

## Paul Defends His Apostleship, Part 1

Scripture: Galatians 1:10–15

Code: 48-5

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For now, I do want you open you Bible to the first chapter of Galatians. We are working our way through Galatians. Now we live in a day when culture does not tolerate absolute truth. If that is escaping anyone, you're not watching very carefully. This society in which we live today denies the existence of absolute truth. They deny it at all levels, but they deny it even at the level that renders it insanity. They typical or identifiable evidence of the insanity of our culture is to say that gender is fluid from day to day. That is the definition of insanity. That is a rebellion against all absolute truth.

And not only does our culture despise absolute truth, but consequently they reject absolute authority. And so here we are as the church of Jesus Christ proclaiming absolute truth with absolute authority in the world around us. Never has the confrontation been more stark, never has the gospel been more readily rejected. The generation that's developing in our culture wants nothing to do with fixed, absolute reality, and certainly nothing to do with absolute, singular authority. And yet that is precisely what Christianity avers. That is exactly what we declare.

Let me give you a statement that is the most offensive claim that can be made in the realm of religion. This is the most offensive claim that can be made in the realm of religion. Here it is: There is only one God, one Savior, one true religion, one Holy Book, one gospel, on way of salvation. All other religious claims are lies, deceptions, doctrines of Satan and demons that lead people to eternal hell, along with all the immoral, irreligious, atheistic, hedonistic, naturalistic unbelievers. That is the most offensive statement that I could come up with; it just happens to be the truth.

It is the truth. That is the exclusive truth of Christianity. Even within the professing church, any deviation from the true gospel of grace is a damning lie to be cursed. We understand why the world rejects this. It is, however, a very sad day when people inside the church, even the evangelical church, begin to reject this.

Over the last couple of weeks you may have read a famous evangelical teacher and radio personality joined the Eastern Orthodox Church, went through a ceremony of ritual called Chrismation in which a rag supposedly infused with divine life was placed upon head and transferred to him. This is an Eastern Orthodox ritual.

What does the Eastern Orthodox Church believe about the gospel? Here is Decree 13 from their dogma: "We believe a man to be not justified through faith alone, but through faith which works through love, that is to say through faith and works." End quote. That's what Eastern Orthodoxy teaches: "We are not justified through faith alone, but by faith and works."

There are about 300 million people worldwide who are in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The sister

church in the West is the Roman Catholic Church that has the exact same doctrine, and there are 1.3 billion people in the Roman Catholic Church worldwide. So 1.6 billion people call themselves Christians and believe in a salvation that is a combination of grace and works. That is false Christianity within true Christianity. That is false Christianity teaching a false gospel. It is not to be joined, it is to be cursed. And as I have said, getting the gospel right is the most important reality in the world, because the true gospel is the only way of salvation.

We're not surprised that the true gospel is under assault. We're not even surprised that it's under assault inside the church. No sooner were the apostles preaching the true gospel than it was assaulted in their day from inside the church. It was under attack, it was altered, it was corrupted by people who believed Jesus was the Messiah, believed in His death and resurrection, called themselves Christians, but added works to salvation. They trail the apostle Paul and the other apostles through the New Testament coming into the churches that Paul planted and adding works to the gospel that he preached, which was the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. What they were adding was the works of Judaism. They were saying that a person could not be saved unless that person was circumcised and adhered to the Mosaic traditions. It came so fast on the heels of the apostles that Paul writes Galatians, the first of his thirteen letters chronologically, the first of his thirteen letters, and immediately in this, his first letter, attacks those who tamper with the gospel.

In chapter 1, you'll remember verses 8 and 9: "Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" That's the word *anathema*. It means devoted to divine destruction. Paul wrote his first epistle to establish the true gospel and to denounce any other gospel.

Again, this specific occasion that prompted the letter was the invasion of the Judaizers, the professing Christian Jews who actually had come from Jerusalem, but who believed that the law of Moses had to be adhered to in order for salvation to be received. They followed Paul into Galatia, and they began to Judaize the congregations that he established. Their whole purpose was to bring in a satanic, demonic, corrupt false gospel. They claimed to be true Christian believers who were the true teachers, and Paul was the false teacher.

Yes, they believed in Christ. Yes, they believed in His death and resurrection; they said they did. Yes, they even claimed there was grace in salvation, and faith played a role. But works must be added. In so doing, Paul says in Galatians 3, "They added a curse to people that would bring about the fury of God Himself who would curse that gospel and all its adherence."

Now they had not just attacked the gospel. In order to attack the gospel they had to undermine the one who was preaching it. The people in Galatia, as in the other places where Paul went on his three missionary journeys, believed him to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. They believed he was a true teacher, that God had called him, that God had given him the truth, and that he was speaking for God. The false teachers knew that if the people continued to believe that he was a true apostle, they would hold onto his message. So it was important to denounce not only the message he preached, but the authority that he claimed. And so there was this relentless attack dogging the whole history of Paul's missionary life: an attack on his authority.

And what they said was pretty basic. They said he came into the Gentile world and he wanted to

please men. He's a man-pleaser. He wants to be popular. He wants to be accepted. He wants to be liked. He wants to be winsome. He wants to be attractive. So he stripped the gospel of the works that are necessary so as not to make it difficult for the Gentiles. He should, if he was telling the truth, have demanded that the Gentiles be circumcised and adhere to the Mosaic traditions. But he stripped that out in order to make the gospel easy, and to please the Gentiles.

The truth is, they were the people-pleasers. The Judaizers were the people-pleasers. They had added circumcision and the Mosaic tradition into the gospel so as not to be persecuted by the Jews. That's what Paul says in chapter 6, verse 12. They were the men-pleasers, but they were accusing Paul of that. So in this epistle, in chapters 3 and 4, he defends his gospel; but in chapters 1 and 2, he defends his apostleship. This is a defense of his apostolic credentials which are essential to his authority. He speaks authoritatively, because God speaks authoritatively.

Now what argument would they use against the authority of Paul? How would they discredit him? The argument very likely would go like this: "We all know who the apostles were. We all know who the twelve apostles were, and we all know that the apostle Judas was a defector and a betrayer, and committed suicide and went to his own place. And we also know that in the first chapter of Acts it's recorded that Matthias was chosen by God to take his place. We know who the twelve are; they are the true apostles.

But this man, this Saul who's now called Paul, when the other apostles were clearly identified, and when they were proclaiming the wonderful works of God on the Day of Pentecost, and when the church was born and then they were preaching the gospel everywhere, this man Saul was a nonbeliever. He was a fanatical, zealous Pharisee; and he was a blasphemer of God; and he was a persecutor of Christ and Christians. How is it that he can possibly claim to be an apostle when he is anything but?" And so in chapter 1, starting in verse 10, and going all the way through chapter 2, he presents one of the most remarkable, powerful portions of New Testament Scripture in defense of his authority.

Now you say, "Well, how does that relate to us today?" Well, since he has written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit thirteen letters in the New Testament, it's critical for us to understand that he speaks and writes with authority from God.

Now let's read the testimony that he gives in chapter 1, starting in verse 10, where he begins by responding to the criticism that he was a man-pleaser. "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." – or a slave of Christ – "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me" – or to me – "so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

"Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas," – or Peter –

“stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying. Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but only, they kept hearing, ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.’ And they were glorifying God because of me.”

Fascinating autobiographical account. And it kind of flies by, and you may be missing exactly what he’s doing here, so I’m going to help you with that this week and next week. This is the defense of his apostolic authority so that his message is to be believed because he is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The question, of course, that the false teachers were trying to raise in the minds of the people in the churches of Galatia was, “Is Paul’s gospel the true gospel? Why would you believe him? He’s not one of the twelve; he was a persecutor of the church. Why would you believe him? Maybe he made this up. Maybe he got it secondhand. He’s devised this thing, because he doesn’t want to make it difficult for him to win over the Gentiles, so he takes out all the works, he takes out the restraints of the Mosaic traditions, and he takes out circumcision, and therefore strips the true gospel,” they say.

“And, by the way, where did he get this message? Maybe he got it from the apostles in Jerusalem, who by the way, according to the Judaizers, had also rejected ancestral Mosaic traditions. Does he really have an opportunity and a right to speak for God; or did he make it up, get it secondhand; or somehow did he get this from the apostles in Jerusalem who also have rejected circumcision and law?” He has to defend himself. It’s a critical, critical defense.

They were the chosen vehicles who received the truth of God, the apostles were. Now we have the apostles’ doctrine, which was then declared orally, verbally; now we have it written down. The Holy Spirit then inspired through that first century the apostles and their associates to write down the truth of God in the New Testament books. But on the Day of Pentecost and beyond there were no books, and they were studying the apostles’ doctrine. Is Paul’s doctrine the apostles’ doctrine, or is he inventing something as someone later claiming to be an apostle? He must defend his rights. The defense in my mind is just amazing. It’s absolutely amazing.

Now back to the accusation. He’s not a theologian, he’s not an apostle, he’s a politician. He’s a politician, he’s a compromiser, he’s trying to be popular, he’s on an ego trip, he’s on a popularity binge. He wants to strip the requirement of Judaism out so that he can be accepted easily by the Gentiles. That’s the accusation. So let’s pick it up in verse 10.

“For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men?” Now why does he ask those two questions? Because of what he has just said. He has just said, “If we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if anyone, any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!” He has just pronounced a double curse on anyone who alters the gospel.

Then in verse 10, the verse begins with the Greek word *gar*. It can mean “for,” it can mean “because,” or it can be a strong exclamation and literally be translated “there, there.” And that may be the best translation. Having just pronounced a double curse, he says, “There, am I now seeking

the favor of men? Does that sound like a man-pleaser? Do men-pleasers go around pronouncing damnation on people's heads? Is that what a man-pleaser does? Does that sound like a popularity seeker, hurling *anathemas* in every direction for every person that deviates from the gospel?"

He says, "If I didn't do that, if I were still trying to please men, I would not be a slave of Christ. To be a slave of Christ, you must pronounce curses on false gospels. To be a faithful slave of Christ requires that you pronounce curses on false gospels." I think we need a reminder of that today among preachers. He accepts his slavery, and with that slavery he accepts the responsibility to curse false gospels. He does not seek the honor of men, and he has the marks to prove it.

The end of chapter 6 and verse 17, the end of chapter 6, verse 17, he says, "From now on let no one cause trouble for me. Stop hassling me." He's back to the issue of his authority. "Stop hassling me, for I bear on my body the scars of Jesus. Stop denouncing my apostolic authority. Stop calling me a man-pleaser."

Back in verse 12 of chapter 6, he said, "You Judaizers are the real man-pleasers. Stop, because I bear the scars of my slavery to Christ. And some of those scars I received, many of those scars I received when I was in Galatia in the city of Lystra where I was stoned and left for dead. I see scars in my body every day that remind me that I am not a man-pleaser. I am a slave of Jesus Christ, and I have the scars to prove it. I've been beaten with whips. I've been beaten with rods. All those scars are not the scars of a man-pleaser. I've taken everything they've thrown at me, the Jews and the Gentiles. If all I wanted to do was to be admired by men and to be popular with men, would I have this many scars?" So Paul answers his slanderers. "I don't act like a people-pleaser, I am Christ's slave."

And what he said in 2 Corinthians 5:9 is what's behind this. "My ambition" – he says – "is to be pleasing to Christ, not to men, to Christ; and I have the scars for that. I'm not a man-pleaser." And that deals with that issue.

And then immediately on the heels of that he addresses the matter of "Where did he get his message?" Look at verses 11 and 12: "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." Okay, he's no man-pleaser. That answers that; he's got scars to prove it. And he just pronounced damnation on anybody who alters the gospel. That's not what man-pleasers do.

And now he says, "I am a true apostle." "Based on what?" "On the fact that I received, I received the truth of the gospel from a revelation that came to me through Jesus Christ."

How did the twelve apostles receive the gospel? From the lips of whom? Not from rabbis. No. They received everything over a period of three years from the lips of Jesus, everything. That was unique to the apostles. They had direct revelation of the gospel. In fact, Jesus even said when they affirmed His messiahship, "Flesh and blood didn't reveal that to you, but My Father who's in heaven. You didn't learn this from the people around you. You didn't learn this even from those who believe the truth about the Old Testament. This came directly from the Father through Me to you." That is the unique revelation that comes to an apostle.

But Paul, he comes way after that. “Why should we believe he’s an apostle?” And his answer is, “Because I received the gospel the exact same way that the twelve received it from the mouth of Jesus Himself. I didn’t get it in Jerusalem. I didn’t get it secondhand. It didn’t come from believers wandering around or living in Damascus. This came to me from Jesus Christ Himself. I would have you know, *gnórizó*, I am now disclosing to you. I am now revealing to you.” He’s saying it. It’s a solemn, strong term, like, “Let me make this absolutely clear, brethren.” A little tenderness moderates his fury here.

“The gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. It doesn’t come from men. It’s not a human development. It’s not devised by men. It’s not authored by men. It’s not from men as to its invention.”

Then in verse 12: “Neither did I receive it from men. It is not a doctrine developed by men, and it isn’t even a doctrine handed to me by men. I received it as a revelation of Jesus Christ.” Wow, what a statement. What a claim: a supernatural revelation exactly as the other apostles had received the gospel.

Sure, he knew the facts of Jesus’ life. He knew the claims of Jesus. That was the basis of his persecution. But that was a bare knowledge in the midst of his ignorance and darkness. He had no supernatural understanding of the gospel. But on the Damascus Road, when a light from heaven suddenly descended, engulfed him, slammed him to the ground, and blinded him, he heard, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,” everything changed. He saw Christ, the risen Christ.

And he saw Him five more times in his life. He saw the risen Christ, he saw the victor, and he knew that he was full of mercy, and full of grace. And the light broke on his darkness, and the veil over his eyes was gone, and he discarded all of his traditional religion, and he says to the Philippians, “It is excrement.” He received the gospel by direct revelation from Jesus Himself. Three days of blindness and Jesus is tutoring him by the Holy Spirit: no human source.

Now this is an open rebuke of the Judaizers, because all their message came from men. You must understand that; it is such an important point. Judaism, at the time of Paul, at the time of the New Testament, as today, gave very little attention to the Scripture. The Scripture is a relic like it is in Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. The Scripture is a relic. To Judaism, the Old Testament was a relic that the rabbis had twisted, and perverted, and overruled with massive, massive piles of tradition. Some of you remember *Fiddler on the Roof*— tradition, tradition, tradition.

They learned it all from men. It was all developed by men. As in the Catholic Church and in the Eastern Orthodox Church, men in religious garb sit in judgment on the Scripture. And so it was in Judaism. Paul says, “I did not get my gospel like you have taken in your traditional Judaism.” Matthew 15:6 he says, “You’ve exchanged, you’ve exchanged your traditions for the truth of God. I received my gospel exactly the way the other apostles received it, from the very mouth of Jesus.”

Now he’s going to support that. Starting in verse 13, he’s going to support that, and he’s going to support it three ways: pre-conversion, conversion, post-conversion. He’s going to show us that he did receive his gospel from Jesus directly. It’s evident in his pre-conversion, it’s evident from his conversion, and what happened after his conversion; and we’ll maybe look at the first two, or partway through the second, leave the third for next time. This is autobiographical. This is really important.

First, Paul turns to his pre-conversion. Notice what he says, verse 13: “You have heard of my former manner of life.” So he goes back. “My former manner of life, you’ve heard of it in Judaism.”

“Two things marked my former manner of life. One, I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it. Two, I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.”

Now a simple way to understand this is, “I was going full blast in the opposite direction from the gospel. I saw it as blasphemy, and I believed it was my responsibility to God to imprison and kill Christians. At the same time that I was denouncing and fighting against Christianity, I was advancing in Judaism.” He is going full-bore into his Judaism.

Paul describes his state in Judaism. He’s a fanatic. He’s a zealot. He’s passionate. He’s over-the-top. He’s a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He’s a legalist at every single level. He says, “Doesn’t that tell you that I did not receive my gospel from men? My early education is proof I never had the gospel handed down to me by men. I was brought up in the rigid school of ritualism, legalism, Phariseism, in direct opposition to the liberty of gospel grace. You have heard this. You know this to be true of my former life, that as far as Judaism is concerned I was steeped in it. I persecuted the church. I tried to destroy it. I literally tried to waste it. Men, women, I bound in chains, put them in prison.” And then what he actually did – very amazing – he urged them to blaspheme so that he would have reason to punish them. And when they would blaspheme, they would recite the gospel. It was for that blasphemy that they were imprisoned and killed.

Yes, he heard the gospel. He heard it from the lips of those he imprisoned. He heard it from the lips of those he led to death. The reason he was a persecutor was because he heard the gospel, but heard it as blasphemy.

“I persecuted the church,” – continuous-form verb. “Secondly, I was advancing in Judaism.” He was so extreme into traditional Judaism that he went beyond his contemporaries. In Acts 22:4, as he gives his testimony, he said, “I persecuted this Way,” – Christ being the Way, the Truth, and the Life; Christianity became known as the Way – “I was persecuted this Way to the death, binding, putting both men and women into prison.”

In the twenty-sixth chapter of the book of Acts, interesting verse, verse 11 – I committed on it a moment ago: “And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme, force them to confess Christ; and when they did,” – he says – “I was furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. That’s what got me to Damascus.”

Notice in verse 14: “I was advancing,” – literally in the Greek that’s “chopping,” that’s “chopping.” That’s a verb that describes somebody with a machete in his hand going through the jungle – “hacking my way through the jungle, chopping ahead, beating out a path, hacking down every obstacle in the way of the advance of Judaism. And I was hacking down the Christians that I saw standing in the way of the advance of Judaism. I was way beyond the other countrymen of mine. Now tell me: if I was more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions than anyone else, how, how in a moment of time did I stop and become a preacher of Jesus Christ and the gospel? That can’t come from men. I was hellbent, headlong in one direction at full speed. And such progress in a

young rabbi was aided and abetted by the best of teachers available: Gamaliel, outstripping Jewish contemporaries in his devotion to tradition.”

Mosaic law is not in view, but tradition, *halacha*: a body of Jewish oral law that surrounded the Torah and pretty much obscured it. “I was a fanatic. I was a legalist, bigot, ritualist, persecutor, hater of Jesus, hater of the gospel. How could I ever have changed so fast, so that in hours, three days, I’m preaching ‘Jesus is the Son of God’ and proving it?” What would he use to prove it? The Old Testament; and the life of Jesus, His works and words.

The gospel had no attraction to him. He wasn’t seeking it. A man in that mental and emotional state is in no mood to change his mind or be changed by men. He’d heard all that the Christians had to say. They had worked on him, I’m sure. But only God could change his heart. It had to be a revelation from God. That’s pre-conversion, evidence that he didn’t get his gospel from men.

Secondly, he speaks of his conversion. What happened at his conversion? Look at verse 15: “But when God,” – that’s the initiation, right? This is sovereign: sovereign grace, sovereign power. “But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb,” – whoa. God had predetermined the salvation of this man? Yes, God predetermines the salvation of every person.

When a man is going headlong in one direction and suddenly reverses, and stops, and goes the absolute opposite direction, there has to be a divine explanation. God saved him. God broke into his darkness, transformed his life. This is the miracle of his conversion, initiated by God because he was chosen by God. He was set apart even from his mother’s womb; and what that means is at the very moment of his conception in the womb of his mother, God’s purposes for him began.

“And God call me” – that’s an effectual call to salvation on the Damascus Road – “through His grace.” And it didn’t stop there. “The God who set me apart in my mother’s womb, the God who called me through His grace on the Damascus Road, was pleased to reveal His Son to me,” – why? – “so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.” This is the work of God. God chooses, God regenerates through the effectual call by grace, God reveals His Son so that faith is born and attached to the Son of God. And then he becomes a preacher of the one he persecuted.

“Look at my conversion. This wasn’t a work of men. This wasn’t a work of men. My pre-conversion state proves that I didn’t receive this from men. My conversion is all about God. What am I doing on the Damascus Road? I’ve got papers from the high priest. I’m headed to Damascus for the purpose of imprisoning believers in Jesus. I’m not some secondhand apostle. Nobody gave me the message; Jesus showed up on the Damascus Road.”

You say, “Well, He doesn’t do that for us.” No, because we’re not apostles. He does do that internally, right; it’s the same miracle. He stops us dead in our sinful tracks and reverses us, doesn’t He. That’s what salvation is.

“Saul, Saul. Saul, Saul.” “Who are You, Lord?” “I’m Jesus whom you persecuted, and I’m now calling you to preach My name to the Gentiles.” So he says in 1 Corinthians 1:1, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”

I love that opening statement in verse 15: “But when God” – end of the verse – “was pleased. When



God was pleased, He called me.”

It is in the purpose of God that He will, at His own time when it pleases Him, call His elect to Himself with an effectual call that takes them out of the darkness into the light; and it's through grace. It's His pleasure to do that. Whatever pleases the Lord is what He does.

“When it pleased the Lord, the Lord who had set me apart from my mother's womb, chose me; began to work on me when I was conceived in my mother's womb.” Amazing.

Same is said of John the Baptist in Luke 1. Same is said Messiah in Isaiah 49. Same is said of Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapter 1. Chosen before they were ever born to be proclaimers of the true God.

Acts 9, Paul was chosen. Acts 13, he was set apart. He was marked off before he was born, he had nothing to do with it. And it wasn't brought about by men, it was done by God. God called him, God gave him life, and he responded. Acts 26:19, he says, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.”

The grace that called him revealed Christ to him. The grace that called him revealed Christ to him produced obedience in him, willing obedience. “He” – here's the key phrase – “revealed His Son to me. He revealed His Son to me.” Three days of blindness he was receiving revelation concerning Christ from Jesus Christ. For three days Jesus mentored him; and then he came out and preached that Jesus is the Son of God, and proved it. How could he have proved it so fast? Because he was a very knowledgeable person about the Old Testament, and all the proof was there. You can't describe Paul from any human perspective; it's impossible. His pre-conversion, his conversion had to be dramatic acts of God; and they were.

All salvation is like that. It's not all physically, outwardly, circumstantially so dramatic; but the internal miracle is this dramatic. You're rescued from the kingdom of darkness in a moment and placed into the kingdom of God's dear Son, given a new nature. There's only one thing that can do that, and that is the true gospel, the true gospel.

Now Paul received this on the Damascus Road, and there was no man, there was no preacher. But after that, after the final apostle, that's not the norm, that's not the norm. Romans, Paul writes this: “Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how will they call on one of whom they have not heard, and how will they hear without a preacher? How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.”

For the apostles it was direct revelation from the lips of Christ. For us, for the rest of history, it falls to the preacher. And we're all witnesses, and we're all proclaimers of the gospel. But it doesn't take a Damascus Road, because even through a humble preacher such as we are, a humble witness such as we are, God constantly does the exact same miracle of transformation. You're proof of it.

There's one other feature in his autobiography, and that's what happened after his conversion, and we'll look at that next time.

Father, we thank You for this testimony to the beloved Paul. He has been such a part of my life for so long. His story in the book of Acts, his autobiographical sections in his epistles, his theology, his

understanding of the church, all the incredible riches that come pouring through his ministry, both in his preaching and missionary effort in the book of Acts and in his powerful theological treatises, in his epistles, practical instruction – all of it has had massive influence on my own life, and the lives of all of us.

We thank You for what You did in that man, that man of whom false teachers said his presence was unimpressive and his speech was contemptible. But he said, “I am not, even though I am unworthy, I am not less than the other apostles, because I received the gospel right from the lips of Jesus.” We thank You that You, blessed Holy Spirit, inspired the apostles and those with them to write all of it down. Now we have the one Book, the single authority, and the one non-negotiable, unalterable gospel.

Lord, we are, we are a hostility, an irritation. We are an enemy to the culture that wants to silence us because we proclaim that there is one God, one Savior, one true religion, one Holy Book, one gospel, one way of salvation; and all other religious claim are lies. That is the truth. Thank You for bringing us to the truth and equipping us to proclaim it, in Your Son’s name we pray. Amen.

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