age. It’s possible that it refers to class; that is, however the Pharisees measured rank and status (think sergeant or captain in the military), he was ahead of nearly everyone in his rank. In either case, the idea is that Paul was being promoted rapidly, far beyond what was normal for someone of his age.

Why was Paul advancing so rapidly? He was advancing because he was exceedingly zealous of his ancestral traditions. This phrase begins with “being” (ὑπάρχων); this participle modifies “advancing” and gives the reason⁶² Paul was advancing so fast in

⁵⁸ Kittel, 8:522.

⁵⁹ Louw, 1:232.

⁶⁰ Conative imperfect, meaning it was in progress but not complete.

⁶¹ Accusative of comparison.

⁶² Adverbial participle of cause.

Judaism. He was zealous (ζηλωτής⁶³) of his ancestral traditions (παραδόσεων); he was earnestly committed,⁶⁴ and his commitment was with respect to the Pharisaical traditions and teachings.⁶⁵

Paul piled on the adverbs in these two verses to show he had been whole-hearted in his pursuit of the Pharisaical teachings. Or as George says, “This entire passage is replete with superlative words that speak of compulsive obsession and ambition.”⁶⁶ His zealousness for his ancestral traditions was probably what did not allow him to tolerate Christianity, which was originally perceived as a sect of Judaism that worshipped a man, Jesus, on the same level as God.

In summary, Paul was a radical Pharisee that persecuted deviant religions and was, figuratively speaking, at the head of his class. Paul was not disgruntled with Judaism; in fact, he had everything his religion had to offer. “As a Jew he had no reason to leave Judaism.”⁶⁷ Humanly speaking, he should not have responded positively to the gospel.⁶⁸

15 Ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν [ὁ θεὸς] ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ 16 ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι

15 But when God, who set me aside from my mother’s womb and called me through his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me, so that I might preach him to the nations, I did not then submit *it* to other people for judgment

The main thought of this clause is “God was pleased to reveal his Son,” but the subject is separated from the verb by a pair of attributive participles functioning as adjectives; in other words, Paul described the type of God who was pleased to reveal his Son, and he did so by mentioning two of God’s actions.

The first action of God is that he set Paul aside from his mother’s womb. The participle “who set aside” (ἀφορίσας) comes from a verb (ἀφορίζω) that means “to set aside a person for a particular task or function.”⁶⁹ This same verb is used in Ac 13:2 when the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” God is one who sets aside people do his work, sometimes even from the womb. From the womb (ἐκ κοιλίας) is a prepositional phrase that has the idea of “from this time on.” God set aside Paul before he was born and while he was still in his mother’s womb. Bruce suggests that there is a play on words here: The word for

⁶³ The word translated here as zealous is actually a noun acting as a predicate adjective, so this could have been translated as “being a zealot.”

⁶⁴ Arndt, 427.

⁶⁵ Swanson, DBLG 4142.

⁶⁶ George, 114.

⁶⁷ Betz quoted in Longenecker, 30.

⁶⁸ George, 113.

⁶⁹ Louw, 1:482.

Pharisee has the idea of being a separated one, but Paul said he was separated (set aside) for a different reason.⁷⁰

The second action of God is that he called Paul through his grace. The participle “who called” (καλέσας) comes from a verb (καλέω) which generally means to literally call someone. In the New Testament it can refer to God’s calling a person into a relationship with him, and thus is a reference to salvation. This is the same verb Paul used in Ga 1:6 where he referred to God as “the one who called you by the grace of Christ.” Through grace (διὰ χάριτος) describes how God called Paul.⁷¹ Paul’s calling was similar to some Old Testament callings; see Jeremiah (Je 1:5) and Isaiah (Is 49:1-6) for examples. In ascribing these two actions to God—setting aside for a task before he could make any choices and calling into a salvation relationship—Paul emphasized God’s role in salvation, highlighting his initiative, and gave him the preeminence.

God not only set aside and called, he was pleased (εὐδόκησεν) to reveal his Son, which means he took pleasure in⁷² this activity. In this verse God’s volition and God’s emotions come together; he carried out his will, doing what he chose to do, yet at the same time he enjoyed what he did. God took pleasure in selecting Paul for his ministry. What else pleases God? He was pleased with his Son (at his baptism and transfiguration), and he is pleased at the saving of those who believe through foolishness of preaching (1 Co 1:21).

Paul tied his separation and his calling closely to the revelation of Jesus he received. God was pleased to reveal (ἀποκαλύψαι) his Son in Paul; God’s revelation resulted from his pleasure. To reveal is the verb form of the same word he used in verse 12, where he said “*I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

God was pleased to reveal his Son so that Paul might preach. This is a purpose clause; the reason God revealed Jesus to Paul was so that he would preach Jesus. “God does not call any person to salvation whom He does not also call to service.”⁷³ Paul would discuss this in more detail in 2:1-10. Paul was to preach Jesus to the nations (ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν), the Gentiles, which was something new. “Knowledge of the law was the prerogative of Jews, but if salvation was bestowed by grace (as it was now bestowed on Paul) and not on the grounds of law-keeping, then it was accessible to Gentiles equally with Jews.”⁷⁴

Paul finally gets to the main clause of this sentence: He did not submit his revelation for judgment and did not go to the apostles. Paul continued the thought he began in 1:13; the second defense of Paul’s claim to apostleship was that he did not study under

⁷⁰ Bruce, 92.

⁷¹ Genitive of means.

⁷² Swanson, DBLG 2305.

⁷³ MacArthur, 29.

⁷⁴ Bruce, 94.

the other apostles. This defense comes in two parts; one, Paul went to Arabia and Damascus first (1:17), and two, Paul took a quick trip to Jerusalem to hang out with Peter (1:18-20). The timing of these trips is such that neither gave him time to study under the other apostles.

After receiving the revelation, Paul did not submit it for judgment (*προσανεθέμην*). This verb appears in the New Testament only here and in 2:6, and it means to submit for judgment, consideration, or approval.⁷⁵ Many translations translate the verb completely differently in these verses (“ask advice” vs. “add”), but this is not necessary. Paul did not take the gospel he received by revelation and submit it to any people for judgment, to have them evaluate it or approve it. And in 2:16, the leaders did not submit anything for Paul’s judgment, meaning they had no improvements or additions to make to his gospel. So it is reasonable to translate this verb consistently. Regardless of how it’s translated, the point of the verb is pretty clear: Since Paul had received his revelation directly from God, he did not take it to anyone, particularly the Twelve (1:17), and submit it for their approval, clarification, or further instruction. The voice of the verb⁷⁶ emphasizes that Paul personally did not submit anything. Paul did not submit his revelation to other people (*σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι*); a literal translation would be “from flesh and blood,” but this is a metaphor for people.

17 οὐδὲ ἀνηλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους, ἀλλὰ ἀπηλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.

17 and did not go to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles, but I went into Arabia and then returned again to Damascus.

Paul did not submit his revelation for judgment, nor did he take it to those who were already apostles (*πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους*). Literally translated, he did not go “to the before-me apostles.” There’s no English equivalent to “before-me,” an adjective that means “had previously attained this status,” so to keep the meaning clear⁷⁷ the prepositional phrase is changed into a clause. Paul did not attend Jerusalem Baptist Seminary nor sign up for a class in Apostolic Mentored Internship. Paul was not attempting to deny the apostleship of the Twelve; he affirmed that. He just was maintaining his own apostleship as equal but unique.

The text is not clear exactly where in Arabia Paul went—it was a big place—nor for what reason. But it’s reasonable to assume that Paul was re-evaluating his extensive understanding of the Old Testament in light of the revelation of Jesus. After meeting God face-to-face, he would have needed to harmonize in his own mind what he had previously considered to be disjointed realities. Since Jesus was the Messiah, the Old

⁷⁵ Kittel, 1:353.

⁷⁶ Intensive middle.

⁷⁷ Other words like current, pre-existing, and prior don’t accurately translate the idea.

Testament had to have spoken about him in particular. Others conjecture he went there preaching, reasoning that if he began preaching in Damascus as soon as he was saved (Ac 9:20), then surely he was preaching in Arabia, too. The main point is that during this time, Paul did not interact with the apostles nor learn from them.

18 Ἐπειτα μετὰ ἔτη τρία ἀνήλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ἱστορῆσαι Κηφᾶν καὶ ἐπέμεινα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡμέρας δεκαπέντε,

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas, and I stayed with him fifteen days,

Paul continued his defense with a “tightly woven alibi,”⁷⁸ which showed that he never had time to study under the other apostles. The alibi is based upon the three “then’s” (Ἐπειτα) in a row (1:18, 1:21, 2:1), which are used as a literary device to relate these sections serially without interruption; that is, there are no holes or gaps left in the narrative.⁷⁹ Paul reconstructed all of his time; if he had left any holes, the Judaizers could have filled them with a connection to the church at Jerusalem.

It seems that Paul began his ministry right away without any apostolic approval; in fact, he did not even meet any of the apostles until after three years (μετὰ ἔτη τρία). This prepositional phrase answers the question, “When did Paul go to Jerusalem?” There is a comparison of time here; Paul spent three years in Damascus and then spent only fifteen days in Jerusalem. He emphasized the comparative shortness of time.⁸⁰

Paul went to Jerusalem in order to get acquainted with (ἱστορῆσαι) Cephas, the Aramaic name for Peter. This is the only place in the Bible this verb is used; it means “to visit in order to get to know.”⁸¹ Paul was careful to say that he went to get to know Peter, not to have Peter advise or instruct him (1:16). Longenecker suggests that a large part of this visit was spent discussing Jesus.⁸² This visit probably correlates to Ac 9:26-30. If so, Paul had other activities than just talking with Peter, and he probably had intended to remain longer than fifteen days. Luke records that Paul was preaching in Jerusalem (Ac 9:28), so it seems that Paul was already preaching the gospel every chance he got.

19 ἕτερον δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων οὐκ εἶδον εἰ μὴ Ἰάκωβον τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ κυρίου.

19 but I did not see the other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord.

The point of this verse in the narrative is simple: Paul didn’t really hang out with anyone but Peter. He apparently stayed with Peter and didn’t even see the other apostles (ἕτερον τῶν ἀποστόλων), except James, the brother (τὸν ἀδελφὸν) of the Lord

⁷⁸ George, 126.

⁷⁹ Longenecker, 36-37.

⁸⁰ Longenecker, 37.

⁸¹ Kittel, 3:396.

⁸² Longenecker, 38.

(see Mk 6:3).⁸³ If this passage correlates with Ac 9:26-30, then the apostles mentioned in Ac 9:27 must be Peter and James.

This statement—other apostles except James—has led to a debate among scholars, a debate that is tangential to the point of the verse: Was Paul implying that James was an apostle? On the one hand James the brother of Jesus is not on any of the lists of the Twelve (see Mt 10:2-4 for an example), and no other text clearly identifies him as an apostle. On the other hand the natural way to read the Greek in 1:19 suggests that James was an apostle, and 1 Co 15:7 might imply that he was an apostle. He is later identified as a pillar of the church (2:9), and he identifies himself as a bondservant of Jesus (Jm 1:1). So what did Paul mean when he called James an apostle? The word apostle means sent one or messenger. Although it does refer to the special Twelve Apostles of Jesus, it is also used more generically of other men (see Titus in 2 Co 8:23 and Epaphroditus in Php 2:25). It would seem that James was an apostle in this more generic sense. MacArthur distinguishes between apostles of Jesus and the apostles of the church, a helpful distinction.⁸⁴

20 ἃ δὲ γράφω, ἰδοὺ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ὅτι οὐ ψεύδομαι.

(20 And the *words* I am writing to you: I swear before God that I am not lying.)

At this point Paul stopped in the middle of his sentence and asserted his truthfulness by interjecting an oath. He used similar oaths in 2 Co 1:23, 2 Co 11:31, and 1 Th 2:5, though with different words. This verse is in parenthesis because it is an interruption to the narrative.

The text begins literally with “these I am writing to you” (ἃ...γράφω ὑμῖν). The pronoun “these” is what Paul is writing. It could be any number of things: words, sentences, thoughts, assertions, or historical references. My translation supplies “words” for smoothness.

Paul said, “I swear” (ἰδοὺ). This particle typically has one of two meanings: It either calls attention to a detail (i.e., look at this!) or emphasizes the truth of something (i.e., indeed, certainly). The later is in use here, but the usual translations are awkward. The NASB translates it “I assure” and the ISV “I declare,” but neither seems strong enough to capture Paul’s intention as well as “I swear.” Longenecker says that when Paul uses the words “before God,” he is taking an oath, so it seems that “I swear” is appropriate.⁸⁵

Why did Paul use the oath here? It was probably to counter the claims of the Judaizers, particularly that he derived his gospel from the other apostles. The strength of Paul’s second defense is that he did not spend much time in Jerusalem, time that would have

⁸³ For an excellent summary of what the Bible says about James, see George, 128-129.

⁸⁴ MacArthur, 2.

⁸⁵ Longenecker, 20-21.

been necessary to learn the gospel.

21 Ἐπειτα ἦλθον εἰς τὰ κλίματα τῆς Συρίας καὶ τῆς Κιλικίας· 22 ἤμην δὲ ἀγνοούμενος τῷ προσώπῳ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Ἰουδαίας ταῖς ἐν Χριστῷ.

21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, 22 and I remained unknown by sight to the churches of Judea who are in Christ.

The third defense of Paul's claim to apostleship was that God was glorified because of his change, and the climax of this defense is in 1:24. Ac 9:29-30 says that when death threats forced Paul to leave Jerusalem, the brothers sent Paul to Tarsus. That correlates with 1:21, which says that Paul went into the regions (εἰς τὰ κλίματα) of Syria and Cilicia. Syria is the region north of Judea, around the city of Antioch. Cilicia is northwest from there along the coast of the Mediterranean, around the city of Tarsus. This also correlates to Ac 11:25-26, which says that Barnabas brought Paul from Tarsus to Antioch.

1:23 says that Paul preached as he went. The letter of the Jerusalem council was later written to the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (Ac 15:23), so it seems that Paul was planting churches among the Gentiles.

Far from the Judaizer's claim that Paul's gospel was derived from the apostles, the churches in the region wouldn't even recognize him, and they would not have recognized him because he had not been long in Jerusalem (1:19) and many of the disciples there at that time were still afraid of him (Ac 9:26).

Paul said, "I remained unknown" (ἤμην...ἀγνοούμενος),⁸⁶ using a participle that comes from a verb (ἀγνοέω) that has three different meanings: To not know, to ignore, or to fail to understand.⁸⁷ In this case, the churches did not ignore Paul or fail to understand him; they just didn't know him by sight. The text literally says they didn't know him by face (τῷ προσώπῳ), but by sight is the English equivalent. If a church member from Judea had seen Paul on the street, he would not have recognized him. Paul was unknown by sight to the churches who (ταῖς) were in Christ. "Who" is an article, so it might be translated as "the ones," but it is also a relative pronoun referring to people (the churches), so it is translated as "who."

23 μόνον δὲ ἀκούοντες ἦσαν ὅτι ὁ διώκων ἡμᾶς ποτε νῦν εὐαγγελίζεται τὴν πίστιν ἣν ποτε ἐπόρθει,

23 And they kept hearing only *one thing*, "The one formerly persecuting us now preaches the gospel of faith which he was formerly attempting to destroy."

⁸⁶ This is the periphrastic, iterative imperfect. When the participle is present tense and the verb of being is imperfect, the verb is translated as imperfect. Thus a literal translation is "I was being unknown." It is also the iterative imperfect, meaning the emphasis is not on the fact that the hearing was in past time, but that it happened repeatedly. So the literal translation should be "I kept being unknown," but this is a bit awkward, thus "I remained unknown."

⁸⁷ Swanson, DBLG 51.

Paul's radical change combined with his revelation of Jesus led to a new ministry: Preaching the gospel.

The churches in Judea kept hearing (ἀκούοντες ἦσαν).⁸⁸ Again and again the people in these churches were hearing about Paul, and the report they heard was only about one thing (μόνον). Only is an adjective modifying the entire clause to follow, and the "one thing" was added for smoothness.⁸⁹ The one thing they heard about Paul was the testimony given in the quotation.

This testimony is contained in a clause that begins with *hoti* (ὅτι). This conjunction can be translated as "that" or "because," but it can also mark a quote. Either would make sense for this clause, but perhaps the quote reads smoother; certainly it's easy to imagine many believers telling Paul's unbelievable story to each other.

The story was this: The one formerly persecuting us now preaches the gospel of faith, which he was formerly attempting to destroy. The same verbs used in 1:13—I was excessively persecuting the church of God and attempting to destroy it—are used here again to describe the change in Paul from persecutor to preacher. The content of Paul's preaching was the gospel of faith (πίστιν). Faith can mean trust (subjective), but it can also mean what is trusted (objective) when it refers to trust in the gospel of Jesus. This is the same way Jude used the word in Jude 3. The Judean churches equated the gospel Paul preached to the gospel they believed; this was no doubt a contradiction of the Judaizer's claims.

24 καὶ ἐδόξαζον ἐν ἐμοὶ τὸν θεόν.

24 And they kept glorifying God because of me.

This is the climax of this portion of the narrative. Because of his post-revelation preaching, the name of God was glorified. This must have been quite the contrast to what the Judaizers told the Galatians. The churches in Judea kept glorifying (ἐδόξαζον)⁹⁰ God. This verb is related to "hearing" in 1:23; that is, they kept hearing and kept glorifying. The focus of the verb is on the repetition of hearing and glorifying. They kept glorifying God because of (ἐν) Paul. This preposition has broad semantic range, as many Greek prepositions do, but here it is used here as a marker of reason;⁹¹ Paul was the reason they glorified God.

Although Paul's ministry was independent of the apostles and the Judean churches, they were united by one and same gospel and by a desire to bring glory to God's name.⁹²

⁸⁸ Also periphrastic, iterative imperfect.

⁸⁹ The ISV does something similar (but more complicated): "The only thing they kept hearing was this."

⁹⁰ Iterative imperfect.

⁹¹ Swanson, DBLG 1877.

⁹² George, 134.

Structural Diagram

(Paul is an apostle; 1:1)

For

I am telling you that
| the gospel is not of man's origin
| for
| I myself neither received it from man
| nor
| was taught *it*
| **but**
| *I received it* through a revelation

For

you heard of my former way of life in Judaism,
| how
| I was excessively persecuting the church
| and
| I was advancing in Judaism

But

| when God was pleased to reveal his Son in me
I did not then submit *it* to other people for judgment
| and
| did not go to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles
but
I went into Arabia

I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas
and
I stayed with him fifteen days
but
I did not see the other apostles

I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia
and
I remained unknown by sight to the churches of Judea
And
they kept hearing *only one thing*
| The one now preaches the gospel of faith
And
they kept glorifying God because of me.

Tracing the Argument

External – In his introduction, Paul asserted that he was an apostle. In this section, he began to defend his claim.

Internal – Paul asserted that he received a revelation from God, and then gave three proofs of his assertion. First, he radically changed from persecuting the church to preaching Jesus. Second, he never studied under the apostles. Third, his preaching caused the churches to glorify God.

Textual Outline

1. Paul claimed his gospel came through a revelation (1:11-12).
2. Paul defended his claim (1:13-24)
 - a. His conversion was radical (1:13-15).
 - b. He did not study under the other apostles (1:16-20).

c. His change glorified God (1:21-24).

Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Galatians 1:11-24 in order to assert that God alone called him to be an apostle.

Teaching Outline

God calls his people to serve him, and he still does this today. From our text in Galatians 2, I want you to see 3 reasons why God calls his people to serve him.

1. Accept God's call to serve him, because he knows the right person to accomplish his will (1:11-15).
2. Accept God's call to serve him, because he gives authority to accomplish his will (1:16-20).
3. Accept God's call to serve him, because it will bring glory to his name when you accomplish his will (1:21-24).

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