

“Consulting with Christ Alone”

December 5, 2010

Text: Galatians 1:16-24

In his 1962 book, *The Divine Propagandist*, William Aitken accused the apostle Paul of misunderstanding and misconstruing what Jesus taught=>

“[Paul was] incapable by nature of understanding the spirit of the Master.... He did damage to Christianity.”

* Other “scholars” who also disagree with Paul’s writings have said that he was just sharing his own private, human opinions, which are no better than anyone else’s.

* Still others argue that Paul’s teachings simply reflected the naïve perspectives, & simplistic/mistaken ideas, of first century Xnity, propagated/perpetuated by the Church.

But in Galatians 1, Paul himself refutes these latter-day wisemen, arguing that what he proclaimed was revealed to him by the resurrected X, who had appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

* Paul didn’t misconstrue X’s words;

He preached them with an inspired accuracy, that made them God’s own words.

* His message wasn’t his own, or any other man’s;

It was exactly what Jesus had told him to say.

* And, as we'll see in today's text, he went to great lengths to show that neither Apostles nor other Church leaders, had ever influenced what he thought/taught—only X.

He had consulted X alone; not men, not even himself.

It is very important that Xns understand this about Paul, since it means his words are authoritative—they are God's inspired words.

What Peter says of OT prophets, he also applied to Paul=>

“No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

Paul's words aren't just human opinions that we are free to ignore.

As John Stott (pastor of All Saints Church in Longdon)

says in his commentary=> “If Paul was right in asserting that his gospel was not man's, but God's, then to reject Paul is to reject God.”

In the background of *Galatians* is a series of slanderous comments about Paul, made by supposed Jewish converts called “Judaizers.”

Their goal was to impose Mosaic Law on the Church.

They taught that to become saved, a man must not only believe in Jesus, but also become circumcised and obey the Law.

Since Paul had taught the Galatian churches that all a person needs to do to become saved is believe in Jesus, the Judaizers attacked Paul, saying he wasn't even a real apostle.

They also said that his gospel was a second-hand message, stolen from the true Apostles, then modified, to eliminate reference to the Law.

Galatians is Paul's answer, systematically dismantling their accusations, refuting the Judaizers' charges, proving them illogical/absurd.

* In last week's text, he argued that his own abrupt reversal in lifestyle/character from being a ruthless persecutor of Xns to being a Xn himself was proof positive that God had regenerated/transformed him from the inside out.

* He insisted that his conversion had resulted from a life-changing encounter with God=>dramatic appearance to him on the road to Damascus.

* Today he'll add that his isolation from other Xn teachers after his conversion, meant they couldn't have taught him the gospel he preached.

His instruction in the truths he proclaimed was revealed to him by X alone, uninfluenced by the Church or by any other human source.

In today's text, Paul will declare that no man had instructed him immediately after his conversion, 3 years afterward when he visited Jerusalem, or later on in his life...

*** Immediately After His Conversion**

[Galatians 1:16b-17] (Paul)=> *"I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood [any man], / nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me;"*

Paul hadn't given anyone the chance to influence him with mere human wisdom right after his conversion.

He didn't consult w/ any of the believers in the church at Damascus regarding what he should teach as an apostle.

We learn in Acts 22 that Ananias had told him he was going to be a witness for X to all men (22:15).

But Ananias was just telling Paul what the Lord Himself had told him to say—not sharing his own opinions, just conveying a message.

Paul could truthfully say he hadn't immediately consulted w/ Ananias/anyone in Damascus about what to teach.

Neither did Paul go to Jerusalem, asking the Apostles there to instruct him in the gospel message he was to proclaim, nor to recognize him as a fellow apostle.

"Consult" means to present one's self to another person for approval/advice.

Paul didn't do that, since his authority was already equal to that of the Apostles.

They couldn't confer authority on him that X had already conferred.

He never needed an apprenticeship as an apostle.

He (like they) could rely entirely on X's commission alone as the source of his apostolic authority, & on X's instruction, as the message he was to teach others.

In 2 Cor 11:5 he will write=> *"I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles."*

Having told us whom he didn't consult with (the Xns in Damascus and the Apostles in Jerusalem), Paul now tells where he did go, & hints at whom he consulted w/.

[Verse 17b]=> *"but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus."*

For the first few days after Paul's conversion, he went into the synagogues of Damascus, proclaiming Jesus as God's Son. Even at this point, his understanding of who Jesus is, and what He had done to make salvation possible, must have been sufficiently formulated in his mind so that he could confront Damascus' Jews with these basic Xn truths.

From Damascus, Paul went to Nabatean Arabia, SE of Israel;

And later on, he returned to Damascus once again.

In verse 18 we'll learn that the total time he spent in Arabia and Damascus combined, was 3 years.

We don't know for sure how long he stayed in each place.

Scholars can't help but speculate about what Paul did in Arabia.

Although the Bible doesn't tell us, most feel he went there for solitude and quiet meditation.

Verses 16-17 say Paul didn't seek to consult with men in either Damascus/Jerusalem, but he instead went to Arabia.

"But" is a strongly contrasting conjunction, which some commentators interpret to mean he was seeking to be alone with the Lord, instead of listening to other men.

J.B. Lightfoot (of Trinity College) wrote this in 1865=> "It is a mysterious pause, a moment of suspense in the Apostle's history, a breathless calm which ushers in the tumultuous storm of his active missionary life.... Can we doubt that by this journey he sought seclusion from the outer world, that his desire was to commune with God and his own soul amid these hallowed scenes, and thus to gather strength in solitude for his active labors?"

It seems likely that Jesus appeared to Paul during this time in Arabia to explain to him the OT Scriptures in light of NT truth, & to fully reveal the meaning of His death/resurrection/ascension.

As we read the theological wealth found in Paul's epistles, we ask where he got it all.

It seems very likely that his Savior must have spent extended time revealing/instructing him in the doctrinal truths he teaches us in those letters.

* **Three years later** (still no instruction from men).

[Verse 18]=> “*Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed [lit. “prolonged my stay”] with him fifteen days.*”

After his time in the desert of Arabia, Paul returned to Damascus & again proclaimed Jesus as God’s Son.

The Jews there rebelled against the truth & plotted to kill him.

They guarded the city gates day/night to make sure he didn’t get away from them.

The Xns of Damascus discovered the plot and lowered Paul over the city wall at night, so he could escape.

But where should he go next?

Paul went to Jerusalem to meet Cephas (the Aramaic name for Peter).

The word here that’s translated “*become acquainted with*” means to visit in order to get to know someone.

When used of places instead of people it means sightseeing.

It’s easy to understand why Paul wanted to meet Peter=>

* Paul wanted to hear from Peter’s own lips a firsthand account of his experiences with Jesus.

* Peter was the Apostle who’d first recognized Jesus as=> “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Mt 16:16).

* He was the one to whom Jesus had given the keys of the Kingdom by which he opened the Church to Gentiles, the very people X had called Paul to evangelize, as an apostle.

- * He was the original spokesman for the Church, whose preaching on Pentecost had brought 3000 Jews to X.
- * Paul wanted to protect the Church from potential disunity as Xns developed loyalties to individual leaders, a problem that we know did occur in Corinth.

His relationship with Peter might help prevent that.

In all likelihood, the Judaizers claimed that Paul had gotten his gospel message from Peter at this meeting.

Paul makes it clear, that couldn't have happened as the Judaizers argued, for several reasons=>

- * Paul had gone to Jerusalem simply to get to know Peter, not to be instructed by him.

He had originally planned to stay for just a few days.

- * Paul had spent only 15 days with Peter—too short a time to teach anyone the whole counsel of God.

After 15 days in a good seminary course, you may be ready to take your first pop-quiz, but you're certainly not ready to take your final exam.

In Acts 9:28-29 we learn that Paul spent much of that 15 day period evangelizing Hellenistic Jews.

- * It hadn't taken place until 3 years after Paul's conversion, when the message he proclaimed was already fixed and well-established.

If anything, Paul had a better understanding of NT doctrine/theology by this time than Peter had.

In II Pet 3:15-16, Peter writes of=> “*our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, / as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand.*”

The ex-fisherman may have found it hard to keep up with Paul, theologically.

[Verse 19] (Paul)=> “*But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.*”

The other Apostles had prob. left Jerusalem by this time, going to various other cities to spread the gospel and oversee newly-established churches.

It wasn't important for Paul that they be there, since he wasn't looking for their approval/recognition.

The word “*other*” means “others of a different kind.”

Paul says he didn't see any of the other apostles of a different kind, “*except James.*”

This means he must have considered James one of those “different kind” of apostles.

I like to refer to The Twelve as “Apostles with a Capital A” and men like James/Barnabas Silas/Timothy (not among The Twelve) as “small ‘a’ apostles.”

James was the half-brother of Jesus, but he had never been considered one of The Twelve.

In fact, he hadn't even believed in Jesus until after X's death.

But I Cor 15:7 says Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection, & James may have believed at that time. Ultimately, James had become the leader of the Jerusalem church, & he eventually wrote the epistle of James.

It would have been unthinkable for Paul to visit Jerusalem and ignore such an important church leader;

But he didn't get either his commission/message from James, any more than he did from Peter.

Those came from Jesus X alone.

Paul's claim that he hadn't spent enough time with any of the Church's leaders to get his gospel message from them, was a key to his defense against the Judaizers.

In order to further strengthen that point, he now takes a vow/oath.

[Verse 20] (Paul)=> *“(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)”*

Paul knows his enemies are going to challenge his account of the facts regarding how much time he'd spent w/ the other Apostles.

So he calls God to witness that his words have been a true/faithful record of the events he has related.

He puts his whole case on the line, saying in essence to the Galatians, “God is my witness that I didn't get my gospel from others, but that I am a true apostle—an authoritative spokesman for God—not a liar. The gospel I have taught you is His truth, revealed by Him to me, through Jesus X.”

* Later in His Life

Paul hadn't been instructed by other men immediately after his conversion, nor was he instructed 3 years later when he went up to Jerusalem, nor was he instructed by other Xn leaders in the years after that.

This final aspect of his argument was based on the fact that he went to remote places far from Jerusalem and the influence of other Church leaders.

[Verse 21] (Paul)— *“Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.”*

Leaving Jerusalem, Paul had traveled hundreds of miles to the north, ministering as an apostle in Syria/Cilicia.

Originally Paul had gone to Tarsus, his hometown in Cilicia.

Then Barnabas (another “small ‘a’ apostle”) had brought him Antioch, where they ministered together for a year, before God sent them out as missionaries to Galatia, & in Paul's case to Asia Minor, and Greece.

Meanwhile, in the region of Judea surrounding Jerusalem, people knew who Paul was, but they'd never seen him.

Since some of the Apostles may have migrated into that area (Judea) in response to X's Great Commission, this is another proof that none of them had contributed anything to Paul's gospel message or understanding of NT doctrine, because he hadn't gone to Judea, so they'd never even seen him.

[Verse 22]=> *“And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ;”*

After spending 15 days in Jerusalem, Paul had gotten the Greek-speaking Jews there so upset by proclaiming the gospel to them, that another plot to kill him was formed.

At that same time, Jesus had again appeared to him in the Temple,

saying=> *“Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me. / Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles”*
(Acts 22:18, 21).

The men of the Jerusalem church hustled Paul out of town, took him to Caesarea, and put him on a ship sailing north.

The churches of Judea had seen virtually nothing of Paul after that, so he was unknown by sight to them.

But they had heard about his activities as an apostle.

[Verse 23]=> *“but only, they kept hearing, ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.’”*

The Jewish Xns in Judea had heard much about Paul in the past, and it was all bad.

They knew that he had created turmoil in the church at nearby Jerusalem, and was a threat to the believers there before his conversion.

They must have wondered if this notorious persecutor of Xns would come after them next.

Suddenly they'd started hearing rumors about Paul's conversion and then his ministry as an apostle, preaching the faith.

They may even have heard about his suffering for his faith.

The response of these Xns, and undoubtedly those in many other places, was to praise God for the miracle He had brought about in this man's heart.

[Verse 24] (Paul)=> *“And they were glorifying God because of me.”*

The Judean Xns had never personally met Paul, but they glorified God because of him.

At one time they had all feared him.

But the Apostles had acknowledged the change in him clear back in Acts 9:27, when Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to them.

They had even recognized Paul as a true apostle like them.

The Apostles' acceptance of Paul must have enabled the rest of the Church to drop their suspicions and accept him themselves.

Now the Judean church all glorified God because of what He had accomplished in Paul's heart, and was now accomplishing through his life.

They were no longer suspicious of him, nor did they merely forgive him, nor were they merely happy about him or for him.

They actually glorified God for transforming the Church's worst enemy into its best preacher, evangelist, and missionary.

Even common Xns in Judea realized that the gospel Paul was preaching was the same one the Apostles had taught them, and they had come to believe unto salvation.

It was the gospel Jesus Himself had revealed to His people. It was the only gospel that can save a person's soul=> salvation through faith in X w/o religious-works or good-deeds.

This was a crushing argument against the Judaizers' charge that Paul was preaching a false gospel.

They had claimed to come from Jerusalem themselves and therefore to represent the people of that whole area around Judea.

Paul was saying his gospel was the only one X had revealed, & the only one the Xns of Judea believed; So it was the Judaizers' gospel that was fraudulent/distorted.

We still glorify God today for Paul's conversion, and for what the Lord taught Paul out there in the Arabian desert.

1/2 of our NT treasury of Scriptures is what God revealed to him. It contains the doctrinal foundations of our whole faith. Paul himself was so devoted to the Church (including us) that he could truthfully say in Col 1:24=> *"I rejoice*

in my sufferings for your sake, & in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church)."

We praise God for changing this mad, infuriated persecutor of Xns into such a holy and devoted apostle, from whose life every true believer benefits still today.

How do we apply this passage to ourselves?

With 1 simple principle=> Faith armed with the revelation of God's Word doesn't need to consult with flesh/blood (i.e., with other people).

* Paul didn't need authorization from men to function as an apostle because X had revealed to him that he was an apostle and was to minister as an apostle.

* Noah didn't need to consult other people about whether/not building an ark on dry land was a good idea.

God had told him to do so, so he obeyed God, built it and both he/his-family survived the great Flood.

* Abram was told by God to go to a land God would show him.

If he had consulted his wife or his family, they'd have said, "You're 70 years old, and you don't even know where you're going. It doesn't make any sense."

Abram didn't consult flesh/blood, he just obeyed the Lord, and became the great patriarch of God's people, and the spiritual patriarch of people believers today.

* If David had listened to his brother Eliab, he'd never have fought Goliath.

If God's Word makes it clear that you are to do something, do it; and if the Word is clear that you are not to do something, don't do it.

Don't ask your friends whether/not you should, because that is putting your friends on a par with God's Word.

They have no right to exercise that kind of authority, & you have no right to ask them to bear that kind of responsibility.

In fact, your asking for their advice may be an attempt on your part to shift the responsibility for defiance of God onto them.

Let me give you some specific examples of this principle=>

*E.g. It is every Xn's duty to forsake sin and resist temptation.

Scripture may tell you that some particular activity is wrong even though all your friends consider it OK.

The question comes down to this: On the Day of Judgment, will they be there to defend you against God's judgment?

If they actually do, how successful do you think they'd be?

*E.g. In order to obey the Bible with a clear conscience, a believer who makes his living doing something that leads others into sin, might have to change jobs/careers.

Or his new ethical values/behavior might cost him profits in his business.

E.g. mechanics who replace part in your engine that you don't really need, or finish the job in 45 minutes and charge you for 2 hours of labor.

Colleagues in that same business will gladly counsel him to continue in the same old unethical practices that have become commonplace among them all.

In fact, they'll think him a fool/failure if he doesn't.

Consulting them might give him an excuse for continuing in his sin, but he'll know it's wrong.

If you're wincing at this principle, remember I Cor 6=>

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? / For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (6:19-20).

The question is not=> How much will I have to sacrifice if I obey God's Word?

The only question is=> Am I glorifying Him who owns me by my obedience to it?

*E.g. Confessing one's faith before unbelievers or those of another faith can lead to a loss of affection from friends/family.

Jesus understood this, so He made it the criterion by which to evaluate the genuineness of our own faith in Him, as His disciples.

Lk 14:26 (X)=> *“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.”*

Our love for X is to be so all-inclusive that it makes our love for our family members seem miniscule by comparison.

In fact, it makes all other loves seem like hatred.

Jesus required believers to take a public stand for their faith by becoming baptized, so that if others are going to reject them just because of their commitment to Him, they'll have an opportunity to do so, in a setting where the issues are crystal clear.

It comes down to this=> Do what the Bible says is right, no matter what others may tell you, and no matter what it may cost you to be right before God & glorify Him w/ your life.

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December 5, 2010

Text: Galatians 1:16-24

1. In the background of *Galatians* is a series of slanderous comments about Paul made by supposed Jewish converts called “[20 Judaizers].”
2. **In today’s text Paul will declare that no [8 man] had instructed him immediately after his conversion, three years afterward when visited Jerusalem, or later on in his life...**

*** Immediately After His Conversion**

Galatians 1:16b-17—*“I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, / nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me;”*

Acts 22:15; II Cor 11:5

3. Having told us whom he did not consult with (the Christians in Damascus and the Apostles in Jerusalem), Paul now tells where he [8 did] go and hints at whom he consulted with.

Verse 17b—*“but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.”*

4. It seems likely that Jesus appeared to Paul during this time to explain to him the OT Scriptures in light of NT truth, and to fully reveal the [16 meaning] of His death, resurrection, and ascension.

*** Three Years Later**

Verse 18—*“Then **three years later** I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.”*

5. It is easy to understand why Paul wanted to meet Peter: He wanted to hear from Peter’s own lips a firsthand account of his experiences with [12 Jesus].

Mt 16:16

6. In all likelihood, the Judaizers claimed that Paul had gotten his gospel message from Peter at this meeting; Paul makes it clear that [20 couldn’t] have happened.

Acts 9:28-29; II Pet 3:15-16

Verse 19—*“But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.”*

I Cor 15:7

7. Paul’s claim that he hadn’t spent enough time with any of the Church’s leaders to get his gospel message from them was a key to his [16 defense] against the Judaizers.

Verse 20—“(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)”

* **Later in His Life**

8. This final aspect of Paul’s argument was based on the fact that he went to remote places [8 far] from Jerusalem and the influence of other Church leaders.

Verse 21—“Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.”

9. Since some of the Apostles may have migrated into Judea, this is another proof that none of them had contributed anything to Paul’s gospel message or understanding of NT [20 doctrine].

Verses 22-23—“And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; / but only, they kept hearing, ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.’”

Acts 22:18, 21

10. The Jewish Christians in Judea had heard much about Paul, and it was all bad; suddenly they had started hearing rumors about Paul’s conversion and his ministry as an [16 apostle].

Verse 24—“And they were glorifying God because of me.”

Acts 9:27; Col 1:24

How do we apply this passage to ourselves?

11. With one simple principle: Faith armed with the revelation of God’s Word [16 doesn’t] need to consult with flesh and blood.

12. If the Word is clear that you are not to do something, don’t do it; and don’t ask your [16 friends] whether or not you should.

I Cor 6:19-20; Lk 14:26

13. Do what the Bible says is right no matter what others may tell you, and no matter what it may cost you to be right before God and [16 glorify] Him with your life.