

“The Witness of a Changed Life”
(Galatians 1:23-24)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Paul has been arguing the genuineness of his Gospel over that of the Judaizers.
 - a. Let’s not forget, if he’s right, his Gospel overrides/supersedes *any* different gospel that any man preaches, any change that anyone has made.
 - b. His Gospel not only overrides these other gospels, but condemns those who follow them and those who teach and preach them (including the gospel of man’s good deeds outweighing his bad, bringing him to “the good place”).
 - c. Paul preached the Gospel of grace: that man is saved by Christ’s works, not his own works, or Christ’s plus his own.
 - d. Any other gospel is no Gospel at all.
2. So far, Paul has offered these arguments for the validity of his Gospel:
 - a. He is an apostle of Christ: He was not send by man, but by Jesus Christ Himself and God the Father.
 - b. As we reviewed this morning, God also bore witness to this Gospel by His Spirit and through miracles (3:5).
 - c. Paul also argued that he did not receive this Gospel from any man – neither before or after his conversion – he received it from Christ.

B. Preview.

1. But Paul has more arguments – not only did he receive this Gospel from Christ, but he experienced its power himself: it transformed his life.
 - a. How does a man go from hating Christ so much that he devotes his life to destroying Christ’s church, to loving Him and being so devoted to Him that he is willing to give his life for Christ’s cause?
 - b. There can only be one answer: the Gospel he has must be God’s truth – because it alone has the power to change the heart and the life.
 - c. Here is another argument for the validity/truthfulness of Paul’s Gospel and for his apostolic authority.
2. This evening, let’s consider that only the true Gospel has the power to change lives. We’ll want to see two things:
 - a. First, that the Gospel transformed Paul’s life.
 - b. And second, that only the true Gospel could do this.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let’s consider the effects that Paul’s Gospel had on his own life.

1. When he began, Paul hated Christ: We saw something of this in the morning message.
 - a. He was a persecutor of the church; he tried to destroy it; and it wasn’t just that he hated Christians, it’s because he hated Jesus Christ.

- (i) He said to King Agrippa, “So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26:9-11).
 - (ii) Paul had a zeal, but not in accordance with knowledge (Rom. 10:2).
 - (iii) Since he could not destroy Jesus Christ, he would do the next best thing: destroy His body/people/church.
- b. We often don’t think of our unconverted neighbors being this way, but if God wasn’t holding back the sin of their hearts, they would be the same or worse.
- (i) The Bible says that each of us was born dead in our sins: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5).
 - (ii) We all used to obey the prince of darkness from our hearts: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (Eph. 2:1-3).
 - (iii) We hated the light of God’s truth: “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed” (John 3:19-20).
 - (iv) We hated God and His Laws/Commandments and would not submit to them: “The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8).
 - (v) All we could do was practice evil: “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:4-9).
 - (vi) And along with our evil, all we could earn for our evil works was the wages of sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23).
 - (vii) In a word, we hated God (that’s what sin is) and refused to submit to Him.
 - (viii) This was the condition of Paul’s heart.
2. But through the Gospel, Christ transformed Paul’s life: He made him one who loves Him.
- a. The Lord revealed His Son to Paul on that road to Damascus.

- (i) God had chosen Paul – set him apart from his mother’s womb.
 - (ii) He called him by His grace, obviously not because of Paul’s works.
 - (iii) And He revealed His Son to him (better rendering than ‘in me’).
 - (iv) The Lord opened His eyes to have a spiritual view of Jesus, rather than a carnal or fleshly view.
 - (a) What difference does it make? All the difference in the world.
 - (b) It’s the difference between looking at Jesus as the most hated and despised person in the universe because of His holiness; and looking at Him as the most beautiful and desirable person in the universe because of His holiness.
 - (c) This is a spiritual view/sight of Jesus: being able to see the beauty of His holiness and being irresistibly drawn to Him.
 - (d) And now Paul loved Jesus more than anything else – he was willing to give anything to serve Christ, even his life, if that’s what it took.
 - (1) He was willing to pay the price Jesus said we must all pay if we are to follow Him: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matt. 16:24-25).
 - (2) He said to the elders from Ephesus, “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).
- b. At this same time the Lord gave Paul a spiritual sight of Himself, He also called him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.
- (i) And this is what he did. He also preached to the Jews.
 - (ii) Often he was in danger, but it didn’t matter (2 Cor. 11:22-33): he had died with Christ and lived only now to serve Him (Rom. 6:12-13).
- c. The result was that the church, instead of being afraid of him, was now glorifying God for his life: “I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but only, they kept hearing, ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.’ And they were glorifying God because of me” (vv. 22-24).
- d. The Lord had so completely transformed Paul’s life through the Gospel, that He literally made him into a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).
- B. The point is that only the true Gospel can do this.
1. Certainly people can change their minds and become zealous for many things.
 - a. People have had changes of heart apart from the Gospel.
 - (i) Men have become patriots/terrorists/martyrs for various causes.
 - (ii) Muslims can be very zealous, even committing suicide to please their god.
 - (iii) Mormons, Jews, and many others can tirelessly serve their gods, their religions with a passion, from their hearts, again even giving their lives for their causes.
 - (iv) People have followed philosophies, such as Marxism, to the point of revolution, because they believed it to be best.

- b. We really can't deny this.
 - (i) Christianity has never claimed that an unconverted person can't love a god of their own making - people do this every day – or love a cause so much to lay down their lives for it. .
 - (ii) But they cannot love the true God and desire to live for His glory at their own expense, unless they are born again from above.
2. Only the Gospel can make us love what we hate by nature.
- a. The Bible clearly says that we were born into this world hating God, as we've already seen.
 - (i) It also tells us that God alone can change our hearts: to make us to love Him.
 - (ii) The way He does this – the only way – is through the Gospel.
 - (iii) Paul writes, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous *man* shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16-17).
 - (iv) Peter told the rulers of Israel, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
 - b. Only the Gospel can work the change of heart that makes this possible.
 - (i) The Holy Spirit works only through the Gospel to unite us to Christ.
 - (ii) He must change the nature of our hearts. He must work His nature in us: a love for holiness.
 - (iii) The only way he does this is through the Gospel.
 - c. Paul's life was transformed through His Gospel, and he saw it transform the lives of many more.
 - (i) He hated Christ and His church, and now he loved Him and was willing to give his life to promote His cause.
 - (ii) This shows that his Gospel is true.
 - d. And so why should we believe the message Paul preached?
 - (i) He was called and sent by Jesus Christ and God the Father.
 - (ii) He received his Gospel from Jesus Christ.
 - (iii) God testified to this Gospel by His Word and through His Spirit.
 - (iv) And it has the power to transform even the most hardened sinner into an obedient and self-sacrificing servant.
 - (v) There is no other message, no other religion has that power, no matter what people might claim.
 - (vi) This Gospel condemns all other gospels, those who follow those gospels and those who teach and preach them.
 - (vii) And so let's listen to it, receive the Christ it reveals, live the life it commands, and receive the blessing it promises by God's grace: eternal life. Amen.