

"I Conferred Not" #1

Paul's sustained his declaration that his *"gospel was not after man"* in the balance of Galatians one. It was not enough to make that assertion; compelling evidence to substantiate it was essential that he might ward off the fierce denials of his detractors. He set about to prove his point in a sustainable way.

First, he reminded his readers of his former life. The Galatians were familiar with that period of his life for he wrote, *"For ye have heard of my manner of life in times past in the Jews religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and made havoc of it ..."* (Gal. 1:13). Luke's history of the early years of the church chronicles that period of Paul's life. He was a feared, zealous antagonist of God's people. His own zeal in persecuting God's people would be mirrored in the lives of Asian Jews who persecuted him and "dogged" him with the same intensity as he had persecuted Christians in his early years (Acts 14:5; 14:19; 17:57; 17:13). This part of his life was something which afterward caused him great sorrow. His principal solace for his past behavior was that he did what he did *"ignorantly and in unbelief"* and that he had done all in *"all good conscience"* (1 Tim. 1:14; Acts 26:9).

Nor was Paul's present state the result that he had not advanced as he ought nor had "fallen from grace" among former associates. Such sometimes happens. Often men leave one "camp" for an opposing one because they feel they can better themselves elsewhere or they have by misbehavior fallen into disfavor with their associates. Such was not Paul's case. *"And I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of mine own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers"* (Gal. 1:14). Paul had everything in his favor: prestige with his nation; a deep conviction in his religion, ability far beyond ordinary. Yet, he changed!

Did he change because he was convicted by the defense of Stephen whom he had heard in the synagogue of the Libertines (Acts 6-7)? Did he change because he heard the fiery defenses and accusations of Peter or John? He says he didn't. Instead, hearing Stephen only served to ignite his persecutions against Christians. Luke records his reactions: *"Paul laid waste the church, entering into every house and dragging men and women committing them to prison;" "but Saul, yet breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"* (Acts 8:3; 9:1).

Well, what then? There was a complete reversal in Paul's life which occurred on his journey to Damascus. Hear Paul's explanation: *"But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the Gentiles"* (Gal. 1:15f). The Damascan Road! The Blinding Light! The Accusing Voice! *"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me"* (Acts 9:4)? And when Saul, agonizingly asked, *"Who art thou Lord?"* and the responding answer came, *"I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest."* Paul's immediate question was, *"Lord what wilt thou have me to do"* (Acts 22:8; 10)? Jesus' answer was, *"Go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do"* (Acts 9:6). Paul obeyed immediately. He went into the city. Ananias came and said, *"And now, why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:16). THEN, there were no months of study with earlier apostles; no apprenticeship with Barnabas or others who had long served the Lord and had given no ground in persecutions which had befallen them from the hand of Paul, himself. Nothing of that kind. Paul wrote, *"Straightway, I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me: but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned unto Damascus"* (Gal. 1:16f). Many years later Paul reminisced of this event when he stood before Agrippa. *"Wherefore, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision"* (Acts 26:19).

Why did Paul act as he acted? He did what he did because Christ had called him and his response to that call was immediate. He did not look back. He had been called and followed faithfully that call for his gospel was *"not after man ..."*

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