

“When God Was Pleased”

Galatians 1:11-24

Introduction:

1. Our world is filled with opinions! People everywhere either act like experts or are convinced that they know who the experts really are. This can supposed expertise can be rather harmless when the topic is shaving cream or cake mixes, but quickly becomes expensive when the discussion involves car or home purchases, and it becomes outright dangerous when the subject is medical care or politics. Far beyond all of the preceding in importance is the matter of God and human destiny. To be misled at this point has eternal significance.
2. Paul writes the letter of Galatians to a group of congregations of people who had professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But now some (most?) of them had become helpless prey to supposed religious experts, who actually were twisting the good news the Galatians had received into a something that was not good news at all. For this reason, Paul writes to help his friends.
3. How do you help people who are walking away from God and the story of his glory in Jesus Christ—the good news? Do you nod in appreciation of their supposed right to decide what is good and what is evil? Do you shrug your shoulders and agree that every story has equal validity? Do you suppose that a new day needs a fresh story in which people can participate in creating? Most in our time would agree with such revisionist methods. It is rather easy to find people who have suffered in some kind of religious system, critique it, and say to them, “You’re not achieving the happiness that you deserve. You need a message that is relevant to you, in which you reinterpret reality according to your thoughts.” In contemporary Christian circles, we call such revisionists by the name “emergents”. They have easily spotted many dysfunctional practices, but have wrongly blamed the good news for the problems, instead of the errors of those who accepted twisted beliefs and practices. But Paul rejects such methodology. He stands up for the gospel of Christ and defends it against those who were twisting it.
4. To do this, Paul must answer the claims of those supposed experts to know what the Galatians needed. The first point that he must establish is the source of the message he preached to the Galatians and which they received. Only then will they be prepared to accept that the gospel he preached is the correct message.

Exposition:

- I. The origin of the gospel that Paul preached (1:11-12) – This is his starting point of restoration—the authority of God in Christ
 - A. Denial of any human origin – It seems that the gospel twisters were claiming that what Paul had told the Galatians was sufficient... to a point. Oh, he was right in telling them that Jesus was the Messiah, but Paul simply didn’t understand that salvation was not simply a matter of faith in the crucified and risen Christ. It also, claimed the gospel twisters, involved continued obedience to the law covenant

with its commands and regulations. Therefore, Paul needs to establish that his message first of all didn't come from human sources but from God.

1. No person invented the good news he told the Galatians. In fact, when you understand the gospel, you know that no human would invent such a story, because it exalts God alone and humbles all people everywhere.

2. No person taught Paul this message. He was not dependent on human sources or subject to their authority for a proper presentation of it. He was not liable to correction by any human. *Comment:* What Paul is saying is true of every apostle, but he focuses on himself. The church did not create the gospel; the gospel created the church. The church is subject to God's word in the gospel in every way. Since the gospel is the breathed out message of God the Holy Spirit, we do not say, "Where the church is, there is the Spirit," which gives priority to the church. But we say, "Where the Spirit is, there is the church," which gives God the honor in the gospel.

B. Assertion of divine origin

1. As Paul asserted that his position of apostle (sent one) came from God the Father and Christ the Son, so he asserts that his message of the good news (the gospel) came from God also. God directly revealed the good news to him. Therefore, he was not dependent on any human authority.

2. What was revealed to Paul? He says that it was "a revelation of Jesus Christ" (cf. NASV, ESV). God made known to him the risen Lord, and this totally changed Paul's worldview. Yes, Jesus had been crucified. Paul knew that. But he had not known that Christ had been raised from the dead. And when he sees him, he knows that what he used to believe is wrong and that everything must be reinterpreted through the truth of the risen Messiah. He knows that the saving reign or kingship of God that the prophets foretold has come, and this is good news (Is 52:7-10; 52:13-53:12).

Apply: As we have said before, the pivotal event of all history is the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He died to pay the penalty for sinners, and rose to break the power of death and to rescue sinners to eternal glory. These twin truths change everything. Jesus is the risen Lord and Savior, and the only proper response is bow before Jesus who is Lord over all. In this passage one of the most hardened opponents of Christ tells how seeing him alive changed everything for him. Listen to the eyewitness testimony and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

II. The defense of this account (1:13-24)

A. His way of life before his conversion to Christ (1:13-14). His argument here is that his pre-Christian life in no way prepared him to be an apostle or to invent the gospel. Here was far off from any such ideas.

1. He intensely persecuted Christians. He was bigoted against Christians. He hated Christians. He tried to destroy the church. He did not want to learn any of their ideas.

2. He was totally committed to Judaism. He was a dyed in the wool traditionalist. His mind was locked up in Judaism's approach to life and worship. Salvation to him was keeping the rules and rituals of the law covenant. Nothing predisposed him to accept the gospel. Paul was a fanatic. He was zealous for Judaism and proud of it.

Point: To reach someone like this clearly requires an act of God. There is no other explanation.

B. His unexpected conversion to Christ (1:15-16a) – How did Paul change? He tells us that God did act in him to produce radical commitment to Jesus Christ. Observe carefully how everything came from God alone.

1. God had set him apart from his mother's womb—before he had done anything God or bad to influence God's choice. God decided to change Paul. God said, "I will have Paul become a fully committed follower of my Son." This was the root of his change. It was in God, and not in anything human. This is independent election.

2. God called him by his grace. God stepped into his life one day, not because Paul had kept the rules and rituals of the law. No, it was an act of pure grace. It was an act of sovereign grace toward someone who deserved holy wrath.

Apply: Do you understand that you justly deserve wrath for your rejection of God, refusal to love God, and rebellion against God? Has God shown grace to you?

3. God revealed his Son in Paul. This is what happens in true conversion. A person comes to know Jesus Christ, not simply some facts about him, but Christ himself. He or she experiences the reality of Jesus. The believer knows the Lord. This is personal knowledge. He or she then follows the Lord Jesus. And in Paul's case it opened up the purpose of his life: to preach God's Son among the people groups of the nations. Notice carefully that God purposed that Paul would preach his Son the Messiah. He did not send him to preach the law with its commands and regulations. He sent him to preach his Son.

Point: This is the essence of a gospel ministry: it is about Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the theme, the focus, the vision, the message, the purpose, the goal, the significance, the hope, the joy, the treasure, the wonder, the song, the delight, yes, he's the all in all of a gospel ministry.

C. His life in the years immediately following his conversion to Christ (1:16b-24)

1. His years in Arabia and Damascus (1:16b-17) – He had no contact with any of the apostles or anyone from Jerusalem. He started to tell the good news in the area where the Lord saved him, until he has to run for his life from Damascus. He did not owe his gospel message to anyone.

2. His brief visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion (1:18-20) – He meets with Peter, who shows hospitality to him. Believers welcome other believers into their homes. But it is only a short visit of fifteen days, which is plainly insufficient time to become anyone's student. (How much theology and practice could you learn in fifteen days?) It would have been convenient for Paul not to mention this visit, but he tells the complete truth. This is an additional witness to the integrity of Paul and the gospel.

3. His ministry in Syria and Cilicia (1:21-24) – Finally, he returns to his home area to preach Christ to them. But he was personally unknown to the churches of Judea. Therefore again, he could not have received his message from them. Every point in his story demonstrates that he directly received his message independent of human teaching and directly from the Lord. Observe also how he refers to the churches in Judea; they are assemblies of people who are “in Christ”.

Apply: What was the reaction of the church to all this? Every time they heard about Paul preaching the good news of Christ, they were glorifying God because of what had happened in him. Do you rejoice in God’s work of grace in his people? When people are saved by grace, they rejoice in God’s grace revealed in others. Do you thank God for his saving grace to others? I mean, do you really praise the Lord for them?

Apply: Take a few moments now to answer three questions quietly before the Lord. They are printed on the handout. Answer them truthfully, since you are in the presence of God. What real change did Jesus Christ make in you when you met him? How is the Lord changing you now? What changes do you know still need to be made? If you have any questions blank, you need help. Someone will be at the front, and I’ll be in the lobby, if you would like to talk to someone.

-Dave Frampton