

## LSB Galatians 1:1 - 10

*11 For I make known to you, brothers, that the gospel which I am proclaiming as good news is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. 14 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being far more zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when God, who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might proclaim Him as good news among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. 18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying!) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which are in Christ; 23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the good news of the faith which he once tried to destroy." 24 And they were glorifying God because of me.*

Last week we spent time recognizing that the gospel, the good news of salvation available to anyone, the rescue from an evil rebellious age, our rescue from a common condemnation of all sinful men by God, is dependent on words. A message. A thesis if you will. Definitive words that define our present condition and how we might be rescued from imminent doom.

Words that form ideas in our intellect. The thing that elevates us as image of God bearers, the fact that we have an awareness of ourselves. Animals have no self awareness of a soul that transcends their bodies. We, created in the image of God, do have that.

We read in this book and discover that because of sin we are separated from our Creator. And furthermore, in our sin we are missing the mark of what we were designed to do which is worship our Creator and because we operate out of sync with our intended design, we are empty shells of what we long to be in our innermost being. Empty, sad, frustrated, without hope.

We were designed to be in relationship with our loving Creator and sin has caused a breach that leaves us hollow and empty. Always searching for the inner wellness we somehow know is missing.

It was a headline this week that colleges everywhere are stricken with a crisis of students who have no sense of belonging. And it has become a crisis because if you don't belong, you don't finish. Emptiness, hollowness affects hope and also affects finishing. Why strive to finish an education where you have no sense of belonging?

But the breach reaches much deeper than just college campuses. Secularism, in its mad rush to kill off God, in order to be rid of any morality, in the quest of absolute personal autonomy, left us with, what? Free sex. At the cost of flying through space on a rock that has happened purely by accident and means nothing. Your life means nothing, so grab what you can on the moments that you're here because you will soon be forgotten dust. Nothing means anything.

We killed God because He constrains. We killed families, moms and dads committed to children and generations with security and love because those constrain us. We killed governments and civilizations so we can do what we want with no constraints. We kill our babies in the womb so we can not be throttled in our hedonism. And then we stand around in a circle navel gazing about why we don't feel like we belong. To anything.

Well in that scenario, you don't. You're just dust retaining a bit of water for a few short years and you will return to dust, on a rock, flying through space meaninglessly. Sin did that to us.

The Gospel is the good news that that breach can be mended. The root cause which is our sin can be forgiven, and we can be re-united with our loving Creator. That process is defined by words. A message. Good news. Jesus died and rose again to remove our sins and give us a right standing before God. He took our sins upon Himself and gave to our accounts His sinless perfection.

And last week we discovered that the "way" of salvation within the message that defines the problem and the solution is very circumspect. You can't add to the message and you can't subtract from the message, or the end result is null. Ineffective.

I love banana cake. A particular recipe of banana cake that my father loved so much that my mother got the recipe from a baker in Alaska before I was born, for this particular cake. About once a year I'll mix up a batch myself and make myself a cake. Usually when Miss Pam is out of town visiting Tina for a week or 10 days. Cat away, mouse plays.

One time I got confused and thought the bin with the powdered sugar was the flour bin. Mix mix mix. Something's not adding up. I got glop, not cake batter. Another time I mixed something else up and got a cake that tasted like salt. You have to get all of the elements correct or the finished product is worthless. Right?

The gospel that differentiates the possible hearers destiny between heaven and hell is important to get right on an entirely magnified scale. I can waste \$5 worth of materials on a bad cake and throw it away and it matters very little in the long run.

But if we get the gospel message wrong and it is ineffective to the hearers whose eternity hangs in the balance, that's enormous. Which is also why Satan directs most of his effort to rob God of the glory God is due, right at this very thing. Add or subtract from the gospel so it is incomplete in it's effect. Ineffectual. Like a car that didn't start. Or a bomb that didn't go

off.

Multitudes can be re-directed back onto the wide road to destruction if Satan can get people to believe a false gospel. Subtract repentance. Disallow sin. Add works to salvation. All of those plus many more can do irreparable damage to the gospel message and render it void of it's effect.

So the correct gospel with all of the necessary elemental ideas and no less, no more, is necessary for life. Or death. Heaven or hell.

Which raises the question; Why would we believe Paul. Why would we trust our eternities to him? He claims to have the right recipe with the right elements that can result in an effectual salvation. Eternal rescue. Eternity therefore hangs in the balance on Paul being either right, or wrong.

That's actually a fair question, and Paul has sort of kicked the door in and entered the room with both guns blazing precisely because some men had come to the churches Paul had established in the region of Galatia, and undone what Paul had begun there.

And their premise is, Paul was wrong. Paul's gospel is incomplete. Paul's formula lacks elements that are necessary to be right with God. You need to add works to your faith. Specifically, you need to convert to judaism first and follow the law of Moses, before Jesus can help you. Jewish customs, jewish law, jewish ceremonies. Works are required for Jesus to be any effect for you.

Somebody's right, and somebody's wrong. And eternity in either heaven or hell, hangs in the balance over this issue. Is Paul right? Are the judaizer's right? We'd better find out!

Who's got the credentials? I'm sure the judaizers from Jerusalem came saying, listen, we know very well who the apostles are, the eleven after Judas, and then Matthias by God's choice. 12 apostles of the church and Paul didn't make the list.

And not only that, the apostles were out on the ground preaching the gospel, enduring persecution while Paul was leading the opposition to the church. Paul was killing christians while the 12 known apostles were giving their very lives to establish Christ's church. Of all people, Paul is the least likely credentialed person you should probably believe.

It seems like a fair argument, right. Heaven and hell dangle in the balance. We dangle over hell hanging onto a thread. We better figure out who we're going to believe and they need some rock solid credentials, or we'll be spending eternity in hell. Why Paul? Of all people, why Paul??

Well, Paul know's that question is out there and it needs to be answered. It's a fair question, and it is wildly important. Why do we believe Paul's gospel is the correct effectual formula for life or death, heaven or hell? Here's Paul's cred in his own words;

*11 For I make known to you, brothers, that the gospel which I am proclaiming as good news is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Paul's going to take the time to tell his story in the following verses, but everything we need to know is in this statement of credential. Paul's claim is simple. My gospel came from the source. Period.

Paul's claim is that as an apostle, chosen by the Lord Jesus for that purpose, his message was given to him, through a revelation, of Jesus Christ. Paul's statement of facts is one of disclaimer, and one of claim.

Paul disclaims that the gospel he preaches originated with men. He didn't get it from Peter or James or John or any other of the Lord's chosen apostles. He didn't get it from any man, any where. No man taught him the gospel that he teaches and preaches.

His gospel that he claims is THE once for all delivered to the saints faith "gospel" was revealed to him by a revelation from the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Does that mean Jesus showed up in person? We don't know. We do know that on the Damascus road, Jesus personally showed up and stopped Paul dead in his tracks, and re-directed him in a different direction. Paul met Christ on that road and became the slave of Christ where once he was slave of the Pharisee-ism branch of Judaism.

This defense and establishment of Paul's authority of apostleship to the church is hugely important. It's going to go on for chapters as Paul lays out his defense of his God given authority. He's going to go into detail about his pre-conversion state, his conversion on the road to Damascus by Christ in person, and then his post conversion experience and path of apostleship.

And if we think about this with full 20-20 hindsight it's easy to see why this is important to establish. For God's own purposes and pleasure, He didn't use the 12 apostles who walked with Jesus for 3 years on the ground to write down for us the precepts and defining dogmas and doctrines of the church.

Paul eventually wrote 13 books of the new testament. God chose Paul to write the defining truths of the new covenant. Therefore, if you are Satan, and you want to do damage to the church of God, Paul is the bullseye in the middle of the target. Still true today.

Think about issues the church faces today. Women want to be elders and preachers. Gotta get rid of Paul. Divorce for any cause. Get rid of Paul. Chastity before marriage. Get rid of Paul. Want to build a case for homosexuality, get rid of Paul.

Want to redefine soteriology, OK, break for a big word, Soteriology is the study of the mechanics and order of salvation. What, how and in what order does true salvation with real regeneration come? Want to add or subtract or fiddle with salvation, get rid of Paul. A lot of clear definition

about life or death subjects falls ultimately on the writings of Paul.

You have to weaken or eliminate Paul before you can change stuff, because Paul was crystal clear in matters that can make or break christianity, make or break real effectual transformative regeneration. Salvation. Once you knock down Paul, you can run amuck wrecking God's church. Paul is the levy wall that keeps the church on high ground. Breach Paul and the water can flood in.

So this defense of Paul's apostleship was not just necessary for a few wobbly christians in Galatia, God knew that we would need this defense thousands of times for the last 2000 years. Paul is ground zero to get at the church and make changes that render it null and void. We are not surprised that this first letter of Paul's defines and establishes his authority to speak authoritatively as an apostle God's very words, for His church.

Let me state it simply. If Paul said it, we are under the authoritative revealed inspired truth of God, we must do it. Period. Therefore, this portion that establishes that God given authority spoken through His chosen apostle is foundational. We don't get to pick and choose what we must obey. If Paul wrote it, it is the clear word of God.

My own mom used to say, you know, Paul was a woman hater. Clearly, he didn't like women. He was a gumpy old woman hater. Had no need for women. You didn't know my mom was a women's libber, did you. Grouchy old Paul squashing women. Saying stuff like Satan had an easier time deceiving Eve which got us into this mess. Saying women have to submit to their husbands. Sorry mom, everything Paul said and wrote is inspired revealed truth, God's words given for your good. And so it goes. Paul is always present crushing our absolute personal autonomy. He's the oracle.

Why would we believe his claims. Well, to begin with, his salvation, his calling is perhaps the most abrupt redirection ever to have happened. Talk about skidding to a stop and making a complete about face and going the

opposite direction! Paul's case is wildly extreme. Almost inconceivable.

He was on the road to Damascus, papers in hand, prepared to crush christianity and kill christians, when he hit a brick wall. When he makes the claim to have been the chief of sinners, it isn't hyperbole. He was on a mission to eliminate christians and decimate the church. Passionate, ardent hatred of christians and their assembling together as the church.

*13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.*

Again, no hyperbole. No one went beyond the measure of Paul's mission to destroy christianity. He actually was the chief at the forefront of that effort. I can almost hear Satan chortling, Jesus may have James and Peter and John and the rest, but I've got Paul. A worthy opponent. Equal to the task. Paul was radicalized in our current terminology. Irrationally driven to crush christians.

Why?

*14 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being far more zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*

Judaism like Roman Catholicism today had a caste, an order, a rank and file of different levels and divisions that you could rise to the top in. Priests, bishops, cardinals, pope. Judaism was similar. Phariseism, Priesthood, Jerusalem Council, 70 elders, chief priest. Paul was on his way to the top of the jewish heap.

What was he doing to surpass his countrymen. Zeal for the traditions of the fathers. Radicalized. Paul was making his name known by killing christians. In a world of names rising in the ranks, Paul's name was well known. Crushing christians was simply a means to an end. Paul wanted to be at the top of his religion. Chief priest perhaps. Or one of the 70 elders

on his way.

### *15 But when God,*

There was only one person who could stop Paul on his mad rush to claw his way to the pinnacle of judaism. Only one.

Years ago when Jeff and I were trying to not starve to death, running the Sears Catalog store here in Tonopah, Sears had a lady who trained us in all things Sears. And one of Sears great efforts was to sign people up for credit. And Sears had a rule for us. You do not pre-qualify a person. The credit department qualifies or dis-qualifies people who apply. Not you.

So when that guy who lives out at the dump in an old station wagon comes in and wants to apply for credit so he can buy some new tires and you know very well, he's the least likely candidate on earth to receive credit, that's not your job. Your job is to give him the application and then to mail it to us.

We all have this problem. Built in. We pre-qualify people. We look at someone who is blatantly defiantly arrogantly secular in their atheism and you think, why would I waste time telling that guy he's a sinner and his sins can be forgiven. He's hopeless. Raise your hand if you're guilty. We pre-qualify people.

Paul was in the category of a radicalized Moslem who is on a mission to behead christians. That's the closest parallel we could draw. He was like a rampaging radical moslem. Trying to get his name to the top of Islam. That's a fair comparison.

We would look at that guy with about 3 bloody christian heads next to him, with no bodies, just the heads on the ground, and we would tend to pre-qualify him as a poor candidate for christianity. That was Paul!

He wasn't a poor candidate, he was an impossible candidate. Last person on earth who could ever be a christian.

*15 But when God, who had set me apart from my mother's womb*

Only one person could stop Paul in his tracks and turn him into the vehicle that would define christianity through inspired revelation. One person alone.

And just here, we have to stop and ask ourselves, is Paul a special case? Are there tiers of christians who come into this deal through different channels than Paul did.

I'm asking, does God, Himself, for His own pleasure and purposes and by His will, call all christians out of the world and into His kingdom, or are those folks, like Paul here defines himself, a specialized group within the big umbrella of christianity?

Because if Paul isn't a special case, we have a problem here. Well, actually, only a problem if you hate the doctrine of election, because, clearly, that's what we have here.

We have dual truths running in parallel. Paul was the worst candidate for conversion ever. The least likely candidate. He wasn't most likely to be a christian, he was most likely to murder you if you are a christian, but he was also set apart to be a christian before he was ever born, by God's election.

People either love or hate the concept of predestination by election according to God's good pleasure. Like most folks, I started out hating that doctrine and somewhere in my 52 years began to love it.

Here's the thing, in our post post modern secular world where christians may again be burned at the stake before long, the doctrine of election says this;

You could put me in the popemobile with the bullet proof glass and drive

me into the middle of a moslem horde, at mecca, and give me a loudspeaker system to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of a horde of murderous moslems, I'd need the popemobile to be able to finish the message before they tipped it over and lit it on fire, but here's the truth, if God has some person in that horde who He has elected to belong to Him, just like Paul, that person could walk out of Satan's world and into God's kingdom.

God's chosen set apart for Him people will respond to the good news, even if they are christian killers on their way to a city to murder christians. That's what those 3 words at the beginning of verse 15 mean. ***But when God . . .***

This is Paul's salvation experience. Listen to it again and tell me what Paul did in order to be saved; *15 But when God, who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me*

God set Paul apart before the foundations of the world. God called Paul through His infinite grace. The worst candidate on earth. Paul defines grace. God revealed His Son IN Paul.

The only thing Paul did was skid to a stop when he hit a brick wall. God predestined Paul to be saved. God set Paul apart for a task He designed. God called Paul to salvation. God took up residence through His Holy Spirit of His Son inside Paul.

*so that I might proclaim Him as good news among the Gentiles,*

God apparently has a sense of humor. Paul is a jew of jews. The only thing more distasteful to Paul than a christian is a gentile christian. God called Paul out of this world to go to the gentiles and make christians. It's so impossible that it's comical.

But we believe Paul's authority based in the utter impossibility of this

previous person becoming, Paul the apostle to the gentiles. Utter and totally impossible opposites. God must have smiled at His plan for Paul's life. Paul is believable partly because of the impossibility of what transpired.

Now Paul is going to shift gears and talk about what happened to him after his improbable U-turn on the road to Damascus. Now he's a christian, what does he do?

*I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.*

Paul was a climber. As a jew he was fanatical about getting to the top. As a christian, just the opposite happened. Paul didn't buddy up with all the other apostles and go to apostle school. Instead he retracted from organized christendom, whatever that looked like in 1st century AD.

Instead he went away to Arabia. Speculation only but some scholars think since the other apostles got 3 years intensive training with Jesus that Paul also received 3 years, alone, with the Lord, in Arabia. Some day in heaven perhaps we'll get a replay.

What Paul is telling us here is that he didn't go to apostles seminary, he spent 3 years in Arabia. His gospel is not influenced by what the apostles in Jerusalem were doing during those years. Alone time with the Lord in preparation for what God had set him apart to do.

*18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying!)*

After three years Paul goes to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, Peter. He spent 15 days with Peter. And the sole other apostle

Paul met at that juncture was James.

Now that isn't James, son of Zebedee, and brother of John. It was James, the half brother of Jesus. The son of Mary and Joseph. And it's interesting that Paul calls James an apostle. He also was not one of the original 12. Yet he is here called an apostle by Paul and he authored the book of James about the same time as this letter of Paul's to the Galatians.

Church tradition tells us Jude like James was also half brother of Jesus. Both are among the new testament writers, but not part of the original 12 apostles.

Ephesians tells us that Christ gave the church apostles as gifts. *11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ,*

Of course we believe that those apostles were part of the apostolic age right as the church was being formed after Jesus ascended into heaven. They have authority to write scripture during the foundation period, as well as work miracles and other sign gifts. Paul is in that group, selected by Jesus, the last apostle, untimely born.

I take that to mean after Paul, there are no other apostles. And by the end of the first century that foundation era of the church was closed. The miracle gifts ceased. The inspired scriptures were written. It was a special formative time. Likewise new prophecy about the future ended at the same time. Evangelists and Pastor/Teachers still remain 2000 years later.

*21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which are in Christ; 23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the good news of the faith which he once tried to destroy." 24 And they were glorifying God because of me.*

What Paul is arguing here in his defense of his authority as an apostle is exactly what the Judaizers argued against him. Paul isn't an apostle. Paul's gospel is incomplete.

Paul argues, I had revelation of this gospel, independent of the chosen apostles, far away from Jerusalem, those folks didn't even know what I look like, they could have passed me on the street and not recognized me, and yet independent of the forming organized Church of Jesus Christ, off by myself in Arabia and Syria and Cilicia, here is the report about me.

*“He who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the good news of the faith which he once tried to destroy.”*

His gospel is their gospel. The report comes back, Paul is now proclaiming **the** good news of **the** faith he once tried to eliminate.

Did you catch that. Paul preaches the gospel of the faith. Not a different gospel. The gospel. The same gospel of the same faith. The faith. The report is, Paul's one of us. Preaching this faith. Preaching our gospel.

And without meeting Paul or approving of what Paul was doing, the apostles in Jerusalem were praising God for Paul. Very different from what the judaizers had come and told the Galatians.

So who're you going to believe? The christian killer who hit a brick wall on his way to kill christians, Jesus stopped him dead in his tracks and called him to be an apostle, and Jesus gave him his gospel which is the same gospel as the other apostles were proclaiming, who are glorifying God because of what God did through Paul? Or the guys who said Paul's gospel is wrong. Paul's a cult. We've got the real gospel. Christ through judaism and works.

Paul's defense is compelling. And there is more to come.

Do we all need to be struck blind by a glorious light to be saved. No. Paul

was special in his particular meeting with Christ. But we all must meet Him. I like the example of Lydia in Acts 16. So quiet. So gentle. No drama.

*13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate along the river, where it was customary to find a place of prayer. After sitting down, we spoke to the women who had gathered there. 14 Among those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*

But just like Paul, the Lord opened Lydia's heart to believe.