

Paul's Revelation of Jesus Christ

Galatians 1

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The following is an excerpt from
The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Galatians 1.

Paul's Message Was Not Received from Man

For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, (1:12a)

That statement was particularly directed against the Judaizers, who received their religious instruction primarily from rabbinic tradition by means of rote memorization. Rather than studying the Scriptures directly, most Jews—religious leaders and laymen alike—looked to human interpretations of Scripture as their religious authority and guide. Their theology, moral standards, and ceremonies had roots in God's revealed Word of the Old Testament, but the biblical truths and standards had been so diluted and distorted by human interpretations that the Judaism of New Testament times was largely **received ... from man** and **taught** according to man's interpretation. Although the Scriptures, especially the Torah, or law, were ritually given the highest honor, they were not honored by the people through direct study and sincere obedience. In the eyes of many Jews of that day—just as in the eyes of many professing Christians today—Scripture was a religious relic that deserved superficial reverence but not serious study or obedience. The religious ideas they took seriously and attempted to live by were the man-made traditions related to their unique community culture that had accumulated over the previous several hundred years. Many of the traditions not only were not taught in Scripture but contradicted Scripture. With few exceptions, Jews “invalidated the word of God for the sake of [their] tradition” (Matt. 15:6).

But Paul's teaching and preaching had no such human basis. **Neither** translates *oude*, which is here used emphatically, meaning “not even.” The idea is, “Not even I who might so readily have been taught by men was so taught.” Although he had been highly trained in rabbinic schools and was “a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of [Jewish] religion” (Acts 26:5; cf. 23:6), he had discarded every unscriptural notion he had learned in that man-made religious system. No Jew had more reason than Paul to boast in his accomplishments in Judaism; but everything he had accomplished in the flesh before receiving Christ he counted “as rubbish” (Phil. 3:4–8), and even the elements of the story of Christ that he knew prior to his conversion were shallow and empty because of his unbelief. What he now believed and preached he **neither received ... from man, nor was ... taught** by man. There was no human source for Paul's message. The gospel was not invented by men nor transmitted to him by any human being. This response no doubt reflects another of the Judaizers' accusations against Paul, namely, that he had been taught his doctrine by the apostles in Jerusalem, who had also abandoned Judaism.

Paul's Message Was Directly from Christ

but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (1:12b)

The gospel Paul preached and taught was neither a human invention nor a human tradition, but was given to him directly by God **through a revelation of Jesus Christ**. **Revelation** is from *apokalupsis* and means an unveiling of something previously secret. **Jesus Christ** is best understood as the object of that very **revelation**. It was not that he had no previous knowledge of Jesus. It was for the very reason that he *did* know something of Him and His work that he had fiercely persecuted those who believed in Him. He obviously had known that Christians believed Jesus was the Son of God and the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, because it was for those claims that Jesus was most criticized and eventually crucified (Luke 23:2, 35; John 5:18; 10:30). Paul had known that Christians believed Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. He also knew that Jesus not only dispensed with the rabbinic traditions but even with the ceremonial laws of Moses. Before his conversion Paul could have accurately stated many of the central teachings of the gospel. But he did not believe those teachings were true and thus had no grasp of their spiritual meaning and significance.

It was only after he himself at Damascus (Acts 9:1–16) came personally to encounter and to know **Jesus Christ** as Lord and Savior that he **received** the supernatural truth of the gospel **through** divine **revelation**. As he explained to the Corinthian church, it is only when a person turns to the Lord that the veil of spiritual ignorance and separation from God is removed (1 Cor. 3:14–16), so that the truth received can be understood. And for Paul the details and distinctions of that gospel truth came by special revelation directly from God (cf. v. 16).

It is one thing to claim direct revelation from God but another to prove it. Throughout the history of the church many people have falsely claimed such revelation, as many do today. But Paul was not content merely to make the claim. Nor did he expect his readers to believe him simply on the basis of personal assertions. In the next 12 verses, therefore, the apostle proceeds to substantiate his claim by presenting irrefutable evidence of that divine revelation and of his apostolic credentials.

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