

June 14th, 2020

The Man Who Spoke for God

1 Corinthians 1:1

The foundation is most vital

This morning we are beginning the exposition of 1 Corinthians, and the temptation is to rush past these introductory verses to our favorite verses. But these introductory verses are not literary filler. They are the foundation. When a house is being built, everything seems so slow in the beginning. The ground is prepared, the forms are built, the plans are consulted, the concrete is poured, and nothing substantial seems to be happening. But it is the foundation that is the most critical, most vital part of the house. If the foundation is not established correctly, then it doesn't matter how beautiful or strong the rest of the house is, it will come crashing down.¹

The world-changing-words of the Apostle Paul

This morning we are looking carefully at the author of this letter: the apostle Paul. Next to Jesus Christ, no one in the history of the world has had a greater impact on humanity than Paul. His words have shaped nations, politics, economics; his words have restrained evil and promoted righteousness. His words have left humanity without excuse (**Romans 1:20**). His words have turned many from the darkness to the light, from the power of Satan to God (**Acts 26:17**).

God used Paul's words to rescue Martin Luther from utter despair. From his own pen, Luther wrote "...my situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the

¹ Matthew 7:24-27

dear Paul and had a great hearing to know what he meant.”² Luther discovered the true meaning of Paul’s words from **Romans 1:17** “the righteous shall live by faith”—namely, that God imputes the very righteousness of Christ to us by sheer grace and mercy, only received through faith *alone*. Luther than said “This passage of Paul became to me a gate to Heaven.”³

Paul’s words: a gate to Heaven

That’s what I so want us to see this morning. This letter is a gate to Heaven. This letter is not merely a personal letter, from one great man. It is not a personal correspondence akin to that of George Washington, or some great statesman. It is a letter from Heaven. “The man writing is not just Paul...the man writing is...Paul the apostle.”⁴ He was called by the will of God to deliver to us God’s *very words*. To hear Paul is to hear God Himself. Is there anything the world needs today *more than that*? The world is on fire. What is the solution? We need a word from the LORD. That is what Paul is claiming this letter is.

² Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, (New York, NY,: The Penguin Group, 1955), pg. 49

³ *ibid*, pg. 50

—
Furthermore, God used Paul’s words to rescue Augustine from a life of lechery and sexual immorality. As his soul was in agony over his sin, as he sat in a garden one afternoon, he heard some children singing: ‘Tolle, lege’—pick up and read. Augustine picked up the Bible and upon opening it to Paul’s words in **Romans 13:13-14** “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” And like a lightning bolt, Augustine was converted, becoming one of the greatest helps the church has ever received.

⁴ Kim Riddlebarger, *The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians*, (Powder Springs, GA.,: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), pg. 2

The Big Idea...

The Apostle's words are the most ultimate, determinative, vital words in the world today, because they are the very words of God

- ☆ Paul: the Destined Man
- ☆ Paul: the Divine Messenger
- ☆ Paul: the Devoted Missionary

I. Paul: the Destined Man

Paul's name

v.1 simply begins with "Paul." We typically end our letters by signing our name, but the "ancient Greeks put their names at the beginning, allowing readers to immediately identify the author."⁵ Now Paul's name means "small or little." Paul had two names: Paul and Saul. Some have speculated that Paul became his name after his conversion, but Scripture doesn't seem to justify this. Paul was simply the Hellenized form for his Hebrew name "Saul." There were others who likewise had two names: Cephas was Peter, John was Mark.⁶

Paul's Jewish origins and upbringing

Paul was born Jewish to the core. He tells us in **Philippians 3:5** that he was "...circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews." He was educated by the premier Pharisean

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 1

⁶ cf. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church Vol. 1: APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY: From the Birth of Christ to the Death of St. John, A.D. 1-100*, (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, Reprint 2011), pg. 286

Rabbi Gamaliel.⁷ **Acts 5:34** says that Gamaliel “was a teacher of the law held in honor by all people.” It was because of this upbringing that Paul could claim that he was “in regard to the law, a Pharisee.” The Pharisees were separatists.⁸ “The Pharisees set themselves apart. They walked on the other side of the street...they were careful that their skirts should not touch anybody else lest they should be rendered unclean...they would have nothing to do with publicans and sinners. That is a biblical Pharisee.”⁹ That’s who Paul was. His upbringing ensured that he knew Judaism “inside out.” He was an absolute expert in the law. His intellect was sharp and stunning. Paul said of himself in **Galatians 1:14** “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”

Saul: the Christian killer

The first place that Saul or Paul is mentioned in Scripture is at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr: Stephen. **Acts 7:58** “Then they cast him [Stephen] out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named *Saul*.” And it wasn’t that Saul was *merely* holding their jackets. **Acts 8:1** says “And Saul approved of his execution.” Saul hated Christians. He was the church’s worst enemy. He said about himself in **Acts 22:4** “I persecuted this *Way to the death...*” and in **Galatians 1:13** “For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.” Why did he hate Christians so much? Because he hated Christ. “With his Pharisaic education he regarded Jesus of Nazareth...as a false Messiah, a rebel, a blasphemer, who was justly condemned to death.”¹⁰ And so Saul felt it to be his duty to silence any who swore allegiance to Christ. He even became a bounty hunter, sanctioned by the High Priest

⁷ cf. Acts 22:3

⁸ cf. Strong’s Concordance

⁹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 1: The Gospel of God*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 50-51

¹⁰ Schaff, pg. 292

himself to eradicate the church.¹¹ **Acts 9:1-2** says that he “...went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

Paul’s miraculous conversion

Please turn with me to **Acts 9**.¹² Picking up in **v.3** after Saul had received his papers to arrest Christians, we read “Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” Notice three vital things here.

First, Saul wasn’t seeking Jesus. He wasn’t investigating Jesus’s claims to see if they were true. He was on his way to Damascus to imprison and murder more Christians. He was in no way tempted to believe in Jesus.

Second, Saul was the chief enemy of Jesus on earth. The voice said to him “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?” It wasn’t merely Christians Paul was persecuting, *it was Christ Himself*. There was no one further from Jesus than Saul was.

Third, despite these things—despite Saul’s not seeking Christ, despite Saul’s hating Christ—Saul was *instantaneously converted*. Notice his response in **v. 5** “Who are you, *Lord*?” He calls Jesus *Lord*. That’s what conversion looks like. It is an entirely supernatural event. Yes Jesus spoke audibly, the other soldiers heard his voice—**v.7** says. But they weren’t changed, at least it’s not recorded. But Saul’s heart had been completely transformed. He is now a brother in Christ. That’s how Ananias addresses him in **v.17** “*Brother Saul...*”

¹¹ Acts 8:3 says “Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”

¹² You can also find Paul recount his testimony in ch. 22 and ch. 26.

The grace of God's timing

Why is *this* important to see? Why is Paul's conversion so vital? Because of the timing of it all. In **Galatians 1:15** Paul says that God "...had set [him] apart before [he] was born..." In other words, Paul was always destined to be saved. Yet God allowed him to blaspheme, to persecute and to be an insolent opponent (**1 Timothy 1:13**). God allowed him to ravage the church (**Acts 8:3**), and to do unspeakable harm to God's own people. Why? Why didn't God just save him *before* he did all these things? He was set apart from birth! 'Why wait God? Stephen died. Your people were slaughtered. Why?' Paul tells us.

Paul an example of grace

Please turn to **1 Timothy 1:16** "But I received mercy [you can insert "*when I did*"] for this reason, that in me, as *the foremost* [that is, "*as the greatest sinner*" —v. 15], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." Did you see? Paul is an example, meaning he is an illustration. An illustration of what? An illustration of what type of person can be saved. Who wrote 1 Corinthians? A Christian killer. The chief sinner on earth (**1 Timothy 1:15**). What does that tell us? It tells us that no one is too sinful, too unclean, too lost, too full of hatred, too condemned, too guilty for Christ to save them. What have you done friend?

Have you ever murdered someone?

Aborted a baby?

Have you ever raped?

Done drugs?

Have you stolen?

Committed adultery?

Blasphemed God's name?

Violated His Sabbath?

Coveted?

Dishonored your parents?

Lied?
Served other gods?

All of these are damnable sins. No amount of good things you do can ever erase them. Only Jesus can cleanse you through His sacrificial blood and righteousness. And Paul proves this is not theoretical. Jesus saved a Christian killer and commissioned him to pastor and plant and write 13 letters in the NT to show you that no sin, no wickedness, no depravity is beyond the saving power of Jesus Christ. As the old hymn goes:

Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;

Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow?
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;

There is power, power, wonder-working power
In the blood of the Lamb.

There is power, power, wonder-working power
In the precious blood of the Lamb.¹³

That's our **first point**. Paul was a man of destiny. First and foremost he was destined to show us that no sin is greater than the saving power of Jesus Christ.

II. Paul: the Divine Messenger

“Called by the will of God”

Please look again at v.1. “Paul, *called* by the will of God...” This word *call* κλητός klētos has three uses in Scripture.

¹³ Author: Lewis E. Jones (1899) Tune: POWER IN THE BLOOD

The first **use** of κλητός klētos is God’s general invitation to believe the gospel. We find this in Matthew **22:14** “For many are *called* [or many are invited] but few are chosen.”

The **second use** of κλητός klētos is essentially a synonym for God’s elect people—those chosen to obtain salvation. Paul called the church in **Romans 1:6** those “who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”¹⁴

But it’s the **third use** of κλητός klētos or calling that v.1 is speaking about. This calling is God’s choosing someone to discharge some office. That’s clearly the use here. God chose Paul to be an apostle.¹⁵

Paul’s Roman/Greco influence

Part of God’s calling of Paul was His preparing Paul to do the work. Though he was Jewish to the bone, **Acts 22:25** tells us he was born a Roman citizen. This is of no small consequence. To buy one’s citizenship would cost a great deal of money (**Acts 22:28**). It was a great honor to be a belong to the empire, it granted all the best privileges. Paul was a protected man with certain inviolable rights and was free to go where he wished.

But Paul also had a considerable Greek influence. Tarsus, the place he was born, “was one of three main centers of Greek culture; the other two were... Athens and Alexandria in Egypt.”¹⁶ As a consequence, Paul was well-versed in both Greek poetry and philosophy. He quoted three such Greeks in Scripture: the Greek playwright Menander in **1 Corinthians 15:33**; the philosopher-poet Epimenides in **Titus 1:12**; and the Greek didactic poet Aratus in **Acts 17:28**.¹⁷ So although Paul was Jewish in his birth and training, he was Roman in his citizenship, and Greek in his culture. The church historian Philip Schaff said

¹⁴ That’s how Paul uses the word in v.2 “...called to be saints...”

¹⁵ Romans 1:1 “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.”

¹⁶ *ibid*, pg. 9

¹⁷ Schaff, pg. 290

that Paul "...combined in himself...the three great nationalities of the ancient world..."¹⁸

Paul's brilliant mind

As a consequence, Paul was an alarmingly brilliant man. "[He] was the only scholar among the apostles."¹⁹ Peter acknowledged his writings to be the very wisdom of God, including some things "hard to understand" (**2 Peter 3:15-16**). Even the secular world has acknowledged Paul's exceptional mind. In the 1940's, there was "series of lectures given in London on 'The Master Minds of the Ages.'" It was a secular society that arranged them, but in the list of the men dealt with came this man, the Apostle Paul, because they had recognize and to admit that he was on of the master minds of the ages."²⁰

Why does Paul's pedigree matter?

Why am I stressing these things? Why does considering Paul's intellect matter at all? Because there is a tendency within Evangelicalism to celebrate ignorance. And it is crippling the church. As a whole, we don't know how to think anymore. Take the current situation, major Evangelical leaders are coming out in support of "Black Lives Matter"²¹ though the Black Lives Matter movement according to their own literature call themselves queer affirming, trans affirming²² and are openly socialistic.²³ Don't you see how even bringing

¹⁸ *ibid*, pg. 287

¹⁹ *ibid*, pg. 288

²⁰ Lloyd-Jones, pg.8

²¹ Source: <https://www.foxnews.com/us/black-lives-matter-southern-baptist> Accessed June 13, 2020

²² Source: <https://www.dcareaeducators4socialjustice.org/black-lives-matter/13-guiding-principles> Accessed June 13, 2020

²³ Source: <https://disrn.com/opinion/in-loving-black-brothers-and-sisters-the-church-of-jesus-christ-must-oppose-black-lives-matter> Accessed June 14, 2020. Also see <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/christian-worldview/all-lives-matter-because-god-is-the-creator-getting-the-conversation-right/>

up the slogan “Black Lives Matter” at this moment is a test for our thinking? How will you respond? Will you conclude the pastor is a racist? Or will you say, “perhaps there are bigger things to consider than a *mere* slogan?” We have been cultivating an anti-intellectual culture in Evangelicalism for the last 100 years and we are reaping the whirlwind.

Cultivating anti-intellectualism

How have we been cultivating anti-intellectualism? Well we have accepted the idea that ‘all you need is the new birth—that is all that matters—as long as a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, then nothing else really matters.’ As if being filled with the Spirit relieves us of having to think or study or be rigorous in thought. Dear congregation, the life of the Apostle Paul destroys that notion. Do you think it was an accident that he was trained under the best teacher in Israel—Gamaliel? Do you think it was a coincidence that he was born a Roman citizen? Do you think that the Greek philosophy he was exposed to was mere circumstance? No God was preparing Him. When God regenerated Paul, He didn’t do away with his education or all his natural gifts. No, the new birth does not nullify secondary causes. It doesn't make us all egalitarian. It doesn’t nullify our education or the natural gifts that we have. No the new birth brings these things under the Lordship of Christ, and they are now used for the spread of His gospel. Because Paul was an expert in the Jewish law, he was able to stand against the Judaizers (cf. Galatians). Because Paul was a Roman citizen, he had free access to the empire, and he could appeal to Caesar, something else no other apostle could do. Because Paul was a man of Greek culture, he became the apostle to the Gentile world. He could “...become all things to all people, [so] that by all means [he] might save some” (1 **Corinthians 9:22**). Do you see, all of this is part of God’s *calling* Paul. “All of this was in God’s mind. He brought it to pass.”²⁴

²⁴ Lloyd-Jones, pg. 53

Paul the divine messenger

Alright then, what did God call Paul to be? **v.1** tells us “Paul, called by the will of God to be an *apostle* of Christ Jesus.” An apostle is a messenger. He is a person who carries a message. The NT uses the word apostle in a general sense and in an exclusive sense. In **general sense**, some of Paul’s co-workers were called *apostles*. Barnabas is called an apostle in **Acts 14:14**. He was one of the messengers of the gospel along with Paul. The LORD Jesus is called “the apostle and high priest of our confession” in **Hebrews 3:1**. He was the ultimate messenger from Heaven—the Divine Son of God. So the Bible uses the word apostle in this general sense first—as a messenger.

But in the **exclusive sense**, the word *apostle* was limited to the 12. It was the special office of Apostle, capital A. Look at **v.1** again, this letter comes from Paul the apostle “...and our brother Sosthenes.” Sosthenes is mentioned here most likely because he was Paul’s scribe. In that sense, Sosthenes was also a messenger of sorts. But, as faithful a brother as Sosthenes was, he was not one of the *Apostles*, which is why Paul *simply* refers to him as a brother.

Defending the office

Now this may sound as if Paul is puffing himself up, as if his ego is getting in the way. But Paul was not flaunting his position. In fact, later in this book he says “I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (**1 Corinthians 15:9**). No Paul identified as an apostle for three main reasons. **First**, because there were false apostles abounding in his days. He spoke in **2 Corinthians 11:13** of men who were “... false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”²⁵ **Secondly**, he established his apostleship because he was being maligned as a false apostle. It was said that since he never accompanied Christ while on earth, since he never heard his teaching, since he was late to the game, that he was an imposter.²⁶ That’s why in Galatians he especially defends his apostleship in

²⁵ also see 2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11 and Revelation 2:2

²⁶ Lloyd-Jones, pg. 37

chapters 1-2. **Thirdly**, Paul establishes his apostleship because he didn't make himself an apostle, God did. v.1 says he was "called by *the will of God* to be an apostle..."

The marks of an apostle²⁷

If you take the NT as a whole, it provides us with several marks of a true apostle. The **first mark** of a true apostle is that he had to see the risen Lord. In Acts 1, when the apostles sought to fill Judas' spot after his betrayal, they said in v.22 "...one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." This is how Paul argues for his apostleship. He says in 1 **Corinthians 9:1** "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"²⁸

The **second mark** of a true apostle is that he had to be called by the Lord Himself. No man could not appoint themselves. Paul was called and chosen as were all the others.²⁹ "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 **Cor. 15:10**).³⁰

The **third mark** of a true apostle is that he had to have signs that accompanied his apostleship. In 2 **Corinthians 12:12**, Paul tells the church "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works."

The **fourth mark** of a true apostle is that he had to be taught by the Lord Himself. In **Galatians 1:11-12** "For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, *but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*" Paul was taught directly from the Lord and not "...by the other apostles, had that been so he would not have been an apostle himself."³¹

²⁷ Much help here from Lloyd-Jones, pg.39, 45

²⁸ also see 1 Corinthians 15:8.

²⁹ see Galatians 1:1

³⁰ This phrase "I am what I am" was specifically tied to him claiming to be an apostle in the previous verse.

³¹ Lloyd-Jones, pg. 45

The **fifth mark** of a true apostle is that he was commissioned to help lay the foundation doctrines for the church for all ages. **Ephesians 2:20** says that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,”³² meaning their teachings, their doctrines or instructions.

No living apostles today

Those are the five marks of a true apostle, and we conclude from these the impossibility that there be living apostles today. How can there be? Who is alive today that is still laying the foundation for the church? “A foundation is something that you lay at the beginning and once only.”³³ Who is alive today that is able to bear personal witness to the resurrection of Christ? Only false religions and cults claim living apostles. The position is unbiblical.

Paul’s words were God’s words

But let me make the argument even stronger. The office of the Apostle was in the absolute unique position of claiming that their doctrine was God’s doctrine. When they spoke, it was God was speaking through them. Do you want proof of this? Turn to **1 Thessalonians 2:13** “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, *the word of God*, which is at work in you believers.” Do you see? Paul asserted his words were God’s own words. Everything that Paul says in Scripture is what God says. Or we could say it this way: any one who opposes Paul’s doctrine or words, opposes God himself. Therefore this is a vital test of a person’s

³² 1 Timothy 2:7 “For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”

³³ Lloyd-Jones, pg. 48. “...in a very interesting way we do know from history that when the early church came to define and to determine the Canon of the New Testament—there were large numbers of Christian writings by then, and the question was what should be put in and what should be left out—we do know that the Holy Spirit led the early church to decide in this way: they said that unless a document purported to be a Gospel or an Epistle and could be traced back to an apostle, either directly or indirectly with apostolic authority, it should not be included. The test of apostolicity was the test that was employed by the early church in the wisdom given to it by the Holy Spirit in determining the New Testament Canon.” *ibid*, pg. 41-42

Christianity: Paul either spoke God's Words or he did not. There is no middle ground. His words carry the authority of God himself or they are crazy delusions that ought to be destroyed.

Objection: "...all religions claim to be speaking for God"

Now someone may object here and say, "But this is what all religions claim. All religions claim that their prophet or leader speaks the words of God." Certainly this is what Islam claims, that the prophet Muhammed speaks for Allah. Certainly this is what Mormonism claims, that their president speaks for their god. So how do we answer? First we should point out that of course all religions claim this. If they didn't claim that their words were from God, it wouldn't be much a religion. They *necessarily* have to make this claim. So the real question is simply this: how do we know that these words, Paul's words are really Divine? I have three answers.

First, God has revealed Himself in two books: the book of nature and the book of Scripture. The book of nature include everything in the universe—visible and invisible. *Nature speaks.* **Psalm 19:1-2** "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above *proclaims* his handiwork. Day to day *pours out speech*, and night to night *reveals knowledge.*" *Nature teaches.* Paul appeals to it in **1 Corinthians 11:14** "Does not nature itself teach you..."³⁴ The book of nature and the book of Scripture are God's two books. And these two books must agree. No other religion can get their book to agree with the book of nature. Case in point is Islam. In the Middle Ages, a crisis came to the fore. A synthesis could not be achieved between Aristotelian philosophy and Muslim theology so they produced a concept called the "double-truth theory." R.C. Sproul explains

The double-truth theory argued that what was true in religion could be false in science, and what was true in science could at the same time be false in

³⁴ What does the book of nature teach us? What does a dog wagging it's tail teach us? That God is happy. What does the cracking of thunder teach us? That God is powerful. What do mathematics teach us? That God is logical.

religion. To translate that into contemporary categories...one could believe that the universe came into being through the purposive act of a divine Creator while at the same time believing that the universe emerged gratuitously as a cosmic accident... [This violates the LNC]³⁵ Nevertheless, the double-truth theory would say that truth is contradictory, and one could hold these contradictory ideas at the same time.”³⁶

The Bible never calls us to contradict the book of nature. Rather it calls us to study the book of nature and delight in it. **Psalm 111:2** “Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.” So that’s my first answer to how do we know that the Bible and specifically Paul’s words are from God—because they perfectly harmonize with the book of nature.

My **second answer** comes from the Larger Catechism Q.4. How does it appear that the Scriptures are the Word of God? A. The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God; by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation...” In other words, the evidence that Scripture or Paul’s words are from God Himself are seen by simply examining the words. Just as the officers said of Jesus in **John 7:46** “No one ever spoke like this man!” so we can say of the whole Bible—no other book speaks like this book. Do you want to know if it is divine? ‘Tolle, lege’ Pick up and read!

My **third answer** comes from the end of that same catechism question. It concludes by saying “...but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very Word of God.” Only through the Holy Spirit can we be fully persuaded that this is the Word of God. Now what does that sound like? It kind of sounds like Mormonism’s claim that they know the book of Mormon is true because of

³⁵ My words

³⁶ Source: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/all-truth-gods-truth-sproul/> Accessed June 13, 2020

the “burning in the bosom” that they receive. Are we saying the same thing? Not at all. Here’s the difference: the spirit that is causing their bosom to burn³⁷ is convincing them to believe things that contradict the book of nature.³⁸ Like Islam, they have to hold to a double-truth theory. Plain logic contradicts Mormon doctrine on multiple points, not the least of which is their belief in polytheism. Yes we affirm that the Holy Spirit alone can cause someone to believe the Scripture, but the Holy Spirit never convinces us to believe something that is not true, or contradictory, because the Spirit of God is the author of both books: the book of nature and the book of Scripture.

The practical consequences

So then what are the practical consequences of Paul being an apostle—a divine messenger sent from God to speak the words of God to us. **First**, if we dismiss Paul as just a man, we are dismissing God himself. When Paul speaks in this book, it is the same as God Himself speaking.³⁹ Paul is not representing himself, he is representing the all-knowing, eternal, infinite Triune God of the universe.

Secondly, what other words on planet earth besides what you find here in this book can you say are from God? Don’t you see? Knowing that Paul is a divine messenger relieves you of a thousand burdens beloved. You can know that when you pick up these words, you are hearing from God. So many words out there today are making troubling claims—political claims, racial claims, but

³⁷ And I do believe they experience a spirit—2 Corinthians 11:14-15 “And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.” 1 John 4:1-2 “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”

³⁸ Furthermore in the case of both Islam and Mormonism, both deny that Jesus is the Son of God and God Himself.

³⁹ This also makes plain the heresy of the so-called “Red Letter Christian” movement.

you can take all those words and test them against the apostolic word to see if they are true.⁴⁰

Thirdly, this has immediate ramifications for the preached word. If a preacher is faithfully proclaiming Paul's Words—who is an apostle of Christ Jesus—then that preacher *just is* proclaiming God's words. This is why the 2nd Helvetic Confession says that “the preaching of the word of God is the word of God.”⁴¹ This doesn't mean the preacher's words are inerrant or inspired or that they should be added to the Bible.⁴² It means that when you hear the Word preached, you are not simply confronted with explanation and application. You are confronted with Christ Himself, the living Word.⁴³ This should change the way we listen to sermons. Beloved God is speaking through this event. This should change the way we talk to others about sermons. We should be able to ask others with all earnestness “What did you hear from God today?” Paul was unashamed to make this claim about his preaching. He said in **2 Corinthians 4:5** “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.” Beloved is that how you handle this word? As God's own word? Is it to you as Martin Luther said “a gate to Heaven?” That's our **second point**. Paul did not speak his own words, but he spoke and still speaks today, the very words of God.

⁴⁰ The philosophy of postmodernity has said “there is no ultimate authority, everyone decides what is their truth.” That has failed. We are entering into a new philosophical chapter in America: collectivism/socialism which says “the state is the authority.” History has already shown the utter failure of statism.

⁴¹ Source: <https://www.ccel.org/creeds/helvetic.htm> Accessed June 13, 2020

⁴² “Preaching is a *mode* of the Word of God. It is distinct from Scripture and Christ but inextricably linked to it...as Christ is proclaimed Scripturally – it is itself the Word of God. *Not* a competing revelation to the Bible *but* rather a ‘Word from Word.’ The humanity of the preacher is not a barrier to divine revelation but instead is the very worldiness in which the Word must meet us.” Source: <http://christthetruth.wordpress.com/2008/02/06/preaching-of-the-word-of-god-is-the-word-of-god/>

⁴³ *ibid*

III. Paul: the Devoted Missionary

Apostle to the Gentiles

The word apostle from **v.1** includes the idea of being sent forth. An apostle is one who is set forth. In other words the apostles were missionaries. Paul specifically was an apostle—a missionary—to the Gentiles. **Acts 9:15** "... the Lord said...he is a chosen instrument of mine *to carry my name* before the Gentiles..."⁴⁴ Dear congregation, that means that Paul was sent for you—you are Gentile—you are non-Jewish. Jesus Christ sent Paul to *carry His name* to you.

Paul's affection

But the thing that surprised me most in my study this week is *how* Paul carried Christ's name. It's clear that he does this in words, we've seen that. Has he done it any other way? In other words, we are asking: *how* has the Apostle Paul made Jesus Christ more clear to us? Through his affections. Calvin links Paul's authority and affection together. Paul's *authority* as an apostle secures his right to speak on God's behalf. Paul's *affection* testifies that he genuinely longs for our salvation. Calvin says "We believe much more readily the man whom we look upon as regarding us with affection, [who] faithfully endeavors to promote our [well-being]."⁴⁵ As we look at the exploits of the Apostle Paul, who can argue that anyone, except Christ, was more devoted to the souls of men and women?

Paul: a lively image of Christ

He says in **2 Corinthians 11:24-27** "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;

⁴⁴ "Christ called men to Himself out of the world in order to send them forth into the world." Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. 2

⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 47

on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” Why did Paul endure such things? For money? No one would endure such things for money.⁴⁶ All he had to do was stop preaching Christ, and the pain would have evaporated. Why didn’t he? Because he loved your souls dear congregation. Just like Christ. As an apostle of Christ, he represented Christ, modeled Christ. He shows us who Christ is not only by his authority but by his affections. Paul shows us Christ by the kind of person that he was. *He was a living image of Christ.*⁴⁷

Or consider another unbelievable picture of *Christ-through-Paul*. **Romans 9:1-3** “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” Though impossible, Paul because of the intensity of his love for his fellow Jews, could contemplate being damned for their salvation.⁴⁸ What an image of Christ! Jesus was damned for you beloved. That’s what happened on the cross. He was cut off, accursed, condemned for us. **Galatians 3:13** “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”

Or consider another image of Christ in Paul. **2 Corinthians 12:14-15** “Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.” Do you see beloved? God made Paul an apostle so that

⁴⁶ “Love makes labor light. Men will do voluntarily that which they would never undertake for pay, and they will keep up freely under an amount of pressure which would crush the hireling.” Charles Spurgeon, *Flowers from a Puritan’s Garden: Illustrations and Meditations*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), pg. 295

⁴⁷ He said in 1 Corinthians 11:1 “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

⁴⁸ Reformation Heritage Study Bible online

you can see Christ better. Paul made have spent himself for our souls, but Christ poured out his soul to death for you and me. Isaiah 53:12 "...because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

Paul is honest and hopeful

Dear congregation, consider these things as we close this morning. Paul was a man who spoke for God. These words are the greatest gift any *mere* man could ever give you. Paul is honest with you. "And like his Master, he loves [you]. though he has never seen [you], he has diagnosed [your] hopeless, sinful condition before God. He has looked [you] in the eye and told [you] the truth. There is no hope in [yourself]."⁴⁹

But then he points you to hope *incarnate*: the Lord Jesus Christ "who gave himself for our sins, to deliver us from the present evil age."⁵⁰ Look for Christ-in-Paul as we go through this book. God has given us Paul as a gift so that we can know His Son more intimately.⁵¹

He who deserves no pity

If you are here this morning and you haven't yet received Christ as your only hope in life and death, consider these words by the 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon:

"A man who dies of starvation with bread before him, and perishes with disease when the remedy is at hand, deserves no pity; and he who sinks down to hell beneath the burden of his sins because he will not pray, 'God be merciful to me a sinner', deserves all that damnation means. Pardon, life,

⁴⁹ John Piper, *Why I Love the Apostle Paul: 30 Reasons*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2019), pg. 192

⁵⁰ Galatians 1:4

⁵¹ God made Paul an apostle in order to turn you from darkness to light (Acts 26:16-18). God made Paul an apostle in order to build you up (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10).

salvation, heaven, are all to be had for the asking; and if he that sketch not receiveth not, who shall blame...God?⁵²

Paul—the man who spoke for God—pleads with you this morning: “...we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (**2 Corinthians 5:20**).

⁵² Spurgeon, pg. 299