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

Apostolic Credentials, Part 2

Scripture: Galatians 1:16-24

Code: 1653

1974

Galatians, chapter 1, 10 through 24. We've entitled this little brief series in Galatians, as we're getting through the first couple of chapters, Apostolic Credentials...Apostolic Credentials.

Now, as we mentioned to you last week, the apostle Paul wrote the book of Galatians to defend himself against Judaizers. Judaizers are those who teach, or were those who taught that in order to be saved, an individual had to have circumcision. That is, salvation was not accomplished by faith in Jesus Christ alone; you had to become a Jew physically through the rite of circumcision, then you could be introduced to Christ. And these Judaizers had arrived in the area of Galatia and after Paul had left, had sowed the seeds of legalism or this Judaizing false doctrine among the Christians there. And Paul is writing the letter of Galatians to react against this false doctrine. It's becoming very apparent in the book of Galatians, even as you begin to look at the first chapter and you see his opening introduction where he claims he's an apostle, and then you move to verse 6 where he just simply states that they have been removed from the gospel. It's more defined in chapter 3. As he says in verse 1, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you that ye should not obey the truth..." And then down in verse 3 he says "...having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?" In other words, couldn't the Spirit accomplish salvation? Did you need some fleshly rite? Over in chapter 4, Paul deals in rather specific terms with this also, in verse 9. Apparently, these Judaizers had gotten them to go back to all kinds of ceremonial Old Testament customs. He said to them, "But after you have known God or rather are known by God, how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements into which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and times and years. I am afraid of you lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." And then when you come to chapter 5, he again says the same thing in verse 1, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." He says in 2, "...I, Paul, say unto you that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." The point is this, if you trust in that for your salvation, you're not trusting totally in God for your salvation. And that would be tantamount to not having salvation at all, for it demands total trust in God.

So it is because of what has happened in the interim between his preaching there and the writing of this letter that Paul reacts. There have been these Judaizing false teachers who have gone there and sowed false doctrine. And you remember we showed that they have done three things. One, they denied Paul's apostleship. In other words, if you're gonna wipe out another man's teaching, the first

place to start is to wipe out his authority. They denied his apostleship. Secondly, they denied his gospel of pure grace. They denied his gospel of grace. Thirdly, they denied that the Christian can live a life of grace and they wanted to impose faith/works as a system. And we saw that Paul answers the first thing, the denial of his apostolate in chapters one and two. He answers the second thing, the denial of his gospel of grace, in chapters three and four. He answers the third thing, the denial of the life of grace in chapters five and six. So the book, then, is a reply and it's a somewhat strong one and tainted with a little bit of righteous indignation.

But to begin with, in our consideration of the first two chapters, we're dealing with his defense of his authority. He is replying to the denial that he had any right to speak for God. Now, let me say, as I said last week, that this really is the heart of the issue. When Paul comes into a town and begins to speak, it is absolutely essential that people believe that he has the right to speak for God because if they don't believe that, then there's no reason to hear what he says. So this is a cardinal issue for this book and, incidentally, it's a cardinal issue for all of Paul's ministry and for the authority of the New Testament. So we ask ourselves the question as we approach these first two chapters: Is Paul's gospel the standard or can we believe in anything? Or is Paul wrong? Is he really speaking the truth? Does he have authority? Does he speak for God or does he not? Where did he get his message? Did he make it up? Did he concoct it? Was it a conglomeration of all different philosophies that he had pulled together as, perhaps, those in Athens thought? Could he really say, "thus saith the Lord" and speak exactly that message which God wanted said? Well, Paul claimed that he could. Paul claimed that he spoke for God, that he had absolute authority in terms of the inspiration that the Holy Spirit gave him when he was delivering the message of God. And so, consequently, he defends his apostleship. For if he has no authority, there's no reason to listen to him.

Now, this is important for another reason. All of the early church knew that the apostles were God's spokesmen. And it's interesting that in the early years of Christianity, the only guy that was sort of up for grabs was Paul. We don't find any other occasion in the New Testament where any other of the apostles' authority is questioned. Because, you see, they lived with Christ. And the statements of Jesus Christ were directly related to them. He very pointedly said, for example, through John 14 to 16, that He would speak through them, that the Spirit would bring all things to their remembrance, that they would literally be the voice of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit communicating. And so there wasn't much question about that. For example, you go back to Matthew and the authority of the apostles is clearly established. Chapter 10, verse 2: "...the names of the twelve apostles are these: ...Simon, ...called Peter; Andrew, his brother; James, the son of Zebedee; John, his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus; and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon, the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him." Now, listen. "These twelve Jesus sent forth..." Now, there was no question about them. There was no question about their connection to Jesus Christ. Over in the same chapter, verse 14, it even went further than that. "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when you depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet." In other words, treat them like

Gentiles. When a Jew had been in a Gentile area, came into Jerusalem, he always got the dust off him because he didn't want to drag any Gentile dust into Israel. And so Jesus is saying, if they don't hear what you say, treat them like Gentiles; walk away. And we saw Paul do that, didn't we, in the city of Corinth. When the Jews opposed him blatantly and openly, he shook out the dust in his garment and walked out and said, I'm going to the Gentiles; your blood be upon your own heads, Acts 18. And Jesus says the criterion is if they won't hear your words. That's interesting because it indicates that Jesus gave to those apostles the right to speak for Him and that their words were to be listened to. Over in verse 19, "...when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what you shall speak. For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." Now, beloved, I know that those are wonderful verses for us all to claim, but we can't legitimately claim them. We cannot say, in the same sense, that I can get myself into a situation and speak with divine inspiration. Surely the Holy Spirit may bring things to our remembrance. The Holy Spirit may bring things to our mind that apply at a moment, but here is a promise of revelation. They had no backlog to draw on in terms of Christ, and so Christ would speak directly through them. They had no New Testament to study. Over in John 14, as I told you, in verses 25 and 26...I'll just read those again..."These things have I spoken unto you being present with you. But the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you." You know that when the apostles quoted Jesus Christ, and when the apostles reflected on principles laid down by Christ, and when the apostles reflected on the things that Christ stood for and taught, they spoke with absolute accuracy because that was the promise that Jesus gave them. Now, you see, the early church, then, had no question about the apostle. The only guy who was sort of a little bit off-center was the apostle Paul and the reason is simply because he was not included in the original 12. And so there was a question...and it really was no legitimate question...but it was an opportunity for a question to be at least thrown out by these false teachers. The apostles themselves became the spokesmen for the early church. When the church came together in Acts 2:42, the Bible says they got together for fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayer and the apostles'...what?...doctrine. The word means teaching. They studied the teaching of the apostles as authoritative...as the very Word of God. And this was characteristic of the life of the early church. In fact, in Acts, chapter 6, verse 4, the apostles felt that there may be an intrusion on the time they needed to give themselves to the ministry of the word God had given them and so they appointed deacons and said we'll give ourselves totally to prayer and the ministry of the Word. This was what God was doing through them.

Now, in addition to that, they sort of ruled in the early church. If you were to look at chapter 4, for example, verse 35, you would see that when they took the collections and the monies from the early church, they gave it to the apostles, who distributed it. And that's indicated in 35 and in 37 and also, incidentally, in chapter 5, verse 2, the case of Ananias and Sapphira. So the apostles were authoritative. There was never a question in the early church about the apostles who were with Jesus Christ. When they spoke, it was as if God Himself was speaking, and indeed He was, through His Holy Spirit in them. And God confirmed it, as we saw, by signs and wonders.

Now, Paul came along and Paul claimed to have the very same authority. And the Judaizers just decided we'll just knock the props out of his authority and if we can knock the props out of his authority, then we've got a running start on his gospel. And we'll eliminate the gospel of grace and that way, we'll hold on to the beauties of Judaism and we'll propagate that everybody's got to become a Jew. And they did this because they wanted to make a display of their own flesh. In other words, they wanted to glorify their own nationality. That's clear from what it says in Galatians later on. And so Paul's apostleship was undermined. Now, the apostle Paul didn't consider himself a second-class apostle. And he, throughout the New Testament, is found defending himself. Repeatedly, at the beginning of his letters, he says, "Paul, an apostle," "Paul, an apostle," "Paul, an apostle." He just hammers and hammers at that. It's a very important point because his apostleship was a little bit different and it had been questioned. For example...and I'll show you just a few that you can point to as references when you teach these things to somebody else...Romans 11:13, "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles..." Now, look, listen to this. "...I am the apostle of the Gentiles"...which he follows with this most interesting statement..."I magnify my office." Paul was consistently lifting up the office that he enjoyed as an apostle. In I Corinthians, again, we see the same thing. I think it's 9:1. Yes. "Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" Now, you see, the qualification of an apostle was that he had to have seen Christ after the resurrection and he had to have had a personal call from Christ. Paul says, "If I be not an apostle unto others, yea doubtless I am to you, for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord." He says to the Corinthians, you ought to be evidence enough that I'm an apostle, just from what God did through me in your midst. Again, in writing to Timothy, he says in I Timothy 2:7, "For this I am ordained a preacher and an apostle"...and then he throws in this; this is most interesting..."(I speak the truth in Christ and lie not);" And, again, it implies that he was under attack in terms of his apostleship. In II Timothy also, in 1:11 "Unto which I am appointed a preacher and an apostle..." And he said this is why I suffer persecution. So the apostle Paul was very, very concerned about defending his apostolate. Now, somebody would say, well, the poor guy's on an ego trip. "I magnify my office," and all that stuff. No, he wasn't. He was not, and he very carefully defends that fact. He was not glorifying his apostleship to build himself him, not at all. Listen to these words. I Corinthians 4:9: "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men." And then he gets sarcastic. "We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ." He's saying, oh, you really know it all and we don't know anything, sarcastic. "We are weak, but you are strong. You are honorable, but we are despised." And then he gets into the real discussion of his apostolate. Listen to what he says. "Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling place, and labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things unto this day." No, he's not boasting. He's not blowing his own horn. He's very honest. He admits the apostolate is a difficult thing and he suffers. And he says in I Corinthians 15, and I love this, "For I am the least of the apostles." You know on another occasion he said this, "I come behind

the chief apostles in nothing" in terms of his office. I'm not less than them in any way. But he sees himself inside, not according to his call, but inside he sees himself humbly as the least of all apostles. And he says I'm not even fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. You remember this one? "But by the grace of God"...what?..."I am what I am. And His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Paul wasn't on an ego trip. He took the pain and he took the abuse and he took the suffering and as he looked at his own life and his own soul; he said I'm the least of all. As he looked at his office he said, I magnify it; I come behind not the chiefest of the apostles. And so all through his life he's defending his right to speak for God authoritatively. Paul wanted to establish that. And the Judaizers had come along into Galatia and they'd started telling everybody that this was no apostle; this was a Johnny-come-lately who didn't really belong at all and he had no authority. In fact, everything happened in Jerusalem. This was some guy who came from Antioch, probably self-appointed or appointed by those Gentiles up in Antioch and we were from Jerusalem. Incidentally, the Judaizers obviously came from Jerusalem. We can find an indication of that in Acts 15, which seems to tie in. And they were saying, probably, we are the authority church. We are the ones subject to the real apostles and we are coming to straighten this matter out. And we want you to know that the only reason Paul ever gave you full grace and no law and no Judaism was just to accommodate your Gentile mentality and he didn't want to make himself unpopular. And so Paul writes to his beloved Galatians whom he fathered in the faith and with whom he shed tears and over whom he shed his blood. And his defense is strong. Look at verse 10. "For do I now seek the favor of men or of God? Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." And this verse only makes sense if you read 8 and 9. He says, "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. As we said before, so say I again. If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed." Now he gives two scathing curses in a row. And the first word in verse 10 in the Greek is gar. And gar can be translated as a strong exclamation in many ways. And I think Hendrickson translates it accurately, at least on one sense, by translating it with the word "there." In other words, after two curses he says, "There, do I now seek the favor of men?" Does that sound like a men-pleaser? And then he says in addition, "For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." If I claim to be a slave of Jesus Christ, a bond-slave of Christ, and I serve men, then I'm a liar. My claim is false. And you know, they knew about his slavery to Christ. How could the Galatians forget that he was stoned there and dragged out of the city and left for dead? Is that the activity of a men-pleaser? He went all the way with Jesus Christ till it almost cost him his life. Now, he says, you've seen the character of my slavery. Isn't it obvious that I'm serving Christ, that I'm not there to please men?...not when I'm pronouncing curses on men.

Then he presents in verses 11 and 12 his thesis, which he defends the rest of the chapter. "But 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 it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul says, no, I'm no man-pleaser. I'm no servant of man. The gospel that I preach I never got from man. That's his

thesis...11 and 12. And we've covered this last week. Just quickly I'm reviewing. He says, this is not...this is not me. I'm not just announcing what makes me popular. I'm telling you what I received by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Now, beloved, that's an astounding claim. I can't make that claim. I can't come in here and say, oh, I'm gonna tell you what God told me. I only know what it says in this book and I study the book and the Spirit of God is my teacher, but I know no more than that. And I speak not for God unless I speak accurately in accordance with the pages of Scripture. But Paul says, I speak by the revelation of God or the revelation of Jesus Christ. Now, you know what he did then? He put himself on a par with the Old Testament writers. That's right. If you were to read II Peter, chapter 1, verse 21, you'd read this: "For the prophecy came not at any time"...I like that..."by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The Old Testament was not written by men's minds; it was written by the Holy Spirit through men. They were the tools; the Holy Spirit was the author. The same thing is true in II Timothy; isn't it? Chapter 3 and verse 16 where it says, and we're familiar with it, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God"...all scripture. And so, Paul, by saying I get what I get from Jesus Christ directly puts himself on a par with Old Testament writers. Now, that is an astounding claim, just an astounding claim. And he needs to defend it.

And one little interesting note and then we'll look at his defense. Isn't it interesting, and I was just looking through this in the Bible and tracing a little bit. It's interesting that Paul calls his gospel two things and I think this is very interesting. He calls it "the gospel of God" and he also calls it "my gospel." Isn't that interesting that this man could say it is the gospel of God, but it is also my gospel, which meant that what he said was God speaking through him. Now to support this astounding claim he brings three things out of his biography: his pre-conversion, his conversion and his postconversion...what happened before he was saved, when he was saved and after he was saved, all piles up the evidence that he indeed speaks for God. He begins, let's look at it, with his preconversion in 13 and 14 and we'll just mention a couple of things because we went over this last time. But here he begins by saying this: "For you have heard of my manner of life in time past in Judaism...beyond measure"...beyond all bounds, literally..."I persecuted the church of God and wasted"...or destroyed..."it. And profited in the Jews' religion"...Judaism..."above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers..." Now what he says is this. He says, I was an unbelievably zealous Jew. You say, what's the point Paul? The point is this. My early education, my early training, my early upbringing never, ever gave me this information. I couldn't have learned it because I was in a totally different situation. Nobody taught me about Christ. Nobody, in typical Jewish fashion, handed this stuff down by tradition from generation to generation. No rabbi sat me in a corner and taught me all of this thing that I've been telling you about Christ. There was no way I could have learned this from my background. In fact, he says, I was at the very opposite extreme. I was a persecutor of those who believed this. I was a legalist of the first order. To come from being a persecutor of the church to the preacher of the church; to come from being legalist to a grace teacher could not have happened by tradition or by instruction. None of those things were possible in my life. And certainly, such a fanatical legalist as he was couldn't have been persuaded by any human to change his mind. So as we saw last time, his pre-conversion is evidence that his

message didn't come from a human source.

Secondly, his conversion. Look at that in verse 15. What happened at the very moment that he was saved proves that he couldn't have received this message from any other than God. "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. Now, here he goes to his conversion and he says that my conversion, when it pleased God, who separated me, that is, who called me to be an apostle from the time of my mother's womb...not talking about physical birth there...and called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me. In other words, Paul says it was God who revealed His Son in me when it pleased Him to do it. And there was no other way at his conversion. I mean, his conversion wasn't any kind of educational process. He was walking down the road to Damascus and got slammed down to the ground in his tracks and God transformed him in a moment right there sovereignly. Now, he was marked off, he says, to be an apostle from his mother's womb. We showed you last week how that was not uncommon and the Jews would've remembered Isaiah and they would've remembered Jeremiah who both had the same call.

And then he says...and we'll pick it up here for our study tonight...he says in verse 15, "called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles." Three things there. He first of all talks about the past tense when God really called him to be an apostle from the time of his mother's womb. Then he moves it into the time of his conversion when God actually called him by His grace and revealed Christ to him. You remember the story in Acts, chapter 9 on the Damascus road as he was walking to persecute the Christians there, God stopped him in his tracks, said "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" And Jesus confronted him right there on the road and I believe he saw the glory of Jesus Christ. I don't believe it was the blindness of darkness; I believe it was the blindness of blazing light. And he met Jesus Christ and he fell and he said, "Lord"...what?..."what will You have me do?" And there the miracle of his conversion took place, but it was when God pleased to call him by His grace. It was all grace. Paul hadn't done anything to earn his salvation, nothing at all, it was purely on the part of God's grace. You say, well, John, you mean the guy just walked down the road and God saved him whether he liked it or not. Didn't he have to respond? Yes. To say that there is sovereignty doesn't mean you don't respond. Acts 26:19 says this. Just listen. Acts 29:16 [sic] says this...and he was talking to one of those kings, I forget, one of those rulers. I think it was Agrippa. And he said this: "...I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," and there implies that he had to make a positive response. The grace of the Lord stopped him in his tracks, the grace of the Lord moved upon his heart and he made a positive response to Jesus Christ. And God had separated him in the past, God had called him in time, and at that moment...verse 16...God's purpose was revealed, "to reveal His Son in me." And just as God, later on, removed the scales from his physical eyes, so God removed the scales from his spiritual eyes and he saw who Jesus was. And I want you to notice that he saw that Jesus was God's Son and Paul uses those terms..."to reveal His Son," not Jesus, not Christ. Those aren't the terms used, but His Son. God wanted him to see that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God, God Himself in the form of the Son.

Now, the phrase, to reveal His Son in me, is a beautiful thing. It was only at the very beginning there on the Damascus road that Christ was revealed to Paul in a very, very beginning way. And as Paul continued to live his life, more and more of the beauty of Christ was revealed to him. You see, the revelation of Christ doesn't begin and end at salvation; it only begins, right. And then Paul prayed from then on through his life that "I may"...what?..."I may know Him." And Paul even said in II Corinthians 3:18 that if you'll gaze at His glory and continue to learn Him, you'll be changed into His image by the Holy Spirit. Paul, through his life, continually said be ye followers of me as I am of Christ. He desired all of his life to learn more of Jesus. And so the beginning of the revelation of Christ in Paul took place on the Damascus road. And you see, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. No one ever comes to Christ other than when the Holy Spirit reveals Christ in him. That's the Spirit's work. You go back to many, many passages, but I think of one where Jesus said to Peter...to the disciples, Who do men say that I am? Peter says, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said, Peter you couldn't know that. My Father in Heaven had to reveal it to you. And the agency of revelation was the Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians, chapter 2, what does it say in verses 9 and following? "But as it is written, 'Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit..." And he goes on to say that only the Spirit of God can know these things. The natural man doesn't understand these things. The Holy Spirit teaches us, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. And so the apostle Paul had a revelation of Jesus Christ. He saw Jesus Christ and he responded to the Spirit's work in his heart. Now, beloved, there was no human activity involved. There was no learning process. Whatever he got, he got directly from God. Spent the rest of his life longing to know more about the Christ that he had met on that Damascus road. And even when he came to the crisis times in his life and the decision times, he said to the Philippians, it's nice to be with you but, oh, I'd far rather depart and be with Christ. The revelation of Christ began that day; it didn't end...it didn't end. Paul, looking back over his life in Acts 26, reported his testimony briefly to Agrippa and he said this: "Who art thou, Lord?" And he's reflecting on what he said on the Damascus road. "And he said, I am Jesus whom you persecute. But rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee, delivering thee from the people, from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee"...listen..."to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me." Jesus said all of that to him on the Damascus road. The Holy Spirit moved into his life, revealed Jesus Christ and both his salvation...watch it...and his call came directly from Jesus. Did you hear that? Paul was no second-rate apostle. Paul was no Johnny-come-lately. He says in Acts 26, Jesus Himself told me that I was an apostle to the Gentiles and he told me where to go and what to say. No, his salvation was from God, his call was from God, he was an apostle in every sense of the word and his conversion was verification of that indeed. The thrust, then, of this section is clear. God called him, God saved him, God called him before he was ever born, God saved him in time by grace, God revealed His Son in him and then God said to him, I

want you to preach Him among the Gentiles. It's an interesting thing...just a footnote. God gave him a call to salvation and a call to service at the same time. You get that? A call to salvation and a call to service at the same time. I doubt, beloved, whether God ever does it any other way. I doubt whether there's ever such a thing as being called to save and not being called to serve. But in Paul's case, it was a very specific kind of service. I'm thinking of a verse, I Peter 2:9 I think. Yes. "But you are a chosen generation"...listen to this, talking to all believers..."you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own"...now, look at this..."that you should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His light." He saved you to be a witness. He saved you to show forth His praise. You can say, well, I've been saved, but I haven't been called of God to do anything else. (Laughter) Sorry about that. So, Paul says I was preplanned, converted, the Son was revealed, I was called to be an evangelist. All of that occurred at my salvation. It came into focus. And he's saying my apostleship wasn't a learned thing at all; it was a divine act of God. The information I have about what I do as an apostle came from God Himself. So if you want to depreciate my apostleship, you're not dealing with me, call up Heaven.

Now, there are other features besides this. Sure, before his salvation, his apostolate couldn't have come from Jewish tradition nor his salvation. At his salvation, no other way, but that directly from God all of this came. You say, but the Judaizers would probably say, well, Paul, sure, but after you got saved, you hustled off down to Jerusalem and you got all that information and you learned it from the rest of the apostles. And it's not really what you're teaching [possible skip]. Apparently, their claim was, you got it at Jerusalem and you corrupted it because you wanted to be popular with the Gentiles. You dropped out all the Judaism features. So Paul moves thirdly to his post-conversion. And he shows in verses 16 to 24...and it's just a very simple portion; you can read it through yourself and get the understanding of it...but he says in these verses in effect that after I was saved, I'll prove to you again that I didn't get this message from men. In fact, when he was saved, if you were to go back to Acts 9, you'd find out that when he was saved...and we'll do that in a minute...immediately upon his salvation, he began to preach, which is a startling thing. You know, we used to say to people, now you're saved, now we want to teach you first of all before you go shooting your mouth off. I mean, it's all right to give a limited witness, but you never set up a novice do you? That's clear in Scripture. The apostle Paul, he was saved and bang, he's preaching right away. Now, God had to do something very specific. Now, notice what he says in verse 16. When God revealed "His Son in me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, immediately I"...and what it should be saying is, "immediately I decided not to confer with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them who were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus." Paul says, when the moment of my conversion occurred, following those days...of course, the time when he was blind, the time when he met Ananias, the time he preached in Damascus... I determined not to go to Jerusalem...not to go to Jerusalem. You see, he recognized one very important thing. He had no need...watch this...he had no need to go to learn from the apostles. Why? He himself was an apostle. And all of the information he needed would be given directly to him from God. So he went into Arabia. Not the Arabia you're thinking about, but what was known as Nabatae-an Arabia and the capital area

of Nabatae-an Arabia was around Damascus. So it was in that general vicinity that he ministered. And verse 18 indicates it was a three-year period.

Now, looking just quickly at Acts 9 just to set your mind in the historical perspective. Acts 9:20, "Immediately" after his conversion, "he preached Christ in the synagogues." And they were amazed at him, just absolutely astounded because they knew who he was. He was so good at preaching, verse 22, he "increased the more in strength and confounded the Jews..." And so he began preaching. Well, it says in verse 23, skipping over a three-year period, "And after many days..." That little phrase, "after many days," is a phrase in the Greek that's used to speak of two or three years. And so it was after several years were fulfilled, "the Jews took counsel to kill him." What happened? He apparently preached in Damascus for a period of time. Then he took off for Arabia, stayed several years there, returning back to Damascus and continuing to preach there. And all of this period in the Arabia area...Nabatae-an Arabia...and in Damascus totaled up three years as indicated in verse 18. It's interesting that when he came back, the people of Damascus were persecuting him and it may reflect the attitude of King Aretus. I Corinthians 11:32 says...Aretus was the king of that area of Arabia there, Nabatae-an Arabia, and he joined in the persecution of Paul apparently, which leads me to believe that when Paul was over there in Arabia, he wasn't just sitting around, that he may have been in a time of quiet and a time of introspection and a time of instruction from the Spirit, but I believe he was also preaching. And that may have been what infuriated Aretus and got him involved in the persecution when he came back to Damascus. All right, verse 18, "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and abode with him fifteen days." So it's important for us to recognize that the Holy Spirit did not allow Paul to go to Jerusalem. Why? Because He wanted it established that Paul did not need to be taught by other apostles. It was not dependent on the Jerusalem church or on any human agency. And he says why I went there. He says...this is honest, you know. He could have avoided this issue and somebody would have dug it up and then thrown it at him, so he's very honest. He says, yes, I did go to Jerusalem after three years of ministry. And in addition to that, he says, I went for one reason: to see Peter. And if that's not enough to convince you I didn't get my schooling there, I stayed 15 days. The apostle Paul said to the Ephesian elders, I have not failed to declare unto you the whole...what?...counsel of God. Do you think you could learn that in 15 days? Not a chance...not a chance. And they didn't even have overheads in those days (laughter). Just think of the pain of the process of education and the absorption of all that. There's no way he could have learned what he knew except God gave it to him. He went out to Arabia all alone. No, he says, I went and I went only for one reason. Historeo...historeo is the word he uses to see Peter and the word means to visit him, to get to know him. That's basically what it means, to visit with the purpose of becoming acquainted. It comes from the Greek id...basic root. And so he went there just to get to know Peter and that's understandable, right. I mean, if he loved Jesus, he'd like to know Peter cause Peter was so close to Jesus and he could find out a lot of wonderful things that would thrill his heart about what Jesus was like. And he went to get to know Peter. Well, he had a good intention. You remember what happened when he went? Everybody in Jerusalem panicked. "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem"...Acts 9:26..."he tried to join himself to the disciples, but they were afraid of

him..." They said, hey, this is probably some ploy by Satan. Sure, this guy knocks on the door and says, I'm Saul, remember me, I used to kill you people. I've been saved. Sure, sure, sure, yeah. Keep the door locked, see. (Laughter) Oh, that's an old one. There's only one guy in town who believed him and who was it?...the son of consolation, lovable old Barnabas. "Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the Way, that he had spoken to him, how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out in Jerusalem." You know, for the time that he was there, he was on the move. He wasn't in class; he was active. You say, what was he doing? Guess. Verse 29: "...spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, disputed against the Grecians..." And so much so they went about to slay him, and the brethren, when they found this, brought him to Caesarea and put him on a ship and sent him home. And then it says, "the churches had rest." Phew! (Laughter) Got rid of him...too hot when he was around. The apostle Paul didn't go there for the purpose of learning; he went there to know Peter. And when he got there he wasn't accepted by the apostles. We don't know how much time, kind of, in the gap there, but he was also busy preaching. So what is he saying? He's saying this. Yes, I did go to Jerusalem, but after three years of ministry and only to visit Peter to get to know him and I only stayed 15 days. And there's no time to get the whole counsel of God and I was going in and out of the place. And there was no commissioning service and I was busy preaching while I was there. And they finally threw me out because I created so much problems. No, no. There's no way, Paul says, that I could have learned what I know. Now, in addition to spending 15 days, he says in 19, "other of the apostles saw I none." You say, why didn't he see the others? Well, it's likely that they were out ministering. They were on the go. They were moving around. He didn't see any other apostle than Peter. That's the only one. If you were to check the book of Acts, you'll find the apostles were moving around and they may not have even been there. But he does mention this, and I think it's a beautiful thing. He says, "except James, the Lord's brother." Now, James, the Lord's brother was not an apostle. James, the Lord Jesus' brother, was the leader of the Jerusalem church, but he was not an apostle. He saw none of the other apostles, but he did see James, the Lord's brother. You know, I know why he saw Peter. He saw Peter because he knew Peter was so close to Jesus and he loved Jesus so much, I imagine he sat down with Peter and he said, Now, Peter, I know the revelation God's given me, but what was He like? I mean, what did you do, Peter? What did you do? I mean, you got up in the morning and what is He like? See? And then the only other guy in town who knew as much about Jesus as Peter did was Jesus' own brother, James. Now, I imagine he got to James and said, James, tell me about Him when He was little, will you. What was He like? You say, MacArthur, you're speculating. Of course (laughter). But let me add this. Jesus did have many brothers and sisters. James, our Lord's brother...isn't that interesting...our Lord's brother. Matthew, chapter 13, verses 55 and 56...you don't need to look this up; just let me read it to you...13:55, 56..."Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary and His brethren James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?" In other words, He went to Nazareth and everybody was saying, what is this, who is this guy claiming to be? He says, we know His family. He's nobody famous. You know, even those people recognized Jesus had brothers and sisters. Believe

me, folks, the perpetual virginity of Mary is a lie. Mary was not a perpetual virgin. She had children. James sprang from the same womb that Jesus came from. James was not virgin-born but nevertheless he was carried by Mary just as Jesus had been in that same womb. And certainly, the interest in the heart of the apostle was to just know these personal things about Jesus. So he spent time with them. And, certainly, it was to honor James, too, that he spent time with him, as James was such an esteemed man.

Well, summing it up, Paul says, I came to Jerusalem. It was after three years of ministry, lasted only two weeks, saw only Peter, spent some time with James, preached and left in a hurry. My friends, it is then ridiculous, it is ridiculous to charge that he obtained his gospel and teaching from the Jerusalem apostles. It's ridiculous to say that he learned this. No, no. The Judaizers wanted to prove it so they could subordinate Paul to them. But he says there's no way. Then in verse 20 he does what many Jews did, took a Jewish vow or he appeals to the highest court there is, typical Jewish fashion, he binds himself. He says, "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not." Now, that's a pretty strong thing. Now, let me tell you something friends. I told you a few weeks ago about a man that I met at Forest Home who said he didn't know whether Paul actually was authoritative and he didn't believe everything Paul said. You know that Paul claimed that everything that he said came from God. If everything Paul said did not come from God, then Paul is an out and out liar. Right? Worse than that, he is a blasphemer because in verse 20, he mocks God by saying "I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not." Now, don't come along with any of that patronizing stuff about, well, he was a wonderful religious guy and a nice teacher. He is either the spokesman for God, or he is a liar and a blasphemer and there is no middle ground. And Paul said that so he'd leave no middle ground. And when some of these modernists and liberal people come along and say, well, Paul made a lot of opinions, blah, blah, blah, you don't have that option anymore than you have that option with Jesus Christ. No. Verse 21: "Afterwards" he said...just to cover any uncovered ground, he says "Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia..." Now, that was pretty far off. That was his home region. Tarsus was in Cilicia. And he stayed there. You know what he did? He went to Cilicia and Syria and he stayed there for years and he founded churches in Cilicia and we don't know of any other apostles in that area. The apostles were down in Judea, Samaria. And he is way up in Syria and Cilicia. He didn't meet any apostles then. The next time we see Paul is when Barnabas goes over there and finds him and says, come on, I want you to be my co-pastor at Antioch. But all the years in between he's over in Syria and Cilicia by himself founding churches. No, he never sat under the teaching of the apostles. The history of his life proves it. The only thing that was any connection at all is indicated in verse 22. He was "unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ, but they had heard..." Now, that's it. He says the churches in Judea didn't even know me. I remained unknown, the Greek says. I remained unknown. Not point action, but a time period. I was remaining unknown. They just knew one thing...and I like this..."they had heard only that he who persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed." Isn't that good? He had a reputation and his reputation was that he had been saved.

Now, let me show you something exciting. It says in verse 24, "They glorified God on account of me." You know what this is doing? This is like taking a shovel and hitting those Judaizers right in the back of the head. I mean, this is such a slam you can't even believe it. What do you mean? They were saying, Well, we don't feel he's an apostle and we're not allowing him to speak authoritatively for the Jerusalem church, blah, blah. He says, incidentally, folks, the people in Judea who aren't even up there, just the plain old people in Judea, they heard that I had been a persecutor, but I now preach the faith, which once I destroyed and they glorify God on account of me. You know what he's saying? He's saying your all-wise Judaizers don't know as much as the people in Judea. No, they weren't suspicious, not at all. They were glorifying God on account of Paul. They probably heard reports and they were just praising God over what he was doing. And here are these Judaizers trying to propagate the fact that he's no apostle. And so Paul sums up a crushing argument against them when he shows that the people who heard, who got the word, glorified God on account of him. And, you know, later even the leaders of the church in chapter 2 of Galatians, right over there in verse 6 through 10 really, but verse 9 is good enough, "And when James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship that we should go unto the Gentiles..." In other words, even the apostles soon recognized his authority and commissioned him. Do you know that the apostles recognized the authority of Paul? That's right. They never questioned it. Listen to Peter. Oh, this is good. Listen to Peter. He says in II Peter 3:15, "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation..." We believe that. The reason God is patient is because He's a saving God. Listen. "...even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you, as also in all his epistles..." You know what Peter claimed for Paul?...divine authority. Peter believed that Paul had apostolic authority. "...in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things in which are some things hard to be understood..." Peter says, yes, Paul speaks with apostolic authority. So the believers weren't suspicious. How it must have thrilled Paul when they glorified God on account of him.

Beloved, you say, why all this belaboring over Paul's apostleship?...because it's a basic point. Go back to verse 11 and 12 and we'll wrap up. "But I make know to you" he says, "brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man." No. "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it..." It wasn't tradition and it was didactics. It wasn't rabbinical school. "...but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." I ask you this. Can you accept that? Can you accept Paul's divine authority? Some say, no, I can't. He's just an ordinary man, bright, oh, yes, with faults, not always right, opinionated, sometimes good opinions, but no different than any other man. But, you see, Paul didn't allow that. Paul said, what I speak, I speak of God. Now, he's either true or he's a liar. And if he's a liar, then he's a liar and a blasphemer. And if he is, then we can't make a religious nice guy out of him. Now, that's your dilemma, my friend. Is Paul speaking for God, or is he not? That's all the ground there is. And if he is, and we believe he is, this was his message. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you...by which you are saved"...what is it Paul?..."For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received..." In other words, I only told you what God spoke to me. Here it is,

"...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." You believe that? You believe Jesus died and rose again for our justification? That's Paul's message. It's either true or it's an outright lie. You need to decide. And may I hasten to say this. To reject Paul is to reject God. And, beloved, I have belabored this point because I want you to know without shadow of a doubt that the New Testament is authoritative. The principle is clear. The authority rests in Jesus and His apostles. Clark Pinnock says, and I quote, "If we cannot accept the gospel because of its superior truth, we must accept it because of its superior authority," end quote. Let's pray.

Father, we know that this book is Your book. And we know that we are to be careful in handling it. Father, we thank You that we have an authoritative statement from Thee, given through the minds and hearts and pens of man and yet, no less Thine. We thank You that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, that the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. We thank You that this book we hold is authoritative. God, we would pray that there would be no one in this place tonight who, hearing the authoritative gospel of Jesus Christ, that He lived, that He died, that He rose again for our justification, would turn his back on the divine truth. And then, Father, for those of us who are Christians, God give us such a strength of stand on this book. Give us such a firmness of conviction that we stand unashamedly and wholeheartedly for the absolute authority of the Word of God, that we might speak boldly to men, thus saith the Lord, and then give them what it is in this revelation that applies to them. Thank you, Father, in a world that is seeking for an authority, in a world that is groping for a rock to stand on, for the rock of the Word of God. Father, we pray that we might be committed to its truth and to its Christ. In whose Name we pray. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 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).