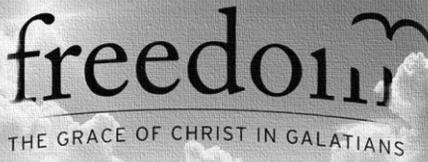


Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 4, 2017 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



freedom
THE GRACE OF CHRIST IN GALATIANS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF GALATIANS “A Radical Transformation” *Galatians 1:11-24*

Once heresy begins and multiplies in a congregation, strong measures must be taken to curb its movement. Otherwise, the disease spreads... causing damage to individuals' lives, destruction of unity, and ultimately death to the testimony of the assembly. Paul saw this happening in Galatia. The religious legalists (the Judaizers) slipped into the ranks and began to infect the body with “a different gospel,” namely a gospel of “works.” They didn't throw out everything; they just added to the message of salvation. They taught that justification occurred when the sinner believed in Christ... plus kept the Law. Determined to correct the heresy, Paul took strong and immediate steps which included writing this letter. We needn't be surprised that the first facts he confirmed relate to his authority as an apostle (in Gal. 1:1-10) and the divine origin of his message (Gal. 1:1-24).

MEET THE JUDAIZERS

There have always been those who balk at the idea of God's salvation being offered freely to those who believe. They reason that such a grand gift as forgiveness from such a holy God *must* require some kind of payment from us. We thank God for His grace, but we understand that He expects us to somehow *earn* that grace—in other words, there must be *something* that we can do to pay off the debt we owe to God.

In the early church, those who taught a combination of God's grace and human effort were called “Judaizers.” The word *Judaizer* comes from a Greek verb meaning “to live according to Jewish customs.” The word appears in Galatians 2:14 where Paul describes how he confronted Peter for forcing Gentile Christians to “Judaize.” The Judaizers were most likely from the “Pharisee” branch/sect of Judaism, who were strict adherents and proponents of law keeping, but had embraced at least some aspect of Jesus teaching. In this sense, “Judaizers” refers to Jewish Christians who sought to induce Gentiles to observe Jewish religious customs: to “judaize.” It

appears that these individuals agreed with much of the apostolic kerygma (teaching) but sought to regulate the admission of Gentiles into the covenant people of God through circumcision and the keeping of the ceremonial law. Insisting that "Unless you are circumcised ... you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). To familiarize ourselves a bit with what Paul was dealing with in this letter to these church at Galatia let's get an understanding of what these "Judaizers" taught and believed.

Basic Beliefs and Teachings of the Judaizers:

1. **A Judaizer taught that, in order for a Christian to truly be right with God, he must conform to the Mosaic Law** - Circumcision, especially, was promoted as necessary for salvation. Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes *first*, and *then* they could come to Christ.
2. **A Judaizer taught a doctrine that was a mixture of grace (through Christ) and works (through the keeping of the Law)** - This false doctrine was dealt with in Acts 15 and strongly condemned in the book of Galatians. At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, a group of Judaizers opposed Paul and Barnabas. Some men who belonged to the party of the Pharisees insisted that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were first circumcised and obeyed the Law of Moses. Paul made the case that, in Christ, there was no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile, for God had purified the hearts of the Gentiles by faith (Acts 15:8–9). He said it plainly in Galatians 2:16: *"A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."* To add anything to the work that Christ did for salvation is to negate God's grace. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, not by returning to the Law. "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing" (Galatians 2:21).

Two Present Day Religious Groups Similar to Judaizers: There are many groups today with beliefs/practices very similar to the Judaizers of the New Testament, but there are two that may be most prominent in our day. NOTE: It is not my intention here to offend anyone if they have ties to any of the groups I am about to name, I am only pointing out the stated teaching of these groups.

1. **Hebrew Roots Movement** - The teachings of the "Hebrew Roots Movement" are virtually identical to those of the Judaizers whom Paul rebuked in Galatians. A primary focus of the Hebrew Roots Movement is to put followers of Christ back under the bondage of the Old Testament Law. **Hebrew Roots** is a **movement** that advocates the return and adherence to the first century walk of faith and obedience to the Torah by seeking a better understanding of the culture, history, and religio-political backdrop of that era which led to the core differences with both the Jewish, and later, the Christian communities. It has a solidly "works righteousness" basis for salvation. Some groups that may be closely related to the Hebrew Roots Movement in some ways at least in some basic ideologies and root beliefs are Messianic Judaism (some), Worldwide Church of God (Herbert W. Armstrong), Church of God. There may also be early ties to Pentecostalism, Faith-healing, Charismatic Movement, Seventh-day Adventism although it should be noted that there are core differences with these. Interestingly all of these teach that one can lose their salvation or fall from grace because their works is what maintains their salvation.

2. **Roman Catholic Church** - The Roman Catholic Church teaches a doctrine similar to that of the Judaizers of the New Testament in this way: its doctrine is a mixture of law and grace. At the Council of Trent in the 16th century, the Catholic Church explicitly denied the idea of salvation by faith alone. The Catholic Church has always held that certain sacraments are necessary for salvation. The issues for the 1st-century Judaizers were circumcision and Sabbath-keeping. The issues for modern-day Catholics are baptism, confession, etc. The works considered necessary may have changed, but both Judaizers and Catholics attempt to merit God's grace through the performance of ritualistic acts. 1 Timothy 4:3 says that, in later times, false teachers will "forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth." This sounds suspiciously close to some of the teachings of Roman Catholicism, which requires priests to be celibate ("forbidding to marry") and proclaims some food to be off-limits during Lent ("abstaining from certain foods"). The Judaizers upheld the Mosaic Law as necessary for salvation; Catholics uphold man-made tradition as necessary; both view Christ's death as being insufficient *without the active and continued cooperation of the one being saved.*

Important Perspective: *The Bible is clear that the attempt to add human works to God's grace overlooks the very meaning of grace, which is "undeserved blessing," "unmerited, undeserved, unearned, unworked for favor of God. As Paul says, "If by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6). Praise the Lord, "Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).*

DESTROY THE MESSENGER, DESTROY THE MESSAGE

Now, we said last week, that one of the things the Judaizers had done in these church in the region of Galatia was to try to attack Paul personally. Hence, the first part of Paul's letter to the Galatians finds Paul seeking to establish himself as an apostle and essentially begin this letter by defending his credentials? Because his credibility was being questioned by the Judaizer, but what could they possibly have to gain by attacking him personally? Doesn't it seem that they would only see the need to attack his message and teaching? Well, there is something to this. If you can destroy the messenger, you certainly destroy his message. Silencing the messenger, silences his message. Just for review here are the 4 reasons we looked at last week that these false teachers, the Judaizers, attacked Paul, the messenger, personally. These need to be kept in mind especially as you read and study the first part of his letter.

4 Reasons Paul's Person was Attacked:

1. **To cast doubt** – One seed of doubt cast into a situation can cloud the entire situation with doubt. This was certainly true in Paul's case. These false teacher that had infiltrated the church in the region of Galatia, and had cast doubt not only on Paul's teaching, but on Paul himself.
2. **To construct discredit** – If you can discredit the man you can discredit his message. The false teacher Paul was engaging in his letter had tried to discredit him by not only challenging what he said by his right to say it.
3. **To disparage** – Paul had been a murderer, a persecutor of the very message he was not preaching and had preached in Galatia. The question was raised about his character, was he

trustworthy, was he credible, was he honest, or was this a trick from an ultimate trickster who would later try to destroy them

4. **To create discouragement** – All of this doubt, discredit, disparage was to create discouragement among those who had believed Paul’s message. If these false teacher could discredit and then discourage the teacher of the message, his message could be replace with another that was being peddled by these Judiazing hucksters.

This set the stage for Paul’s discussion of his credentials and credibility in verses 11-24 of Galatians 1, and the focus of this study.

I. **A BRIEF REVIEW (Galatians 1:6-10)**

Passage through a letter like Galatians is made more meaningful by pausing periodically and looking across our shoulders to territory already covered. Certain milestones of truth or detail should not be forgotten. Three words can help us capture the heart of our study thus far.

3 Words That Capture the Heart of Our Study:

1. **Amazement (v.6)** – Paul says in Galatians 1:6, “⁶ *I marvel (I am amazed) that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel*”
2. **Announcement (vv.7-9)** – Paul writes in Galatians 1:7-9, “⁷ *Which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.* ⁸ *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.* ⁹ *As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.*” In essence Paul wrote, “There is only one Gospel, and anyone who preaches another, let him be accursed.”
3. **Affirmation (v.10)** – In verse 10 Paul wrote, “¹⁰ *For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*” Simply stated: “Stop seeking the favor of man... start seeking the favor or God.”

Question: *Who was to say that the Gospel Paul preached was the true one?*

II. **THE ORIGINATION OF THE MESSAGE (Galatians 1:11-12)**

By all appearances, the Judaizers had called into question the credibility of the apostle’s message. Paul answered their attack by presenting two lines of defense... one negative, the other more positive.

THE NEGATIVE (vv. 11-12a) – This argument to prove non-human origin is introduced with three words:

3 Negative Words Used to Give Credibility to Paul’s Message:

1. **NOT - “Not according to man” (v.11)** Paul preached the message to man, but did not invent it.

2. **NEITHER** – “Neither received it from man” (v.12) In other words, it was not the product of religious traditions. He gave it to men, but did not get it from them.
3. **NOR** - “Nor was I taught it” (v.12) The message was not learned in a classroom. He taught it, but it hadn’t been taught to him.

THE POSITIVE (vv..12) – Paul says at the end of Galatians 1:12, “...but it came through (I received it by) the revelation of Jesus Christ.” In other words, Paul had been tutored by Christ, personally. Whereas today God’s message to man is complete (contained in the Bible, the cannon of Scripture is closed), in Paul’s time it was not. With completion of the book of Revelation, God ceased tutoring selected men with His revelation. The term “revelation” indicates that God’s message was disclosed to him, unveiled before his eyes. Thus the Gospel Paul knew came directly from God Himself, without the aid of human instructors.

The following are “Eleven Characteristics of the Cults (and false religions and their false teaching)” (the following is compiled from research adapted from Josh McDowell’s “Handbook of Today’s Religions.”)

11 Characteristics of A Cult and False Religions and Their False Teaching:

1. **New Truth – Christians principle: Any teaching must be subjected to the Scripture test. Does it contradict Scripture?** - God’s Word is truth and if a “new teaching” contradicts God’s Word it is not truth. Many cults and false teaching (even those in the church today) promote the false idea that God has revealed something special to them. This is usually truth that has never before been revealed and supersedes and contradicts all previous revelations. Sun Myung Moon’s claim is that the mission of Christ was left unfinished and the world is now ready for the completion of Christ’s work on earth.

The Unification Church teaches that the Rev. Moon is bringing truth previously not revealed. Moon has said, “We (the Unification Church) are the only people who truly understand the heart of Jesus, the anguish of Jesus, and the hope of Jesus” (Rev. Moon, The Way of the World, Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, Vol. VIII, No. 4, April, 1976).

The Mormon Church (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) teaches that Christianity was in apostasy for some 18 centuries until God revealed new “truth” to Joseph Smith, Jr., restoring the true gospel that had been lost. Today the Mormon church has its living prophets who receive divine revelation from God, continually bringing new “truth” to the world.

These and other cults justify their existence by claiming they have something more than just the Bible and its “inadequate message.”

The cults have no objective, independent way to test their teachings and practices. It’s almost as though they feel just a firm assertion of their own exclusivity is sufficient proof of their anointing by God. However, as members of the orthodox (traditional, mainline,

genuine) Christian churches, we can and should test all of our teachings and practices objectively and independently by God's infallible Word, the Bible, and history.

2. **New Interpretations of Scripture – Christians principle:** **There is only one correct interpretation of God's Word, God's! The interpreter of God's Word must use good hermeneutical principles in correctly understanding Scripture** (*type/kind of literature, context of the passage, plain/obvious meaning, understand writer's intentions, grammar/language, theological themes, God-centered perspective*). **Some cults make no claim to new truth or extra-biblical revelation, but believe they alone have the key to interpreting the mysteries in the Bible. The Scriptures are their only acknowledged source of authority, but they are interpreted unreasonably and in a way different from that of orthodox Christianity. They testify that the historic beliefs and interpretations of Scripture are based upon a misunderstanding of the Bible or were pagan in origin.** An example of this is found in the writing of "The World Wide Church of God's" Herbert W. Armstrong: *"I found that the popular church teachings and practices were not based on the Bible. They originated... in paganism. The amazing, unbelievable TRUTH was, the sources of these popular beliefs and practices of professing Christianity was quite largely, paganism and human reasoning and custom, not the Bible! (Herbert W. Armstrong, The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, Pasadena: Ambassador College Press, 1967, P. 298, 294).*

The Bible is then reinterpreted, usually out of context, to justify the peculiar doctrines of the cult. Without an objective and reasonable way to understand what the Bible teaches, the cult member is at the mercy of the theological whims of the cult leader.

3. **A Non-biblical Source of Authority – Christians principle:** **"Sola scriptura" (Latin, "by Scripture alone") is the Protestant Christian doctrine that the Bible is the supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. God's Word is our sole source of authority.** We have no other extra-biblical writings that tell us what to do that are authoritative. Some cults have sacred writings or a source of authority that supersedes the Bible. The Mormon Church says, "We believe the Bible to be the Word of God in so far as it is translated correctly..." (Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Article 8). Although this sounds like the Mormons trust the Bible, they, in fact, believe it has been changed and corrupted. Listen to what the Mormon apostle Talmage has said: *"There will be, there can be no absolutely reliable translation of these or other Scriptures unless it is effected through the gift of translation, as one of the endowments of the Holy Ghost... Let the Bible then be read reverently and with prayerful care, the reader ever seeking the light of the Spirit that he may discern between the truth and the errors of men (James E. Talmage, The Articles of Faith, Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1968, p. 237)."*

Such a statement opens the door for their additional sacred books, like "The Book of Mormon," "The Pearl of Great Price," and "Doctrines and Covenants," as greater authoritative sources. Thus, the Bible is not truly their final source of authority.

In Christian Science, the Bible is characterized as being mistaken and corrupt and inferior to the writings of Mary Baker Eddy.

The Unification Church believes the Bible to be incomplete, while Rev. Moon's "Divine Principle" is the true authoritative source.

Other groups such as the "The Way International" and "The Worldwide Church of God" claim the Bible to be their final authority when in actuality their authority is the Bible as interpreted by the cult leader. Regardless of whether the Bible is superseded by other works or reinterpreted by a cult leader, a sure mark of a cult is that the final authority on spiritual matters rests on something other than the plain teaching of Holy Scripture.

4. **Another Jesus – Christian Principle: A basic, indisputable teaching/doctrine of orthodox Christianity is that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. That Jesus Christ is God, become a man (in the flesh).** One characteristic that is found in all cults is false teaching about the person of Jesus Christ in light of historical biblical Christianity. The Apostle Paul warned about following after "another Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4) who is not the same Jesus who is revealed in Scripture. The "Jesus" of the cults is always someone less than the Bible's eternal God who became flesh, lived here on earth, and died for our sins.

The Bible make it clear that Jesus was God in human flesh, second person of the Holy Trinity, who lived a sinless life on earth and died as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Three days after His crucifixion, Jesus rose bodily from the dead. Fifty days afterward he ascended into heaven, where He now sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding on behalf of believers. He will, one day, return bodily to planet earth and judge the living and the dead while setting up His eternal Kingdom.

The Jesus of the cults is not the Jesus of the Bible.

According to the theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus did not exist as God from all eternity by was rather the first creation of Jehovah God. Before coming to earth, He was Michael the Archangel, the head of all the angels. He is not God.

The Mormon Church does not accept the unique deity of Jesus Christ. He is, to them, one of many gods, the "first-born spirit child," spiritually conceived by a sexual union between the heavenly Father and a heavenly mother. He was also the spirit-brother of Lucifer in His preexistent state. His incarnation was accomplished by the physical union of the heavenly Father and the human Mary.

No matter what the particular beliefs of any cult may be, the one common denominator they all possess is a denial of the biblical teaching on the deity of Jesus Christ.

5. **Rejection of Orthodox Christianity – Christian Principle: In classical Christian usage, the term *orthodox* refers to the set of Biblical doctrines which were believed by Christians (*the deity of Christ, the inspiration and infallibility of God's Word, salvation by grace, the resurrection of Christ, monotheism/one God, Jesus as the only way to salvation, the virgin birth, the trinity, etc.*)** Characteristics of many cultic groups is a frontal attack on orthodox Christianity. They argue that the church has departed from the true faith. Helena

P. Blavatsky, founder of Theosophy, has this to say of orthodox Christianity: “The name has been used in a manner so intolerant and dogmatic, especially in our day, that Christianity is now the religion on arrogance, par excellence, a stepping-stone for ambition, a sinecure for wealth, shame, and power; a convenient screen for hypocrisy (H.P. Blavatsky, *Studies in Occultism*, Theosophical University Press, n.d., p. 138).

Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of Mormonism, said he was given this assessment of the Christian church when he inquired of the Lord as to which church to join: “*I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in His sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that ‘they draw near to Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof’*” (Joseph Smith, Jr., *The Pearl of Great Price*, 2:18-19).

- 6. Double-Talk – Christian Principle: Those claiming to be Christian, but maintain an orthodoxy and orthopraxy that is consistent with Scripture/God’s Word and the doctrines of orthodox Christianity.** A feature of some cultic groups is that they say one thing publicly but internally believe something totally different. Many organizations call themselves Christians when in fact they deny the fundamentals of the faith.

The Mormon church is an example of this kind of double-talk. The first article of faith in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reads, “We believe... in His Son, Jesus Christ.” This gives the impression Mormons are Christians since they believe in Jesus Christ. However, when we understand the semantics of what they mean by Jesus Christ, we discover they are far removed from orthodox Christianity. Nevertheless, the impression the Mormon church gives from their advertising is that they are another denomination or sect of Christianity. One, therefore, must be on the alert for organizations that advertise themselves as “Christians” but whose internal teaching disagree with Scripture.

- 7. Non-biblical Teaching on the Nature of God (Trinity) – Christian Principle: A basic Biblical doctrine of Christianity is that God is one yet three, a triune God identified in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the trinity.** Another characteristic of all non-Christian cults is either an inadequate view or outright denial of the Holy Trinity. The biblical doctrine of the Trinity, one God in three Persons, is usually attacked as being pagan or satanic in origin.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses are an example of this. They say, “There is no authority in the Word of God for the doctrine of the trinity of the Godhead” (Charles Taze Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures*, V, Brooklyn: International Bible Students, 1912, p. 54). “The plain truth is that this is another of Satan’s attempts to keep the God-fearing person from learning the truth of Jehovah and His Son Christ Jesus” (Let God Be True, Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1946, p. 31).

The Way International take a similar position, “Long before the founding of Christianity, the idea of a triune god or a god-in-three-persons was a common belief in ancient religions. Although many of these religions had many minor deities, they distinctly acknowledged that

there was one supreme god who consisted of three persons or essences. The Babylonians used an equilateral triangle to represent this three-in-one god, now the symbol of the modern three-in-one believers” (Jesus Christ Is Not God, Victor Paul Wierville, New Knoxville, Ohio: American Christian Press, 1975, p. 11)

Cults, therefore, are marked by their deviation on the doctrine of the Trinity and the nature of God.

- 8. Changing Theology – Christian Principle: Christianity does not have a changing theology but a theology based on the unchanging Word of God.** Cult doctrines are continually in a state of flux and have no sure foundation on which to anchor their hope. Adherents of a particular cult will learn a doctrine only to find that doctrine later changed or contradicted by further revelation. Most cults will deny this, with the possible exception of the Unification Church. Recently they admitted their theology was in a state of flux. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example, used to believe vaccinations were sinful. Anyone who allowed himself to be vaccinated would lose his good standing in the organization. Today that is no longer taught.

Christianity Today, in an article interviewing William Cetnar (former high official in the Jehovah’s Witnesses), says: “The controversial ban on receiving blood transfusions will probably be lifted after Franz’s death, (Frederick Franz, 87, is the president of the Jehovah’s Witnesses) Cetnar thinks. A new date for the end of the world (JW’s have previously predicted Christ’s return seven times) is likely to be announced, possible 1988 (they missed that one too). By sheer mathematical necessity, some change will have to be made in the JW doctrine that Christ will return before an elect 144,000 Witnesses have died. 144,000 places are filled by those living in 1914 and few remain alive today. But Christ is supposed to return before the entire generation has died (Christianity Today, Nov. 20, 1981, p.70).

The Mormon Church is equally guilty of changing doctrine. The most famous is its belief and practice, later prohibited, of polygamy.

- 9. Strong Leadership - Christian Principle: Jesus Christ is seen as the head of the Church, and while God may provide strong leadership within the church those leaders are not to be worshipped, exalted or held on up a pedestal. We worship and follow God alone.** Cults are usually characterized by central leader figures who consider themselves messengers of God with unique access to the Almighty. Since the leader has such a special relationship with God, he can dictate the theology and behavior of the cult. Consequently, he exercises enormous influence over the group. This is true, for example, in the Unification Church, The Way International and the Worldwide Church of God.

The strong leadership leads the cult followers into total dependence upon the cult for belief, behavior and lifestyle. When this falls into the hands of particularly corrupt leaders, the results can be tragic, as with Jim Jones and the People’s Temple or David Koresh and the Branch Davidians. The more dramatic the claims of a cult leader, the more the possibility of a tragic conclusion.

10. Salvation by Works – Christian Principle: Christian orthodox teaching and a basic doctrine of the Christianity is that salvation is by grace through faith alone, and not by works so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:8-9). One teaching that is totally absent from all the cults is the gospel of the grace of God. No one is taught in the cults that he can be saved from eternal damnation by simply placing his faith in Jesus Christ. It is always belief in Jesus Christ and “do this” or “follow that.” All cults attach something to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. It might be baptism, obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel, or something else, but it is never taught that faith in Christ alone will save anyone.

Herbert W. Armstrong, founder and leader of the Worldwide Church of God, exemplifies this: *“Salvation, then, is a process! But how the God of this world would blind your eyes to that! He tries to deceive you into thinking all there is to it is just “accepting Christ” with “no works” – and presto-chango, you are pronounced “saved.” But the Bible reveals that none is yet saved.”* (Herbert W. Armstrong, *Why Were You Born?* Pg. 11.)

11. False Prophecy - Christian Principle: Biblically speaking “false prophecy” is seen clearly in Scripture and among Christians as being distinctive evidence of “bad/false fruit” and therefore not Christian but false, and to be rejected. Another feature of the cults is they often promulgate false prophecy. Cult leaders, who believe they have been divinely called by God, have made bold predictions of future events, supposedly revealed by the inspiration of God. Unfortunately, for the cult leaders, these predictions of future events do not come to pass. The one who prophesied is exposed as a false prophet.

Writing in 1967, Herbert W. Armstrong, (leader of the Worldwide Church of God) said, *“Now other prophecies reveal we are to soon have (probably in about four years) such drought and famine, that disease epidemics will follow, taking millions of lives... Well, we have been getting foretastes of them! That condition is coming! And I don not mean in 400 years – nor in 40 years – but in the very next four of five!”* (Herbert W. Armstrong, *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*, Pasadena: Ambassador College Press, 1967, P. 184).

The Jehovah’s Witnesses have a well-established record of making false prophecies. This pattern was established by their founder and first president, Charles Taze Russell, who conclusively prophesied the end of the world for 1914.

1. “All present governments will be overthrown and dissolved in 1914” – “The Time Is At Hand,” pp. 98-99 (1899)
2. “1914 – The farthest limit of the rule of imperfect man.” – “The Time Is At Hand,” p. 77 (1906 ed)
3. “The full establishment of the Kingdom of God in the earth at A.D. 1914.” – “Thy Kingdom Come,” p. 126 (1891).
4. “Christ was spiritually present in 1874 and will be present as Earth’s new ruler in 1914.” – “The Time Is At Hand,” p. 77
5. “Before the end of A.D. 1914, the last member of the ‘body of Christ’ will be glorified with the head.” – “The Time Is At Hand” p. 77.

**The Watchtower Society in later editions made changes in what Russell stated here in an attempt to cover up his erroneous predictions.*

Special Observation - *While not every group that possesses these characteristics can be labeled a cult, beware of a group that embraces some of these features. The sure mark of a cult is what it does with the person of Jesus Christ. All cults ultimately deny the fact that Jesus Christ is God the Son, second Person of the Holy Trinity, and mankind's only hope.*

III. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE MAN (Galatians 1:13-24)

Adding to the weight of the arguments already presented, Paul testified as to how that message brought sweeping change to his own life. Paul's comments in verses 13-24 do two things for us:

2 Things Paul's Word in Galatians 1:13-24 Do For Us:

1. Paul's comments give much-appreciated insights into his life
2. Paul's comments provide a practical guide for forming a personal testimony useful in declaring Christ to others.

**Be sure to observe both.*

BEFORE CONVERSION (vv.13-14) – The work of God's grace within the human life is equally powerful and thorough for all who submit to Christ. Yet, our human perception of its work is enlarged when the grace wraps around one who has run from God, leaving behind him much injury to others... or has even taken up active cause against His Son and His people. Perhaps our surprise results because such a person seems to be an unlikely candidate for transformation (conversion). Paul's life "before Christ" heightens our respect and appreciation of God's grace.

2 Things We Know About Paul Prior to Conversion:

1. Paul was among the church's worst persecutors (v.13) – Paul writes in verse 13, *"¹³ For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it."* Paul loved religion, but hated Christians. As a matter of fact, it was religion which kept him from Christ for so long. **Can "religion" actually keep someone from Christ? How?**
2. Paul was a zealous defender of Jewish traditions (v.14) – Paul say about himself in verse 14, *"¹⁴ And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers."* He loved Judaism, but despised Jesus

AT CONVERSION (vv.15-16a) – The conjunction Paul used at the beginning of verse 15 ("but"), signals God's intervention in his life. Abruptly, his defense of Jewish tradition and persecution of Christians halted. His encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus turned him a perfect 180° from the ways he'd previously known... socially, politically, and religiously. He summarized his conversion with these words in verses 15-16, *"¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb (think Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.") and called me through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with*

flesh and blood.” And additional dimension of God’s revealing acts is mentioned here. In verse 12 God “unveiled” (revealed) His message to Paul. But here in verse 16, God “unveiled (revealed) or disclosed His Son within him. In other words, God put His Son on display in Paul’s inner man. The ramifications of this is significant... at salvation, Christ is unveiled in the believer’s life.

SEE: Read Acts 9:1-9, *“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” ⁶ So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” ⁷ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”*

What Happened at Paul’s Conversion?: *This is how we too are saved/converted. This is how every man really comes to Christ.*

1. **His heart was arrested by God (He got his attention) (v.3) –**
2. **His life was spoken to by God (v.4) –**
3. **He sought the Lord (v.5)**
4. **He surrendered his life to the Lord (v.6)**
5. **He followed the Lord (v.8)**

AFTER CONVERSION (vv.16-24) – Unless we keep in mind the criticism being leveled against Paul, we might forget his reason for detailing the results of his change (conversion). Notice what Paul says in verses 15-25, *“¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. ²⁰ (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) ²¹ Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. ²³ But they were hearing only, “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.” ²⁴ And they glorified God in me.”* Let’s note both the events which followed his highway encounter with the Lord and the mindset of other believers regarding him.

3 Events that Followed Paul’s Conversion:

1. **No one indoctrinated or told him what to say (v.16)** – Paul wasn't brainwashed, coached, as he said in **verse 16, "I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood."** Some may have tried to attack Paul and his message by trying to discredit him with the rationale that he had been suddenly threatened and brainwashed, and was just saying what others told him to say. Paul traveled first to Arabia... then on the Damascus; he consulted with no one. *NOTE: This supports the truth that Paul was trained, taught, disciplined by none but the Lord Himself in Arabia*
2. **His contact and influence from the disciples of Christ was brief and limited (vv.18-19)** - Three years later, after his conversion, he met Cephas (Peter) in Jerusalem and stayed with him slightly more than two weeks (15 days). The only other apostle he met there was the Lord's half-brother, James, who was not even a believer himself when Jesus had suffered and died on the cross only became a believer after his brother's resurrection from the dead. *NOTE: Paul was to be a unique and specialized operative of the Gospel, different than the other disciples/apostles because of his past. While they had walked with Jesus and of course could repeat their teaching, Paul had not. His message came from God Himself.*
3. **He went home to tell his story and minister in his home area (v.21)** – Paul said in verse 21, **"²¹Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia."** Paul traveled through Syria and Cilicia for an unstated length of time. This area included his home town of Tarsus. He was preaching in that region for several years (no contact with the disciples v.22).



3 Mindsets Regarding Paul that Others Had: Paul says in **verses 22-24, "²² And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. ²³ But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God in me."** How was Paul thought of during this time in

his life, post-conversion. These verses reveal something of the mindset regarding Paul by others around the early New Testament world.

1. **Paul was unknown to some** – He had no renown (fame, celebrity, notoriety) to many. He says in verse 22 that “*I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ.*”
2. **Paul’s story was being heard** - The Christians had heard that their persecutor had changed and was declaring the message which they had prized for so long. Verse 23 says, “²³ *But they were hearing only, “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.”*”
3. **Paul’s life was cause for glorifying God** - They were giving glory to God for him. As verse 24 says, “²⁴ *And they glorified God in me.*” Paul’s life, testimony and message (the gospel of Jesus Christ), cause a ground swell of praise and glory to God for what He had and was doing.

IV. TWO PRACTICAL FACTS WHICH STAND OUT

2 Practical Facts Which Stand Out:

1. **When a person does battle with God, as did Paul, God always wins, thus humbling the man –**
2. **When God transforms a life, there is always a change, thus glorifying Himself.**

Incidentally, good counsel regarding the preparation and sharing of our personal testimony can be drawn from this study. Let’s put it this way; don’t preach... just talk; don’t generalize... be specific; don’t defend... just declare. Here are three things to remember:

3 Things to Remember in Preparing and Sharing Our Personal Testimony:

1. **Keep it brief** – Paul covered fourteen years in ten to twelve verses. He could have told his story in two minutes or less without any significant point being lost.
2. **Follow a logical progression** – Include descriptions of life before Christ, moment of conversion, life since Christ.
3. **Glorify God... not self** – Nasty details of one’s past can easily focus too much attention on the man and not the “Man-Changer.” Keep credit placed where it is due, with Jesus Christ alone and to God’s glory. He is the one who saves and changes lives. It’s all about Him.