

How Can I Know With Confidence?

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[0 : 0 0] me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles. My immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went to Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him 15 days. I saw none of the other apostles, only James the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing to you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 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. This is the word of the Lord.

Good evening St. Silas. What a joy to see you all guys. I know we had, it's good to see you this evening. You should have been handed a white sheet in your way, and it's a little more elaborate than this week. I made an effort. So hopefully you're encouraged. Just hopefully you had a good time chatting about questions. It's an important question to ask, isn't it? How do you judge what you hear about Jesus? Do you pick up those conversations after the chat? I have a couple of, just a couple of things just to help you out here as we get into Galatians on Sunday evenings.

And the first is you've got a map there on your sheet. They'll be helpful to let you know where we're talking. So Galatia, that's probably Pisidia, Antioch, Iconia, Derbe, that area a bit. And those places we see on the map, they all come out in tonight's reading. We've also got some dates. A lot of what we're reading in Galatians comes up in Acts, in the book of Acts. So you can go and cross-reference those and fill in the picture a bit more for yourselves. In Galatians, the letter, Paul's constantly keen on getting us clear on the gospel. So time and again he does it, and he does it tonight. He goes, it's this, not that. Not this, but that. So watch out for that. That comes up a lot. And then finally, we've got some weird words in Galatians. And the two big ones that are going to come up again and again, I'll just tee them up because they kind of come up this evening, are Gentile.

And that's Gentiles are non-Jewish people. They are people who are not ethnically Jewish. They are outside of Jewish. That's like basically everyone else in the whole world except for Jews.

[2 : 3 1] And then Jewish folk who believed and held to a very strict understanding of the Old Testament. But as we go on, let me pray, and then we'll dive into our passage tonight.

So Father, we thank you that you are speaking to us. We thank you that we can know with certainty the gospel, that we come to knowing it, and not through our own wisdom and understanding, not through our own efforts, but through a revelation of Jesus in us. Please won't you speak to us tonight through the words of Scripture by your Holy Spirit, as your Holy Spirit works within us and points us to Jesus clearly. Amen.

Well, Paul opens up our reading tonight with those words, I want you to know, and he speaks tonight about how he has come to know the gospel. So how do you come to know about Jesus? How do you judge what you hear about Jesus? How do you do that when you go to work? How do you do that at sports clubs? When you are out and about with your university mates or your workmates? What is the basis of your convictions that you hold about either believing in Jesus or rejecting Jesus? What are the basis of those convictions?

Last week, Paul argued that there's only one gospel, and the content of the gospel there, he listed in verse 4, that Jesus gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of God our Father. And that was the gospel that was not to be moved on. And this week, Paul is going to argue and speak about the origins of the gospel, how he came to get the gospel, and that was through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 2 9] Well, thinking about this this week, I think most of us, when we come to thinking about how we know Jesus, how we judge what we hear about Jesus, we fall into four major categories. So

some of us will, and you'll find that in that little block over the sheet there, Bible, reason, institution, and experience. The first one is Bible. You might approach everything that you hear and understand about Jesus from, is it in the Bible? Is that what the Bible says? And is the Holy Spirit unpacking that Bible for us in our hearts and our lives? And we saw a bit of that last week in verse 8 of Galatians. So we read there, but even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let them be under God's curse. So Paul's an apostle. He speaks God's words. He speaks the revelation. It's written down in the scriptures. And then he places himself under those revelations, under those words. He judges. That's his basis. That's his authority. But those of us will be more left brain center. I hope that's the right way of putting it.

We'll be more logical and we'll demand evidence. And it's got to be reasonable. It's got to be something I can feel and touch. And that's the way that I know. And my primary authority is reason. Is it reasonable? Is it within this closed system of cause and effect? Others of us will, well, we're just dutiful and obedient. We listen to the institutions. What the man says we go with.

And we'll, whatever those institutions may be. There might be our friend sphere on Twitter. There might be what our mates say on Instagram. There might be a church, what the guy says at the front of church. Or we might, our final authority might be experience. We might have had a great experience of Jesus. A great experience of the gospel. A number of mates I've spoken to, when they've come to Christ, they've come to Christ through a vision of glory. And they speak of it in those terms. In some ways, sometimes they've moved on and been quite helpful in the gospel and they've come to a real understanding of the faith. But other times they've drifted from the faith and they haven't really landed on it. And so is your authority there and experience, is that the thing that you look back to and remember? And the goal for us tonight is to place ourselves under and to base our knowing Christ on that first block, that B block that Paul places himself under in verse 8. And to see that

Paul has his gospel because he's been given a revelation of Jesus Christ. That's the basis of his gospel. It's not secondhand. It's not from anywhere else. It's directly from the source.

[7 : 22] It's from Jesus. So our first point there, Paul's gospel came by a revelation of Jesus Christ, verse 11 and 12. So verse 1, Paul says his apostleship, his right to speak doesn't come from humans.

And then verse 11, he says his message, his gospel is not from humans either. So just look down at verse 11. Do open your Bibles if you've closed them. I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. And then verse 12, I did not receive it from any man. And what Paul's, the agitators, the false teachers, Paul's detractors in Galatia are saying is that Paul's gospel is not from God, but from men, that his authority is made up and that he's got his gospel by listening backhandedly to the apostles in Jerusalem or somewhere else. And having heard it and written it down and taken some notes, he's changed it to make it more attractive. And what he's done is he's left out all the Jewish bits of the gospel that might make it hard for non-Jewish people, Gentile people to hear and believe it. But that's not the full gospel they're saying. And his gospel is like that when you play a game of broken down telephone, it starts off with the real gospel. By the time you get to the end of the line, it's all made up and the message has got nothing to do with the original message. That's what they're saying Paul's gospel is like. It's completely garbled nonsense.

But Paul says he did not get his gospel from the apostles in Jerusalem, not from men, but directly from God, from Jesus. It's not secondhand, it's straight from the source. I did not receive it, verse 11. The word there, receive, that he uses is the way that we go to class and we sit and listen to the lecturer and we take notes. That's the word that they're using there.

Nor was I taught it, he goes on to say. And it's not something that had to go through his filter of reason or language skills to understand for him to make the logical associations of. And that is not to say that we don't have to work hard in understanding the Bible for ourselves. But that wasn't his primary authority, learning it, being taught it. But rather he received the gospel directly through a revelation of Jesus Christ. And the event that he's talking about there is that we read about in Acts 9 is how he was someone who hated Christians, who'd imprisoned them, who wanted to destroy them entirely. And how as he was going to Damascus in Acts 9, he meets the risen Lord Jesus. And Jesus speaks to him and asks him, why are you persecuting me? And that's Paul's converted there. He's taken out of the kingdom of the present evil age and is transformed into a new creation. But what was it that happened at the event? Well, we read about that in verse 16. Look how he speaks

about that event in verse 16. Just look down there.

[10:44] But God, by his grace, his kindness, was pleased to reveal his Son, what in me. And the thing that Paul longs for the Galatians is that Christ would be formed in them. Galatians 4, 19. And what, by speaking of a revelation in him, what he's spelling out is the comfort of the gospel and the call of the gospel. So the comfort of the gospel. Paul is saying that when Jesus appeared to him and he was confronted by who Jesus is, that he is Lord. Yes, he understood the facts surrounding Jesus. But more importantly, he understood that he had been rescued out of evil, out of hatred, out of wanting to kill and imprison Christians.

And into being a new creation. Someone who was happy in Jesus. Who delighted in knowing Jesus spiritually and showed that love to others. He was a completely different person.

Here's how Timothy Keller puts it. This shows us this critical difference between a mere religious or moral person and a Christian. A Christian has more than an intellectual belief in Christ.

They sense a personal relationship. So growing up, I had a Polish friend. I've told the story a couple of times. But his granny was down in the basement. They kept her in the basement weirdly. And she used to make this amazing chocolate cake. Black Forest chocolate gâteau. And I can list the ingredients.

Eggs, flour, chocolate, cherries, some more sugar, sugar, more sugar, and cream and stuff. I can list all the ingredients. But that wouldn't tell you what that cake tasted like. When I ate that cake, it would go up in my mouth and seem to evaporate into my brain and into my head. It was absolutely stunning. It was literally like tasting heaven in your mouth. It was something that was life-changing and transforming. It was amazing to eat. It was absolutely stunning. And so I wonder, when we speak about Christ, do we simply list the ingredients? Or do we speak about the change and the effect that Jesus has had on us? Do we speak of a personal relationship? Do we speak of Christ in a real way that shows that we have been moved out of the present evil age and are a new creation?

[13:37] That's the comfort of the gospel, knowing and delighting in Jesus. But look what he goes on to say in verse 16. And this is the call of the gospel. I wonder if you spotted it there.

To reveal his son in me, and then the because clause there, so that I might preach him among the Gentiles. And Paul was so delighted in Jesus, so amazed, that all he wanted to do was tell others. It was something that had changed his life completely. Jesus had revealed himself in Paul that he might tell others. So this is how Keller goes on in his quote. He says, And Christians know that this relationship is not given to them solely for their own personal comfort and joy. They know they have a responsibility to reveal Christ to others through what they are and do and say. So knowing, being happy in Jesus, it's not simply about our personal comfort that we'll go to heaven one day. But in remembering the facts, we come to delight in Jesus, that we have been rescued, and we delight in sharing him and speaking about him in simple ways to our friends day by day. Sometimes it's hard, I understand, depending on our work and that.

And I think a great model, there's lots of wisdom in this. I don't know what your favorite Christmas movie is. Mine is Paddington. Paddington 2, top one. And what's the thing that marks out Paddington 2?

Who's the person that's always in the room with Paddington, but you barely see her in the movie? It's Aunt Lucy. She's never more than a hand-breadth away. Whatever Paddington does, you hear what Aunt Lucy thinks about it. And so when we share about, speak to our friends about Jesus, when we go through our day, I wonder if we should be more like Paddington is with Aunt Lucy.

[15:36] Never have Jesus more than an arm-length away. Always be willing to share and think through, what would Jesus think in this situation? How would he react? What are the values and things that he would desire and aspire and want us to know and delight in?

So Paul, having stated where his gospel comes from, from the resurrected Lord Jesus, he then goes to speak on where it does not come from. Not from men. And this includes the Jewish mender under who he studied in Jerusalem before he became a Christian when he was a Pharisee.

That's like an expert in the Old Testament that Jews all aspired to be. So be there on our sheet, not by reason, and his studies in Judaism. And what we'll see here tonight is that Paul says his gospel is not from those Jewish religious teachers who taught him as a Pharisee. But nevertheless, he and his gospel are a fulfillment of the Old Testament. And moreover, that fulfillment includes preaching the gospel to Gentiles, to non-Jews, which was the very thing that the false teachers were accusing him of doing. And were trying to stop happening. So I wonder if you can think of, what are the ingredients or the recipes that make for a great James Bond movie? So here's a couple that I

thought of. What are my top trumps of James Bond movies that I'd judge a good James Bond? What's the car like? It's got to be a vintage Aston Martin. It's got to have certain key characters, Q, M, Money, Penny. It's got to have top trumps. It's got to have a really slightly bad 60s theme tune. That's how I'd judge what it's going to be like. It's got to have some really bad one-liners. The worse the one-liners, the better the James Bond movie. I guess he gets the point in Sean Corrine, if you remember that far back. What we have in this section, in this long autobiography that carries on for almost a fifth of the letter of Galatians, is not Paul boasting, but he's trying to defend the gospel here. And what he does in this section is he's playing a game of Jewish top trumps with them. You see the categories that you were assessed of as to whether you're a good Jew. [18:02] Were you fanatical enough? I know we're a bit down on that, but they were pride of themselves in doing this. They looked, aspired to be like their heroes, who are fanatical and who cast out people who were impure or unclean. The next is you needed to be someone who's serious about their studies. And then you needed to be someone who was devoted to the traditions of the ancestors.

And so let's quickly look at his top trumps, his Jewish credentials. Was he fanatical? Verse 13, he was top of his class. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism. How intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. Secondly, his studies. Was he a good student? I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people. He was top of the class. No one could touch him. We know what a pain it is to be in a class with someone who's a complete nerd.

I studied with this guy who he spent most of his time at the back of class watching cricket and American football. In three years of a degree, he never picked up his pen, but he walked away with a first. Just soul-destroying to be in a class like that. And that's what it would have been like to be with Paul a bit. So next, top trumps. How was he on traditions? Paul was faultless. He was extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers. So Paul says he would have beaten anyone in a game of Jewish top trumps. He was top of the class. And the things that were important in Jewish reasoning, those were the things that they judged their reason on. But his gospel and authority did not come from any of those. Well, if you weren't convinced by that, he then goes and he, there's one way that in this little section where Paul says that he's keeping in the best of Judaism. And where he says rather than moving on from being a Jew, he and his gospel are actually a fulfillment of Judaism. It's the best picture of everything that the Old Testament says.

And so just look down at verse 15 and 16. We read, But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son in me so that I might preach among the Gentiles. And that's a passage that speaks powerfully and awesomely about how God has loved Paul and how he has ruled over Paul's life in the ups and downs. And if you're a Christian here tonight, you should feel incredibly assured and loved by God when you read that section. But what he is saying here is he's in the back of his mind.

[20:57] He's got the Old Testament. And so he's saying, think of the Old Testament prophets. Think of the best one. It's the kind of thing the kids might have discussed in a Jewish primary school around on the swing or the roundabout. It's a real Bible nerd question. Who would you be on your list?

And Paul takes them to the big one straight away. He takes them to the one they were all waiting for, to fulfill the Old Testament. The servant king in Isaiah. The one who had, the Messiah who'd come around and fulfill Judaism and make it perfect. And he takes them there. And so what he says is, he's saying is that while he is not that servant who is Jesus, and we understand that from the New Testament, he is most firmly modeled on him. He's keeping with the best of Judaism. And so he's a fulfillment. So just look there at how we compare Isaiah 49 and verses 15 and 16. So Isaiah 49, before I was born, the Lord called me from my mother's womb. He has spoken my name, Galatians.

But when God who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace. And then he says, later the servant says, but I said I have labored in vain. And then Paul in chapter two, he'll say, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. And then finally he says, and the servant says, God says of the servant, I will also make you a light for the Gentiles.

You will attract all the world to you and fill the world with the knowledge of God's kingdom. And Paul says, what does he say about his mission and what he's doing? So that I might preach him, preach Jesus, preach this servant among the Gentiles.

So the false teachers, they were saying that Paul was ditching his Jewish roots. But when Paul says those roots and reasoning never got him to the gospel, he was saying he was the top Trump champion in being Jewish. But even then, even now, he's fulfilling what it is to be Jewish.

[23 : 09] And he's doing the exact thing that the great prophet, the great servant king would do. He'd be a light to the Gentiles.

The very thing that the false teachers were criticizing him for. Well, it's popular for us today to undermine Paul, to say that he was a person of his time and he had his opinions. And that we too are people of our times. And our time is different to Paul's time. So we don't really need to take him seriously. But just note how strong he is on his apostleship in Galatians, throughout Galatians.

I've been commissioned by God to speak. And then here, although I'm not the Messiah, the Son of God, my mission is his mission. To be a light to the Gentiles.

We might say Paul is not relevant today. But note the opposition that he faced in his own time. They hated him.

[24 : 13] He was not in keeping step with his time. He was speaking of a better age, a new creation, an age to come. An age for all people, where all people could come under the sound of the gospel.

So, not by reason and his studies in Jerusalem. Next, we're going to say his gospel does not come by experience.

And his personal experience of the Jerusalem apostles. And I think of the three points here, of the three knots here, this is the big one. So just look down.

Verse 20. I assure you, before God, what I'm writing to you is no lie. He wants to be absolutely emphatic here. And the point here that he makes is how could he have got his gospel from the apostles, from a personal experience.

And what he's going to argue is, he didn't even really know them. He never even really met them. So just look down at the end of verse 16. Having received his revelation, he states, My immediate response was not to consult any human being.

[25 : 19] And the word there for consult is to, a word meaning analyze, or go and inspect the details on, or verify. He did not go up to Jerusalem immediately to those apostles, to have his message stamped with the seal of approval.

But verse 17, I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me. Instead, what did he do? He went to Arabia, and then returned again to Damascus.

In Arabia, he was probably thinking about all the things that had happened to him. He was having some quiet time. And although it's good to have solitary time with God from time to time, and it's fundamental to the Christian life, the Christian life is not a solitary one.

It's one to be lived in the context of people, in a church family. And then, having done business with God in Arabia, he goes back to Damascus, and then up to Jerusalem, to do business for God.

In verse 18 and 19, Then after three years, I went to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him 15 days. And I saw none of the other apostles, only James, the Lord's brother.

[26 : 31] And he makes it absolutely clear that this trip wasn't a fact-finding mission, but it was only the word that he uses is to make the acquaintance of, to be introduced to.

Oh, how are you? My name's Paul. You're Peter. Pleased to meet you. That's the kind of thing that's going on here. And then, for a moment, passing through the corridor, he may have bumped into James, Jesus' brother.

And it was only for a limited time, for two weeks. And so, the false teachers were saying that Paul got his gospel from the apostles in Jerusalem. But Paul says, how could I?

I barely met them. And then, finally, Paul says that he did not get his gospel from any institution. So, D, not by institution, and his travel among the churches in Judea.

And so, Paul heads up to Syria and Cilicia. And just note the degree of the interaction that Paul has with the churches up there. Verse 22. I was personally unknown to them.

[27 : 32] Verse 23. They only heard the reports. And so, the accusation may have come that Paul got his gospel from those institutions, those churches.

And Paul responds saying, yes, I was there, but I didn't meet anyone. They only heard I was there. Paul did not get his gospel from any institution.

So, note here, what we've looked at tonight. How should we land? Paul gets his gospel from a revelation from Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Straight from the source. How did he know? He knew with absolutely certainty. He got his message directly from Jesus. And so, when we come to the Bible, when we read it, we can know we're getting it straight from the source.

It's not garbled. It's not secondhand. It's directly from the source. It wasn't through reason. It wasn't through his studies. It wasn't through a dramatic experience, a personal encounter with the apostles.

[28 : 39] It wasn't through an institution, through the churches in Syria and Cilicia. But it was by having a revelation of Jesus in him that changed him.

That moved him from the present evil age to be a new creation. That Jesus commissioned him as his spokesperson to speak on his behalf.

In speaking and in writing. Speaks with authority on his behalf. And so, what should we take away from this?

Well, firstly, Paul is an example to us and an apostle. An example, verse 8. He listens to the scriptures. Even if an angel or I myself should give you another gospel, don't listen to them. But rather, he looks to find God and meet God in the revelation of Jesus Christ that's been given to him. And then note, he's an apostle.

[29 : 39] He speaks God's words. He's been commissioned by Jesus. And so, we must listen to him. We must come to him and bow. And bow at the scriptures.

We must know God. Not through institutions. Not through what our friends say. Not through what the man at the front says. Not through Twitter says. Not through what the BBC says.

Not through our university. Not through our work. We must know God. Not through our reason. Not through, can I touch it? God is God. He's outside of creation.

He's outside of this closed system of cause and effect. He's bigger than everything. He could communicate however he wanted to. And then, we must know God not through our experience.

We must not look for a dramatic experience that we might know God. But we must come to God simply and humbly in the revelation that's been given to us in the Bible.

[30 : 40] We must read it diligently and daily. And seek to know it in our hearts. We must seek to have Christ formed in us. Dwelling on it. Meditating on it.

Chewing it over with our friends in our conversations. And just note there how the churches in Syria and Cilicia responded to Paul. When he was taken out of that present evil age into being a new creation.

They praised God because of it. And so, as we seek to know God through the scriptures. As we seek to be changed and have Christ in us. So, we should expect that people around us should praise God because of that.

As they look to us. As they speak to us. As we chat to them. Thank you. Right.

Let's close in a word of prayer. So, Father, we thank you that we can come to you tonight with certainty that you are speaking.

[31 : 47] That you have spoken through your Apostle Paul. That you have spoken through the scriptures. Please help us to listen.

Please help us to listen to this revelation that has come directly from Jesus Christ. Please help us to pray for understanding on the scriptures through the Holy Spirit as we read the Bible.

Please help us to not stand over the Bible but stand under the Bible. Please help us not to doubt Paul. Not to undermine him. Not to say he was a man of his times.

Not relevant. Please help us to see that these scriptures are entirely relevant today. For us and for our salvation. In Jesus' name.

Amen.