

The Peerless Gospel

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We're thinking about what it means to be grounded in the gospel in the winds of change. What do we need to be true to Christ as we participate in cultural life? This passage helps us by posing three questions: Why trust Paul? Why trust God? What implications follow?

Why Trust Paul?

Why should we trust Paul's writings? It's a question people asked in 1st C, and it's a question people ask today. In 1st C Galatia, people were questioning Paul not because they didn't think he was reliable (they had received him quite enthusiastically), but because there was a small group of influential teachers who 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 must be circumcised. Now that may sound bizarre, and we'll look at it more later, but it's kinda like saying you can use our bathrooms and be part of our church only if you're white. It favors in the in-group, bolsters their power and influence, while marginalizing the out-group. Today, people question Paul for different reasons (intolerant, 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, with witnesses, Jesus spoke to Paul. He's saying my gospel isn't really "my" gospel; it's straight from Jesus himself. 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). 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 toking on dope. It's truth revealed the divine authority, Jesus Christ. If someone comes to me and says, I can't accept Christianity because of the Bible's view on homosexuality, or abortion, 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, your own truth to accept his authority and his truth. Your problem, at the end of the day, is with Jesus. Now we might do that for any number of reasons—compassion for others, pain from our past, failure of Christians—but whatever the motivation we're still establishing a rival authority. Now if we step back for a minute and consider this rationally, it doesn't make much sense. You're saying your flawed, culturally bound, emotionally driven, epistemologically limited, finite opinion is superior to the revelation of Jesus? Did you c consider 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. And Paul is saying, my gospel comes *from him*. That's why we should trust him.

Why trust God?

Which brings us to the 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 \(12-14\).](#) At this point faithful Jews in Galatia would be nodding their heads. Yes, you

ainers (13-14). At this point many 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). Taking life in the name of God, now he's seeking to give life! He puts his whole reputation on the line, his platform in the crosshairs, and says I was wrong. Like the FB executive who confessed they sought to exploit a vulnerability in human psychology, resigned (after billions), and walked away. 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 life in Christ. *Jesus changes lives.* 2) **Authority:** Consider how Jesus uses his authority. Paul, why are you persecuting me? He says from the cross, forgive them for they know not what they do. This same Jesus was beaten, mocked, tortured, and impaled on a cross *for us*. He uses his authority to suffer in our place, to become one of us. *His authority has wounds.* 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 *happily*. Many of us have images of fathers that are just the opposite: overbearing, absent. 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. But 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 was his pleasure to set you apart, call you, reveal Christ in you. He may be calling you today. Why should you 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 us, we must also 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. 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. Are you withholding the peerless pleasure, grace, authority of Christ from others? To trust this God is to share his good news with everybody.

