

Real or Fake?

Galatians 1:11-24 (ESV)

¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God because of me.

Background:

The Judaizers were leading many Galatians astray with their teaching that faith in Jesus must be accompanied by full adherence to the Jewish law, including circumcision for Gentiles.

They challenged Paul's gospel and apostleship by claiming his message was derived from the Jerusalem apostles and was a diluted, 'easy' version tailored for the Galatians. They also regarded Paul as a second-rate apostle because he supposedly received his gospel second-hand from others..

Upon hearing his, Paul responds sharply in this letter—not merely to defend his reputation, but because the Galatians' very salvation is at stake. If they embrace a false gospel, they risk placing their hope in vain.

DISCUSS

1. A Gospel not from men but God (1:11-12)

Paul asserts that his gospel is genuine because he did not receive it from any human source or teacher, but through a direct revelation of Jesus Christ.

This revelation affirms that his gospel was not handed down by the Jerusalem apostles, proving that Paul was not a second-hand or inferior apostle. He received it directly from Christ on the Damascus road (cf. Acts 9:1-18).

If the gospel you believe comes from God Himself, how does that give you confidence to live it out and share it boldly?

2. Proved by his radical conversion (13-16a)

Having established that his message is from God, Paul now goes on to prove it from history, from the facts of his own autobiography.

He urges the Galatians to remember his former life before and during his conversion

Before conversion (v13-14), he was a practicing Pharisee, marked by two key aspects: 1) His persecution of the church *beyond measure* and 2) His *zealous* enthusiasm for the traditions of his fathers. Paul emphasizes that nothing in his religious background and pre-conversion life could have prepared him for a positive response to the gospel.

Yet his conversion was entirely the work of God. We see God as the subject of each action: setting him apart, calling him, and revealing His Son to him. Only God could have transformed Paul and commissioned him preach this gospel to the Gentiles.

Such a drastic conversion story proves that Paul received his gospel from God.

How does recalling your own conversion story deepen your gratitude for God's grace in saving you? (Feel free to share your conversion story with one other – it's a helpful and encouraging practice!)

3. Proved by his independence from the Jerusalem Apostles (v16b-24)

Paul then goes on to share what happened after his conversion. He wanted to dispel any doubts that he received his gospel from the apostles afterwards.

He gives 3 'alibis':

- 1) In verses 16b-17, Paul did not immediately consult with any human being, nor did visit the apostles in Jerusalem. Instead, he went to Arabia and Damascus. [Note: We don't know exactly what he did there, but scholars suggest that he was either preaching there or reflecting further on the implications of the gospel he received]
- 2) In verses 18-20, Paul openly acknowledges his visit to Jerusalem, but he makes light of it. This is because it took place three years after his conversion, by then his gospel was fully formed; he only Cephas and James briefly, and he went for only 15 days. Far too short to be discipled by them.
- 3) In verses 21-24, Paul travels far north to Syria and Cilicia. This is evidenced by the churches in Judea not knowing him personally but only hearing of his great conversion.

All three alibis prove that Paul did not receive his gospel from men.

Is your understanding of the gospel confidently grounded in God's Word, or is it second-hand from others?

Pray For:

1. Assurance of the Gospel

Pray that God would help us stand firm in the confidence that the gospel we believe is His own revelation, not a human invention. May this assurance give us boldness to live faithfully and share it with others.

2. Gratitude for Grace

Thank God for His amazing grace that transformed our lives, just as He did with Paul's. Pray that remembering our own conversion stories would fill our hearts with deep gratitude and praise.

3. Unity in the Gospel

Pray that God would keep His church united around the true gospel, protecting us from divisions caused by legalism or distorted teaching. May we glorify God by standing together on the foundation of grace through faith.