

## CHECKING OUT THE PREACHER

Galatians 1:10-24

- Intro: “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;
- which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ.
  - But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.
  - As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:6-9)
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- Those harsh words followed directly after the Apostle Paul’s brief greeting in his letter to the churches of Galatia.
  - And the most shocking thing he said---he said twice---so no one would miss it.
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- “Let him be accursed.”
  - If the kids weren’t in here this morning---I’d put that in more colloquial terms.
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- I’ll leave it up to you to so translate the word “accursed.”
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- Any way you put it---that’s not a nice thing to say---and I’m sure some were offended by it.
  - It certainly wasn’t “seeker sensitive.”
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- But then again---Paul wasn’t trying to please men.
  - As he goes on to readily admit.

- “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10)
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- A bond-servant of Christ cannot worry about pleasing men.
  - That’s not to suggest he should be unnecessarily antagonistic---or have utter disdain and disregard for the feelings of others.
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- But he cannot allow the fear of offending someone keep him from saying what his Master would have him say.
  - He must not limit his message to things that will be culturally acceptable---liked---and popular.
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- Paul knew when he said the Galatians were deserting Christ ---and had bought into a distorted gospel----they wouldn’t like it.
  - But it didn’t stop him.
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- And even more offensive was his audacity to declare that if anyone should preach anything other than what he had already preached to them---he should be accursed.
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- Now Paul is not just being judgmental of others when he says that.
  - The “we” includes Paul.
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- It wouldn’t matter who did it.
  - Anyone who would dare to change the gospel should be condemned to hell---be they Paul’s co-workers---apostles---angels---or Paul himself.

- The gospel that Paul delivered to the Galatians was not something that could be altered---by anyone.
- What they had received was the truth---the whole truth---and nothing but the truth.
- That was Paul's assertion---so help him God.
- But how did they know they had been told the truth---the whole truth---and nothing but the truth?
- And even more importantly---for us---how do we know if we've been told the truth---the whole truth---and nothing but the truth?
- Even though the Galatians were questioning it---they had heard it from an apostle---but none of us have.
- So how do we know that the one who shares the gospel with us has it right?
- Isn't it possible that we're hearing it from someone who was more like the Apollos we read about in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts?
- He was a powerful preacher---and he knew the Old Testament.
- He had been instructed in the way of the Lord---but there were some holes in his theology.
- He hadn't been taught about the Holy Spirit---and his understanding of baptism was inadequate.
- So Priscilla and Aquila had to take aside the preacher---and explain to him the way of God more accurately.
- How were the Galatians to know whether they had received the gospel from an Apollos---or from one with a full and accurate knowledge of the gospel?
- How were they to know that Paul was right---and the Judaizers were wrong?
- Paul has to answer that question---before they will accept what he has to say about grace.
- An understanding that differed markedly from what they were being taught by those who insisted that Christians had to abide by all the laws---traditions---restrictions---and obligations of the Old Testament---before they could be found acceptable to God.
- They wouldn't hear what he has to say---until they knew why they should listen to him.
- So Paul begins the defense of his apostleship---and the gospel he had preached to the Galatians.
- "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.
- For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11-12)
- Paul begins by stating in no uncertain terms that the gospel he preached wasn't something he made up---or even got from another man.
- The gospel he declared came through a direct revelation from Jesus Christ.
- Obviously---if he could support that claim---that would settle it.

- If his gospel came directly from Jesus Christ---who could dispute it?
- Now---we know from the book of Acts that what he is saying is true.
- We looked at his conversion experience on the road to Damascus last week.
- We read of Christ's post-resurrection---post-ascension---appearance to Paul.
- And of Paul's direct commission as an apostle.
- The Galatians---however---couldn't look up the account in the book of Acts.
- Luke hadn't yet written it.
- And just saying it's so---doesn't make it so.
- Besides---don't most who say they have a message from God claim it came directly from Him?
- So how could the Galatians---and how can we---determine whether or not the preacher is telling us the truth?
- In other words---how can we check out the preacher?
- Obviously we have at our disposal a resource the Galatians didn't have.
- We have the complete revelation of God---and can compare anything that is said against that which is written in God's Word.
- But even if we have a good working knowledge of the Scriptures---we can be led astray.

- Scripture can be twisted and distorted---and a persuasive preacher can cause us to question our understanding---even if it is right.
- So how do we know if we should listen to him?
- Again---how do we check out the preacher?
- I think Paul would have us do what he invited the Galatians to do.
- Check out his life---his calling---and his sources.
- He begins by opening up his past to the Galatians---and inviting them to check out his life.

#### I. CHECK OUT HIS LIFE Galatians 1:13-14

- “For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it;
- and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.”
- Paul didn't try to hide anything about his life.
- He was an open book.
- He begins by acknowledging that the Galatians knew about his past.
- And if he hadn't shared it himself---the Judaizers no doubt had.

- He had persecuted the church.
- He had actually tried to destroy it.
- That in itself would naturally make him---and his message---suspect.
- How could you trust someone who had hunted down Christians---tried to force them to renounce their faith---and condemned them to death if they didn't?
- What if he was now a double-agent---posing as an apostle---while actually seeking to condemn Christians to eternal damnation by preaching a false gospel?
- I'm sure the Judaizers had tried to use his past against him.
- Paul---however---disarms them by openly acknowledging his past.
- Without trying to spin it.
- He doesn't downplay it.
- He doesn't minimize it.
- He says he persecuted the church of God---beyond measure.
- He doesn't try to justify it.
- He doesn't make excuses for what he did.
- He simply admits it.
- "Yes, I tried to destroy the church."
- But the zeal he had shown in persecuting the church---which he had thought to be a heretical departure from Judaism---could also assure the Galatians that he now understood the Old Testament.

- And he knew it better than those who were challenging his understanding of the Law.
- Before his conversion he had been a top student of the Law.
- In his testimony recorded in Acts he revealed that he had studied under Gamaliel---that he was a Pharisee---and the son of Pharisees.
- And he obviously understood the importance of circumcision to a Jew.
- Having been raised in a Jewish home---he had been circumcised on the eighth day.
- He was in every way what he declared himself to be in Philippians---"a Hebrew of Hebrews."
- But---as he also stated in Philippians---those things that he had once counted as so important---he now counted as rubbish in view of what he had found in knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.
- He doesn't share that in so many words to the Galatians.
- But the surpassing greatness of what he had found in Christ ---and in grace---will become evident in his letter to them.
- All he is doing now is disarming his critics by making sure his readers know there are no skeletons in his closet.
- He openly shares with them both the bad---and the good---of his past.
- And---in effect---invites them to check him out.
- Anyone who would presume to teach you God's Word should be willing to do the same.

- He should be open about his past---and willing to let you know where he's coming from.
- And he shouldn't be offended if you check him out yourself.
- If his answers are evasive---and things just don't add up--- you should dig a little deeper.
- It's vitally important that you have confidence in the character of anyone who would offer to teach you things of eternal significance.
- Now---you should be aware that anyone who would claim to speak for God will be painting a target on his back.
- He will be inviting people to take a shot at him.
- As a safeguard against unfounded accusations---Paul does tell us in I Timothy 5:19 not to receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.
- That means groundless rumors and personal animosity must be acknowledged for what they are---and not taken seriously.
- Furthermore---I don't believe youthful indiscretions--- statements taken out of context---or long-ago repented of sins---should be held against a man who is preaching the truth.
- Legitimate concerns---however---about his past---or present life---should be openly explored.
- And they should be welcomed by the preacher.
- So don't be afraid to check out the preacher's past.
- And while you're at it---check out his call.

## II. CHECK OUT HIS CALL Galatians 1:15-16a

- “But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased
- to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles,”
- Paul has been focusing on what he had done in the past.
- His focus now changes to what God did.
- Paul had been advancing in Judaism---and was extremely zealous for his ancestral traditions.
- But then God called him---and set him apart to preach the gospel to Gentiles.
- At first it didn't make sense to Paul.
- He was certainly more qualified to preach to Jews---who he fully understood---than to Gentiles.
- In fact---after his conversion he started preaching to Jews--- confounding them---proving to them that Jesus was the Christ.
- They responded---however---by wanting to kill him---and he eventually had to be whisked out of town in a basket lowered through a hole in the city wall.
- Then---when he got to Jerusalem---he stirred up the Jews to such an extent that the brethren sent him back home to Tarsus.
- After which---Luke notes---the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace.

- At first Paul didn't understand God's call on his life.
- But he eventually came to understand that God had called him---even from his mother's womb---to preach among the Gentiles.
- And this---by the way---makes it very clear that in God's eyes a fetus is not only human---but fully a person worthy of protection while still in the womb.
- Even though Paul didn't know it at the time---God had set him apart for ministry---before he was born.
- As He had done Jeremiah.
- When the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah he was told---“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5)
- Paul had likewise been called into the ministry---and I'm convinced God still calls men into the ministry today.
- In Ephesians---while speaking of our mutual calling in Christ---Paul makes it clear that God has given to the church some who are gifted by the Spirit to serve as apostles---prophets---evangelists---and pastor-teachers. (Ephesians 4:1-16)
- Now that we have the apostolic witness in written form---and God's will for us---as well as our future---has been revealed ---apostles and prophets are no longer needed in the church.
- But evangelists and pastor-teachers are---and God still calls men to be such.
- I must confess---however---that I really don't know how such calls are made.
- When I was six years old---I let it be known that I was going to be a preacher.
- I didn't hear any voices---I just knew it.
- And other than a brief period in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade when I thought I might want to be a pathologist---I've never doubted it.
- And some among us may have received a call even sooner than I did.
- Years ago---when asked what he wanted to be when he grew up---Jake said he wanted to be janitor---like Rick.
- And just last week in Sunday School---Theo told Marilyn he was going to be a Chatham Christian Church preacher.
- Only time will tell if those youthful declarations were premature.
- But if a preacher doesn't tell you of his call into the ministry ---how do you know God called him into it?
- Well---you might start by simply asking him why he's in the ministry---what went into his decision to preach.
- Was it simply a career choice he made---or was it something he felt compelled to do?
- Years ago I read a statement from a famous preacher that made a lot of sense to me.
- When asked whether someone should go into the ministry or not---he said if they could do anything else---they shouldn't.

- Now he wasn't saying that if you don't have what it takes to make it in the real world of business and commerce---you should go into the ministry.
- He was saying if you know in your heart that you could never be content doing anything else---that you share Paul's passion expressed in---“Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel”---only then should you be a preacher.
- So even if a preacher doesn't verbalize his sense of call into the ministry---you should find evidence for it in his passion for preaching.
- And you may be able to discern it by trying to see what motivates him.
- If he appears to be more interested in pleasing people---than pleasing the Lord---you might be justified in calling his call into question.
- And while it is true that those who proclaim the gospel are to get their living from the gospel---a minister who seems unduly concerned with the material benefits of the ministry ---may have gone into the ministry for the wrong reasons. (I Corinthians 9:7-14)
- Now we do have to be careful here---because it's very dangerous to judge a man's motives.
- But what a man does in ministry---may give an idea as to why he went into it.
- And---more importantly---what he really believes.
- And why he preaches---what he preaches.
- And that brings us to something else that we ought to check out.

### III. CHECK OUT HIS SOURCES

Galatians 1:16b-24

- “I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,
- nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.
- Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.
- But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.
- (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)
- Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.
- 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.’
- And they were glorifying God because of me.”
- Paul wanted there to be no doubt about the source of the message he proclaimed.
- After God called him he didn't consult with flesh and blood ---he didn't ask anyone what he should preach---and he didn't go to Jerusalem to learn from the other apostles.
- He left Damascus---and went to Arabia.
- Now this is the only place we read of that---and he doesn't tell us what he did while there.
- But the inference is that it was there that he received the message he was to proclaim.

- He has already said that he received the gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
- So there's a good possibility that while he was alone in the desert---Jesus personally instructed him as to what he was to preach.
- I also think we're safe in assuming that while there he reexamined the Old Testament to see what he had missed.
- That he studied the Scriptures---to understand how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies and promises God had made.
- After his time in Arabia he returned to Damascus---until forced to leave through a hole in the wall.
- He then did go to Jerusalem and briefly met with Peter and James---but they didn't take him under their wing---and mentor him.
- They were suspicious of him---and only agreed to meet with him at the insistence of Barnabas.
- After a couple of weeks with them---at their insistence---he headed home to the regions of Syria and Cilicia.
- He then spent ten or more years there---preaching the message he had received from Christ.
- He shared this with the Galatians because he wanted them to know he wasn't feeding them second-hand information.
- He was preaching them the gospel that he had received directly from the primary source.
- And while preachers no longer have the opportunity to learn directly from Christ in the desert---they can still get the messages they proclaim from the primary source.
- They can---and should---get their sermons from the Bible.
- That's not to suggest that it is wrong for preachers to go to Bible college---consult commentaries---read sermons from other preachers---and even get things off the Internet.
- But if a preacher is actually getting the sermons he preaches from others---you might be justified in questioning his call to be a preacher.
- And if it becomes obvious he isn't getting the messages he preaches directly from God's word---you may need to do more than simply evaluate the accuracy of his interpretation and the appropriateness of his application.
- You may have to examine the theology of the one from whom he is getting his sermons.
- You may have to check out more preachers---than just the one who is preaching to you.
- Bottom line---you have to be careful who you listen to.
- You must carefully check out anyone who would presume to teach you things of eternal significance.
- Paul did want the Galatians to have confidence in him.
- And I pray you have confidence in me.
- But ultimately the only one any of us can trust completely is the Lord Himself.
- And it's the goal of my preaching to lead you to the place where you trust Him---and His Word---more than you trust any preacher.