

Paul's God Story

Acts 9:1-9 (ESV) ¹ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men, or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So, they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Galatians 1:10-24 (ESV) ¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. ¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God because of me.

The apostles were divinely appointed meaning they were uniquely handpicked and chosen by God. After Judas betrayed Jesus, he was overcome by his own guilt and shame and killed himself. The enemy talked Judas into betraying Jesus and later accused Judas giving to him a spirit of self-condemnation. Satan works the same today. He makes sin look really good and fun and after the sin accuses you of the terrible activity, he brought to your attention in the first place.

After the death of Judas, the 11 disciples under the Lord's direction chose Mattias.

Mattias had been among the disciples who accompanied them "all the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up...a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). These 12 apostles were well known and their apostleship unquestionable with the early believers and the church after Pentecost. Jesus had promised them, "When they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what to speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. For it is not you who speak, it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" (Matt. 10:19-20). This promise was given to the apostles alone. Yes, the Holy Spirit may help us remember and keep our minds clear when we are called to speak under difficult circumstances. Christ promised new revelation only to the apostles, who were the sole authoritative spokesmen of His word before the New Testament was written. "These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you," Jesus told them. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:25-26). The Holy Spirit not only enabled the apostles to remember accurately and completely what Jesus had taught them during His three-year earthly ministry but divinely revealed to them every additional truth He later declared through them. When they spoke for God, it was God Himself speaking through them. (John MacArthur, Galatians pg. 20-21).

The Judaizers made it clear to the church in Galatia that Paul was not one of the original apostles and either appointed himself or was appointed by a person and not God. Paul had left Galatia and the false teachers made it their aim to discredit Paul. Paul's major purpose was to defend the true Gospel of Jesus Christ He has received from God Himself and in so doing he had to defend his true calling of that of an apostle.

Verse 10 – ¹⁰ "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." The

commentator Todd Wilson writes this about people pleasers. “People pleasers have an inordinate desire to please other people; servants of Christ have an all-consuming passion to please God. People pleasers are motivated by the fear of man; servants of Christ are inspired by the fear of God. People pleasers pretend to serve God when they really intend to serve themselves; servants of Christ actually intend to serve God by meeting the needs of other people. People pleasers are anxious for approval from others and distraught when they do not get it; servants of Christ simply love others and leave approval or disapproval to the judgment of God.... If we are always working hard to curry favor from other people and to do what they think we should do, we will eventually work ourselves into a state of exhaustion and despair.” (Todd Wilson, Galatians pg. 35, 41).

Paul was a true God pleaser, and, in the end, it cost him his life. One time doing his best to please God, the people dragged him out of town, stoned him and left him for dead. He bore on his body the brand marks of Jesus. The worst case of people pleasers in the ministry that I can think of are the Lutheran pastors in Germany during World War II doing their best to please Hitler and ignore the suffering of God’s chosen people, the Jews.

Verse 11 – “¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel.” Dr. MacArthur comments on this verse, “Let me make it perfectly clear.” “The Gospel I preach is not human either in nature or in authority.” “I did not invent it or alter it nor did any other man.” “Its message is completely divine in origin, without many mixture of human wisdom whatever” (Galatians pg.23).

Verse 12a – “¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it,” The source of Paul’s Gospel was God Himself, not any human authority or Jewish tradition.

Verse 12b – “but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” The term revelation means what was once a secret has now been made known. To Paul was revealed the mystery of the Gospel and his source is God, not human tradition of any kind. Salvation is not by works

but a work of God's grace. God spoke directly to Paul. That is why we read of his conversion to Jesus in Acts chapter 9. Paul saw the light and never again lived in the darkness of unbelief. His trip to Damascus would eventually end in heaven due to the grace of God and hell was averted.

Verses 13-14 – ¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴And 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.” Paul is giving his personal testimony of how he came to Christ. Part of his testimony is rather embarrassing indeed. He persecuted the church so violently that he had believers in Christ stoned to death. He thought he was serving God by persecuting the church with much violence. It never ceases to amaze me how a person can be so wrong. Paul thought he had God on his side and was willing to go so far as to put people to death. Putin thinks he has God on his side even quoting the Bible to the masses. “Oh, Lord may none of us be this deceived and used by Satan to steal, kill, and destroy.”

What changed Paul completely was the grace of God, the message of grace given to him by God Himself. None of this message came from his past, from the tradition of being a Pharisee. Paul had to be retaught, rewired, requiring heart surgery by the Master Physician. God's grace is absolutely amazing. When God's grace came into him, Paul realized he was actually in rebellion against God. He was a runaway freight train crushing everyone on his path (ibid. pg. 27), a man without restraint. God's grace led to a massive repentance, a complete change of direction. God performed a major overhaul on his life and to this day we are still reaping the fruit of God's work in and through Paul's life.

Verses 15-16a ¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles.” So often in the Old Testament and on into the New Testament it is stated that

God called specific persons to serve the Lord even before they were born. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while he was still in his mother's womb. In eternity past God planned for Paul to be saved and to be a missionary to the Gentiles. The faith that Paul taught is the faith that we cling to and one day will lift us up into heaven. And when we get into heaven, we will learn that God knew us by name even before we were born. We will also meet every single aborted child. God has plans even for the unborn and it is not to kill them before they are born. In heaven we will finally understand this.

Through the end of the chapter Paul continues his story of God's saving grace. ²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God because of me."

Personal applications. **1. Every Christian has a testimony to offer, a God story that is worthy of being told and worthy of being listened too.** No, you did not see Jesus on the way to Damascus, but the Lord Jesus has made Himself known to you, revealed Himself to you and please do not keep that experience or experiences to yourself. Christ's revelation was personally given to you so you will give it away.

2. No matter how sinful your past, God can turn you around and use you to bring great honor and glory to God. Your past mistakes and sins do not determine your future. God's grace changes everything.

3. There is no soul too far gone that God's grace cannot turn it around so keep praying for those lost souls.

Amen and Amen.