



Certified!

Galatians 1:13-20

Last week Carrie told me she liked the bit of information from the sermon. It was the phrase, "I want you to know." Paul was certifying that what he was about to say is true.

Since Carrie was a mail carrier, she brought up Certified Mail. Here's a definition, "Certified Mail" provides the sender proof of mailing and that the person it's addressed to received their mail."

See that word "proof" there.

That's what Paul is doing. He's going to prove that neither he nor his gospel is a fake. He's going to certify it.



13 For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I persecuted God's church to an extreme degree and tried to destroy it. 14 I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. 15 But when God, who from my birth set me apart and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, so that I could preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone. 17 I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who had become apostles before me; instead I went to Arabia and came back to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, and I stayed with him 15 days. 19 But I didn't see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 Now I am not lying in what I write to you. God is my witness.

So, Paul begins in Galatians 1:13-20.

It's a review of what we have learned about him in our ongoing study of Acts.

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Let's look at some interesting details around this history.

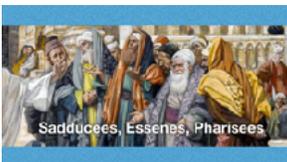
After verse 13, he explains why he persecuted God's church. He was zealous. Let's look at what that means. It involves the political/religious parties in Jerusalem.

There were three, Sadducees, Essenes, and Pharisees. The Sadducees were aristocratic and allied with the Roman hierarchy. The Essenes were fed up with what they saw as the unrighteousness of everyone else. So, they moved out into the desert to be righteous out there.

That leaves the Pharisees. Their name means "set apart." They were influential and made sure their voice was heard. They were zealous for the conservative interpretation and obedience to the Law.

The gospel accounts in the Bible make them the bad guys. But Josephus, the ancient historian, says that the Pharisees maintained a simple lifestyle, were affectionate and

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harmonious in their dealings with others, especially respectful to their elders. All those behaviors are righteous of course.

The zeal part is what Paul is talking about.

Here's why: In Deuteronomy God gave Israel two choices. If they obeyed his laws, he would bless them super abundantly, but if they disobeyed and went after fake gods, he would throw them out of the land of Israel.



So, the Pharisees were zealous to protect their nation by making sure people obeyed God. They listened and discussed carefully with Jesus and asked many questions. In the end though, they concluded that he was leading people to another god, himself! He was making himself equal to God! That would never do, so they had the Romans crucify him and tried very hard to stamp out his followers and teaching.



So back to Paul; he was a Pharisee. In Acts 22:3–5 (HCSB), he defends himself, saying, “I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city [of Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamaliel and educated according to the strict view of our patriarchal law. Being zealous for God, just as all of you are today, I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women in jail, as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me.”

Now, look at verse 15. Oh my, there is a lot there to understand! "But when God, who from my birth set me apart and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me..."

Let's try to understand these three phrases:

"from my birth set me apart"

"called me by his grace,"

"reveal His Son in me"

"from my birth set me apart" Paul is not the first to say something like this.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote it 1:4–5 (HCSB), "The word of the Lord came to me: I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations." See there, Jeremiah was a prophet to the Gentiles!

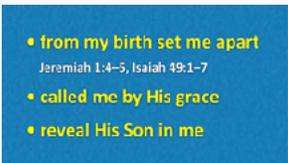
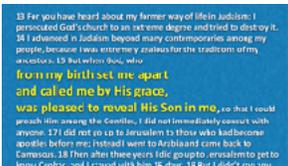
And in Isaiah 49:1–7 (HCSB), the prophet Isaiah calls to the Gentiles saying, ¹Coastlands, listen to me; distant peoples, pay attention. The Lord called me before I was born. He named me while I was in my mother's womb.

²He made my words like a sharp sword; He hid me in the shadow of His hand. He made me like a sharpened arrow; He hid me in His quiver.

³He said to me, "You are My Servant, Israel; I will be glorified in him."

⁴But I myself said: I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and futility; yet my vindication is with the Lord, and my reward is with my God.

⁵And now, says the Lord, who formed me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him so that Israel might be gathered to Him; for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God is my strength—



⁶He says, "It is not enough for you to be My Servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, to be My salvation to the ends of the earth."

⁷This is what the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, says to one who is despised, to one abhorred by people, to a servant of rulers: "Kings will see and stand up, and princes will bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel —and He has chosen you."

Who is Isaiah talking about? He's talking about himself of course, but it seems larger than him. He is talking about the Messiah who was to come and bring salvation to the Gentiles!

Paul is claiming the same calling as Jeremiah and Isaiah were writing about. Like them he was called to preach to the nations.

He is saying that his message is not something he made up.

It didn't come from him and he didn't choose it.

He was destined for this ministry even from the time he was born.

He was God's chosen tool to fulfill the ancient prophecies that the Messiah's message is salvation for all Gentiles too.

His message is the message Jesus gave him.

Paul's conversion was by God's grace and nothing Paul had done. Jesus himself instantly transformed Paul from persecuting the church to reaching out with the same message, the message of the Messiah, Jesus.

And Jesus gave Paul his unique mission.

To preach to the Gentiles.

Now look at that third phrase again. "reveal his Son in me." We would normally expect to see "reveal his Son to me." Some translations do say "to me" because it could mean that too. But that's not what Paul wrote. He wrote, "in me." What does he mean?

Well, there's a clue in what he wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:5–6 (HCSB), "... we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves because of Jesus. For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ."

See there? Paul wrote that God had shone in our hearts.

Why? To give knowledge of Jesus Christ!

That's what happened to him on the road to Damascus.

He was on his way to drag Christians into prison when Jesus appeared to him in a blaze of light. But the light also blazed in his spirit! Jesus entered into him as well as appearing to his eyes. So, no wonder Paul said, "reveal his Son in me."

That's exactly what happened!

His whole understanding underwent a seismic shift, a complete reversal.

And that revelation within a person is the only way a person can understand who Jesus is and what he is doing. It simply must be by revelation from God himself.

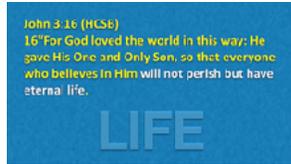
It is the Spirit of Jesus who brings it into a person's inner self, into the me that is me.

It is the Spirit of Jesus living within his people that gives us understanding. And it is that life of God within us that gives us the eternal life he has promised. It is life that is true life.

Here are some very familiar verses, but listed altogether the emphasis on true life is remarkable.

Jesus said in John 3:16 (HCSB)

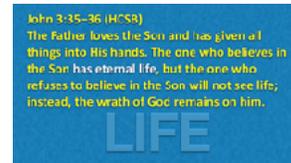
16“For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.



And in John 3:35–36 (HCSB)

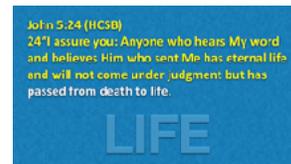
35The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands.

36The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him. (That wrath of God is death.)



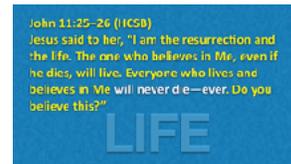
And in John 5:24 (HCSB)

24“I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.

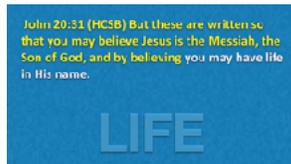


John 11:25–26 (HCSB)

25Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. 26Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?”



All those quotes came from the Gospel of John. Why? Listen to why he wrote his gospel. It's in John 20:31 (HCSB) 31But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name.



So then, Paul reviews his history that we have already read in Acts. He's proving he hadn't learned his gospel to the Gentiles from anyone else other than Christ himself.

Then he again certifies the truth of it by writing in verse 20,

"Now I am not lying in what I write to you. God is my witness."

Like the gospel itself, Paul's life was the historical record that could be verified if the Galatians wanted to check with other sources.

It certainly helps my faith to know that Paul's gospel is certified to be accurate and reliable.

It's true!

Eternal life is true!

That's what Jesus told him.

Praise God!

