

14:26 and 16:13), so Paul received instruction directly from Jesus as well as being inspired by the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:13). Paul's apostleship was not inferior in any way to that of the other apostles. To further support this fact, he sets forth a "before-and-after" picture:

"For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it" (Galatians 1:13). The "before" picture is of Paul (Saul of Tarsus) as a rabid Pharisee. His practice of "Judaism" deals not only with observance of the Law of Moses, but also the traditions of the elders (see v. 14). At that time, Paul (Saul) sincerely believed that it was his duty before God to wipe out the church that Jesus had begun (see Acts 26:9). This he did with a vengeance! He was the ring-leader of the mob that stoned Stephen (Acts 7:57 - 8:1). He continued imprisoning and beating disciples of Jesus, even voting to put them to death (Acts 26:10, 11). He was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). Truly, this persecution was "beyond measure." Nothing short of utterly destroying the church would satisfy him (Galatians 1:13). All of this put him on the path toward a brilliant career in Judaism, as the next verse shows.

"And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Galatians 1:14). Paul's "fathers" refers to his ancestors, including his own father in whose footsteps he followed as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). Pharisees were known for their strict keeping of traditions which they viewed in some cases as equal to the Law of Moses or even above it. Jesus had little use for such traditions and suffered the displeasure of the Pharisees as a result (see Matthew 15:1-20). Paul's former zeal for the traditions set him head-and-shoulders above other Jews his age. Had he not become a Christian, Paul might well have become a famous Rabbi like his teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Given these circumstances, what are the chances he would give up such a sterling career in order to be a fake apostle of Christ with a hand-me-down gospel which he would use to please men? Yet this is what the Judaizing teachers were saying about Paul. Their charges, of course, were baseless. Here is what really happened:

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles . . ." (Galatians 1:15, 16a). In simplest

terms, this sentence says that it pleased God to reveal His Son in Paul. Two related items appear also: God separated Paul from his mother's womb, and God called Paul by His grace.

In His eternal foreknowledge, God knew what would happen in Paul's life, and separated Paul from birth to be an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles (compare Jeremiah 1:5). While a thorough study of "predestination" is beyond the scope of this lesson, suffice it to say that foreknowledge does not amount to some sort of divine decree.

By His grace, God called Paul. First, He called him to salvation; this call was made by means of the gospel (see 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Second, He called Paul to be an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles (see Ephesians 3:8; compare Ephesians 1:1 where Paul refers to himself as a called apostle). This call came directly from Jesus before Paul had even obeyed the gospel (Acts 26:16-17).

Having separated Paul and called him, God was pleased to reveal His son in him. Note that the text does not say simply that Jesus was revealed "to" Paul, but "in" him. Jesus was revealed "to" Paul in the vision on the road to Damascus (Acts 9); revealing Him "in" Paul occurred at some later time. The vision on the road appealed to the eye and ear; this revelation was to the inner man.

Having received that revelation, Paul "did not immediately confer with flesh and blood" (Galatians 1:16b). That is, he didn't discuss what he should do or ask for anyone's permission to preach the gospel. In fact, Acts 9:20 states that "immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

"nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus" (Galatians 1:17). This statement further verifies that Paul neither sought nor received permission, authorization, or endorsement from the apostles in Jerusalem. He had begun preaching immediately in Damascus and, as will be seen in the next lesson, it was three years before he returned to Jerusalem at all (v. 18). Just how much of that three years was spent in Arabia is not certain. Arabia consisted of a huge area from the Sinai peninsula north to near Damascus and east to the Persian gulf. This may be where he had the complete gospel revealed to him. Luke (in Acts) does not mention Paul's time in Arabia; It would fit between Acts 9:22 and 9:23.

Review Questions (Lesson #3)

Answer T for true, F for false

1. In some cases, Pharisees viewed their traditions as equal to Mosaic Law or above it.
2. The Gospel consists only of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
3. Saul of Tarsus sincerely believed God wanted him to destroy the church.
4. Immediately after his conversion, Paul returned to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles.
5. Paul's call to be an apostle to the Gentiles came even before he obeyed the gospel.

Give short answers:

1. What is the difference between the way Paul was called to salvation and the way he was called to be an apostle?

2. What are the similarities in the ways that Paul and the other apostles received the gospel?

3. What possible sources did the Judaizing teachers say Paul had for the gospel he preached?

4. What does the practice of “Judaism” refer to?

5. How are Paul and Jeremiah the prophet similar?

Fill in the blanks:

1. Revelation is that which is _____ or _____.
2. “I make known to you” is a common expression meaning to _____, _____, or make to _____.
3. Paul’s _____ was not _____ in any way from that of the other _____.
4. Paul’s “fathers” refers to his _____, including his own _____ in whose _____ he followed as a _____.
5. Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus appealed to the _____ and _____. The revelation of God’s Son “in” Paul was to the _____.

Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace

Lesson #3 Paul’s Call to Apostleship (Galatians 1:11-17)

Paul took great pains in his opening words to the Galatians to emphasize that his apostleship was by divine appointment, not by some inferior human authority (see lesson #1). Then he showed that the gospel he had preached to them was the one and only true gospel (see lesson #2). Now he transitions back to a defense of his apostleship, which was being called into question by the false teachers who were promoting Jewish legalism.

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man” (v. 11). That is to say, Paul’s gospel was not in keeping with what Paul or any other man might invent. By contrast, Jesus giving Himself for our sins was “according to the will of God” (1:4). That is, it was in keeping with what the Father desired. Paul was not informing the Galatians of the source of his gospel for the first time; rather, “I make known to you” is a common expression meaning to declare, remind, or make to understand fully (compare 1 Corinthians 15:1). So, if neither Paul nor any other man invented his message, where did it originate?

“For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it” (Galatians 1:12a). These expressions seem at first to be the same thing, but Paul makes a distinction between them. To receive something is to have it handed down (in this case, from man). The Galatians had received the gospel from Paul (1:9), as had the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:1); Paul himself also received it (1 Corinthians 15:3), but not from man. This may be emphasizing that the other apostles had not “handed down” the gospel to Paul. Neither had he been taught the gospel, as was commonly done then and still is done today as we fulfill the Great Commission. Of course Paul heard the fundamentals of the gospel from Ananias (Acts 22:16). He would have heard of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus from the defenses of Stephen (Acts 7) and other Christians he had persecuted. But there is much more to the gospel than these basic items. How, then, did Paul come to possess the gospel?

“but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12b). Revelation is that which is disclosed or laid bare. Just as the other apostles received the gospel directly from Jesus in His personal ministry and, later, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent to them (John