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# Galatians

**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**

This is a transitional verse between the thought of the Source of Paul's reception of the gospel and that of a description concerning his conversion and subsequent learning and evangelistic efforts. In order to make that transition, he describes his life just prior to his conversion.

This description is a reiteration of what those in Galatia already knew. This is evident from the words, "For you have heard." He is recalling his testimony to them in order to give them a standard of comparison between himself and the false apostles who had come in and infected their churches with the heresy of reinserting Judaism into the church.

In this case, the term "Judaism" is referring to the religious aspects of life among the Jewish people. He fell into that category, and in that capacity he says, "I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it." The term "church" in the Greek is in the singular. Thus it shows a set distinction between the practice of Judaism without Christ, and that of unity within the many churches who are "in Christ" and under His sole authority.

Again, these words are given to show the contrast between life under the old system and that under the new. Paul was under the old and felt he was acting in

accord with the will of God at that time. However, the term "I persecuted" is in the imperfect tense and should more appropriately be translated as "I was persecuting." Paul was acting in a particular manner towards the church when his conduct was suddenly ended and a great change in his actions took place. But just before that change, it was his intent and passion to utterly destroy the church.

The reason for his words is to refute the Judaizers who were reinserting the law. The break had been made between the two. Christ and His church is on a new and separate path from that of the law, which was set aside through His completed work.

Life application: Many people have amazing conversion experiences. They are heading down one path and suddenly their life makes a sudden turn towards Christ. The zeal and passion with which they follow this new path is one of the surest signs of the power of Christ to change the hardened heart. From time to time, go back and evaluate your own conversion. Return to the roots of that time and look to reenergize the zeal you felt. Rekindle the fire once again, and then press on in His power.

**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 continues here with his qualifications as a true "Jew" to be fawned over, if that was appropriate to occur. Again, the reason for this line of thought is to show those in Galatia that just because someone possessed all of the qualifications of a true "Jew," it had no bearing on whether they were teaching the true gospel message or not. He will continue to show himself as the "standard" by which all other such Jews would be more than willing to gauge themselves if these were the things which mattered.

First he says, "And I advanced in Judaism." This means the teachings of Judaism. It included more than the cultural aspects of that life, which any Jew would be

aware of. Instead, it included the fullest knowledge of those things. Any Jew would know to observe the Passover, but Paul knew the reasons behind the observance in the most detailed manner. Any Jew would know to wear particular clothing, but Paul would understand "why" they did so. These, and countless other precepts, were the things he faithfully studied.

Going on, he said that such knowledge was "beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation." He, along with many other students, was trained at the feet of Gamaliel, a great Jewish rabbi. And yet, he excelled beyond them. He had a greater knowledge, and a greater application of the knowledge, than many who were his contemporaries. This means those of his age and generation who set about to advance in Judaism.

In his advancement, he was "more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers." The word for "zealous" is *zélótés*. This word gives the idea of boiling over with fervency. It comes from *zéloó*, which refers to the sound of boiling. Paul's fervency for his life as a strict and adherent Jew was the epitome of such fervency, exceeding those around him as he strived to be the very best adherent possible. This included "the traditions of my fathers."

These "traditions" are the things which Jesus rebuked the leaders of Israel for. They were those things which Jewish life and culture adhered to, but which were beyond that of Scripture. Whatever laws were set down by the religious elite, Paul was the first to agree to them and to strictly adhere to them. He wanted, in all ways, to be thought of as the cream of this legalistic society.

If those at Galatia wanted someone from Jewish circles to emulate, Paul would be the cat's meow of the one to follow after. But Paul turned from all such things and pursued Christ and His gospel of grace. These notes of his past life are intended to get those in Galatia to see the futility of doing anything but that as well.

Life application: Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

**But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, Galatians 1:15**

This verse falls into the biblical doctrine of "predestination." God has a set plan which will come about and which cannot be thwarted. In the case of the calling of Paul, it is one which God knew would be the most effective calling, both in the individual selected and in the time-period in which his selection was made.

Paul begins with, "But when it pleased God." This actually ties together with the words of the next verse which say, "...to reveal His Son in me." There was a specific time in Paul's life for his calling. However, though his calling came at a later point in life, the preparation for that call came at a much earlier time. Paul says that God "separated me from my mother's womb."

This is a common theme for those selected by God for His redemptive purposes. Samson's calling was made even before his conception, as was Samuel (which is implied in the account), and John the Baptist as well. Isaiah's words concerning the coming Messiah show the same -

"Listen, O coastlands, to Me,  
And take heed, you peoples from afar!  
The LORD has called Me from the womb;  
From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name." Isaiah 49:1

Further, Jeremiah shows this was the case with him. The Lord said to him -

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;  
Before you were born I sanctified you;  
I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah 1:5

In the case of Jeremiah and Paul, they didn't actually receive their commission until much later, and yet their designated paths were set from the womb. In Paul's specific case, it was after years of learning under Gamaliel and after countless persecutions of Christians, among many other things. In other words, these things, which seem contrary to being a servant of the gospel message, were actually being used as a part of his ability to convey that message.

He could not well refute the Judaizers to those in Galatia without having the credentials that he possessed. And so even what we would consider as evil can be used for a good purpose by God. This same idea also permeates the Bible. What happened to Joseph was evil, and yet God used it for good. Thus, we can see that God has a plan which is far greater than any temporary woe or misstep on our part.

Paul was separated from the womb and at the perfect moment he was called "through His grace." Every part of Paul's life was leading up to that magnificent moment on the road to Damascus where he was shown grace. And that moment led to each subsequent moment of his life. The marvelous plan of God was working out exactly as intended in order to bring the world to a fuller understanding of the work of Christ.

The reason for Paul's use of this verse is to show that it was by grace alone that he was saved. If this is so, then the pattern follows through with each other person who is saved. There is no works involved in the salvation of any person, except the finished work of Christ; a work which is of grace alone through faith alone.

However, this then asks us to consider, if Paul has to tell them this because they were falling back under works of the law, then free-will must be a part of the process, even if God is fully aware of it. There would be no need for Paul to even write these words unless there was the possibility that a different outcome would result if a different choice were made. This will become perfectly evident when a situation concerning Peter is introduced into Paul's words in chapter 2.

It is clearly and perfectly evident that even though God knows all things that will occur in all people forever, He does not make our choices for us. Thus, predestination has a dual nature - God knows the choices man will make, but the free-will of man is a part of the equation. It is a complicated issue, but it is both reasonable and self-evident in the pages of the Bible.

Life application: Everything that occurs is known to God before it happens. Though that doesn't take away any pain we may feel, it should give us great comfort to know that if we are in Christ, all things are heading to a very good end. Living through the present may be difficult, but it is only a weigh-station on the highway to glory.

**...to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, Galatians 1:16**

The words "to reveal His Son in me" refer to the calling of Paul through God's grace. It was this calling that was intended to accomplish exactly that. Paul had fought against Christ by fighting against His church, but God intended to reveal Him to Paul in an act of grace and with the intent that he "might preach among the Gentiles."

He was uniquely qualified to accomplish this. His attitude, demeanor, learning of Scripture, language abilities, and so much more made him the logical (and even perfect) choice to become the Apostle to the Gentiles. The other apostles could not grasp that this message would go out to the Gentile world. Passages such as Acts 11:18, and the general idea which brought about the Council in Jerusalem in Acts 15, show that there was continued resistance to the truth of the gospel as it was understood by Paul. Peter will also show this resistance in chapter 2 of Galatians.

But Paul, well trained in the Hebrew Scriptures, was able to pull out the pertinent verses and passages from those same Scriptures to see that how God would work in the Gentiles was how He had actually worked all along. All of his writings methodically show the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, and they

meticulously rely on the very Hebrew Scriptures which he had been so well trained in.

For this reason he says, "I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood." Rather than relying on the doctrines of man, he determined to immediately turn away from such fallible resources and devote himself further to comprehending the great body of Scripture which he was already well trained in. He would do it without presupposition or the weakened, fallible interpretation of man. Instead, he would do it with the leading of the Holy Spirit who gave the Scriptures to man in the first place.

The term "flesh and blood" is used four times in the New Testament, and each time it is connected to a hint of either human weakness or ignorance. In contrast to this is the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. A good example is found in Matthew 16:17 -

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'"

As he has been doing thus far, he is showing the supremacy of the gospel he preached over the fallible and misguided path those in Galatia had chosen to follow by listening to the false apostles. Scripture can be twisted by any fallible human to produce the most wretched of heresies. But the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who are willing to put aside biases, presuppositions, and lies in order to hold fast to what is properly revealed concerning Christ Jesus.

Life application: Paul's words are clear and concise, but they are often twisted by those who have a perverse agenda. Peter mentions exactly this in 2 Peter 3:14-16. Never trust the interpretation of man without checking and rechecking what you have been taught.