

The I Am's of the Apostle Paul

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Preacher: Pastor Wolski

[0 : 00] Praise God. Thank you. An island in the ocean of apostasy. Yeah. Not a lot of people think that way.

But he's experienced some things, huh? So he thinks that way. All right, and I agree with him. Let's find in our Bibles 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

I'm not going to have a lot of time with you tonight, so at the very best I'll try to introduce what I think I want to do over the next couple Wednesdays.

1 Corinthians chapter 15. And before we get there, you recall most recently we were in Exodus on Sunday mornings and when Moses stood before that bush that was burning with fire and it was not consumed, he spoke with God Almighty and he heard, he kind of, he cut the Lord off and said, now, how are they going to know that you sent me?

What name? If they asked me what name, what am I going to say? And he said five words, I am that I am. That was the name he gave.

[1 : 20] In your Bible, it's in all capital letters in Exodus chapter 3. I am that I am. Tell them I am hath sent thee. And then in John chapter 8, Jesus Christ is giving it to the Jews pretty hard, telling them that they're of their father, the devil, and that they don't hear God's words.

They don't have his words in them. And they get upset with him and he's going on and he says before Abraham, or he says that Abraham rejoiced to see his day and they reply, well, you're not even 50 years old.

Hast thou seen Abraham? And he said before Abraham was, I am. And their reaction to that was they picked up stones to stone him because they understood exactly what he was claiming to be.

They considered that blasphemy for a man to claim that he's God. Now, in connection to this declaration of Jesus Christ claiming to be the I am, and to be that I am figure or God that spoke to Moses, the Gospel of John records seven, we call them the I am's of Christ.

There's seven symbolic things that Jesus Christ likens himself or declares himself to be, and they're representative of his role or of his authority in salvation.

[2 : 39] And if you're familiar with what I'm talking about, Jesus answered and said unto them, I am, and then he says, and there's seven of them. Does anybody know one of them? Anybody know one of them off the top? Yeah. He said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

We'll just clump that one together. That's John 14, 1. I am the resurrection and the life. That's another one. I think that's in John 11 or 12.

There's seven of them. I am the bread of life. That's John 8 or 6, somewhere.

I'm the bread of life. Never hunger again. That's three. Does anybody know there's seven? The door. I'm the door of the sheep. John chapter 10.

There's another one in John chapter 10. Kind of connected to the door and the sheep. I am the good shepherd. Is that five?

[3 : 40] Okay. There's two more. No, that's not one of them in John. So, he says, I am the light of the world in John 8 and in John 9.

And then he also says in John 15, I am the true vine. So, there's the seventh one. Now, that was just a little quiz for you. Now, all of these exalt Jesus Christ.

They all reveal his divinity and his unique and necessary role in salvation. So, if Jesus Christ wasn't the son of God, and if he wasn't God in the flesh, and if he wasn't deity, then who cares what he says?

And all of those statements are just a bunch of baloney if he's not truly the son of God. And so, it's really dependent upon who the man is. Upon who he is as God.

His authority for him to be able to say those things. I am the true vine. And my father is the husband. I'm the vine. Ye are the branches. Imagine me standing in front of you and saying, I am the door of the sheep.

[4 : 47] Now, what in the world? A man, like flesh and bone, standing in front of other men, flesh and bone, saying that you can't get to the father except by me. So, that's some, it's either true or it's not.

And, of course, with the Lord Jesus Christ, he is God in the flesh. And those statements, without the authority, the statements are worthless. Now, look at 1 Corinthians 15.

I want to transition and just kind of plug that thought of Jesus Christ and his authority and the things that he says I am. And look at 1 Corinthians 15. And here's the Apostle Paul in verses 9 and 10.

He says, For I am the least of the apostles that am not meant to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am.

And his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain. But I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. So, this is an often quoted statement, or at least that phrase in verse 10 of Paul saying, by the grace of God, I am what I am.

[5 : 59] Sometimes people, I've heard them, they just trim it down to I am what I am. And I want to draw your attention to this, just if you're familiar with it, have you heard it, that that's not an excuse to be weak or to be, to have a sin in your life.

And just say, I am what I am, I'm flesh, I'm human, just like, that's not the statement that Paul's making. Paul's saying, by the grace of God, I am what I am. I was a persecutor of the church in verse 9.

But now, I'm an apostle, earlier in verse 9. And you could say it, you could phrase it differently. What he's saying is, what I am today, I am because of the grace of God.

He said it in verse 10, but by the grace of God, I am what I am. So, more than calling himself an apostle, as he did here in verse 9, I am the least of the apostles.

But more than that, Paul says many things. He uses I am, and he follows it up with a lot of things. One time he says, I am made all things to all men.

[7 : 06] So, they're everything. But I want to borrow the concept that we've just looked at with Jesus Christ, the concept of Christ and his I am's. And I want to study with you the I am's of Paul, the apostle Paul.

And there's numerous times where he says, I am. Now, granted, he is not Jesus Christ, and we're not trying to make him the great I am or anything like that. But the reason Jesus Christ could say that was because the authority that he had as the son of God.

He could say, I am the good shepherd, because he was. And he is the bread of life, and he can, if any man will eat of that bread, he'll never hunger. And so, because of Jesus Christ's authority, if the apostle Paul had any authority at all, he could say some things, and they'd be true too.

And so, just tonight, I want to introduce to you this thought of that over the next several weeks. I think it would be fun to study the I am's of Paul. But there's a reason why we can and should study these is because he has been given some authority.

And probably all we'll get to cover tonight is just laying that groundwork. So, take your Bible and go back to Romans chapter 11. We're going to be back here in Corinthians soon, but Romans 11 is where I want to take you to.

[8 : 22] And right after that, actually, I have Galatians chapter 2. So, maybe you can get those both quickly. Romans 11, Galatians 2.

Numerous times, the apostle Paul says, I am something. And these are not symbolic references like the Lord Jesus Christ that pertain to our salvation at all, but rather they're practical statements that we are to follow and seek to be just like Paul is by the grace of God.

And I think you'll see where I'm going here pretty soon. So, what exactly are you, Paul? What exactly are you today, Paul? Look at Romans chapter 11 and verse number 13.

Paul says, for I speak to you Gentiles inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles. Now, earlier he said he was just the least.

He's least of all the apostles. Here he declares that he is the apostle of the Gentiles. I magnify. It doesn't sound like he's being too meager at this moment, does he?

[9 : 39] He's magnifying an office that he declares was given to him of Jesus Christ as the apostle of the Gentiles. Flip over to Galatians chapter 2.

In Galatians chapter 2, there's a little timeline here I'm not really covering, and we may get to it a little bit later. And if we followed the timeline, we could see some things that would be helpful here.

But for now, we'll just fast forward through a little bit of it to Galatians 2, where he goes to Jerusalem after he has already seen and learned some things by the direct revelation of Jesus Christ that's mentioned in chapter 1.

And he goes to Jerusalem, and he goes to meet the other apostles. And he does it privately. Verse number 2 says, I went up by revelation and communicated unto them that gospel which I preached among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation.

That'd be the big guys, the big shots, Peter, James, John. He didn't go in the street and have a debate with them openly. But no, privately wanted to talk some things out.

[10 : 48] He says, lest by any means I should run or had run in vain. And skimming down a little bit, verse number 6, But of these who seemed to be somewhat, whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me, God accepteth no man's person.

For they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me. But contrarywise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, speaking of the Gentiles, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter, for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles.

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

So Paul meets with these other apostles. And the key note here, the thing I want to point out is that they, where is the word? They added in verse six, nothing to me, nothing at all.

Did these men who spent three and a half years with Jesus Christ, who by their own hands raised the dead and healed the sick and preached the gospel of the kingdom of heaven.

[12 : 11] They added nothing to what the apostle Paul came and showed up. And let me show you something along those lines. Let me think, where is that at? Second Corinthians?

No. Let's try that. Second Corinthians 11. Second Corinthians.

Yeah. Second Corinthians 11. So Paul is an apostle, calls himself the least of the apostles. Why?

Well, because he persecuted the church of God. But he's our apostle. And this is what I'm building to make this point of his authority and why we're going to want to follow him and do when he says, I am such and such.

There's a reason why we should take this to heart. So he's our apostle, the apostle of the Gentiles. And the Jewish apostles said, yes, you go to the heathen, you go to the Gentiles.

[13 : 17] And they had nothing to add to what he had already understood, the revelation he already knew. Now, second Corinthians 11 and notice verse number five, five and six.

He says, for I suppose I was not a wit behind the very chiefest apostles, but though I be rude in speech yet, not in knowledge, but we have been through the manifest among you in all things.

What, what is he not behind in knowledge, not a wit behind the very chiefest apostles. If Paul walked in the room with the big dogs of that day, and they were big dogs, so to speak in the church, they were revered.

I mean, that's, that was natural. God set it up that way. There was only, wasn't that many men and there was thousands of people. And when Paul walked up and walked in the room and showed up and started speaking to them, the word of the Lord that God showed him, some of it was news to them and it was new stuff.

And some of it was, they had nothing to add to that because they didn't. And so when Paul's declaring us, I want us to all understand the authority. The apostle Paul has look at chapter 12 of second Corinthians.

[14 : 28] chapter 12, verse 11 and 12, second Corinthians 12, 11, I am become a fool in glory and you have compelled me for.

I ought to have been commended of you. Now he's not seeking glory of men here, but the truth is he was held in such a position and God put him in a position that the church and the believers ought to have been looking up to him and honoring him.

I ought to have been commended of you for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. So it's not pride in him, but it's a true statement.

And he's declaring his apostleship and authority. Verse 12, truly the signs of an apostle were brought among you in all patience in signs and wonders and mighty deeds and on and on.

Now one more reference along these lines, go back to first Corinthians nine, first Corinthians chapter nine. So although he calls himself least of all the apostles, in reality, there is nothing at all that's meager about his apostleship or his office, nothing.

[15 : 38] And first Corinthians nine, look at verses one and two. Granted, he's writing to this church at Corinth. He says, am I not an apostle?

Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you for the seal of mine apostleship.

Are ye in the Lord? Paul had every right to administer and impose his views, his teachings as the word of God to these men and women, this church and all Gentile believers, because they existed because of his preaching, because of what God had called him and sent him to be and to do.

Now, just give you an example of this. Let's just imagine. Actually, this isn't such an imagination. There's a brother that comes here every now and again. His name is Mark Decker. Um, and just, he was here this Sunday, sat right there and he, he lives in Idaho.

He comes to town here. And when he's in town, at least as much as I know, he comes by every so often. He was here this week and two, two, three weeks ago, he was here. Mark has a son named Tyler who went to Pensacola Bible Institute recently.

[16 : 58] Tyler got saved. Tyler felt the Lord leading him through some other brothers up in Oregon and, uh, Idaho. I think to, uh, the Lord dealing with his heart about learning the Bible and going to Bible school.

Tyler led his dad Mark to the Lord. And then Tyler goes off to Pensacola Bible Institute. And he's there for a few years and he graduates. And on his way to school, he's driving the West coast, heading East.

And he comes through Utah and he stops at a town and he feels burdened in his heart about this town. Doesn't have a church. He's looking around, doesn't have a gospel preaching witness anywhere. And he just feels like Lord.

And he's a young man, but he's like, Lord, if you want me to come back here and start a church, I will after school three years later. And he just kind of, he, he believed that in the moment. And you might look at that and say, you know, he's young, doesn't know he's talking about.

And maybe that's true too, but he went to school. And the whole time that burden for that town in Utah never left. I think it's called Cedar Springs or Cedar city or something.

[17 : 59] It's, it's just North of Vegas and St. George. And it's a little bit up there. So Tyler graduated school and came back and took a little survey and felt the Lord confirmed that he wants him there.

And Tyler came and he's been there about six months now in Utah, about six hours from here, trying to get something going, has a few people. And so let's just imagine now this is where it's at.

It's legitimate. He's trying to start a work. Let's just imagine that Tyler's there and he's preaching and, and he leads a few people to Christ and he's got some people together and somebody runs into him and, you know, while he's trying to hand out tracts and things and says, well, I didn't even know there was Christians here.

And, and he finds some other believers and before long, they've got themselves something going. And let's just say five years ago and he's got a little church going and people are coming and somebody shows up and gets offended by something that he preaches.

And they stand up and say, I don't think that you're called to be a pastor. I don't think that you're qualified. Now you might say, get out of here.

[19 : 03] Paul, you know, that, that man, just imagining this now, if this scenario happened, trying to apply it to what Paul's defending or saying to this church here, if that was the case, and Tyler as pastor of that church, he says, Hey, I may not be qualified to, to be on the board of directors to the missions program or some agency like that.

I don't have any experience of foreign missions. I may not be qualified to be the president of some theological seminary, but I know by God's grace that I'm called and qualified to pastor this church because he told me and used me to start it.

And he could say, if anything I'm called to do in this life is this right here, because that's what the hand of God led him to do in his life. And that's what Paul's saying here. If I'm not an apostle to anybody else, I certainly am to you, church of Corinth.

You're my work in the Lord. You're the seal of mine. Apostleship. As a matter of fact, the fact that they had a church and were thriving and, and the gospel was alive and there's nothing else to say about that.

Now, the apostle Paul is an apostle. He is not behind the Jewish apostles or disciples of the Lord. He is in his own category as an apostle to the Gentiles and the doctrine and the teaching that he gives is to the body of Christ.

[20 : 34] Now, some, I know some of you, this is old stuff and you get it. You've known this for years, but to others of you, I know this is not, this is newer stuff and you need to get a handle on this.

It's understanding. When the apostle Paul teaches and gives doctrine, it is for us to follow. Sometimes you'll see something back here that Jesus Christ said to his disciples in the gospels, and it won't match what the apostle Paul said.

So what do we do? Well, I'll tell you, you follow your apostle and your apostle is Paul. Now in a doctoral position to start with tonight, we need to understand that Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

flip back to, to Romans chapter one. And after this, I'm going to first Timothy, Romans one, and then first Timothy.

As a doctrinal position, Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ. Verse number one, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ.

[21 : 50] And now notice the next phrase called to be an apostle. He's first a servant of Jesus Christ, like you and I.

And on that road in, uh, in Acts chapter nine, the Lord shows up and Paul says, what will thou have me to do? Offers himself and his services to Jesus Christ.

As a servant of Jesus Christ, he is called to be an apostle. And later in Acts chapter nine, we don't have time to go through this, but that's where God reveals he's a chosen vessel unto me.

And he's going to bear my name before Kings and before Gentiles. And now flip the first Timothy chapter two, first Timothy chapter two, he is called to be an apostle.

First Timothy two, verse seven, after he's speaking of God, wanting all men to be saved and gave himself a ransom. He says in verse seven, we're unto, I am ordained a preacher and an apostle.

[22 : 56] I speak the truth in Christ and lie not. Notice how he plugs that in after this apostle thing. I'm telling you the truth in Christ and lie not a teacher of the Gentiles.

So he's called to be an apostle. He's ordained to be an apostle. And one more second Timothy one, second Timothy one and verse 11.

He's appointed by God, by the Lord Jesus Christ to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Second Timothy one, verse 11, we're unto notice the words, the gospel right before that, where unto, I am appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the Gentile for the, which cause I also suffer these things.

Now, the doctrinal position is that the apostle Paul is the authority, just like Jesus Christ had the authority as the son of God to declare these, I am's that can lead you to salvation and to the father.

The apostle Paul has been given the authority to say some things that he is. And these things he tells us were to follow. Now, these are not the doctoral things to lead you to salvation necessarily that I'm speaking to you of, but rather the practical things to help you live for Jesus Christ today and not frustrate yourself trying to follow somebody else's doctrine.

[24 : 26] And so now one more verse and we're closing Galatians chapter one. By way of a practical application.

The first thing we read in first Corinthians chapter 15 was Paul said, I'm an apostle. I used to be a persecutor, but now I'm an apostle.

And as a practical thought here for you, Paul is not who he was. He's no longer a persecutor, but now he's known as an apostle.

Look at Galatians chapter one. And this is kind of a little bit of the timeline I mentioned. In verse 12, he talks about revelation of Jesus Christ.

He talks about his conversion and what he was before he was saved. Look at verse 13. For you have heard of my conversation in times past in the Jews religion, how that beyond measure, I persecuted the church of God and wasted it and profited in the Jews religion above many, my equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of the fathers.

[25 : 41] But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace to reveal his son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which are the apostles before me, but I went into Arabia and returned again into Damascus.

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter. And that's what we read here in chapter two. So Paul gets his education, not by man, but by Jesus Christ.

He gets revelation of some things that Peter and the apostles didn't remember. I don't know if you remember Peter writing this. He says that some things that our brother Paul writes are hard to understand. Why is that Peter?

You spent three and a half years with Jesus Christ, went up on the Mount with him. I mean, you got some private lessons with Christ and you say that Paul writes some things hard to understand. because he got some revelation.

He got some knowledge from Jesus Christ that he didn't give to those men because it was for us. It was for this day we call the church age. Now moving forward in this chapter, Galatians one and closing here, he says, I did not go to Jerusalem, but then I finally went.

[26 : 56] Verse afterwards, verse 21, I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia and was unknown by face under the churches of Judea. which were in Christ, but they had heard only here it is that he, which persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith, which once he destroyed and they glorified God in me.

The practical application. I want to get you here is that Paul is no longer the same man that he was. He was a persecutor. He's now an apostle.

And the first reference that we read in Galatians 15, when he said, by the grace of God, I am what I am. That's saying, I am an apostle of Jesus Christ, and I'm no longer the man I used to be by his grace.

And so just, this is kind of more introduction than anything, but let's just take a little nugget or glimpse away and say that what he is, the I am of Paul that were to follow here is to be a changed man, is to be a different man after you meet Jesus Christ.

And so much so that even those that did not see him to by face, those in the churches of Judea, they heard only that he that persecuted him was, you know what?

[28 : 20] His reputation was different too. He had a changed reputation. The people, believers now recognized him. It took a little time and that's, you'd have to read through his ministry early in the book of Acts, took a little time for them to receive him.

They were afraid of him. He had that bad reputation, but after some time, he had a reputation for preaching Jesus Christ. And so he's not the same man.

Now, just to close, can you say that? Can you say, I am not the man or I am not the woman that I used to be because Jesus Christ changed me.

Since I've been born again, the word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, his spirit inside of me has changed me. And I am not the man or woman I used to be. That's what Paul says right here.

I am what I am. I am the least of the apostles, but I'm an apostle. Now, you may not be called to fulfill such an office, but you are called to have a changed life.

[29 : 23] You are called to be different than you used to be. You're called to lay down some things that you, that you had and held and release them and take some better things that the scripture offers.

We're going to study through this time here. Lord willing, as a few things like Paul says, I am crucified with Christ. He says some other things.

And there's a whole list that I was writing out. And it was delicious. There was so much good stuff in these epistles where Paul says, I am this. And then he says, be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

He's a follower of Jesus Christ. And now we're supposed to follow him as our example. So as we come back together in some weeks forward, Lord willing, we'll kind of go through some thoughts here.

Some of the apostle Paul's I am's. And I think there's some practical stuff that we can learn and take and grow from because that's what we need the most. So we'll stop with that. Thank you men for the testimonies tonight.

[30 : 23] And thank you for being here. Just since brother rich asked about Barb Fleming, she hasn't been around for a while. She was in Texas with her sister. And I reached out to her today and said, are you back yet?

And she said, well, I did come back and then I left again on a cruise. So she's here and gone, but she said she thinks she'll be in church this weekend. So Lord willing, we'll see her again soon. So tough life.

All right. I'll have a word of prayer. Then we'll leave. Father, we pray that tonight would be, would stay with us. These few thoughts. Thank you for the testimonies of these men, for the work that you're doing in their lives.

Lord, thank you for your holy scriptures and for the truth. And what a blessing it is to have it. Let us never take it for granted. And Lord, burden us and equip us and strengthen us.

Help us to do something with what we have. Thank you so much for the eternal life that you've given us freely through the sacrifice of our savior. Lord, let us not take that for granted.

[31 : 21] And let us not take this precious book for granted. Let us not take one another for granted and the opportunity we have to meet and the freedom and the privilege it is. Please keep us safe as we go home in the rain.

Thank you for your supply. Thank you for your mercy. And we anticipate a good weekend. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So, so, Amen.