

## The Peerless Gospel

Jonathan K. Dodson | Gal 1:11-24 | September 15, 2019

We're considering what it means to be grounded in the gospel in the swirling currents of our culture. Why trust Paul's writings? Why trust his God? What are the implications?

### Why Trust Paul?

Why should we trust Paul's writings? It's a question people asked in 1<sup>st</sup> C, and it's a question people ask today. In 1<sup>st</sup> C Galatia where Paul had planted several churches, the people were questioning him because a small group of influential teachers were accusing him of being lower management, that he wasn't like the executive apostles down in Jerusalem who actually met Jesus. Paul is soft: doesn't require non-Jews to get circumcised. We know better, if you really want to be on God's side, to be part of his family, you have to be circumcised. Now that may sound bizarre, and we'll look at it more later, but essentially it was their word against his word—competing authorities. Today, people question Paul for different reasons (homophobic, chauvinistic), pit him against Jesus: I follow Jesus but not Paul. What does Paul say to this, [“For I would have you know, brothers \(he's still warm to them\), that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ](#)

(11-12). He says, listen don't take it from me, because it's not from me; it's not even from upper management. It's from *God*, Jesus Christ in fact. On a road to Damascus, Paul was confronted by the risen Christ in a flash of light that blinded him and his traveling companions. There, Jesus spoke to Paul. Therefore, we can't pit Paul *against* Jesus because his message is *from* Jesus. Well isn't that convenient? Yes, but it's more than convenient. It's either terribly manipulative (cult-like) or it's terrifically true (good news): to say that God spoke to him on behalf of humanity. It was a very public conversion with witnesses. See, Paul has upped the stakes. He's appealing to a higher authority, going over all our heads, and saying this is a *revelation* of Jesus Christ. Now what's a revelation? The Greek word means "to reveal a truth not known." It's not a vision from a sweat lodge or an insight after taking a hit. It's truth revealed by the God who conquered death. If someone comes to me and says, I can't accept Christianity because of the Bible's view on women, sexuality, I'll eventually say to them, No the real reason you can't accept Christianity is because you're unwilling to accept Christ. Your unwilling to abandon your own authority, to embrace his authority. Your problem, at the end of the day, is with Jesus. *Absolute authority*. Now we might object for any number of reasons—compassion for others, pain in our past, failure of Christians—but whatever the motivation we're still establishing a rival authority. Now step back

for a minute and consider this rationally. Are you saying your flawed, culturally bound, emotionally driven, epistemologically limited, finite opinion is superior to the revelation of Jesus?—the image of the invisible God, tempted in every way yet without sin, the same yesterday, today, and forever? You’ve got to admit his vantage point is *peerless*. His authority unmatched: omniscient, sinless, compassionate, eternal. Paul is saying, my gospel comes *from him*. That’s why we should trust him.

### **Why trust God?**

Brings us to our second question, Why trust *this* revelation of God? Paul answers with personal testimony, *you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers* (13-14). At this point faithful Jews in Galatia would be nodding their heads. Yes, yes, yes. That’s how I want my kids to grow up: zealous, knowledgeable, advancing in the faith. But it all comes to a screeching halt when Paul says, *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles* (15-16). He was taking life in the name of God, now he’s seeking life in the name of God! He puts his whole

reputation on the line, his platform in the crosshairs, and says I was wrong. Like the FB executive who resigned confessing he sought to exploit a vulnerability in human psychology through the addictive features of FB. Or prosperity preacher Benny Hinn who recently admitted he's been wrong to sell the gospel all these years, saying give because you love Jesus or don't give at all. Why the 180? Paul met a peerless authority. On a road to Damascus he hears a voice, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He says, "Who are you, Lord?" **And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting"** (Ac 9:4-5). Paul's testimony shows us three reasons we should trust God: 1) **Conversion:** Look what Jesus does in the life of Paul—he turns him around completely. Driven by proud ambition, desire to prove himself, murdering the church in God's name. Now, he's writing about humility, justification by faith, and giving his life for the church. Jesus changes lives. Incontrovertible. 2) **Authority:** Consider how Jesus uses his authority. Paul, why are you persecuting me? Persecuted Authority. Jesus says from the cross, forgive them for they know not what they do. This Jesus was beaten, mocked, tortured, and impaled on a cross *for us*. He uses his authority to suffer in our place. His authority has wounds. That's one of the issues we have with authority today: self-serving, power-promoting, not self-sacrificing public servants. Here's the Model! Scarred for you. 3) **Pleasure:** Verse 16 says he was *pleased* to reveal his Son in

me. In the original language “pleased” is at the front of the sentence modifying all three things God the Father does: *pleased* to set him apart, *pleased* to call by grace, *pleased* to reveal his son. He does it all not begrudgingly but *happily*. Romans 8 says the same thing of us: *those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified*. Many of us have images of fathers that are the opposite: overbearing, absent not pleased. But this father, your heavenly Father, is *present and pleased*. Philippians 2:13 says *he works in us according to his good pleasure!* He doesn’t just tolerate you; he’s pleased with you! He delights in you. Growing up my father delighted in me, *but I still didn’t grasp this when it came to God*. Every time I sinned in a big way, I felt like I was on God’s bad side. I’d pray, fast, cry out for him to break me, like a horse so I could run free. Then I came across a book that pointed me to Scriptures like these, revealing our Father is pleased with us in Christ; he delights to be with us, to work in us. It blew me away. I’d related to a distorted image of God my whole life, not through clarifying spectacles of Scripture. I discovered God didn’t want to break me; he was broken for me. He doesn’t tolerate me; he delights in me. And he delights *in you*. It’s his pleasure to set you apart, call you, reveal Christ in you. He may be calling you this morning. Why should we trust him? *Jesus changes lives; his authority has wounds; he delights in you*.

## What are the Implications?

Now what are the implications of trusting this God? What happens when we receive the revelation of Jesus Christ? 1) **Jesus comes with the Church attached.** Just like there's no room for I follow Jesus not Paul, there's also no room for I love Jesus but not the Church. Notice when Paul was persecuting the Church Jesus said, why are you persecuting *me*? To receive Christ is to receive the Church. The Head comes with the Body. It is his good pleasure to work not only in us but also in others. Even the people who snub, judge, hurt, disappoint us. Paul says it like this in Galatians, *as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith* (6:10). *The grace he extends to me, is the grace I must extend to others.* Are you striving to do good, especially to those in your city group/church? Or are you aloof, self-absorbed, judgmental? Then you haven't absorbed God's delightful grace. Working with a distorted image. Will you give it up? Jesus comes with the Church attached. 2) **Preach Christ among the Nations.** God was pleased to reveal Christ in Paul *in order that* he might preach him among the Gentiles. This is God's way of saying, the gospel is for everybody. Don't withhold the peerless pleasure, grace, authority of Christ from others! If you trust this God, then share his good news with others.