

Our Faith & Our Life: Theology & Testimony

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- [0 : 00] Please be seated. Let's turn to our text, which is the very last two verses of Galatians chapter 1, where Paul is sharing something of his story.
- And he says this, They only heard the report. The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.
- And they praised God because of me. Now this shows to us the value that we see in the Bible that God places on personal stories, histories, biographies, or in this case, autobiographies.
- You see, we each have a story. And each of those stories is significant. It matters. And on the pages of Scripture, we read of the stories of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.
- We read of Joseph in the Old Testament. We read of David and Solomon. You fill out the list. And if we were looking for a biography of Paul, you would naturally go to the book of Acts, where we are introduced to Saul of Tarsus, Damascus Road, Paul's preaching, missionary journeys, etc.
- [1 : 13] But throughout the letters of Paul are little nuggets of autobiography, where he tells us something of his story to point us to a bigger story.
- Now, the danger, of course, is that when we tell stories about ourselves, we tend to place ourselves at the center of those stories. I'm reminded of a famous series of books, a multi-volume set.
- Winston Churchill, in between the two wars, had a gap in his political career. And so he set his mind to writing. And he wrote this multi-volume history of the First World War called The World Crisis.
- One of his contemporary politicians, Balfour, once commented. And he said, Winston has written four volumes about himself and called it World Crisis. Now, that's the history or the autobiography that is often written by people.
- They are at the center of their story. Whereas in the Bible, when we have autobiography, we have God at the center of that person's story. So Paul is telling us something about himself, but he's telling us something about himself to point us to God, to Jesus, and to the gospel.
- [2 : 30] You may be familiar with the name Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards, not the triple jumper at the Olympics, but Jonathan Edwards, the American theologian philosopher. He was probably the greatest theologian produced in North America.
- But his most popular work, his most published work, was not a book of theology, though he had many. But his most popular work was an autobiography.
- Not of himself, but he published The Life and Journal of David Brainerd. Now, this journal, this missionary autobiography, is literally a who's who of the modern missionary movement.
- Because so many people read this book and found themselves going somewhere. Such was the nature of this biography, autobiography. For example, William Carey went to India.

Henry Martin went to Persia and to Turkey. Robert Morrison went to China. Adoniram Judson, Burma. Robert Murray, McChain, Dundee, then to the Holy Land.

[3 : 35] David Livingston, Africa. Jim Elliott, Ecuador. All of these people read Edwards' Life of Brainerd. They read this book and they wanted to bring this gospel message to the ends of the earth.

John Piper, in commenting on this book, said that the value of this book in terms of the world missionary movement is incalculable. But that's by way of introduction because when Edwards was introducing this book, it wasn't written by him, but he wrote the introduction.

He said this. He said there are two ways of representing and recommending true religion and virtue to the world. The one, by doctrine and precept.

The other, by instance and example. Both are abundantly used in the Holy Scriptures. So, doctrine and precept. You look at Galatians chapter 1, verse 3, for example.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of God our Father, to whom be glory forever and ever.

[4 : 41] Amen. We think of the Apostle Paul, doctrine and precept. He's telling us about God. He's telling us about Jesus. He's telling us about the Christian life. But he also readily gives us examples of instance or examples from his own story.

He said, I used to be a persecutor. I now became a preacher. And people praised God because of me. So, as you read the Bible, read it with that lens in place.

Because you'll see constantly examples of doctrine and precept. And instance and example. That's why so much of the Bible is history. That's why we have such a big chunk of the Bible looking at the life of David.

Or looking at the life of Joseph. Or looking at the story of Abraham. Because in these accounts we see God's truth revealed. Sometimes we see it revealed positively.

When men and women in the past honor God. Sometimes we see it negatively. When they disobey God. And see the consequences of that disobedience. But God shows himself in the life stories on the pages of the Bible.

[5 : 51] But God also shows himself in the life stories of his people. Past and present. So, you and I each have a story. We have a testimony.

And many of us will have had the privilege and opportunity of sharing that testimony. Maybe one-to-one. Somebody asks you, how did you become a Christian? Maybe you've had the opportunity in a small gathering.

Maybe in a Bible study or a home group. Or maybe in a larger setting. Maybe in a service at church. Or, you know, a fellowship evening where you can share that story. And stories are powerful.

Because stories testify to the reality of God in the lives of people. Now, this text, verse 23 from Galatians 1, has stuck in my mind over the years.

Because I was down in London. And in London, if you get a chance. I mean, there's so much to see down in London. But if you're in the city of London, right in the center. You can go to St. Mary's Woolnuth Church.

[6 : 50] If you happen to be worshiping at the Free Church, which is very close to the Museum of London. Just a couple hundred yards is St. Mary's Woolnuth. And that was the church where John Newton was the minister.

And John Newton wrote his own epitaph. Most times, an epitaph is written by someone else. But he wrote his own epitaph. And he put it this way. He described himself in these terms.

John Newton, Clark. Once an infidel and libertine. An infidel means an unbeliever. A libertine means a person who lived however they wished. A servant of slaves in Africa.

Was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Preserved, restored, pardoned. And appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.

So he's not exactly quoting Galatians 1, 23 and 24. But that's the reference. He says what Paul's testimony was 2,000 years ago. Was his testimony.

[7 : 47] And we see the way in which God works in people's lives. Through people's lives. For the benefit of others. And with you this evening.

I'd like to just highlight a few aspects of Galatians 1. Where Paul is establishing principles. Precepts. Doctrines. And where Paul is using instance and example from his own story.

To highlight and to underscore. That the gospel. Nothing less. Nothing more. Nothing else. Is the message.

That we preach. Is the message that we believe. Is the message that we share. We have nothing else to offer this world. And as you see. There are at least four occasions.

Where Paul is identifying. Or contrasting. Man and God. Sometimes the contrast is explicit. Where both man and God are mentioned.

[8 : 46] Other times just alluded to. So first we begin in verse 1. And Paul is establishing his credentials. And he says that he's an apostle. That means he's someone who's been sent.

Someone who's been commissioned. But he says look. I want you to know that I'm not sent by a man. I'm sent by Jesus. I'm sent by God the Father. I'm sent by God.

Not by man. So his credentials do not rest on himself. In verse 10 he says. He talks about his goal.

Verse 10 he says. Am I now trying to win the approval of men. Or of God. Okay what's my desire here. Do I want to be celebrated by people.

Well if I want to be celebrated by people. The last thing he would do would be a Christian. Would be a servant of Jesus. He said. Or am I trying to please men. If I was still trying to please men.

[9 : 43] I would not be a servant of Christ. So his credentials. His goal. And then in verse 11. His message. I want you to know brothers.

That the gospel I preached. Is not something that man made up. Nothing could be truer. You see if the gospel was man made. We would be at the center of the gospel.

We would have something to offer. Within the gospel. We would have some part to play. Some share. Some stake. But the gospel is from God. Is about God.

Is nothing to do with us. Except that it benefits us. We offer nothing. We contribute nothing. We add nothing. I did not receive it from any man.

Nor was I taught it. Rather I received it by revelation. From Jesus Christ. That's the story.

[10 : 40] That's the message. That's what Paul has come to proclaim. His credentials are not based on any man. His goal is not to be approved by people.

And the message that he preaches is not made up. Not made up by him. Not made up by anybody else. But comes from God. And Paul demonstrates that this message is authentic.

First in its origin. The origin of this message was from God himself. Directly from Jesus. Paul testifies as to how he received this message.

He said this is what I used to be. I used to be a religious person. And you see man made religion can make us self righteous. Only God's gospel can make us righteous.

Remember this morning that Job was asking how can a person. How can a mortal being be right with God. The answer is Job you can't. Only God can make you right.

[11 : 44] There's nothing we can do. Or not do. Nothing we can add. Nothing we can subtract or delete. Only God can do this. And notice that Paul again.

When he's telling us about his story. He says in verse 15. But when God who set me apart from birth. And called me by his grace. Was pleased to reveal his son in me.

So that I might preach him among the Gentiles. I did not consult any man. That's the fourth contrast. He didn't consult anyone.

There was no higher authority to consult than Jesus Christ. Who he met personally on the road to Damascus. So in each of these four incidents. Instances. Paul is saying.

That his credentials are not man made. That his goal is not man focused. That his message is not created by people. Nor did he receive some seal of approval.

[12 : 45] Some authority from any man. No. Everything about Paul. And everything about Paul's message is from God. And to us. But this is the interesting thing.

Because what Paul then goes on to say. Is not only is the source of his message God. Not only did he receive this by revelation from Jesus Christ. By sharing a little bit of his story.

He tells us something remarkable about this gospel message. A few years ago. When we actually could gather in large groups. Just across from the ETS.

One lunch time. Tim Keller was speaking to a group of church leaders. And a group of us were able to go. And to listen to what he had to say. And one of the many things that he pointed out.

He said that when his father and he were growing up. The main question that people had regarding the Bible. Was is it true? You know the era of Francis Schaeffer.

[13 : 47] And the apologetics of that era. Was here's the reliability of scripture. Here's the authenticity of the documents. Here's the multiplicity of witnesses. Here's some of the archaeological data.

So is this true? He said by contrast. So he was talking about himself and his father. He said by contrast. The generation of my grandchildren is much different. They're not so much asking the is it true question.

They're asking the does it work question. So Paul not only says I got this message from Jesus firsthand. But let me tell you what this message does. That this message and this message alone transforms lives.

He says let me tell you what I was like. He then describes his religious identity. Verse 13. Way of life in Judaism. I intensely persecuted the church and tried to destroy it.

And he testifies that this is what he was like. He meets Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. He's commissioned. He is commissioned to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

[14 : 53] And the persecutor becomes the preacher. So you see this message and this message alone is authoritative because of what it is.

It's all about God. It's authoritative because of where it comes from. It comes from God and not from us. But this message is transformative and powerful. And it can take the persecutor and make him a preacher.

It can take John Newton, that great blasphemer. He described himself as a libertine and an infidel. Even at one point he was literally a servant of slaves.

He was a slave captain at one point. But his life was so debauched that he found himself essentially a slave of slaves. And he became a preacher of the gospel that he himself once tried to destroy.

Paul is saying to the Galatians no other message can compare. You can't improve this message. You can't add to this message.

[15 : 57] You can't somehow make this better. First of all it's genuine. But second of all it works. And I'm sure we can testify. Each one of us here tonight and each one online who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That the gospel of Jesus Christ does what it says it's come to do. Paul says in verse 3, Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.

We are rescued. We are redeemed. Our sins have been dealt with. Our alienation, our estrangement has been transformed to being united, reconciled, adopted into this magnificent family.

The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. And notice in verse 24, And they praised God because of me.

You see, if the testimony was about Paul, if Paul was the hero of this story, Paul would get the praise. Paul would get the glory.

[17 : 10] Paul would get the laurels. But no, Paul is telling his story in such a way that all the credit goes to God. The gospel is from God. The gospel is about God.

And all the credit and all the praise goes to God. One of the books that we use in ETS is written by Michael Horton. It's a big, thick book.

You can easily keep any door open with this book. It's two, three inches thick. It's called The Christian Faith. And in the beginning of that book, Horton sets out four D's, four words that begin with D, that are very helpful in understanding what we believe and what it means or what it ought to mean to us.

He said the first D is the word drama. This Bible is a story, a big story. It begins with creation. It ends with recreation. There's a problem.

We call that the fall. And there's a solution. We call that redemption. But it's a big story. And it takes us to the Middle East. It takes us to Africa. It takes us throughout the Mediterranean Basin.

[18 : 14] It takes us along the journey from people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to Saul, David, and Solomon into the New Testament era, Peter and Paul and Philip, etc.

But a big story. It's a drama. But as you read the book, you understand a bit of the story, the first D drama. The second D, he said, is doctrine. Because from this story, we draw the great truths of the Christian faith.

Who God is, what God is like. Who we are, what we're like. Who Jesus is, and what Jesus has come to do. So the big story tells us what the truths are concerning our God, concerning his son, and concerning his gospel.

But that's not enough. He said, because Christian theology goes more than that. It goes deeper than that, he says, because there's a third D.

And that third D is doxology, or praise. Because if we understand the big story, and if we understand the truths that the big story teaches, the natural reaction must be praise.

[19 : 23] We praise God. We thank God. We recognize what God has done, and we give him the glory. We give him the honor. We give him the credit.

You see, it's possible to study the Christian faith. It's possible to study Christianity as one of many world religions. And you can understand the big picture story of the Bible.

You can understand the doctrines of the Christian faith. But unless you yourself are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will never move from the doctrine to the doxology.

You'll never move from the truth to the praise. And you see, what Paul is saying here is, I'm going to testify to what God has done for me. And I'm going to tell you that the people who heard this testimony, the only conclusion they could draw was God was at work here.

No other explanation makes sense. You go to Amazon or any other internet provider, and you can find hundreds of thousands of self-help books.

[20 : 28] And any particular bad habit that you have, you can be given help to stop. If you smoke, you can be given advice how not to smoke. If you eat too little or eat too much, whatever it might be.

The Bible is not in the self-help section. Because we can't help ourselves. The Apostle Paul did not realize that he was making a mistake.

And he somehow said, you know what? It seems like this new Christian religion actually is right after all. No. It was only through a supernatural encounter with the risen living Lord Jesus Christ that the Apostle Paul's life was powerfully and obviously changed.

They praised God because of me. Now, I mentioned that there were four Ds. Just to finish the fourth D, you go from praise, doxology, you then go to discipleship.

Where we actually follow this man, Jesus. He's the teacher, we're the pupil. He's the leader, we're the follower. He's the master, we're the servants.

[21 : 33] Paul, an apostle sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father. Paul had a new master. Paul had a new message. Paul had a new goal.

Paul had a new desire. And so do we. Because when we become disciples of Jesus Christ, he sets the scene. He leads, he guides, and he directs.

I mentioned that epitaph of John Newton earlier, what he said about himself. But there was a second epitaph that was written about John Newton. When he died, he was very old.

He was 82. He was infirm in body and in mind. And he preached until literally weeks before his death. And he was so infirm that when he went into the pulpit, an assistant went in with him, with a manuscript.

And the assistant would read a line and John Newton might speak. And Newton would point and the assistant would read again. And at one point they said, Mr. Newton, you're too old.

[22 : 39] You're too frail. Your mind isn't what it used to be. And he said, oh yes, that's very true. But I do remember two things. I remember that John Newton is a great sinner.

And I remember that Jesus Christ is a great savior. And when John Newton did die, there was a short paragraph that was written in the Times. And it said this. Both epitaphs were true.

John Newton was focusing on what he was. And what by the grace of God he had become. Whereas those who were observing, all they could see was the testimony of a changed life.

And what a powerful testimony that is. Paul's credentials, Paul's goals, Paul's message, rests upon the reality of his changed life.

So he's testifying to the grace of God. And he's demonstrating the grace of God in his life. And maybe the challenge and the opportunity for us is in this world which seems to be characterized by skepticism or contempt or dismissal.

[24 : 09] That maybe the challenge and the opportunity for you and me is to testify with word and to testify indeed about the power of the gospel to change human hearts.

To transform human lives. The apostle Paul said it was obvious. I was a persecutor. I became a preacher. And that obvious change produced within the audience a remarkable praise to God.

John Newton, he wrote his autobiography which itself was a bestseller. People were fascinated by the blasphemer who became the preacher. Now our stories are not the stories of the apostle Paul.

They're the stories of John Newton. But your story is your story. And God is speaking to us. But I believe that God wants to speak through us. So many people today are not going to come to church.

They're not going to read the Bible. But I tell you what, they're listening. And they're looking. And they're observing. And they're drawing conclusions. It was impossible to meet Saul of Tarsus one moment.

[25 : 15] And then several years later to meet the apostle Paul. And to conclude something remarkable has happened here. Something God, only God could make this change.

Only God could transform such a person. And maybe we need to consider ways of sharing our story. Of testifying to the grace of God.

In my life. In your life. What he has done. What he means to us. And that we might be able to testify to his grace. And that people might hear what we have to say.

And by the grace of God. They too might come to praise God. For what he has done in the lives of his people. His unblemished life.

His amiable character. Both as a man and as a minister. And his able writings are too well known to need any comment. We simply see him for what he is.

[26 : 14] Could that be our testimony? Could that be our epitaph? That our life and our work and our witness are so obvious that they need no further comment.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for this message. Indeed, the Bible, this chapter itself, full of precept.

Full of doctrine. Full of truth concerning your son. His work. His life. His death. And yet so rich in instance and example where we see the life of the Apostle Paul.

He tells us how he met Jesus. He tells of his credentials as an apostle of Jesus. And he shows the power of the gospel to change human lives.

Lord, I pray that each one of us gathered together. Each one of us gathered online. That we would be able to testify. That we too have met with the risen, living Lord Jesus.

[27 : 11] Not on the road to Damascus. But in our own lives. In our own situations. In our own circumstances. Sometimes dramatically. Sometimes gradually. Sometimes in young age.

Sometimes in middle age or old age. Whatever our circumstances. Whatever our story. Help us. In turn. To tell. To testify.

Of your grace in our lives. And to point people to the one alone who can change. We thank you that the gospel indeed is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.

That the gospel says and the gospel does what it claims to do. It claims to change human hearts. And it does. It claims to change human destinies.

And it does. It claims to change men and women and boys and girls for the better. And it does. Lord we pray that we would indeed understand the big story.

[28 : 06] The drama. That we would understand indeed the key doctrines and truths of your word. And that in turn we would praise you. And we would give you the glory and honor that belong to you.

And in response. That we would devote the rest of our lives to being the disciples of Jesus. Those that study him. Those that speak much of him.

And those that seek by his grace to commend him in word and in deed. Bless us. Keep us we pray. Do us good we ask. And all for the Savior's sake. Amen. Our final item of praise tonight.

We're going to sing forever Jesus. Kellen will lead us in singing. And let's stand together to sing to God's praise. My hymn of praise shall be forever Jesus.

His love has held me fast. My firm foundation in shifting sands. My strength and hope through many fears and failures.

[29 : 21] The disappointments of the past. His constant love has held me fast.

So for all my days I will sing my praise to the King.

Forever Jesus. Though the storms may rage. He is strong to save.

He's the King forever Jesus. My song of joy shall be forever Jesus.

Who bore the suffering. Who made a way. His life a gift. His death a precious ransom.

[30 : 31] That wipes the sinner's guilt away. And turns our night to glorious day.

He is the King forever Jesus. So for all my days I will sing my praise to the King.

Forever Jesus. Though the storms may rage. He is strong to save.

He's the King forever Jesus. My final breath shall be forever Jesus.

When shadows lengthen before my eyes. My Lord and friend. Companion through the valley.

[31 : 48] When dearest ones are left behind. His hand will lead me to the light.

So for all my days. I will sing my praise to the King. Forever Jesus.

Though the storms may rage. He is strong to save. He's the King forever Jesus.

When I meet His gaze. I will sing my praise to the King. Forever Jesus.

All my sorrows past. I am home at last. With my King forever Jesus.

[32 : 54] With my King forever Jesus. With my King forever Jesus.

Our benediction comes from the final words of Romans chapter 16. Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel. And the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

According to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past. But now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings. By the command of the eternal God. So that all nations might believe and obey Him.

To the only wise God be glory forever. Through Jesus Christ. Amen. For he is no one thing or may you call in so let me pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[34 : 04] Amen. Amen.