

Galatians 1:10-24

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[0 : 00] Well, have you ever heard it said that the Bible is just stuff made up by men, it's just human ideas written down.! Have you ever heard someone say that? Or have you ever heard people say, it doesn't matter what you believe, provided you're sincere about it.

If you follow a religion, that's fine, you just need to be sincere about it, and if you are, that's all that really matters. I know I've heard those things quite a lot, but in these words here, Paul attacks both of those ideas.

He shows us they are false. He shows us, first of all, that what he writes is not merely man's ideas, but it's from God. And he shows us that being sincere about something is no great help.

You can be sincere about being able to fly and jump out a window and crash land and kill yourself. Sincerity makes no difference. What is important is what you believe in.

I've heard a couple of things that Paul is going to show us in these words. Let me just put a bit of context here. Paul is writing to this young church because he is very worried that they are trying to add to the good news message of Jesus.

[1 : 09] And in doing so, they're destroying the good news and are potentially making a shipwreck of their lives. But there was an accusation that the false teachers were using. They were saying, don't listen to this guy Paul. What does he know? He's just trying to be popular with people.

He's just teaching other human ideas. He's just passing on ideas he's already heard. And people today say that kind of thing, don't they? It's, you know, the Bible, that's just some guy's ideas.

Some men wrote it down. It has no authority. Well, look at what Paul says, first of all, and why the reason the message he is preaching is God's message, not his message.

We'll look at his argument there first, why this is God's message, not a man's message or his message. And then secondly, we'll see how this gospel, how meeting Jesus Christ, completely transformed Saul's life.

And as we meet Jesus Christ, he will completely transform our lives too. So let's look at that. First of all, you can see Paul's main point if you look at verse 11. I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel, the good news message that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

[2 : 22] This isn't a human idea. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. In other words, this came straight to me from the Lord Jesus himself.

God revealed this message to me. Now what's his evidence for that? That's quite a bold claim, isn't it? Muhammad made a similar claim. God spoke to him up the mountain. He wrote down the Koran. Does Paul have any better evidence? Well, yes, he does. He says the evidence is the change God has brought about in me. You see his old way of life. Look at verse 13.

You've heard about my former way of life. How I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. We call it a snapshot of that in the reading from Acts. The word there for try to destroy it is a word also used in the original language for burning down villages.

It means destroy. It's like an act of war. And that was Paul's aim. Why? Because he was zealous, he says, for the traditions of his fathers.

[3 : 26] In other words, for the religious traditions passed down to him. He thought he was doing God's job. Persecuting this church. Trying to destroy this church. He thought it was heresy.

He thought anyone who called Jesus Lord and God was a heretic who deserved death. So as Paul headed to Damascus, he thought he was on God's side.

He thought he was doing God's work. He didn't think he needed forgiveness. He thought he was in the right. So he had this attitude towards Christ, this attitude towards the church.

You see his attitude towards himself as well. Verse 14. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age, among my own people. He was a man on a stellar career path.

Well respected, well admired, great authority. So what changed? Well, God grabbed him, didn't he? Look at how God grabbed him.

[4 : 24] Verse 15. When he, that is God, who had set me apart before I was born, and he called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

So God changed Paul's life around completely. He revealed Jesus to him. He revealed Jesus to him.

At that point, on the road to Damascus, Saul made a wonderful discovery and a terrible discovery. The terrible discovery was that this Jesus, whom he had been trying to obliterate, this Jesus who he stopped people worshipping, that this Jesus was actually alive and kicking, and was God's own son.

That was a terrible discovery. But the wonderful discovery, was that Saul, like Paul, like Jeremiah the prophet in the Old Testament, had been set apart by God from before his birth even.

God had a purpose for him. And Paul, for the sake of showing the Galatians, and showing us, that this is all, is God's message he's preaching, underlines it straight away.

[5 : 35] Verse 16. I did not immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem, for those who were apostles before me. In other words, Saul's saying, I got this message, God revealed Jesus to me.

He revealed the truth to me. And I got it straight from God. I didn't need to go and consult with the leaders in Jerusalem. I didn't need to get it verified by somebody else. Rather, I went off to do what God had told me to do.

You see what Paul is arguing here. He wants us to know, that the message he preached, is not something he made up. It's not something other people told him, or a rumour that was going around at the time.

It's not something he had to check out with other people. Rather, it was a message God gave him, to preach to others. Now that's important, because in the days Paul wrote this letter, there were people saying, he wasn't really teaching the truth, it was just his own ideas.

People today love to dismiss, love the Bible, particularly love to dismiss the Apostle Paul, don't they? Oh, he's a male chauvinist. Oh, he's too fundamentalist.

[6 : 43] He's not inclusive enough. His attitude to sexuality is all wrong. He's not enlightened enough. We've grown up, we've grown past his ideas. And yet Paul claims, the message he had, came straight from God.

What's the evidence? Well, why else would he turn his back on a promising career? Why else would he forego, the status and privilege he had, in Judaism of the day?

To become an outlaw, who was hounded by the Jews, wherever he went. The answer surely is that God changed his life around. As Paul was going to Damascus, he had no felt need of Jesus.

He had no felt need of forgiveness. But he was shocked, and transformed by what God did. We'll see in a moment exactly how he was transformed.

I hope we can see first of all, that Paul's main point here, the message he received, the message he preaches, the message he writes down here, the message we have in our Bible, is not man-made.

[7 : 48] It's not a human idea. It comes from God. And one little element of the evidence we have for that, is how Paul's life was turned around. But let's look more closely at how Paul's life was turned around.

In what ways was it changed? We'll see how encountering the true Jesus changed him, and can change us. It really changed in three different ways particularly. It changed Paul's view of himself.

It changed the goal of Paul's life. It changed the motivation for Paul's actions. So first of all, it changed Paul's view of himself. See, Paul thought he was a really good guy.

Look at verse 14. I was advancing Judaism beyond many of my own age, among my people. So extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. He's on this great career path. Philippians chapter 3, verse 6, talking about his former life.

He says, As for righteousness under the law, I was blameless. People looked at me, and I was perfect, according to the religious rules of the day. See, he thought all his efforts put him in God's good book.

[8 : 53] He thought he was a really nice guy. He thought he was doing God a massive favour. And yet he was then shocked, wasn't he? What did God do?

He revealed Jesus Christ to him. You see that? Verse 12. I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Verse 16.

God was pleased to reveal his son to me. Now why did God do it? It was by grace, wasn't it? Verse 15. When he set me apart from before I was born, he called me by his grace.

God didn't do it, in other words, because Paul was good, because Paul was nice, because Paul was religious. God did it entirely out of his own generous kindness, extravagant kindness, to an undeserving man.

So why God did it? What did God do? He revealed his son Jesus. He wanted Paul to have a right view of Jesus, and having a right view of Jesus, he had a right view of himself.

[9 : 57] Now what did Paul understand? What did Paul grasp as God revealed his son to him? Has he got that revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus? Well we can say lots of things.

Let's just say two things, first of all. First of all, Paul saw at last that Jesus is the eternal son of God in human flesh.

That Jesus is the eternal son of God in human flesh. He was not a heretic claiming to be God. He was in fact the second person of the Trinity. God on earth.

Now raised new life again. That's important. That's important for Paul, because as a Jew he'd always been brought up to believe that God is just one and there is only one God.

And he's suddenly confronted with Jesus as the son of God. It's revealed to him that God is three persons in one. Yes, God is a unity, is one Godhead, yet there's Father, Son and Spirit in the one Godhead.

[10 : 57] And Saul finds Jesus revealed to him. So he realises Jesus is not some creation, not some mere mortal, he's not some being somewhere between God and man as some different sects and cults teach.

He is God eternal himself. And secondly, Saul found out that Jesus is God's promised king. So in the Old Testament, for example, in 2 Samuel chapter 7, the son of God is a title for God's chosen king for his people.

So Saul found that Jesus is God himself, but also Jesus is God's ruler and king. So the very one Saul would be trying to put an end to was in fact the one whom God was using to fulfil his purposes. So in that moment that Saul sees Jesus revealed to him, he completely changes his view of himself. He's no longer a good guy doing God's work. He now sees he is God's enemy.

He is God's enemy. He thought his religious zeal and niceness was good. Actually, it was a way of rebelling against God. And that's actually a warning to all of us, isn't it?

[12 : 09] We can think we're good people, we can think we're very religious, we're doing nice things for God, and yet actually if we don't grasp who Jesus is, however zealous we are, however enthusiastic we are, we can be running headlong against God's program and God's ways.

And we can be God's enemies. So that's the first thing that was transformed in Saul. His view of himself that was all caught up with his view of Jesus. The second thing that was transformed was his whole goal of his life.

The goal of his life was turned upside down. See, formerly his goal was to persecute and destroy the church, wasn't it? But now the persecutor has turned preacher.

Verse 16, God called on him. God is pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I may preach him among the Gentiles. As a good Jew, it must have been an absolutely horrendous idea for Saul to go to the Gentiles.

But now his life is so transformed that instead of trying to put an end to the church, he's preaching so the church is built up. Not only that, he's going to the Gentiles, his very enemies, to preach that.

[13 : 21] The persecutor turns into the preacher. He has a new goal in his life because that is the purpose which God saved him. Now, you and I are not called to be the apostles to the Gentiles.

That only happened to Saul. But we all live life with some goal, don't we? And as I read this, I have to ask myself, truly, what is my goal? Am I just interested in my own career?

As Saul also was, part of his persecuting the church, was to build his own career in Judaism. Am I interested in my own reputation as Saul was? Or am I primarily, is my goal primarily to preach Jesus Christ to let others know this glorious news that we can be forgiven and made whole again by the grace of God in the Lord Jesus and not by our own religious works?

What's your goal? What's your goal? What do you desire in life? What is the longing of your heart? And how does that line up with God's great program?

Well, Saul had a new view of himself and of Jesus. He completely transformed the goal in his life. And thirdly, he had a completely transformed motivation. Look at verse 10. See what his old motivation was and what his new motivation is.

[14:43] Verse 10. For am I seeking the approval of man or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I was still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Literally, a slave of Christ. See what Paul is saying about his old way of life? Actually, he was a people pleaser. Actually, he was a people pleaser. That's what he wanted to do.

And for Paul, for Saul as he was then, being deeply religious was a great way of being a people pleaser. We please people for all sorts of reasons, don't we? And being religious can be a great way of pleasing other people, can't they?

It might be we can please our parents when we're younger because they take us along to church or to the mosque or to the temple or whatever. Sometimes we can please other people by our devotion because they're impressed with us.

So we go up in their views because we're serving so hard in church or we are so involved in so many things. Sometimes we just want to please other people because we want them to like us, don't we?

[15:51] And whenever people pleasing is our real motive, we just end up being a slave to someone else's desires, don't we? Whether that's our parents or our family or our friends or to the fashions and customs of the age.

And Paul is confessing here he was a people pleaser. That got him promoted. He's advancing beyond others in his age in Judaism. There are people following him helping him going to Damascus.

And yet, his motives have now changed. His motives have now changed. He's now trying to please God. If I was still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

You can see that if you look down at the end of the story. Verses 18 to 24. We won't read it all again now. But as soon as God has got hold of his life, what does he do? He doesn't go out to Jerusalem to get in with the people in power in that day in the church.

He goes out into Arabia. Presumably to preach the gospel for three years is when he then comes back to Damascus. If we read on in Acts chapter 9 we find he had to lower it out of the basket.

[16:57] Rumor must have got back to the king in Damascus. But this man is a troublemaker. Get rid of him. So Saul immediately goes to preach the gospel because that's what he's been called to do.

He immediately doesn't go to become popular unsuccessful. He isn't even known in person we read in verses 23 to the people the Christians in Judea. Because none of that mattered.

But what did matter? Look at verse 24. They heard that Saul was now preaching the gospel. Preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. And they glorified God because of me.

See how Paul's motivation has changed around? He's no longer pleasing men but he's pleasing God. He wants God to be glorified. He wants Christ to be made known. Now what about me?

What about you? Are we people pleasers? Or are we God pleasers? If I look at my own heart what lies at the bottom of all my desire to please other people?

[17:57] Well it's actually fear isn't it? Fear of rejection. Fear of missing out. Fear of not being popular. Fear of offending. But what Saul found is that having been accepted by God's grace having been set apart having been loved and chosen by the living God for a purpose there's no fear left is there?

See the gospel deals with our insecurity. If we know we're accepted by God not because of what we do but because of what Christ has done then it matters a whole lot less if other people do not accept us.

And so pleasing other people can become a whole lot less important than pleasing the God who loved us and called us and saved us. Why should we need the praise and affirmation of people when in Christ God calls us his beloved children?

You see how this worked out in Saul's life he was happy to lose his status in Judaism. Happy to lose the reputation he had. Happy to be hounded and persecuted as we see if you read on through his life story.

Because what he really wanted was to please God and not please people. There's a song we sometimes sang at my old church which has this great verse Take all my cravings for vain recognition fleshly indulgence and worldly ambition I want so much Lord to make you the focus to serve you in secret and never be noticed.

[19 : 29] And I think Saul could say that because he'd been transformed by meeting Jesus Christ. He had a new view of himself that he was a rebel who desperately needed God's grace.

He had a new change of the goal of his life. His goal came to preach Christ instead of to kill off the church. It changed his motivation in life. His motivation was now the glory of God rather than pleasing other people.

If we meet Jesus day by day he will change us too. Let's pray shall we?