

The divine source of Paul's gospel (Galatians 1:11–24)

As a servant of Christ, Paul would not distort the message given to him by divine revelation merely to accommodate his audience. Unlike us, but on a level with those apostles who had walked with Jesus and been eyewitnesses to His life, death, and resurrection, Paul received the gospel directly from God. Having made this claim in verse 11–12, Paul demonstrates from his life in verses 13–24 that it could not have been from other men that he received the gospel.

This assurance of a divinely given gospel is passed on to us in the inspired writings of Paul. His words are not less from Christ than the “red-letter” sections. So we are exhorted to learn well the gospel message, to discern it, believe it and proclaim it accurately.

I. *God revealed the gospel to Paul directly (1:11–12).*

1. *Paul denied any human element to the gospel he preached.* Human nature would not lead people to come up with true gospel found in the Bible. And Paul himself did have it passed on to him from an earlier generation or have it taught to him as a pupil.
2. *Paul claimed instead to have received the gospel through direct revelation from Jesus.*

II. *God shaped Paul's life to exalt God's gospel (1:13–24).*

1. *Excelling in human religion was not God's way of salvation (1:13–14).*
 - a. Paul had been a zealous persecutor of the church (cf. Acts 7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1–5), in his words a “blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent” (1 Timothy 1:13). Though knowing sufficient facts inherent in the gospel to persecute the church, he really did not know the gospel.
 - b. Paul also excelled in Judaism, beyond many of his own age, not only in his heritage but also in his personal zeal (cf. Philippians 3:5–6). He knew traditional Judaism thoroughly, but it did not help understand how to be right with God, it only hid the meaning of biblical texts he probably knew.
2. *Divine intervention and not human consultation gave Paul new life (1:15–17; cf. Acts 9:1–13).*
 - a. God had marked Paul for salvation and service even before birth.
 - b. God called Paul to Himself on the road to Damascus, not because Paul deserved it, but by God's grace.
 - c. God revealed His Son in Paul, that is, He gave Him a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ.
 - d. God commissioned Paul to preach Christ among the Gentiles.
 - e. Paul then went first to Arabia and afterwards Damascus, avoiding the other apostles. (Damascus was the capital of the Nabatean kingdom of which Arabia was a part. It is possible that God instructed Paul during the time in Arabia.) In Damascus he “immediately” began to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues. Without help from the other apostles Paul understood that Jesus was the Christ.
3. *Initial apostolic contact was restricted yet God was glorified through Paul's preaching (1:18–24).*
 - a. After “three years” (probably from his conversion) Paul went to Jerusalem to meet Cephas, that is, Peter. Barnabas had to speak to the apostles on Paul's behalf because of his former reputation (cf. Acts 9:26–30), but apparently Paul only got to meet Peter face-to-face, and also James, the leader of the Jerusalem church.
 - b. His powerful preaching in Jerusalem led to further attempts to kill him. The brothers got him out of the city, to the port in Caesarea, and off to Tarsus in Cilicia. He worked there and in Syria until Barnabas got him for the work in Antioch.
 - c. Paul's short stay in Jerusalem kept him unknown in Judea. But it was sufficient to glorify God that the former persecutor was now preaching the gospel.

Paul's short visit, limited contact, and previous thorough knowledge of the gospel shows that he did not get his gospel from the apostles in Jerusalem.

To preach a gospel contrary to what we find in Scripture, adding to it or subtracting from it, is to reject God's good news. Only the true gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. Therefore, be diligent to know the gospel, believe it, and proclaim it.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- Review: When and where did Paul begin to preach clearly that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God? Why is this important in understanding how he learned the gospel?
- Why is it important to pass on messages accurately, like children passing on messages from a parent or employees from a boss? Compare this with passing on from the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Some try to contrast the gospel which Paul preached with that of Peter or John. What is fundamentally wrong with doing that?
- How might we confuse knowing facts about the gospel with truly understanding it?