

Galatians 1: 13-17; “The Facts of Apostolic Experience”, Message # 6 in the series – “Christ has made us Free”, a Bible Study conducted on May 1st, 2013, by Pastor Paul Rendall at the Reformed Baptist Church.

We have seen in past studies the great concern of the Apostle Paul, that these churches of Galatia would not be deceived by the false gospel of the Judaizers. The false gospel which they preached was a gospel made up by legalistic men who were imposing their own additions upon the true gospel of faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. They were saying that circumcision and keeping of the Mosaic law, added to Christ's finished work on the cross, were necessary to being saved. Not only were the churches in Galatia in danger of being carried away by this false doctrine, they were also in danger of not receiving the Apostle Paul's words to them. They had been turned away from believing in Paul's Apostolic authority. They had been told by the Judaizers that Paul's authority to teach and to exercise authority in the churches had not been established by the church in Jerusalem, and the Apostles there. Paul's answer to this in verses 10-12 has been to show that the gospel which he preached was not from men, but came to him by revelation of Jesus Christ. Christ had given Paul saving grace and the gospel; not the other Apostles. And so, we find in these verses that Paul felt it was necessary to remind them of certain facts of his Apostolic experience which they should take heed to; facts which would not only establish his Apostolic authority, but which would also confirm to these Galatian churches the truth of the gospel itself. Tonight we want to take a look 1st at the facts of his former conduct. (verses 13 and 14) 2nd – The facts of God's call. (verses 15 and 16) And 3rd – The facts of Christ's teaching him. (verses 17-24)

1st – Let look at the facts of Paul's former conduct.

“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.” The facts are these: Paul was a Jew who was advanced in his Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries. He persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And the reason for this was that he was “more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers.” What Paul was using for his supposed authority to persecute Christians was these “traditions” of the Jews; not only the Old Testament Scriptures, but also the writings and oral traditions of the Pharisees. Many of Paul's teachers taught him that the righteousness which is of the law was something that could be attained; not by faith in Christ, but by ceremonial works and good outward moral behavior according to the law of God. And so, when you think of these facts, it goes a long way to establish his Apostolic authority when you think of what he was like before his conversion to Christ. Turn to Acts 22, verse 3 with me. “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of

Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our father's law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today." "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons, both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished." You can see here that Paul's persecuting zeal came to him because he was zealous for the truth of these traditions of men who taught that ceremonial and moral righteousness could be attained by works proceeding from self-righteousness; these men not believing that Christ's righteousness alone could save from sins and God imputing Christ's righteousness for justification. He was zealous toward God according to the strictness of "our father's law", and this is why he went to get his authority to persecute Christians, from other men who believed like he did; the high priest and the chief priests.

Let us realize that only the grace of God in Jesus Christ can so change a person's heart that they go from being a persecutor to being one of God's saints, and an Apostle. Paul was exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers. Paul's former conduct could be termed, "his manner of life." It was the way that he lived, and what he pursued. Let's look over at Acts Chapter 26, verses 4-11. "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know." "They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived as a Pharisee." "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers." "To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving Do night and day, hope to attain." "For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews." "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?" "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." "This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them." "And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities." There are several things that ought to be noted about Paul's experience here. The people at Jerusalem and all the Jews knew Paul's manner of life. He was in the strictest sect of the Pharisees. But once he had come to know Christ he was not the angry man that he had once been. Before conversion, Paul thought that he had to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. And he was exceedingly enraged against all Christians. But once he came to Christ, he then became gentle among them.

Look over at 1 Thessalonians 2: 4-8. "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts." "For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, or a cloak for covetousness—God is witness." "Nor did we seek glory from

men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.” “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” “So affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” What a change; what a transformation. Only the grace of God could bring about such a thing; taking a persecuting violent, aggressor, and changing him from that, to a man who loved the brethren, was gentle to them, and who would impart his very life to them because they were dear to him. I hope that you can see the difference between these two gospels. The gospel of self-righteousness and trusting in ceremonial works or outwardly moral works to save you will ultimately lead you to think that you have to do many things against the name of Jesus. That is; if you are consistent and zealous for this false gospel of yours you will become upset and angry with those who tell you that you must be born again to see the kingdom of God; that you must be converted, and trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. At the very least you will suppress and oppose the truth of the gospel in unrighteousness when you realize the implications of it. Paul realized the implications of the gospel of Christ, and this is why he persecuted those who were Christ’s followers. But when the Lord saved Him everything changed. It is this fact, of what Paul once was, before conversion, that should cause us to see that God did indeed call Paul to become His instrument to preach the gospel as we shall see in a few moments.

For 2ndly – We want to look at the facts of God’s effectually calling Paul to be a Christian and an Apostle. (verses 15 and 16a)

“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...” You can see here that God’s effectual call changed everything in his life. God is the One whose good pleasure is fulfilled, in relation to the calling of each and every one of His Elect, in His own good time. “When it pleased God”, He separated Paul from his mother’s womb in his physical birth. And “when it pleased God”, He stopped Paul in his persecuting tracks and effectually called him through His grace unto salvation, by causing him to be born again. All of this was based upon God’s having predestinated Paul to this good work of salvation taking place in his soul. Turn with me over to Jeremiah Chapter 1, verse 4. “Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘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.’” You can see here how sovereign God is, in the work of the salvation of a soul. He knew Jeremiah before He ever formed him in the womb. That is, He had predestined Jeremiah unto salvation and the work that Jeremiah would do for Him. Before he was ever born he was sanctified to this; he was set apart to God’s purposes in salvation and service. He was not only foreknown and predestined unto salvation, but he was also foreordained to the work that God would call him to; that of being a prophet to the nations. You should know that all

of God's works are known unto Him before the foundation of the world; from eternity. (Acts 15: 18) This includes all the people that He will save, and all of the good works that they will do. (Ephesians 2: 10) "For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

There are two kinds of calling which are mentioned in the New Testament. There is the general call which takes place in connection with the preaching of the gospel by a minister, or by those who are sharing the gospel with others. It is God calling to those sinners to turn from their sin and be reconciled to Him. Turn to 2nd Corinthians 5: 18-20 – "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." God has ambassadors who call to men and plead with them to be reconciled to God. But the call of men preaching, or the saint's sharing the gospel, is not in itself what produces the salvation of the soul. Matthew 22: 14 says, "For many are called, but few are chosen." No, when God chooses someone to salvation, and effectually calls them, it is God's Holy Spirit working powerfully and effectually to open the heart and to give light and grace in connection with the truth of the gospel imparted, that enables the sinner to respond to the truth. Turn with me over to James Chapter 1, verse 18 – "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." You can see from this verse that it is not our will which brings us forth out of darkness, or changes our hearts, it is God's own will; and that in connection with the preaching and sharing of the word of truth; the Bible and the gospel contained within it. The Bible and the gospel reveal Christ to the one whose eyes God has opened. What is beautiful is that this is not simply the revelation of Christ in the gospel to our mind, if God is saving us. That would be God's revealing Christ to us. But rather the wording here is that God's calling of Paul was intended to revealed Christ in him, so that he might preach him among the Gentiles, and might be of service to Him. Acts Chapter 9, verse 15 – "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go. For he (that is Paul) is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel." "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." This was the effectual call of Paul. He had been radically changed by the grace of God because Christ was now in him by the power and presence of His Holy Spirit.

And 3rd – The facts of Christ Himself leading Paul and teaching him.
(verse 16b and 17)

Verse 16b Paul says, "I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to those who were apostles before me, but went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus." Now this might seem to be the wrong thing for Paul to have

done; some persons reading this might think that the right thing for Paul to have done would have been for him to go to Jerusalem and immediately join the church there, and submit himself to the Apostles, who were Apostles before Him, to be taught and evaluated and confirmed in his Apostleship over time. But this is not how God led Paul. It was not Paul's simply trying to be independent of their authority, or independent of other Christians. It was Paul's being trained by God Himself; by Christ Himself. Christ Himself had revealed Himself to Paul, and He would personally reveal Himself to Paul on a number of occasions in his ministry. God often teaches the Christian his greatest lessons in solitude. I like what Matthew Henry says about this: "Being thus called to his work and office, he conferred not with flesh and blood. This may be taken more generally, and so we may learn from it that, when God calls us by his grace, we must not consult flesh and blood. But the meaning of it here is that he did not consult men; he did not apply to any others for their advice and direction; neither did he go up to Jerusalem, to those that were apostles before him, as though he needed to be approved by them, or to receive any further instructions or authority from them: but, instead of that, he steered another course, and went into Arabia, either as a place of retirement proper for receiving further divine revelations, or in order to preach the gospel there among the Gentiles, being appointed to be the apostle of the Gentiles; and thence he returned again to Damascus, where he had first begun his ministry, and whence he had with difficulty escaped the rage of his enemies, Acts 9. Let us learn from this that you and I will be taught many important spiritual lessons by Christ Himself; lessons that we will learn in solitude, but alone with our God. We will learn lessons about our own hearts and how much remaining corruption exists in them; we will learn of our service in relation to the gospel and our helping in the advancing of truth in the kingdom of Christ. Psalm 16, verse 7 – "I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons." And Psalm 32, verses 8-11 – "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye." "Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you." As we close this message, let us remember the words of Psalm 25, verses 12-14. "Who is the man that fears the Lord?" "Him shall He teach in the way He chooses." "He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth." "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." This is what God did with Paul and we will talk more of these things in our next time of Bible study together.