Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Apostolic Credentials, Part 1
Scripture: Galatians 1:10-15
Code: 1652

Tonight we come in our study, continuing in the book of Galatians, to chapter 1 and verse 10; Galatians, chapter 1, verse 10. And it deals with apostolic credentials, apostolic credentials. Now, you'll recall, and in case you don't, I'll remind you, that Galatia was an area, not a city, and that when Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians, he was not writing to one church, but he was writing to several. He had founded several churches in Galatia, traveling throughout that area on his first missionary journey, also on his second missionary journey, and visiting there on his third missionary journey.

He had there come into acquaintance with Timothy, who became a very close friend. It was there that he was stoned and left for dead. He had ministered in the towns of Derbe, Iconium, Lystra and Antioch, all in the area of Galatia, and in all of those places he had established churches. He had poured out his heart to those churches. And in his absence, since he has been gone, false teachers have invaded the area of Galatia, and they have propagated one particular message, and that is the message that we call Judaizing.

These were Jewish people from the Jerusalem church, actually calling themselves Christians, who went to Galatia and told all of the Galatian Christians that they needed to be circumcised and to obey all of the Mosaic ceremonial law in order to really be saved. And so they were laying a whole legalistic thing on top of these Christians. Well, Paul heard about this, found out about this, and he wrote the letter to the Galatians to straighten out the heresies that had been delivered by these false teachers.

Now, in the opening five verses of the book, he gives his salutation. And, as we noted when we studied it, it is the only time that Paul ever writes a salutation and says absolutely nothing commendable about the people. He says nothing. He is far too upset for any little nice amenities. He fires right into his message.

And in verses 6 through 9 he wales away on the false teachers. He just says, "Hello, how are you, here's what I'm going to say," and he says it in verses 6 through 9. He can't believe that these teachers have done this. That's part of his problem. Two, he can't believe that these people have bought what the teachers have been selling, after the good beginning that they had. And later on in his particular letter, he makes the statement that "you began so well. Who messed you up? How did

this ever happen?" And so he's writing this letter as a direct attack against false teachers.

Now, as we said in our last study, two weeks ago, the attack came on three fronts. First of all, the false teachers attacked Paul's authority. They, in fact, stated that Paul was a subordinate to them, and that whatever Paul taught was now superseded by what they taught. And they went so far, probably, as to claim their heritage from the Jerusalem church, sort of giving them authority. They...they really denied Paul's right to speak for God.

The second attack was, they denied the gospel of grace. Paul had come preaching salvation by grace plus nothing. They denied that. That you had to be circumcised, that was added to grace. Law added to grace.

The third attack was, they demanded that Christians live by law works; that the Christian life was not just free to live in the Spirit. It was a matter of obeying all the ceremonial things to maintain your relationship. So three attacks: They denied his authority; they denied his gospel; they denied his pattern for the Christian life. And that was everything.

So Paul writes the book of Galatians to answer these attacks. In chapters 1 and 2, he defends his authority. In chapters 3 and 4, he establishes grace salvation. In chapters 5 and 6, he shows that Christians are free from the law. So it's divided into those three sections, generally, where Paul answers each of these criticisms.

Now, the first criticism, then, was the fact that Paul was not the authority and that he had no right to speak for God, and that these Galatians should never just believe what Paul said. They were actually questioning his right to speak. And, of course, this is the heart of everything. This is absolutely the critical issue of this book and of the whole ministry of the apostle, because if he has no authority, then he has no voice. If they do not believe that he speaks for God, then he might as well shut up and forget it, because it doesn't matter.

And so he launches right off, in chapters 1 and 2, with a lengthy defense of his right to speak for God as an authority. And in fact he even gave that the first priority in chapter 1, verse 1, where he says, "Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead." In other words, he establishes the authority of his apostleship in the very first sentence.

Now, apparently, he was really challenged with some success. Apparently, the Judaizers had won a very serious hearing among these Galatian believers and those who were attached to the church, and he was really threatened in terms of his future ministry with them, as well as having his truth that he had imparted to them being threatened.

And so it's a question of apostolic credentials that we see in the first part of the book. It's a question of authority. It's a question of, is Paul's gospel the truth, or isn't it? And we read his words now as we read Galatians and Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus. We read all of this, the letter, even, to Philemon. And as we read these things, we can't help but be amazed at his depth and astounded at the majesty, the insight, the absolute consistency of Paul's message; never waivers, never varies.

We see him outlining God's plan from eternity to eternity, and it is amazing to us. Particularly the book of Romans is startling in its classic approach to the style of the legal mind. And we say, "Boy, that guy gave out a lot of information. Thirteen letters he wrote, at least. And where'd he get it all? I mean, can we believe it?"

I told you a few weeks ago about the fellow I met who said he didn't think we could believe everything Paul said. Is that true? There are all kinds of critics running around in the world today saying, "Well, Paul was sort of a nice guy, and he had a lot of very strong religious opinions, some of them good, some of them bad, no different than you. You can have your opinions, too." I mean, is Paul authoritative today, or isn't he? Was he authoritative then in Galatia, or wasn't he? Where did he get all this information?

You say, "Well, he studied the New Testament." No, he didn't study the New Testament. He wrote the New Testament. You say, "Well, he studied the Old Testament." Well, I'm not sure that... I know he studied the Old Testament, but I'm not sure he got this out of the Old Testament. In fact, I'm quite sure he didn't. Where did he get it all? Did he make it up? I mean, he just...it just came out of him. It just gushed out of him.

Peter had had an interesting experience in Matthew, chapter 16, where he...Christ says, "Who do men say that I am?" Peter says, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And Peter knew he didn't know that. And Jesus said to him, Peter, relax, “Flesh and blood didn't reveal that to you. My Father in heaven did."

Now, is there such a thing as apostolic authority? Did Paul make all of this up? I mean, did he just sit down, "I think I'll write a thing called Galatians and make it all up"? Or did he go to Galatia and just give his opinion like all the rest of the would-be teachers who traveled around? Or did he really get this thing from somebody else? Did he get it secondhand? Maybe some apostles told it to him, and he did the best with the information that he had? Or did he learn it in his trip to Jerusalem? Or did he really get it from God directly?

Now, that's a question that we have to answer, because we need to answer it for the sake of the book of Galatians. We need to answer it for the sake of the whole New Testament. We need to answer it for the sake of apostolic authority today, in 1974. It's a key issue. It's a key issue for all of our Bible study, because there's no sense in studying the book of Galatians if we're not sure what Paul said is true. Right? So it's important.

Now, Paul was super-conscious all his lifetime, his lifetime of ministry, about his credentials as an apostle. At the beginning of Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians and Galatians, at the beginning of all those books, Paul lays down his apostolic credentials, because he knows that this is basic, absolutely basic. For if he cannot be believed for sure then it is a pretty grab-bag situation as to what we do with what he said.

But he said in 2 Corinthians 12:11 this, and I think it's significant. "For in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles." That's quite a statement. He says, "In nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles." Now, that's just a little insight into the fact that he considered himself an absolute equal to every other apostle. He didn't see himself as a second-rate apostle. He didn't see himself as a Paul-come-lately. He didn't see himself as some kind of an addendum to the apostolate. He saw himself in no way less than the chiefest of them. He was an absolute equal. Now, whatever authority they had, he had.

Now, you say, "What authority did the apostles have?" Well, it's indicated to us, to begin with, in Acts 2:42, by this simple statement. "And when the church came together, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." The Spirit of God designed that the early church study the teaching of the apostles. So, at least in the mind of the early church, their doctrine was authoritative. Right?

Let me tell you something else about the early church. The early church was filled with the Holy Spirit, weren't they? The same chapter, chapter 2, says, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." Later on,

“They studied the apostles' doctrine." You know what that means? You put that together and you get this. The Holy Spirit commends to their study the doctrine taught by the apostles. Therefore, not only the church thought it was authoritative, but so did the Holy Spirit.

Now, keep in mind that the early church had no Bibles; that the only information they had was the information granted to them from God. And God had chosen to give it through His apostles, and also, from time to time, His prophets, who seemed, rather than speaking in doctrinal terms, to have spoken in more practical situations. But God directly communicated through them authoritatively. There were no Bibles. And studying the words of Paul, or the words of Peter, or the words of any other apostle, was tantamount to reading the Bible today. It was the same thing.

And God even confirmed them, you know, in, again, 2 Corinthians 12:12. Paul, having not come behind the very chiefest apostles, then says, "Truly, the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, signs, wonders and mighty deeds." In other words, God confirmed His apostles by miracles. Now, we've looked at that very same thought in time past, and we see that if God's going to send an apostle along, there's going to have to be something about this man that's going to make him believable. And God attended his ministry with miracles.

And people would say, "Well, here is a man who preaches a certain message, and his message is confirmed, because God is doing miracles through him." In Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" Well, the ones that heard the Lord were the apostles. "God also bearing them witness with signs, wonders and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit."

Paul, in writing to the Romans, basically says the same thing in Romans 15:17: "For I have, therefore, that of which I may glory in Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God." Listen: "For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me." In other words, "I'm not giving you human information. I wouldn't open my mouth on anything personal. I would not speak anything that Christ has not given me." And then he says, "Through mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God," the idea being that his speech and miracles were from God.

Paul, then, claims throughout his writings to be apostolic, and he claims to have this authority. And this is what he sets about to defend in Galatians 1:10 through, really, chapter 2, halfway through the chapter. He is concerned that they accept his authority.

Now, you say, "Well, what's he motivated by?" Well, he's not motivated by wounded pride. He's not saying, "Oh, this isn't fair to me. I'm an apostle." No, he's not doing that. And it's not selfish desire. "I'm going to be an apostle and I'm going to get my due." No, it's not that, either. It's a deep love for Jesus Christ and the truth, is what it is. They have to know that he speaks for God or they'll not listen to the truth. And that's his concern.

Now, let's follow his defense. Apparently the Judaizing Jews, false teachers, had gotten the message across that Paul was not a legitimate apostle, but that in fact Paul was less than they were. He was really subject to their authority. They, maybe, communicated that he was on a popularity binge; that this nice fellow, Paul, was on an ego trip. And he was going around pawning himself off as some apostle.

And that the reason he dropped all the requirements of Judaism when he got to the Gentiles was obvious. He just didn't want to hassle the Gentiles with Judaism, so he just dropped all of it so he'd be popular. And he went to the Gentiles and said, "Hey, all you have to do is believe in Jesus Christ by grace through faith." And they all believed, and that was it, and he did it just to be popular with the Gentiles. That's what they accused him of.

In chapter 5, verse 11, "I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offense of the cross ceased." He says, "You know, this thing of being popular is getting to me. If I'm on a popularity binge, how come I keep getting persecuted?" You know, if the apostle Paul was just trying to be popular, he did a lousy job of it. I mean the worst job in history. He was an absolute bust at being popular, if that's what he was after. "Why do I yet suffer persecution?" he says.

Now, maybe they brought up an interesting incident. Remember back in chapter 16, verse 3, when Paul met Timothy on the second tour? It says, "Him would Paul have to go forth with him and took and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those quarters, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." Now, Paul wanted to use Timothy, and he thought it would be wise to have Timothy circumcised, since he was already half-Jew. If he was circumcised, it would give him just that extra entrance among the Jews.

And so maybe the Judaizers even picked that up. And they might have used that to accuse him of...of just kind of being whatever he needed to be. And when he was with the Jews, he did the Jews' thing, and when he was with the Gentiles, he played it cool. I don't know. But they apparently got the message across that he was on an ego trip; that he was on a popularity drive. And the only reason he

didn't lay on them some law was because he was afraid he might offend them and lose his popularity.

And to them, you see, Paul was not a theologian. He was a politician. He was playing politics. Well, you know, personally, that must have hurt Paul. I mean, he was a sensitive guy, and that must have really hurt, when he found out that that's what they had told all of his beloved children in Galatia about him. It must have hurt.

But you know something? He's past the point of dealing with his feelings, and he's at the level of dealing with fact. You know, that's something about spiritual maturity, isn't it? Spiritual immaturity usually operates on the feeling level. Spiritual maturity usually operates on the fact level. And Paul wasn't going to write them and say, "Oh, you Galatians, I'm so sad. Look what you've done to me." No, he just wales away on the facts. That's a level of maturity.

Now, I want you to see how he does this. This is really beautiful. Look at verse 6, and let's pick it up right there. Now, watch. And we'll just come flying into verse 10, and you'll get the message. "I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." Now listen to this. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed," anathema, destroyed. "As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed."

Now, watch 10. "For do I now seek the favor of men?" I mean, do those two anathemas sound like I'm trying to please people? The word "for" at the beginning of verse 10 is the word in the Greek *gar*, and *gar* can be used in so many different ways. It can mean "for," it can mean "because," but it can be a strong exclamation. It could be used... It could be translated, "yes, indeed," "certainly," "what," "why," many things. Here, I'd like to translate it, "there." And what he's saying is, "If anybody preaches another gospel, let him be accursed. If anybody preaches another gospel, let him be accursed. There. Does that sound like a people pleaser?"

That doesn't sound like a people pleaser to me, not hurling those anathemas around. That's what he's trying to say. And the beauty of the thing is, he didn't just say it this time. He said it before to them, in verse 9, and apparently he had even said this to them earlier. "Isn't it fairly clear that I'm not seeking men's approval, but God's?" And he goes on in verse 10: "Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Do you think I'd spend my life serving Jesus Christ at this level, suffering what I suffer, if all I want to do is please people?

At the end of the book of Galatians, he says, "I bear in my body" what? "the marks of Jesus Christ." Do you think I'm going through all of this and suffering all the pain and the anguish because I want to please people? Do you think that I would be a men pleaser and serve Christ at this level of commitment? Guess again. He accepted slavery, and that's the word there, servant, bond-servant. I accepted that. I accepted persecution for the cause of Christ. Does that sound like a people pleaser? And he had the marks to prove it. And he got some of them in Galatia, and they knew it, because they had stoned him there and left him for dead.

If all I wanted to do was be admired by men, do you think I'd be hurling anathemas at people? Do you think I'd be serving Jesus Christ at the level that I'm serving Him if all I wanted to do was please people? Guess again. Boy, I mean, that's a pretty... That's a pretty solid argument.

And, incidentally, later on, he accuses the false teachers of doing exactly what they were accusing him of doing; trying to please people, in chapter 6, verse 12. He says, "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh." They just want to show off their heritage as Jews. "They constrain you to be circumcised." Why? "Only lest they should suffer persecution for the cause of Christ." Oh, boy, is that ever a shot at those Judaizers.

Paul says, You know the truth of it is? Do you know why they want you to be circumcised? Because they know well that a Jew who departs from Jewish traditions and accepts Christ is going to get it. And so they're trying to compromise to avoid persecution, and they want to get circumcised so they can say to the Jew, "Well, yes, I know I believe that, but I have been circumcised and blah, blah," see. They're nothing but dirty compromisers. They're doing exactly what they say I'm doing.

They say I water down my message for whoever hears. The only reason they want you to be circumcised is to avoid the persecution that comes when you name the name of Christ. They're the ones, not me, that are hypocrites. Well, that's pretty strong. Paul says, Now, I don't talk like a people pleaser and I don't act like a people pleaser, do I? And we have to say, "No, I don't think you do, Paul. Not suffering like that and not throwing around those curses."

Now, still introducing his apostolic credentials, and this is just introduction, look what he says in verse 11. "But I make known to you, brethren." I love the use of the word "brethren." That's a little tenderness to moderate his fury. "I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught, but by the revelation of

Jesus Christ." Stop there.

Now Paul said, let me go a step further. Not only am I not a people pleaser, but I didn't make up my message, either. Notice verse 11. "But I make known to you." The Greek word, the word literally means, "I reveal." It's a very strong term. In the vernacular, it would be, "Let me make this perfectly clear." Some of you can relate to that, if you watch your television. That's exactly what he's saying in the Greek, *gnriz*. "Let me make this perfectly clear." Or he might be saying, "Look, get this and get it good." The gospel which is preached by me is not after man. I'm not a secondhand voice, and neither in nature or authority is it human. It's above man. I didn't devise it. I didn't invent it. Neither did any other man.

You know what kind of a gospel we'd have if men invented it? You know what kind? Well, just check around. What is every other religion than Christianity based on? Grace? What? Works; if man invents a system, it is always works. So if man was responsible for the gospel, it would be injected with a large dose of works. Paul makes his point clear. The gospel I preach is not human. Verse 12, he says, "I neither received it of man nor was taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

And this, incidentally, is a direct shot at the Judaizers. You say, "How?" Well, the Judaizers learned things two ways. First of all, they received it from man. And do you know what the Jewish received information was called, passed down from generation to generation? What was it called? Tradition; and all Jews were the products of tradition. That goes clear back to Deuteronomy, doesn't it? "Take these things. Teach them to your children." And all of this content was passed down. And Paul is taking a direct shot. I did not receive it like you receive your information, through tradition.

And then the second thing he says is, "And I wasn't taught it, either." You know the second way the Jews learned? They learned under rabbinic teaching. And you know how they learned? They learned by rote repetition. They would... The teacher would repeat and they would repeat. The teacher would repeat and they would repeat, and over and over, repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat. And that again goes back to Deuteronomy, where you're to say these things when you stand up, sit down, lie down, walk around.

So they learned two ways, by a body of truth passed down through tradition, and by rote repetition, rote repetition, again and again. And that's exactly what Paul says was not the way that I got my information. So he rejects entirely their usual format for information, and he comes up with this at the end of verse 12. "But by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Christ Himself gave it to me, revealed it supernaturally.

Now, we need to spend a moment on this, because it's important. You say, "Well, do you mean to tell me that he didn't know anything until Christ spoke to him?" No. I think we would have to admit that he knew a lot about the gospel before he was saved, don't we? You say, "Why?" What did he spend his time doing before he was saved? Persecuting Christians; so, he must've known enough about it to hate it.

So he knew the facts. He knew about Jesus Christ. And he actually persecuted Christ. Although not physically, not bodily persecuting Christ, it was Christ that he was after. He must've known about the claims of Christ. But bare knowledge doesn't mean anything. He had no supernatural acquaintance with Christ. But once he came to know Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road, then he was capable of learning the supernatural truth that God had ready for him to know.

In 2 Corinthians, isn't it 3:16, Paul talks about the fact that men have a veil, and the veil hides the truth, the glory of God. And then in 16, he says, "When it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken," what? "Away." So Paul saw some shady facts, but he never really knew anything until he came to Christ and the veil was gone, and then he really gazed into the glory of the Lord and was transformed into His image, verse 18.

It was on the Damascus Road that the light from heaven suddenly descended on him and engulfed him, and he heard, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." And, bang, everything changed. You say, "What made it change?" Listen. What made it change? When he heard the voice say, "I am Jesus." You know the great, cardinal truth of the gospel became a reality in his life? What is it? The resurrection; because dead people don't talk. God gave him the revelation through Christ directly.

Now, he says, "I didn't get this from men. You'd better listen to me. I'm giving you exactly what Jesus Christ told me." You know something, beloved? I stand here in this pulpit, and I can't tell you, I can't say...You know I... People say that sometimes, but I can't say, "I'm going to tell you what the Lord told me." Because you know something? The only authority I have in this world is the Word of God. And so I'm a secondhand character. I'll tell you what Paul said. He's the authority. And he establishes that in those verses.

Now, it's one thing to state that. Right? It's something else to prove it. OK? I mean, it's a tremendous statement to say that "I speak for God. Everything was revealed to me. I got it from no humans at all." Everybody'd say, "Oh, Paul, what a bunch of hogwash. You didn't get that. You ran around. You went

to Jerusalem and you learned it all down there from some people at the church of Jerusalem, and then you twisted it around to accommodate your own problems up here to be popular. And we...we just know how you got it. Don't give us that baloney about you being an apostle."

So in order to avoid that, he just sets sail on proving that he is a legitimate apostle, and that he did get his message from Christ Himself. And verses 13 through 24 is one of the most fantastic, air-tight arguments for apostolic authority anywhere in the Bible. And, boy, you really need to get a grip on this to have a sense of authority when you read your Bible. And it's exciting.

I read the apostle Paul, and, man, it's Christ. It's God's Word. I told you about the man who only believed the red letters in his Bible. He had a red-letter edition. He says, "I only believe the red letters, because that's when Jesus talked." You know, every letter in the Bible is Jesus Christ speaking. I don't like red-letter Bibles. You don't need to make that distinction. That's a wrong distinction to make.

Anyway, he uses three areas of his life, three areas of his life, to prove his point that he got his message from God, from Jesus Christ directly: His pre-conversion, his conversion and his post-conversion. He just does a biography from 13 to 24, an autobiography, and says, "Before I was saved, when I was saved and after I was saved, all those events prove I never got my message from a man. But God gave it straight to me." And I'm telling you, it's astounding evidence. John Brown said, "Jesus Christ took him under his own immediate tutoring." And he's right.

Let's look first of all at his pre-conversion. His pre-conversion he talks about in verses 13 to 14. Now, here Paul describes his state in Judaism. And he was a Jew of the first order, Pharisee, tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of the Hebrews, circumcised the eighth day, the whole that he goes over. But he describes his state in Judaism, and he's saying this. Now, watch. This is the thing you want to see here. He is saying essentially that there was absolutely no preparation in his former life for this message of grace. That's important.

He goes in verses 13 and 14 into his former life, and says, now, look at that former life. There was no preparation for this message. There was no way that I would ever understand grace. Grace was a foreign concept in my mind. Not foreign in the Old Testament, but foreign in the mind of Paul, who was a Pharisee. And those people were so hung up on law they couldn't see anything else. And so he is saying in 13 and 14, nothing at all whatsoever in my life would ever relate to a concept such as the gospel of grace. Therefore, not my pre-conversion contributed to it.

He had been a fanatic for the law. The law had been his life. His one object was to know the law, study the law, defend the law, propagate the law. All of a sudden, bang, he, in a moment of time, begins to preach grace, and law is gone. Now, something happened. I mean, when you go from law to grace, you go 180 degrees in the opposite direction. Something happened. With such a passionate intensity for the law, such a passionate desire to earn God's favor, he was transformed into a man content to believe God and leave it at that. Now look at verse 13 and 14 with that in mind. He says, "For you have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion," that's really, in the Greek, one word, Judaism, "you have heard of my manner of life in time past in Judaism, how that beyond measure," beyond all bounds, "I persecuted the church of God, and destroyed it," or wasted it, “and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."

Now, he says here, I was an absolute fanatic for the law. I actually was more Jewish and more Judaistic than most of my equals. I was more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers than my contemporaries. I was a super-legalist. I even set about beyond bounds to persecute the church of God and destroy it.

Very often, you know, we say, "Well, you have to understand old Charlie over there. He's a product of his upbringing." You know, you can throw that out when you get into Christianity, can't you? There's a transformation. He says, my early education is proof. I never had the gospel handed down to me by men. I never received some tradition from men. I was brought up in the ritual school, in the school of legalism, ritualism, directly opposed to the liberty of the Spirit.

And he says, "You know that." I like verse 13: "You have heard," maybe from him and maybe from others “that I was up to my neck in Judaism.” And he says, "I'll give you two aspects of my former life. One, I persecuted the church." And then he uses the phrase "beyond measure." And I mean, boy, you start reading what he did in Acts and you just can't believe it. It just... It goes beyond measure, beyond. You'd wonder why a guy would that get uptight. Why doesn't he go home and relax?

But in chapter 8, "At that time there was a great persecution against the church," Acts 8, "which was at Jerusalem; and the church was scattered." And then in verse 3 it says, "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house." Now, man, that's a man on a real binge. No question. He was "hauling men and women out and throwing them in prison." And, I mean, he really took after people.

If you were to go further along in the book, you'll find in chapter 9, verse 1, it says, "And Saul, yet breathing out threatening and slaughter." And the Greek is, "He was breathing in and out slaughter," which means he was like a bull. He was like this. He was furious with Christians. "Breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." He went to the high priest and he said, "You give me permission to go to Damascus. I'm going to go there and get those Christians," you know. I mean, it was beyond the bounds of reason.

And Ananias, after Paul's conversion, Ananias met him, and you can imagine how scared Ananias was when the Lord said, "Go down there. Old Saul's down in that house. I want you to meet him." And Ananias' reaction was, "Sure. You sure you got the same guy in mind that I know about?" But he went down by faith. Ananias said, "Lord, I've heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to the saints at Jerusalem." He had a wild reputation. "And here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all that call on Thy name."

Now, this is almost a madman. He is so zealous for law and Phariseeism and Judaism that he is out to violently, and you'll notice the term "exceedingly zealous." It just... It really means just beyond bounds. He was so zealous for the traditions. He was so committed to persecuting the church of God beyond measure, violently desiring to destroy it.

Well, in verse 14, he takes another step into his back...his background and gives another view of it. He says, "I profited," or I grew, "in the Jewish religion," Judaism, "above many my equals in mine own nation." He was so filled with Pharisaical zeal that he became the Pharisees' Pharisee. I mean, he was the epitome of what a legalist would be.

In chapter 22, verse 4 of Acts, it says, "I persecuted this Way," that's the Way, Christianity, "unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women." In chapter 26, I think it's verse 11, another insight into it. He says, "I punished them often in every synagogue, compelled them to blaspheme, and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities." I mean, he just is out of control he is so zealous for the Jews' religion and so violently in opposition to anything other than that.

The word "profited" is an interesting word in verse 14. It's the word literally that means “chopping ahead.” It could be translated advanced, in a more refined sense. But in a kind of a literal sense, it means to chop ahead. In other words, Paul says, "I hacked my way through the Christians," see, like

he was blazing a trail for Judaism at the expense of all the believers. And he surpassed many of his own equals. Read Acts 26:4 and 5 and you'll read more of it.

So here was this young rabbi. There was nothing in his life, absolutely nothing in his life that would relate to grace. Such a progress was the opposite. Notice it says that he was more exceedingly zealous “of the traditions of my fathers.” Now, here you have not the Mosaic law but what is called the *halakah*. And the *halakah* is the body of Jewish oral law which grew up around the Torah like a big picket fence. This was just a gob of all kinds of little practical and impractical ethical and technical laws. And he was super-zealous for all of that minutia, all of that just sort of meaningless stuff in terms of Scripture that was added as an addendum to everything.

And he was zealous. The word indicates a fanatical legalist. Now, that was Paul. You want a pre-conversion characteristic of Paul? Here it is: bigot, fanatic, legalist, ritualist, persecutor, hater of Jesus. You say, "Well, what's the point of all that, John?" The point is this. You show me a man going that fast and that furiously in that direction, and then you tell me that same man is going in the opposite direction, and you're going to have to explain something to me, something pretty drastic.

And it's going to be more than an education. He's not going to say, "Well, you know, I was going that way, and then I talked to this fellow, and he showed me the light." Oh. That man wouldn't even stop long enough to have a conversation. No. That doesn't come about by some kind of conversation. A man in that mental and emotional state is in no mood to have his mind changed by a human. Not when he's gone that far. The only person who could ever reach that man is Jesus Christ Himself.

Now do you know why he was saved like he was saved on the Damascus Road? There was no other way. No other way. Only God could reach him, and He did, and He slammed him in the dirt, and He said, stop right there, Paul. I'm Jesus talking to you. Shape up. And he did. "What will you have me to do?" And so would you have.

Now, the point of all of this in verses 13 and 14 is to show you that his pre-conversion experience proves that he never got his message from men. Do you see? Only God could bring this about.

Secondly, his conversion experience, which he speaks of in verses 15 and 16, also proves that he never got his message from men. As I said, you put a man in that kind of a direction, you know, that's like a runaway freight train. You get him going in that way, and some guy standing on the track isn't going to say, "Now, slow down there." See? Hopeless. But if you put a man going in one direction

suddenly reverses the opposite direction, and you're going to have to explain what happened. Well, we know what happened. He was saved. And God did it.

And Paul talks about his conversion and shows that his conversion was all divine, and that it was God acting. Now, look at verse 15 and 16a. "But," and I love the word "but," because that's the beginning of the change, "but when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles." Stop there.

He was going along the way he was going. But all of a sudden it pleased God to transform him, and that was the beginning. Now, I want you to notice something. The terms of his apostolic call are supernatural and sovereign. You say, "John, what changed the man?" Well, it wasn't any human. God changed him.

Notice in verse 15, "But when it pleased God." Beloved, I say again what we said this morning, and apparently the Lord wants us to get the message, that the basis of salvation is God's will, God's sovereignty, isn't it? In the case of Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul, there wasn't anything for him to do but stop, because the Lord blinded him and slammed him on the ground.

"When it pleased God." Salvation is a sovereign act on the part of God. So very, very important; you know, that is nothing new, really. God has been operating on that basis clear back in the Old Testament. This is not a new pattern for God.

Let me give you a concept that I think's important. People always say, "Well, why did God choose Israel?" Richard Wolf said one time, "How odd of God to choose the Jews." And, you know, I suppose all of us at one time or another have asked ourselves that question. And in 1 Samuel 12:22, I like this. "For the Lord will not forsake His people." You say, that's good. He won't forsake them. Why? Because they're good people. No. They weren't too good. Why? "Because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people."

Boy, when you talk about election, you're not in the New Testament, beloved, you're in the whole Bible. God chose Israel. You know why? He wanted to. And if he'd have chosen somebody else, we'd say the same thing, only it wouldn't rhyme the same way. But it pleased God to do it, and so He did it. Ultimately, beloved, in all that is done God does that which pleases Himself.

In 1 Chronicles 28:4, this is David, "How be it, the Lord God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever? For He hath chosen Judah to be the ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father," listen to this, out of all those tribes, Judah; out of Judah, his family; out of his family, bang, David. Why?

Listen. "He took pleasure in me," which, being translated, “because He wanted to.” Now, you see how sovereign it all is? And then he said, "And of all my sons, for the Lord hath given me many sons, He hath chosen Solomon, my son, to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel." Why? Because it pleased Him.

You see, God's election is based on His own good pleasure. Paul was transformed because God wanted him transformed. Listen to 1 Corinthians 1:1: "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God." God wanted it. God wanted it. Ephesians 1, listen to verse 5: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ." You say, "Why did God predestine us to be saved?" "According to the good pleasure of His will." Verse 9: "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure." You have to understand one thing in understanding God, and that is, God does what He wants, according to His own will.

Well, in his fanaticism, the apostle Paul was bent on a course of persecution and destruction, but God changed it. You say, "Why?" Because He wanted to. God wanted this man. And God changed it. His raging fanaticism was no match for the will of God. And I think all of us who are in the ministry at one time or another have seen how God has worked His will against our will to get us where He wants us.

Boy, I can relate to that in my life. I'm sure you all recall the auto accident that I had in which God really made very clear to me what He wanted. Some might say, "Well, God was up there in heaven, and He saw his potential." Said, boy, that old Paul; he's really got a lot of fire. If I can just latch onto him, we'll get something done. No, no. Listen to what Paul said, "When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb."

Now, you say, "What's so important about that?" Well, it's not talking about physical birth. He's not saying, "God, who made me be born." He's not... That's no theological point. That's obvious. He is saying, watch this, now, "When it pleased God, who separated me." Separated you unto what? "Unto the apostolate." And when did He separate you, Paul? "From my mother's womb."

Do you know that guy was chosen to be an apostle before he was born? That's right. That's right. The point isn't physical. It's not "God, who caused me to be born." The physical birth of Paul isn't the issue in this passage. What's the issue here is his call to be an apostle. What he's saying is, "Hey, people. You want to know something? I didn't get my message from men. God called me to be an apostle when I was still in the womb." That's pretty strong language.

You say, "God doesn't do things like that, does He?" Sure He does all the time. Listen to this. I love this. Sometime I'll preach a sermon on this. Luke 1, the beginning of the life of John the Baptist. It's amazing when you think about John the Baptist. I mean, what an amazing character he was just to begin with, you know. Went around with sort of a modified Tarzan suit made out of camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey and lived out in the desert, and strange guy, and yet God really used him mightily.

It's amazing that the Bible says, "Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." Astounding statement, for such a character; but listen. It says in Luke 1, and this was such a fantastic announcement. Remember, Zacharias and Elizabeth were told they were going to have a baby. Zacharias didn't believe it, so God made him dumb. Can you imagine an old man who has a child and can't tell anybody?

But, anyway, it says in verse 15, "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, drink neither wine nor strong drink," now, hang on to this one, "and shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb." Do you know that God had his hand on that man before he was born? That talks like God's running the show. That's sovereignty. That's sovereignty.

You say, "Well, did the Jews relate to that? I mean..." Oh, yes. Because that's the way God had always operated. They knew God had chosen them. They knew that's how God usually chose His prophets. Did you know that? Listen to this. Isaiah 49; listen to what Isaiah says. "Listen, oh, coasts, unto me." You know, Isaiah had to fight for the right to speak, too, didn't he? Nobody ever listened to him. He says, "Listen to me. Hearken, you people."

You say, "Oh, Isaiah, what are we going to listen to you for? Who are you? Some guy who keeps popping up with these messages about doom. What are we listening to you for?" Here's his credentials, "The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the body of my mother hath He made mention of my name." You know God started with Isaiah before he was born, too? Well, he even goes over that again. Verse 5, he says, "Now saith the Lord who formed me from the womb to be His servant."

Now look at Jeremiah, just to pick out a couple. Jeremiah 1:5. "The word of the Lord came unto me," says Jeremiah, "saying, 'Before I formed thee in the womb, I knew thee.'" Oh, what a statement. God says, "I knew you, Jeremiah, before you were. And before you came out of the womb, I sanctified you and ordained you a prophet unto the nations." Do you know when Jeremiah got his call? Long before he ever heard it.

No, the Jewish mind has no problem with that. In fact, when Paul said, "Look," and he said in verse 15, "God separated me even from my mother's womb," they knew exactly what he was talking about. They knew that he was claiming apostleship, that he was claiming the call of God equal to the prophet of God who was chosen by God before such a time as he was ever born.

God has always done that. In Romans 9:10, "And not only this," said Paul, "but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father, Isaac," listen, "for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth, it was said unto her, 'The elder shall serve the younger. Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated.'" Rebecca got the message before those boys were ever born which one God had chosen. No, that isn't anything unusual. God has always done that, always.

And the word "separated," look at it in verse 15, means “set aside.” It means consecrated. It means, literally, marked me off. Now, listen. If He had marked Paul off before he was born, then he was no human apostle. Got it? That's a strong, strong proof.

I want you to see this in total, and so I encourage you to be with us. But let me say this. The heart of our commitment to the Word of God is the confidence we have in its writers. Do you believe that? And this, then, becomes tremendously important. Now, what you're going to see next week is equally or more important than what we've seen tonight.

You know, I get so excited when I realize that this Book that I hold in my hand every day, that I study and study and read and re-read and pray over and meditate on, is not a human book, but it's God's Book. He wrote it. Through all different men and all different times, it is God's truth. And when I hear somebody who comes to me and says, "Well, I don't know if I can believe Paul," or, "I don't know if Isaiah really wrote Isaiah," and this goes on all the time, or, "I don't know whether we can believe in the authenticity of this book or that book," I want to be able to go back to this Book and set some standards, and say, "I believe it, and this is why I believe it."

People, we have nothing to say to this world unless they're convinced that our Book is true, right? And they're not going to be too convinced unless you're convinced. And I trust that our study of the apostolic credentials of Paul will help you to be convinced. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that we can accept your Word as authoritative, that it is the rule of life. And we would pray that as we go about to defend the Christ of God we would not do so from a hopeless kind of helpless, weak faith, but that we would do so with a strong and firm conviction that this is an authoritative book and that we have some reasons why we believe it to be so.

God, help us to stand firm on the Word, to believe it with all of our hearts, to the extent that we live by its every precept. Make us men and women and young people of absolute conviction, strong, dogmatic where we have a right to be, that we might stand in this world holding high the Word of God, which is the only hope of the salvation of men.

Lord, we want to be used of Thee. We pray in Christ' name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2016 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).