

## The Birth of a New Man

Galatians 1:13-24

In our text today, Paul is very candid about the man he was prior to Christ, and the miraculous transformation he experienced through coming to Christ in salvation. One who hated the Lord and His church, was brought to saving faith and called to be an apostle in order to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. There are many accounts of men being transformed in Christ, but few, if any, rival the transformation of Paul.

While our stories are much different than that of Paul, each born-again believer stands as a miracle of grace. The Lord came to us in our sin, being separated from God and in danger of eternal judgment. Through His abundant grace, we were drawn to Him through the leading of the Holy Spirit, confessing our sin and believing in the finished work of Christ to secure our salvation. Like Paul, one who was unworthy and condemned was shown grace and reborn in Christ. The old man of sin perished and a new creation was raised unto eternal life. [2 Cor.5:17 – Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.](#)

As we discuss the [details](#) within the passage that Paul reveals about his miraculous transformation, I want to consider: [The Birth of a New Man](#). First, we discover:

**I. Paul: The Pharisee** (13-14) – Here Paul described the life he lived prior to Christ. He is not boasting in his sin, but humbly revealing the transforming grace of God. He mentioned:

**A. His Persecution of the Church** (13) – [For ye have heard of my conversation](#) (conduct, behavior) [in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it.](#)

Paul speaks of the life he lived prior to coming to Christ in salvation. He was very zealous in Judaism, striving to keep the law and live according to the traditions and rituals of the Jews. Due to his zealous commitment to Judaism, like most Pharisees, Paul rejected Jesus as the Christ and hated those who shared the gospel.

➤ He was determined to do all he could to hinder the spread of Christianity through persecuting the church. His committed persecution was “[beyond measure](#),” *exceedingly harsh*. He admits that he had participated in “[wasting the church](#).” This has the idea of “*destroying, ravaging, laying waste*.” Paul was not satisfied with discouraging believers; he was determined to utterly destroy the church and completely stop the spread of the gospel.

**B. His Ambition for Advancement** (14) – *And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.* Paul further reveals his commitment to Judaism and desire to destroy the church. He was on the fast-track to success and ultimate leadership among the Jews. He was held in high esteem by his peers and exceeded many of them in being committed to the cause. Paul would have been the “poster boy” for recruiting young men to embrace and advance the cause of Judaism. He was among the most zealous in keeping the traditions of former generations. *Philip.3:5-6 – Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

➤ It is evident that in Paul’s day, few would have excelled beyond him in Judaism. His commitment was without question. His revealing this was not to boast, but to set the stage for what he described in the verses that follow. One who was zealous of the law and traditions of the fathers would encounter the risen Christ and experience a complete transformation. John R. W. Stott writes: “Now a man in that mental and emotional state is in no mood to change his mind, or even to have it changed for him by men.... Only God could reach him-and God did!” <sup>i</sup>

**II. Paul: The Preacher** (15-24) – Here Paul described his life following his encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road. He immediately was transformed from a zealous Pharisee and defender of Judaism, to a zealous Preacher and proclaimer of the gospel. He described:

**A. A Divine Encounter** (15-16) – His encounter with the risen Christ was not of little consequence for Paul. His life was radically changed in an instant. Consider:

**1. His Conversion** (15-16a) – *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, <sup>16a</sup> To reveal his Son in me...* Paul revealed his conversion to Christ with simple terms, but it was not an insignificant event. His conversion to faith in Christ was planned and orchestrated of God. In fact, Paul declared that it pleased God to reveal His Son in him. While Paul was unaware, God had a plan for him prior to his birth. He had been separated unto the Lord while he was yet within his mother’s womb. God had ordained the salvation of Paul, calling him by His grace.

➤ Our encounter was much different than Paul’s. We did not see the risen Christ physically as Paul did, and yet our conversion was just as miraculous. It pleased God to call us by His grace, revealing His Son in us. In fact, I will argue that God had separated us unto Himself while we were yet in our mother’s womb! *Eph.1:4-6 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: <sup>5</sup> Having predestinated us unto the*

adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup> To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

**2. His Call (16b)** – *that I might preach him among the heathen*. It not only pleased the Lord to set apart Paul unto salvation, He set him apart to proclaim Him unto the heathen. This refers to Paul's calling to preach the gospel unto the Gentiles. It is interesting that the Lord called one so zealous in the traditions and adherence to the Jewish laws to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. God uses whom He will according to His divine plan and wisdom. (All are not called to pastor churches and stand weekly on a platform within the sanctuary to preach, but all the saved are called to serve. If you are saved, the Lord has a work for you to perform.)

**3. His Conviction (16c)** – *immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood*. Paul admitted that he immediately recognized that he did not confer or consult with mere mortals. He will mention his training for ministry in a moment, and I believe there is implication for that here as well, but I also believe Paul is referring to the supernatural experience he had in salvation and preparation for ministry. His work had been given of God and he would seek the Lord to equip him to serve.

**B. A Decisive Education (17-19)** – *Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.* <sup>18</sup> *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.* <sup>19</sup> *But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother*. Bear in mind that Paul was a very educated man when he met the Lord in salvation. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, [Acts 22:3](#). However, following his conversion, Paul did not return to Jerusalem to seek counsel among the other apostles. He went to Arabia and returned unto Damascus. After three years, Paul finally returned to Jerusalem, spending fifteen days with Peter, and the only other apostle he saw was James, the Lord's brother. His preparation to preach the gospel appears to have taken place in the seclusion of Arabia. The Lord separated Paul from the distractions of the world and prepared him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. This time alone with the Lord was essential for Paul. His return to Jerusalem appears to have been made only to become acquainted with Peter.

➤ While I would never discourage anyone in ministry from obtaining a biblical education, one cannot neglect time spent with the Lord. The same is true for anyone who desires to serve the Lord. It is good to learn and understand the doctrines of the faith, but one must also know the one who gives salvation. Each believer must devote time to Bible study and prayer, alone with the Lord, depending on the Holy Spirit to enlighten our understanding and guide us in the way.

**C. A Deliberate Emergence (20-24)** – *Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.* <sup>21</sup> *Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia;* <sup>22</sup> *And was unknown by face unto the*

churches of Judaea which were in Christ: <sup>23</sup> But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. <sup>24</sup> And they glorified God in me. Following his secluded educational experience, preparing him for ministry, Paul began his public ministry. He faithfully preached the gospel in Syria and Cilicia, but as far as we know, he had no contact with any in Jerusalem or the region of Judea. However, word did get back to Judea that he who formerly persecuted the church was now preaching the gospel he once sought to hinder. While some likely remained a bit skeptical of Paul's sincerity for the gospel, others glorified God that he had been converted to Christ and was preaching the truth.

➤ As I considered Paul's early years in ministry, I was reminded of the tendencies of many. While some rejoiced that Paul had been converted and preached the gospel, others opposed him and were skeptical of his sincerity and calling. These tendencies remain today. While I would never encourage or advocate the embrace of false doctrine, we need to encourage those who faithfully proclaim the truth, even if their approach or background is different than ours. Paul was an unlikely candidate to preach the gospel, and yet God used him in extraordinary ways. Who are we to question the wisdom and calling of God? He calls whom he will and equips them for His service.

**Conclusion:** Paul's testimony bears witness to the sovereign grace of God. It reminds us of the transforming power of salvation in Christ and His plans for those He calls. I pray that we will be thankful for the grace we have received, striving to faithfully serve the Lord according to His good pleasure. May we also be reminded of His power to save. Most early Christians would have never dreamed that Saul of Tarsus would be saved and proclaiming the gospel. The Lord works according to His will. Let us be faithful to share the good news and trust the Lord to save!

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<sup>i</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [Galatians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 27.