

## FREEDOM FROM THE PAST

*Galatians 1:11-24*

*"Five elements in Paul's story are common to the story of every person that becomes free in Christ."  
- Eugene Peterson*

The book of Galatians, unlike most of the New Testament letters, contains some very interesting historical information that we would not have known about from any other source. In this section Paul recounts how he came to Christ and received the gospel message which he had passed on to the Galatians. Why does he tell us this? Because his very credentials as an apostle were being questioned; other "teachers" had come to the Galatians after Paul and tried to convince the new believers that he was an inferior messenger with an inferior message. Therefore he defends himself here in order to defend the integrity of the gospel.

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*<sup>11</sup> I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. <sup>12</sup> I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. <sup>15</sup> But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. <sup>18</sup> Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> I saw none of the other apostles--only James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. <sup>21</sup> Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup> They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." <sup>24</sup> And they praised God because of me.*

### 1. The Former Life (11-14)

What kind of person was Paul before he became a Christian? (See Philippians 3:2-6)

What kind of person were you?

## 2. The Great Reversal (15-16)

Read Acts 9 to recount the story of Paul's conversion. What was the crucial event?

Was Paul someone who was "seeking the truth", sensitive to new ideas, just needing a gentle "nudge" to enter the kingdom?

What event was crucial in your coming to Christ?

## 3. The Solitary Retreat (17)

This chapter of Paul's life is somewhat of a mystery. We don't know how the "three years" was divided up between Arabia and Damascus, but we do know that it was a crucial time in which God taught Paul much about how all of Scripture fits together and focuses upon Christ.

Have you ever had an extended period in your life where you were learning a great deal almost daily from the Lord?

Now take a look at Galatians 2:1. From Acts we know that Paul returned to Tarsus, his home town, soon after his Jerusalem visit in Galatians 1:18. If the first Jerusalem visit was three years after becoming a Christian, and Galatians 2:1 says it was fourteen years before his next visit, how long do you think Paul stayed in Tarsus?

Does it surprise you that Paul would have to stay "home" that long?

Have you ever felt like you were "chomping at the bit" in life, but God's plan was for an extended period of what you felt was like being "on the shelf"?

*"It is the manner of God before He bestows any special mercy on people, first to prepare them for it."*

- Jonathan Edwards, 1736

Others in the Bible had a significant period of waiting before service. What was that period like for the following people?

- Moses
- David
- John the Baptist
- Jesus

#### 4. Sharing Our Stories (18-20)

What happened during this first Jerusalem visit? (see Acts 9:26-30)

How did the Jerusalem leaders respond to Paul when he "shared his story", and why do you think Paul mentions this visit at this point in Galatians?

#### 5. Sharing *The* Story (21-24)

Paul quickly became accustomed to telling "the Story" - the message of the gospel. (For "extra credit", check and see how often Paul "gives his testimony" in the 2nd half of the book of Acts.)

According to this section of Galatians, what was the reaction of other Christians to Paul's early ministry?

## APPLICATION

Paul explains this part of his life because there were those who were doubting his credentials (see also 2 Corinthians 3:1-3). Have you ever had your integrity questioned? How did it feel? How did you respond? What was the outcome?

As a group, briefly share your stories of how you each came to Christ. (You may want to do this all at once, or one person a week for several weeks.)

Try sharing your story with one non-Christian this week. If they seem interested in hearing more about how it applies to them, then explain the gospel.