

Freedom From and In Our Past

Passage: Galatians 1:11-24 | Speaker: Steve Grothoff | Date: 260816

SUMMARY

Paul's testimony in Galatians 1:11-24 shows how God took a well-educated, zealous persecutor of the church and turned him into one of Christianity's greatest missionaries. Steve draws three points from it: Jesus calls each of us to follow Him regardless of our past, God equips us for what He calls us to (sometimes immediately and supernaturally, sometimes through the wisdom our own past mistakes and experience give us), and before we can share the gospel with others we need to know it and believe it ourselves, confidently and without wavering. The sermon closes with a challenge to be as bold about our faith as we are about anything else we're passionate about, and to see each person's unique background as equipping them to reach people no one else can.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Your past -- even a shameful one -- doesn't disqualify you from God's calling; Paul was actively persecuting the church before his conversion, and God used that same background to reach people others couldn't.
- God equips people two ways: immediately and supernaturally (like Paul on the road to Damascus) and through wisdom earned the hard way over time -- both are real equipping, neither is lesser.
- You can't share the gospel confidently until you know it well enough to recognize when something taught is off -- like the Bereans, who checked everything against Scripture.
- Each believer has a unique sphere of influence -- people they alone are positioned to reach - - and that's not incidental, it's part of how God builds His church.
- Real conviction shows: Steve's charge is to be as vocal about Christ as people are about CrossFit or veganism -- if believers spoke about Jesus with that same enthusiasm, it would be obvious.

Scripture Reading (Galatians 1:11-24) & Opening Prayer

all right well good morning again wally i'm glad you made it home i saw you walk in earlier and i was like i'll i'll say something in a bit all right if you guys would like to stand with me we are going to be in galatians and the bulletin i told becky wrong i added to it so we're going to add just a couple more verses to the end of this but we're going to start galatians 1 we're going to start verse 11 so if you guys would like to stand with me paul is writing and he says but i make known to you brethren that the gospel which was preached to me is not according to man for i neither received it from man nor was i taught it but it came through the revelation of jesus christ for you have heard of my former conduct in judaism how i persecuted the church of god beyond measure and tried to destroy it and i advanced in judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers but when it pleased god who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace to reveal his son to me that i might preach him among the gentiles i did not immediately confer with flesh and blood nor did i go up to jerusalem to those who were apostles before me but i went to arabia and returned again to damascus then after three years i went up to jerusalem to see peter and remained with him 15 days but i saw none of the other apostles except james the lord's brother now concerning the things which i write to you indeed before god i do not lie afterward i went into the regions of syria and cilicia and i was unknown by face to the churches of judaia which were in christ but they were hearing only he who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy and they glorified god in me then after 14 years i went up again to jerusalem with barnabas and took also titus with me and i went up by revelation and communicated to them that gospel which i preach among the gentiles but i but privately to those who were of reputation lest by any means i might run or had run in vain yet not even titus was compelled with who was with me being a greek was compelled to be circumcised and this occurred because of false brethren brought in who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in christ jesus that they may that they might bring us into bondage to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour that the truth of the gospel might continue with you father we thank you for your word father we thank you for the the people of the bible we thank you for the the people that you used the the people that that were imperfect that you still used in in the most amazing ways to further your church and to just fulfill your will for the world so father as we go through this help us to just be mindful of of the fact that none of us are perfect and father that is not necessarily a shortcoming so father just be with us as we go through this we ask all these things in your son's name amen

Introduction: Paul's Testimony

all right so who here can look back on their entire past and say i did everything perfectly who here can look back on their past and say i don't think that there's anything that i did that was out of the realm of what i thought i should have been doing because i can tell you right now there's probably more no's than there are yes's in my past paul is kind of explaining this to the church in galatia too he's like guys listen i i have a past i did i i used to be this person but because of jesus here's who i am now this is these are the things that i had done that i thought were the right things these are the things that i was doing that i thought i'm doing what i'm supposed to be doing and then jesus comes in and turns it all around gives paul a 180 degree turn and says nope this is what i want you to do so the three points i want us to understand this morning is number one jesus calls us to follow him first and foremost jesus calls us to follow him number two god equips us for what he calls us into now there are two parts to that sometimes that equipping is immediate and supernatural sometimes god calls us and we're immediately he gives us exactly what we need at that moment for what he wants for us sometimes our past wisdom and our past experience is what equips us who we used to be equips us for who god wants us to be number three you need to know the gospel and you need to believe it before you can go out and share it

Point 1: Jesus Calls Us to Follow Him

so the first point jesus calls us to follow him each and every one of us in this building right now at this very moment is being called in some way by jesus if not you wouldn't be sitting here there's you wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the fact that in some way in your life jesus is calling to you god created each and every person with a desire to know him it's inherent in each and every one of us but there will be people that will ignore that call read there in verse 15 he says god called me and set me apart to preach to the gentiles he says i thought this is what i was doing with my life i thought that what i was doing was proper i thought that the things that i were doing was what god wanted me to do and then jesus came along and said nope you're doing it all wrong what you're doing i don't want you to do anymore and he says not only that but saul was raised in a very very he was a very educated man he was tutored by gamaliel who was who was known to be one of the best uh jewish leaders of the time he was a pharisee he was a he was he was a well-known well-liked well-regarded jewish man it's what he says right there in verse 13 he says for you have heard of my former conduct in judaism how i persecuted the church from god and then there in verse 14 it says i advanced in judaism not just i was a jew i advanced in it i was good at being a jewish man i was good and i extended and i became better than most of the people that i was surrounded by most of my contemporaries being being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers he steeped himself in the jewish religion he steeped himself in it because that's what he thought god was calling him for he knew all these things

he knew jewish tradition probably better than most he knew all of jewish history he was very well rounded in in in scripture in in old testament scripture he he talks about scripture often in his letters he was going one direction and thought this is exactly what i'm supposed to be doing and then god showed up and said i'm gonna take you and you're gonna go in an opposite direction not only that but you know all of these jewish things you are well versed in the jewish religion but guess what i'm not gonna send you to go and preach to the jewish people the people that you can connect with the people that you can say i know what you think you know and i'm here to tell you this is what the truth is he was being called in a completely different direction he was going and preaching to people that that were most likely had no idea what scripture was people that had no real true bearing on what jewish tradition was and he went and preached to these people and he's got all of these accolades all of these things that he's like i could use these for my benefit and god's like no i want you to just trust in me i want you to just rely on me as we continue through the passage we can see that paul is is very very dedicated to the gospel now though he is dedicated to the gospel we'll get into that a little bit when he talks and he goes and he says i've revelation i went up to jerusalem he was like i we as we talked about a couple weeks ago the reason he's writing the galatians is they are they've they've got the jewish people they're trying to tell them like hey in order for you to become a christian first you need to be jewish if you're if you're a gentile first you need to become a jew you need to do all of the things fulfill all of the jewish law you need to be able to uphold jewish law and then you can become a christian they were adding steps to it we see that for 17 years at this point paul has been preaching to these people these these the gentiles and he says all you need is faith all you need is i'm going to share the gospel with you and if you put your faith in that guess what that's all it takes you need to repent and you need to have faith that this is what it is and so what he does is he's he's going 17 years later he's been doing all of this and he's like well am i wrong and he's like no i know i'm not wrong i know what i know and i know what the gospel is he's like i just need to go make sure that this isn't that's why he goes and meets with it says that after three years he goes and meets with peter and james what he's saying is like guys i've i received the gospel from god i did not immediately confer with flesh and blood jesus called me and guess what he told me what the gospel was i didn't need that i didn't need other people i didn't want it to come from somebody else it came directly from god he says not according to man i received it not from man but i was taught it it came through revelation of jesus christ jesus himself came and told me what the gospel was and said this is what you need to tell people and then he starts hearing different he starts hearing from other people well i talked to these guys and they said that in order for me to become a christian i have to do this first and he's like that's i received my message directly from jesus and he told me no he was confident he knew what he believed and he knew what he was preaching that's why he went and he says i went and i communicated and he says there in chapter 2 verse 2 he says i did this to make sure i went and preached or talked with it says men of reputation this is most likely the the jerusalem council that they talk about in acts 15 he goes and he's talking he's meeting with these guys and he's like okay why why am i preaching this and i'm hearing this like is this coming from somebody else or is this coming from you guys i just want to

make sure we're all on the same page with what we're preaching here that's why he says at the end there that by any means i might run or had run in vain i just want to make sure that what i'm telling you guys is right and i want to make sure that what you're telling everybody is right i want to make sure that we're saying the same thing because what we don't need to do is be confusing people as we continue through this what i want everybody to think about is how are you each and every one of us how are you uniquely equipped to reach people that no one else in this room are capable of reaching because every one of us it doesn't matter if you're husband and wife you each have your own sphere of influence you each have your own circle of people that you run into that your spouse does not or that your kids do not we each run into a unique group of people what are you doing with that who are you how are you are you sharing the gospel with people that you come in contact with that you know you're probably the only person that that will ever share the gospel with them because there are people we live in a world where people are hungry for truth people want truth people are searching for truth and they're finding everything but truth we need to be that light we as the church need to be the light that's reaching out into the darkness we need to be the people that are equipping ourselves and being equipped to go out and reach people that nobody else is reaching look at the disciples the disciples were all different they all had different backgrounds they all came from different places they all had different career fields they all had different people that they ran into they didn't all come from the same background in fact we see often through the gospels and even through acts that they disagree they disagree on things because they have different backgrounds but despite their diversity in their personalities and their experience in their wisdom nonetheless despite all that diversity their unity their unity and the belief that Jesus was the Messiah is what made them effective each and every one of them was different but each and every one of them believed to the same thing and that is what made their mission and their ministries effective two

Point 2: God Equips Us for What He Calls Us Into

God equips us for what he's called us into we see here in Paul's conversion the two different means of God preparing and equipping us for ministry we see that sometimes he equips us immediately and supernaturally the way he did with Paul he said he came to Paul and he said this is the gospel this is what you're going to start sharing and he supernaturally came to him and gave him and imparted on him the wisdom and the truth of the gospel but we also see that his past wisdom and his past experience also equipped him also harmed him a little bit because we read there in verse 23 he who formerly persecuted us like this guy that was our enemy that's the first part of that is this guy that was trying to kill us a few years ago is now somebody that's coming and he's one of us verse 24 there and they glorified God in me they were proud they were happy they were proud to call me their brother they were proud to turn around and say this is who you used to be this is who you are now we are glad for that we don't have a problem with what happened before your past is not what is defining you in

our minds what you're doing now where you're going the fact that we're on the same mission the fact that we are doing the same thing and we are aimed in the same direction we're glorifying God in that again think of the disciples none of them were trained in ministry they grew up going to some of them in knowing the scripture but none of them were learned men really most of them were blue collar guys by today's standards they were fishermen they were Jesus was a carpenter they had regular jobs that they did they didn't they weren't just sitting around reading books and reading scripture all the time that was not their that was not their their whole education but each and every one of them Jesus met them where they were he went to them they didn't come to Jesus Jesus went to each and every one of them if you read in the gospels there weren't any of the disciples that came to him and said hey I want to be one of your disciples no Jesus went and found them Jesus went to them where they were and what they were in where they were living what they were doing how they were living and said this is what I want to do this is what you're going to start doing but again their past experiences along with their wisdom gained that they the wisdom they gained by by ministering with Jesus came together and that's what equipped the growth of the early church so much was each and every one of them was able to talk to somebody else each and every one of them was able to reach out and reach somebody that the other one was not they were able to share those things they were able to reach out into the darkness of the world as the light and each one touch a different place in that darkness God equips us in supernatural ways Paul's depth of knowledge and unashamed authority in this new church of Christianity was obviously given by God you can't read the amount of information that Paul gives he wrote two-thirds of the New Testament two-thirds of the New Testament came from a guy that up until his mid-thirties was an absolute enemy of the Christian church he was a man that was seeking sought to destroy it says right there in 13 he was trying actively trying to persecute and end this church that he now is one of the biggest teachers of was one of the biggest people one of the best people to elaborate on what that gospel was and all of the theology and all of the doctrine of what all of that entails if you read through any any of Paul's letters he wasn't relying on his own knowledge he was a smart man he was a very smart man he was very well educated he was very smart you can hear that in the way that he writes but the things that he says are from God and there is no doubt about that that is what scripture tells us but that is also if you read through that and you tell me that this guy for the majority of his life until he starts writing was not a Christian the majority of his life he was a persecutor of the Christian church he was the enemy he was somebody that they looked at and said we don't want anything to do with this guy if Paul had tried to accomplish everything that he did of his own volition instead of trusting in God he would have failed immediately if you read what he says there in verse 16 I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood I Jesus came to me told me what the gospel was what did I do I didn't go and find the apostles I didn't go and find the other guys and say hey is this are we

Gentiles so what does he do he gets up and he goes to Gentile territory and he preaches to the Gentiles for three years he did that for three years with no human contact of any kind saying hey this is what the gospel is just going and doing what God asked him to do I'm sure that he got rerouted along the way I'm sure there were things that that as he was traveling on his way to go there he was thinking through things and was like well you know I'm going to go and I'm going to tell him this and God kind of gently redirects him he's like no probably more like this there was probably some of that there was probably a good bit of that I doubt Paul had it all figured out 100% right away again verses 13 and 14 you heard of my former conduct you know what I used to be you heard about me and I was good at it not only did I did you know who I was but you knew I was really good at what I did we know who Saul was and we know who Paul will become he was an enemy of Christians well regarded Jew and became one of the greatest missionaries for Christ he went traveled more distance than than most anybody else in that time to share the gospel again like I said he wrote two thirds of the New Testament he helped establish doctrine and theological truths in a newly formed church and he didn't do it by his own power it was only through the power of God that that happened Jesus met Paul where he was Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus as he was actively headed to persecute Jesus church he told him to go share the gospel with the Gentiles Paul goes and he does it sometimes our past wisdom and experience is what equips us though sometimes it's not directly given to us by God immediately and and we're not just like okay well this is what I'm going to do and God says all right cool here's all the stuff you're going to need for that a lot of times we earn our wisdom through some pain in our own pasts learning things the hard way trust me if there's anybody here that can tell you that they learned things the hard way I did it I have the I have the badge to tell me that I did it the wrong way multiple times but God uses that there are things in my past that I have been able to reach out to people and talk to people that most other people wouldn't be able to because of where I've been what I've done who I was I don't look like the kind of person a lot of times that people when I tell them people that have known me from my past people that that look at me and I tell them when I'm when I'm walking around town and I've got on a metal band t-shirt and and a backwards hat most people when I say yeah I'm a pastor they're like what I'm like yeah that's guess what the disciples didn't all they were Jesus didn't go to the Pharisees guess who he went to he went to the he went to the common folk and said these are the people that I want to use Paul's the same way if you read in Acts 26 Paul is testifying before King Agrippa and he shares his past with the king he says listen I grew up Jewish I know everything about being a Jew I was a Pharisee I was the strictest I was the most Jewish Jew that you can be I was a Pharisee I believed the followers of Jesus were my enemy I put a lot of them in prison I had a lot of them killed I punished them wherever I went I hated them so much that a lot of times I would track them down into other cities I would follow them from city to city and track them down then one day headed to Damascus to do exactly what I had been doing and then he tells Agrippa of the story of him confronting Jesus and how that changed his life Paul looks at him and he says Jesus told me to go and share the message of Christ so I went this is what he told me to do I did it how many of us can say that how many of us have been how many of us are being called day in day out to be out in

the world around the people that we know around the people that trust us that don't necessarily hear from us about our our faith the people that we don't necessarily talk religion or Jesus with the people that we're being called no matter what we were no matter what we have been no matter what we still are at times and God's calling you and there's that voice in your head that says you should go pray for that person or you should go talk to that person or that urge in you when you're having a conversation with somebody to start sharing Jesus or your testimony or something with somebody and we ignore it I'm guilty of it I do it it happens often unfortunately because we don't want to turn somebody away but what we need to understand is most of the times when those situations come up those people are the hungriest for what we have to say in the times that we think I don't want to say that to them those are the people that need to hear it most there's another good example of that you guys have probably heard of Lee Strobel the investigative journalist who actually was a Mizzou alumni if you guys didn't know that who sought to disprove the Bible the ministry of Jesus and Christianity as a whole after his wife's conversion to Christianity his wife became a Christian and he's like I don't believe this I'm going to prove it wrong so what does he do he starts researching and he starts finding out more and more things and he becomes more and more convinced that Christianity is not only the truth but it is the only truth and at 29 years old he became a Christian and he never looked back he was an active enemy of Christianity he was like this is not right I'm going to prove it wrong and in that moment he became one of the greatest honestly one of the best apologists of our modern day if anybody's ever read anything of his he because he knows the other side of it he knows the questions that people are going to ask they're the questions that he asked when he was trying to prove it wrong they're the things that he thought the places that he had been he became a pastor then he became a professor and then in 2020 he founded the Lee Strobel Center for Evangelism and applied apologetics he taught people how to go and not only share the gospel but be able to defend it when people want to argue with him about it the guy that sought to prove the Bible wrong is now helping other people raising other people up to prove the Bible right and the people that used to be like him he's helping to save them God can turn anything around it doesn't matter what it's been where you've been what you've done it does not matter God can turn it around and use it for his good

Point 3: Know the Truth and Believe It Before You Share It

final point here we go you need to know the truth and you need to believe it before you can go out and share it

and try to tell somebody about the gospel if you're stumbling over your words if you don't truly believe it and if you don't truly know exactly what it is start reading it's right here it's all in the book just start reading become very proficient in it the only way to become proficient in something is to do it often spend time in the word spend time praying do it because when you do you become more confident in what it is that you're sharing you can not only go and share it but when somebody asks you why why

do you believe that you can tell somebody what you believe but then when somebody comes back and they say why do you believe that that that's where people get tripped up that's the times where people are like oh well I don't exactly know how to share that to you I don't know how to convey that to you properly maybe we don't need to just know what we believe we need to know why we believe it and knowing why we believe it and knowing what that's done in our life is the best way to equip yourselves to go out and share what the gospel is with other people because what the gospel has done in your life nobody can refute that that's why testimony is so important that's why testimony is so powerful because it's what God's done in your life what is somebody going to come when you start telling them what your past was and then well then I came to Christ and here's how my life is now and they're going to be like no I don't believe you that's not right no I don't think you got it right here's where you're messed up here's the part where you're wrong nobody's going to tell you that because it's your story it's you it's what's happened in your life they don't have to believe it but they can't refute it chapter two verse two like I said earlier I've been preaching to the Gentiles and then I heard there's these extra steps there's these other things that people were adding to this and he says I know this isn't right Paul knew Paul knew what the gospel was so well that he knew what the gospel was not so well that he was able to look at it and hear what other people were saying and say no no that's not right that is incorrect and here's why and he had people with him that he says there Titus he brought Titus with him Titus as we find out there in verse three was a Greek Titus was a Gentile and there at the end of that verse he says he wasn't he was with me and he heard these people sharing you know well you need to become a Jew first he 's like no I don't because because this gospel that Paul told me tells me I

no I do not and even because when we read where it says that he wasn't compelled to be circumcised he wasn't nobody was able to persuade him that what he was doing was wrong he knew what he believed and he stood on that he held fast to that he was bold in his assumptions and guess what he was right because he knew what he believed he knew what he believed and he knew what was right he knew it so well that he understood that this other deficient message that was being shared was incorrect because he knew what the truth was we need to know the truth so well we need to know what this says so well that we can immediately tell what's not true that we can read this and we can say you know what when you hear somebody else preaching about something and you hear something that's not quite right your ears kind of perk up and you're like that doesn't sound quite quite right it's what the Bereans it's why they applauded the Bereans because the Bereans daily were showing up at these churches they were coming to hear the gospel and they were going home and they were double checking it was scripture i i would really hope that if there was if i ever said anything up here that you guys didn't believe or if you heard something that i said that was not that you were like that doesn't sound quite right that you would come to me because that's what we're supposed to do i am not immune to being wrong guys there is i will tell you right now i'm wrong more than i am right my wife's not here to nod her head but there is she probably would be right now i'm wrong more than i

am right and you know what that that's okay as long as when we are wrong we can redirect we can correct ourselves we can say you know what i was wrong and admit to it but when we know we're right we need to stand bold in that like he says here like he says what they did and then there in verse five we didn't yield even a little bit he says not even for an hour what he's saying is we didn't budge what we believed we stood on because the truth of the gospel so that the truth of the gospel might continue are we doing that do we know the truth do we stand on the truth so firmly that the gospel can move on that we are sharing the gospel in a way that other people are looking at it and saying yep this is this is what i believe now too because i can see it i can see the conviction that they have for what they believe i've made the joke numerous times you all have probably heard me say it that if if christians were as outspoken as crossfitters and vegans about what we believe everybody would be a christian when you hear somebody that has started doing crossfit or that becomes a vegan that's all they want to talk about that's the greatest thing that's ever happened to them man i didn't used to work out and now i work out man it's the best thing that i ever did this is the best way to do it like don't don't believe anybody else this is the best way to do it and same with people why don't we hold that same conviction why don't we this is the greatest thing that has ever happened in our lives this i will tell you guys right now me giving my life to christ and believing this is the best thing that has ever happened in my life why don't we share it like that why is that not something that we're out yelling from the rooftops to people the people that that are out actively being loud about what they believe most of them are wrong we hear most of the outspoken people in the world guess what they're not talking about this most of the outspoken people in the world are talking about things that are directly opposed to this why are we not as loud so again jesus is calling us to follow him jesus is calling each and every one of us it doesn't matter if you already belong to him guess what he's calling you to something each and every one of us he is calling you to some part being some part of the kingdom that he is building best part about that is second point he's going to equip us for what he calls us into what we what god is calling us to he will equip us for if he hasn't already done it in our past some things that we can look back on in our lives that we can think there is no way that this will ever be something that god can use to glorify himself i'll tell you guys right now those are the people that i run into those are the people that find it most meaningful when i share my past with somebody that's like i and i can say i get it i've been there we don't want to be the people that when somebody is swimming up to the boat because they are drowning we tell them like now you need to no i don't i don't i just don't understand where it is that you're at like i don't want you in my boat because you're not you don't belong here no each and every person i don't care who walks through that door we need to welcome them because they are glad to be here we are glad that they are here because the message that we are sharing with them and the way that we show them that we live that is the greatest thing that we can give because that is our own special way of sharing gospel with people showing people we love them showing people that we care for them because again you don't go to a hospital because you feel well go to a hospital because you're sick this is the hospital for souls this is where we are but it is also our job as the church each and every one of us to go out into the world and spread the gospel share the light

because me doing it right here for an hour on a day guess what that doesn't do anything compared to the fact that there are 60 people in here and each one of us could be doing it all week long so think about that guys be ready to share the gospel in season and out of season as Paul tells Timothy and just remember that really and truly at the end of the day it is each and every one of our jobs to go out and share the gospel so

Closing & Prayer

let's pray Father we thank you Father we thank you that you have equipped each and every one of us Father we thank you that you have raised each and every one of us up in a unique manner Father that we can each go out and we can each find somebody different we can each find somebody new to share the gospel with we can each go and be able to tell people about the change in our own life in the hopes that that will resonate with them that you can change their life as well so Father thank you for your gospel thank you for the sacrifice of your son that makes salvation available to each and every one of us and Father we thank you for that call that you have put on each and every one of us Father if there are people in here that have not answered that call if there are people in here that don't know exactly what that looks like Father just speak to them Father let them come find somebody and speak to them about it Father I just we love you and Father we just want to share the good news of who you are with everybody so Father help us to do that help us to do that with everybody that we come in contact with Father we ask all these things in your son's name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

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