

GALATIANS 1:8-14 COMMENTARY SAMPLE – Baker Exegetical Commentary (BECNT)

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DAY 1

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should [†] proclaim to you a gospel [‡] other than the one that we proclaimed, let that person fall under God’s curse! ⁹ As I said before, so now I say again: if anyone should proclaim to you a gospel other than the one you received, let that person fall under God’s curse.

¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade human beings or God? Or am I trying to please human beings? If I were yet trying to please human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ. ¹¹ [†] Now [‡] I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that I preach is not a human gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from a human being, [†] neither [‡] was I taught it. Rather, it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: that I intensely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it, ¹⁴ and that I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of those my own age among my people, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

1:8 The mention of the agitators in verse 7 leads Paul to turn away from direct address to the Galatians in order to pronounce judgment on people like those agitators who pervert the gospel. Of course, Paul still has the Galatians very much in mind: his purpose is to awaken them to the seriousness of the situation. What the agitators are teaching is not an interesting and inconsequential option to, or addition to, Paul’s gospel: they are teaching something that will, literally, lead themselves to hell (and by implication, perhaps, the Galatians also if they embrace this teaching). This is the significance of the language that, in a rhetorically emphatic position, concludes both verse 8 and 9: ἀνάθεμα ἔστω (*anathema estō*, let that person be anathema).

The Greek word ἀνάθεμα has come over into English in transliterated form, where it means much what the Greek original means: to be under a curse. The Greek word, in turn, reflects the Hebrew **הֵרֵם** (*hērem*), “something dedicated,” often “dedicated to destruction” (e.g., Num. 21:3; Deut. 7:26; Josh. 6:17; 7:12; Zech. 14:11). (All the NT occurrences have this sense: Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22; Acts 23:14 in a different sense [“We have bound ourselves to suffer a curse if ...,” AT; cf. BDAG 63]). More than removal from the community (e.g., excommunication) is meant (contra, e.g., Betz 1979: 54); what is involved is nothing less than suffering the judicial wrath of God (e.g., Lightfoot 1881: 78; R. Longenecker 1990: 17).

The wrath of God, says Paul, will fall on anyone who preaches a gospel different from the gospel that the Galatians have first heard: whether that “other gospel” be proclaimed by Paul or by “an angel from heaven.” Paul may use the first-person plural (εὐηγγελισάμεθα, *euēngelisametha*, we proclaimed good news) because he includes with him “the brothers and sisters” who accompanied Paul (v. 2) and/or missionaries such as Barnabas, who was with Paul when he first preached in Galatia (cf. Lightfoot 1881: 77; Dunn 1993a: 44). But it might be better to take the plural as “editorial,” the plural being a stylistic device that refers to Paul exclusively (Wallace 1996: 396; Martyn 1997: 113).

More significant, and more difficult to understand, is why Paul refers to an “angel from heaven” here. Some surmise that the false teachers themselves may have been appealing to angelic messages to bolster their message (Martyn 1997: 113). Others note the importance of angelic messengers in Jewish apocalyptic (Betz 1979: 53). And since angelic messengers were sometimes associated with the giving of the law (a point made explicitly in Gal. 3:19), Paul might have in view specifically the angelic mediation of the law (Dunn 1990: 45). However, we have no evidence elsewhere that the false teachers were appealing to angelic revelation; and it seems to be a stretch to read angelic involvement with the law specifically into this allusion. It is better, then, simply to view the reference as hyperbolic (Bligh 1969: 88–89; Hays 2000: 206). Whether it be he himself or the most

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AT author’s translation

BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

significant and spectacular messenger he could name that preaches a false gospel—they will suffer God’s curse for their error.

The verb εὐαγγελίζεται (euangelizētai) is a “general precept with gnomic implications” (Wallace 1996: 525): whenever a gospel contrary to Paul’s is proclaimed, or whoever proclaims it, God’s curse will fall. Indeed, it is possible that Paul means to say, more specifically, that the gospel that brings God’s curse is one that goes “beyond” the gospel that Paul has preached. This is a possible meaning for the preposition that Paul uses here (παρά, *para*) and could make sense in the situation, since the agitators are apparently claiming to “add” to the gospel that Paul has proclaimed (Lightfoot 1881: 77; Porter 1992: 167). But the strength of the language in these verses makes it more likely that Paul is anathematizing any gospel that stands in “contrast to” or “against” his gospel (another meaning for παρά; for this interpretation, see BDF §236.3; Moule 1959: 51; Burton 1921: 17–18; Schütz 2007: 121; it is reflected in all the major English versions).⁴

DAY 2

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should Γ proclaim to you a gospel Υ other than the one that we proclaimed, let that person fall under God’s curse! ⁹ **As I said before, so now I say again: if anyone should proclaim to you a gospel other than the one you received, let that person fall under God’s curse.**

¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade human beings or God? Or am I trying to please human beings? If I were yet trying to please human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ. ¹¹ Γ Now Υ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that I preach is not a human gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from a human being, Γ neither Υ was I taught it. Rather, it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: that I intensely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it, ¹⁴ and that I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of those my own age among my people, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

1:9 Paul repeats his “anathema,” perhaps to make clear that what he says in verse 8 is not a momentary, irrational outburst but a carefully considered warning that needs to be taken with the greatest seriousness. Indeed, Paul claims that the Galatians have heard this warning before: ὡς προειρήκαμεν καὶ ἄρτι πάλιν λέγω (*hōs proeirēkamen kai arti palin legō*, as we said before and now again I say). Two matters, somewhat related, call for comment in this clause. First is the shift in verb number. As in the case of the verb εὐηγγελισάμεθα in verse 8, προειρήκαμεν may be a “true” plural, referring to Paul and others who preached the gospel in Galatia. In this case—to turn to the second issue—Paul would be comparing the warnings he and his missionary cohorts issued when they were in Galatia with his own present renewal of this same warning: “now I say again” (e.g., Lightfoot 1881: 78). However, as we argued in verse 8, the first-person plural form is better taken as “editorial,” referring to Paul alone (note the similarly abrupt shift in person in 2 Cor. 10:2–3; 11:21; see e.g., Martyn 1997: 114). Paul may change the person of the verb to lend emphasis to his renewal of the “anathema” (see Gal. 5:2).

We are still left with the question whether Paul in the first case is referring to an earlier visit or to an earlier section of the letter. Paul can certainly use language broadly similar to what he uses here in the latter sense (e.g., 2 Cor. 7:3; and for this view, see, e.g., Bruce 1982b: 84; Bachmann 2003: 112–15), but the temporal focus here is stronger than in those cases—ἄρτι πάλιν (*arti palin*, now again)—and this makes it likely that he is repeating a warning given when he was ministering with the Galatians (R. Longenecker 1990: 17).⁵

Three other differences between the anathema in verse 8 and this one in verse 9 are also noteworthy. First, in place of “we” or “an angel from heaven,” Paul names as the proclaimer of the false gospel “someone” (τις,

BDF *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass and A. Debrunner, translated and revised by R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)

⁴ Of Paul’s twelve uses of παρά with the accusative (outside Galatians), five have the sense “against,” “contrary to” (Rom. 1:25, 26; 4:18; 11:24; 16:17), while three mean “beyond” (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 3:11; 2 Cor. 8:3); four have other meanings or are hard to classify (Rom. 14:5; 1 Cor. 12:15, 16; 2 Cor. 11:24).

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⁵ Silva (2003: 26) argues that this interpretation favors a date for the letter following the Apostolic Council of Acts 15 because only after the Council would the need for such a warning have arisen. But this is not clear. Paul refers quite broadly here to any “gospel” that contradicts his, not to the specific false teaching that has arisen in Galatia. And it is not at all unlikely that Paul would have routinely warned his new converts about the dangers of “false gospels” in the extraordinarily diverse cultures in the first-century eastern Mediterranean.

tis). This is a thinly disguised way of referring to the agitators (v. 7; cf. 5:7). The singular form does not mean that Paul has a particular false teacher in mind; it is a rhetorical device intended to force the Galatians to make the identification: if it should be that “someone” is preaching a gospel contrary to ours (as for instance, these agitators). A second shift is from the so-called third-class conditional form—*ἐάν* (*ean*, if) with the subjunctive—to the “first class” (*εἰ* [*ei*, if] with indicative). It is now generally recognized that the difference between these two forms is not between a “hypothetical” situation and a “real” one. In fact, differences between these two forms of sentence are often very difficult to discern. Nevertheless, it is probably the case that the second type invites the reader or hearer to envisage the reality of the situation a bit more clearly. Silva (2003: 24) helpfully illustrates with two English examples: “If John comes, we’ll go to the park” versus “If John is here, let us go to the park.”⁶ In our context, then, the difference might be between a general warning (v. 8) and a specific one (v. 9).

The third difference between verse 8 and verse 9 is the addition of the “receptive” side of gospel preaching. In contrast to verse 8, where the point is absent, Paul identifies the “true” gospel as the one that the Galatians have “received” (*παρελάβετε*, *parelabete*, you received). Paul uses this same language in verse 12, where he denies that he “received” the gospel from any human being; and the same verb occurs in the famous passage in 1 Cor. 15:1–6 about the transmission of the Christian message. What is interesting in this case is the way that Paul here begins appealing to the Galatians’ own experience (thereby anticipating the longer and clearer 3:1–5). Implicitly, Paul is suggesting that the Galatians have had a true experience with God’s grace (v. 6) and thus should evaluate any “new” revelation in the light of that experience. There is one gospel, revealed in Christ, to be “received” by those who hear it (Schütz 2007: 123).

DAY 3

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1:10 This verse is difficult: its interpretation and thus its contribution to Paul’s argument at this point in the letter are both very unclear. The Greek text and most English translations (e.g., NRSV, ESV, NLT, NIV) reveal the uncertainty about sequence by putting the verse in its own paragraph. The NA²⁸ text formats the paragraph in such a way that it goes more with what follows than with what precedes it (and see also, e.g., Mussner 1988: 62; Vouga 1998: 25). But the UBS⁴ text, as well as most of the English translations, aligns the verse with what precedes. This is probably the right decision (see also, e.g., Burton 1921: 33). Of course, the verse could be

⁶ See also the discussion of conditional sentences in Wallace 1996: 679–712 (he labels the first-class condition “assumption of truth for the sake of argument” versus the third-class condition “uncertain of fulfillment, but still likely”); Porter 1992: 254–67 (first-class condition, “an assertion for the sake of argument”; third-class condition, in distinction from the first class, “more tentative and simply projects some action or event for hypothetical consideration”).

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NRSV New Revised Standard Version

ESV English Standard Version

NLT New Living Translation

NIV New International Version

NA *Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012)

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UBS *The Greek New Testament*, edited by B. Aland et al., 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993)

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transitional, creating a bridge from the rebuke of 1:6–9 to Paul’s defense of the gospel he preaches (1:11–2:21; e.g., Martyn 1997: 136–37; B. Dodd 1996: 92–94). But γνωρίζω ... ὑμῖν (*gnōrizō ... hymin*, “I want you to know,” 1:11) probably marks the introduction of a new phase of the argument. Moreover, since verse 11 picks up the focus on the gospel and its proclamation from verse 9, it is likely that verse 10 is something of a parenthesis and thus to be taken with what has come before it. We cannot explain the precise way in which this verse functions in its context until we better understand its meaning.

The initial question is puzzling: ἀνθρώπους πείθω ἢ τὸν θεόν; (*anthrōpous peithō ē ton theon?* Am I trying to persuade people or God?). (Context makes clear that the present tense πείθω is conative [i.e., an action attempted but not accomplished], as most of the modern English translations recognize.) This question can mean two very different things, depending on the force that we give to the particle ἢ: (1) “Am I trying to persuade *either* people or God?” (2) “Who am I trying to persuade: people or God?” (cf. NLT: “I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God”). In the first case, Paul expects a negative answer to his question; it is tantamount to his claiming that he is not trying to “persuade” people *or* God.⁷ In the second case, the answer could be “people,” in the sense that Paul’s gospel proclamation is, indeed, designed to “persuade” people about the truth of the gospel (Bruce 1982b: 84–85, who notes 2 Cor. 5:11: ἀνθρώπους πείθομεν, *anthrōpous peithomen*, we persuade people [AT]). But it is likely that the second question in the verse, “Am I seeking to please people?” is parallel to the first question. Moreover, a contrast between humans and God with respect to the gospel is important in the context (see vv. 11–12). If this is so, then Paul would be viewing both “seeking to persuade people” and “pleasing people” negatively; and the answer to his first question would have to be “God.”

The problem with both views is obvious: what would it mean to “persuade God”? (The unusual nature of this language is revealed in the fact that nowhere else in the LXX or the NT does πείθω in the active voice take “God” as an object.) If Paul is denying any intent to “persuade God,” then it can be presumed that this is just what his opponents were criticizing him for doing. In this case, it is possible that πείθω implies a Greco-Roman tradition whereby untrustworthy soothsayers would try to “persuade the gods” (Betz 1979: 54–55; Lüdemann 1984: 51–52). But this accusation does not seem to make much sense in the Galatian situation. Probably, then, “persuade God” is Paul’s own way of saying in other words what he says in the second part of the verse and elsewhere in his letters: in his ministry, he seeks not to curry favor with people but to find approval from God himself (see esp. 1 Thess. 2:4–6; and see, for this view, Lightfoot 1881: 79; and esp. Martyn 1997: 138–40).

The heart of Paul’s concern, as the rest of the verse makes clear, is to deny accusations that he is seeking to “please people.”⁸ He makes this point with a second rhetorical question—ἢ ζητῶ ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκειν; (*ē zētō anthrōpois areскеin?* or am I seeking to please people?)—and with a conditional contrary-to-fact sentence: εἰ ἔτι ἀνθρώποις ἤρεσκον, Χριστοῦ δοῦλος οὐκ ἂν ἦμην (*ei eti anthrōpois ēreskon, Christou doulos ouk an ēmēn*, if I were yet trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ). (The imperfect ἤρεσκον, like πείθω earlier, is conative.) Rhetorically, this type of conditional sentence denies the premise by showing the untenable conclusion that would follow if it were true (if A, then B; not B, therefore not A). Paul clearly believes himself to be a “slave of Christ,” language that both connotes (personally) his total dependence upon and dedication to the Lord Jesus (see esp. Harris 1999) as well as his “official” status (Moses [e.g., 2 Kings 18:12; 21:8] and esp. often David [e.g., 2 Kings 19:34; 20:6] are called “slaves” of God in the OT).

Since Paul’s total focus is on pleasing his new master, it is clearly the case that he no longer is seeking to please people. The “no longer” represents the clear temporal focus that Paul introduces into his discussion of “pleasing people”: ἄρτι at the beginning of the verse and ἔτι here in this last sentence. Lightfoot (1881: 79) thinks that these words imply no clear comparison with an earlier time (“at this late date”). But this is not the most natural reading of these words. More important, perhaps, is the parallel language in 5:11: “Brothers and

NLT New Living Translation

⁷ To be sure, Witherington (1998: 85) thinks that the answer is “yes” to both: Paul seeks to persuade people about the truth of his gospel and to “persuade God,” in the sense of exhorting him to carry out his curse (see also Sandnes 1991: 54–55). However, as Silva (2003: 28) points out, there is no reason to think that God has to be “persuaded” to inflict his curse.

AT author’s translation

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

⁸ B. Dodd (1996: 96–110; 1999: 143–55) argues that this “people-pleasing” motif has an implicit paradigmatic function: Paul is setting forth his own attitude as one for the Galatians to imitate. We will say more about this way of reading Gal. 1–2 below; but here we might just say that, if this note is present, it does not remove the rather clear apologetic focus on the larger passage.

Moses *On the Life of Moses*

sisters, if I am still [ἔτι] preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?” Together these texts (and there are many other parallels in the respective contexts) suggest that Paul was being accused of continuing to do what he admits he used to do, or what he was accused of doing: proclaim the importance of circumcision and “please people.” The reference in both cases could be to his pre-Christian insistence on circumcision and the law. He would not then, of course, have admitted that he was seeking to “please people.” But in light of his conversion, he now can characterize his Jewish ministry in just these terms (see, e.g., Fung 1988: 50).⁹

But a better option is to think that Paul is alluding to his earlier preaching in Galatia—or more accurately, to how his opponents were portraying that preaching. According to them, Paul was a hypocrite: circumcising people when it suited him (5:11 may refer to incidents such as Paul’s circumcision of Timothy [Acts 16:1–3]) while not insisting on circumcision on other occasions. Paul’s opponents insist that such behavior reveals his desire to curry favor with people (Dunn 1990: 48). It is this (false) interpretation of Paul’s motives that he denies here.

And this brings us back—finally!—to the question of the verse’s function in the argument of Gal. 1. We have already suggested that the verse is something of a parenthesis; and it is best to see the γάρ (*gar*), as often in the NT, depending on an assumed line of thought. Paul’s strong language about the “anathema” reminds him, somewhat ironically, of accusations to the effect that he seeks to “please people” in his preaching. In pronouncing damnation on false teachers, Paul implies, he can certainly not be accused of currying favor with people.

DAY 4

A. How Paul Received and Defended the Gospel: Paul and the “Pillars” (1:11–2:14)

Paul’s argument in this section falls into two basic parts: a thesis statement in 1:11–12; elaboration and justification for that statement in 1:13–2:14. The second section divides further into four units. Paul structures a narrative of his conversion and ministry by reference to his relationship to Jerusalem and the apostles resident there—those he calls the “pillars” (2:9). In 1:13–17 he highlights God’s initiative in turning him from persecutor of the church to evangelist of the Gentiles, laying particular stress on the fact that he did not, immediately after his conversion, “go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me” (v. 17a). Next 1:18–24 describes his subsequent ministry, but with a focus again on his contacts with Jerusalem: “Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem ...” (v. 18); “I was unknown personally to the churches in Judea” (v. 22). The “apostolic conference” in 2:1–10 is introduced with a formula similar to the one in 1:18: “Then, after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem.” In the subsequent narrative of the conference (vv. 2–10), however, the focus turns from the negative—“I did not have much contact with the Jerusalem apostles”—to the positive—“the Jerusalem apostles agreed with me about the nature of the gospel” (Silva 2001: 99–100). Paul’s description of the “Incident at Antioch” (2:11–14) departs from the explicitly chronological narrative of 1:18–2:10 and abandons the Jerusalem focus. But the general theme of Paul’s relationship with the “pillars” continues, and the Antioch incident thus becomes an add-on to the narrative. We may then paraphrase Paul’s argument in this section as follows:

- I. Thesis: The gospel I preach (1) is not a human gospel but (2) came through a revelation of Jesus Christ (1:11–12)
- II. Elaboration and proof (1:13–2:14)
 - A. To begin with the second, positive point of my thesis (1:12b): the unexpected and dramatic turnaround in my life took place solely by God’s gracious initiative in revealing his Son to me (1:13–16a). And now turning to my first and negative point (1:11–12a), I did not rush to consult with the apostles in Jerusalem about the gospel I received by revelation (1:13–17).¹

⁹ Another option is to think that Paul refers back to his earlier preaching in Galatia (as interpreted by the false teachers): I am no longer doing what I have been accused of doing, that is, watering down the gospel by ignoring the need for circumcision and other difficult covenant requirements (Dunn 1990: 48).

¹ As we explain more fully below, the relationship between 1:11–12 and 1:13–17 is chiasmic. Indeed, Jeremias (1958: 152–53) thinks that the rest of the letter builds chiasmically on 1:11–12; thus 1:13–2:21 elaborates “not from a human being” in 1:12a; then 3:1–6:10 builds on “not in human terms” in 1:11 (see also BDF §477.1; Mussner 1988: 77). But this scheme is unlikely (R. Longenecker 1990: 21).

- B. I did go to Jerusalem after three years, but it was only to get to know Peter and not to receive instruction in the gospel. I had so little contact with Jerusalem that I was personally unknown to most of the Christians in the area (1:18–24).
- C. I was in Jerusalem again for a conference with the apostles; but far from their teaching me the gospel, they agreed with me about the basic elements of the gospel (2:1–10).
- D. True, as you may have heard, at Antioch Peter took a different view of the matter, but I did not concede his point; instead I opposed him to his face (2:11–14).

Paul's overall purpose in 1:13–2:14 is to assure the Galatians that they have indeed "received" (see 1:9) the true gospel. "Gospel" language is, of course, central in the rebuke passage of verses 6–9; but it is also central in verses 11–12, which set forth the thesis that Paul argues in 1:13–2:14, and it crops up repeatedly in the subsequent argument (1:16, 23; 2:2, 5, 7, 14). "The truth of the gospel" (2:5, 14) is Paul's focus in this section. But the Galatians received this gospel from Paul; and so, to have confidence in the gospel, they must also have confidence in the messenger who proclaimed that gospel to them. The truth of the gospel and Paul's credentials as an authoritative messenger of that gospel are therefore woven together in this part of the letter. But three aspects of Paul's narrative are notable: its focus on Jerusalem, its focus on contact with the Jerusalem apostles, and (in 1:16b–24) its negative character ("a negative travelogue" [Martyn 1997: 178]):

"I did not consult with flesh and blood" (1:16b)

"I did not go up to Jerusalem" (1:17)

"After three years I went up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, ... but I stayed there only fifteen days, and I did not see any other apostle except James" (1:18–19a)

"I was unknown to the churches in Judea" (1:22)

"After fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem" (2:1)

"the [pillars]" (2:2); "those who seemed to be something" (2:6); "Peter" (2:7, 8); "James and Cephas and John, those esteemed to be pillars" (2:9)

"I opposed Cephas to his face" (2:11)

The usual explanation for these emphases has been that Paul is in defensive mode, countering the agitators' claims about him. Judging from Paul's response, it appears that the agitators have been asserting that Paul is under the authority of the Jerusalem apostles and that therefore they, the (self-claimed) representatives of those apostles, should be listened to rather than Paul. As Dunn (1993a: 72) puts it, the distinctive character of this argument makes sense only if "what was at issue in the controversy was the independence of Paul's apostleship and gospel."

This traditional understanding of the opening part of the letter body has been challenged by scholars who argue that it does not integrate the section sufficiently with the overall argument of the letter (see esp. Lyons 1985: 123–76; Gaventa 1986: 311–19; Garlington 2003: 47; Cummins 2001: 98–101, 114–37; Verseput 1993; Matera 1992: 53–55; Vouga 1998: 29–30). They claim that Paul's purpose here is not negative, to defend himself against false accusations, but positive, either to highlight the divine origin of the gospel or to present himself as a model for the Galatians to imitate. Of course, the former point is clear in the text whether Paul asserts it for apologetic reasons or not. In this text the latter view has less explicitly to commend it, but Paul does make clear elsewhere in the letter that he presents himself as a paradigm for the Galatians: "Become like me, for I became like you" (4:12). In effect, then, Paul would be saying in 1:13–2:14: "Become like me, in my renunciation of my Judaism in response to the grace of God in revealing his Son to me."

Those who argue for this view have a point: it makes good sense to think that Paul has one eye on the Galatians as he talks about his own dramatic conversion. But the distinctive features of the passage that we have listed above simply are not adequately explained by this "paradigmatic" interpretation of the passage (Dunn 2010: 29–34). Nor does a simple positive assertion of the gospel's power and divine origin suffice to explain these features. Paul's main purpose is to establish his independent authority as an apostle, in response to the

false claims of the agitators, so that the gospel he has preached to the Galatians might retain its truth and authority (see, e.g., Tolmie 2005: 32–47; Silva 2003: 38–39; Sandnes 1991:49–51; Eckert 1971: 163–228).

1. Thesis: Paul’s Gospel Came through a Revelation of Jesus Christ (1:11–12)

In verses 11–12, Paul combines and elaborates two important claims that he has made in verses 1–10: (1) that his apostleship, and thus his authority, is not of “human origin” but came “through Jesus Christ” (v. 1); and (2) that “the gospel of Christ” the Galatians have received should not be exchanged for any other “gospel,” no matter what the claims about its origin might be (vv. 6–9).

Exegesis and Exposition

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should Γ proclaim to you a gospel Υ other than the one that we proclaimed, let that person fall under God’s curse! ⁹ As I said before, so now I say again: if anyone should proclaim to you a gospel other than the one you received, let that person fall under God’s curse.

¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade human beings or God? Or am I trying to please human beings? If I were yet trying to please human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ. ¹¹ Γ **Now Υ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that I preach is not a human gospel.** ¹² For I did not receive it from a human being, Γ neither Υ was I taught it. Rather, it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: that I intensely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it, ¹⁴ and that I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of those my own age among my people, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

1:11 Paul connects this next stage of his argument to the preceding context with a $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ (*gar*, now; see the additional note on the textual issue). This conjunction, of course, often introduces a reason for, or explanation of, what has come before (hence the common English rendering “for”; and cf. here RSV, NRSV, ESV, NASB). If $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ has this sense here, the connection is probably with an implication of what Paul has said in 1:8: “if we ... should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you”—(implying that) we did preach the true gospel to you—*for* let me now explain how I received that gospel. However, $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ often loses its causal/explanatory sense, functioning as “a narrative marker to express continuation or connection” (BDAG 189.2). It is best rendered in English as “now” (NAB, NET, NJB) or not translated at all (NIV, NLT, CEB). The “disclosure formula” $\gamma\nu\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega \dots \upsilon\mu\acute{\iota}\nu$ (*gnōrizō hymin*, I want you to know) is used by Paul elsewhere to call attention to what he is about to say (1 Cor. 12:3; 15:1; 2 Cor. 8:1; see esp. Runge 2010: 111). Paul’s address of the Galatians as “brothers and sisters” (*ἀδελφοί, adelphoi*; see the note in the commentary on 1:2) signals a change in tone from the rather harsh warning of verses 6–9. “The gospel that I preach” (*τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθέν ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ, to euangelion to euangelisthen hyp’ emou*, lit., the gospel that is preached by me) brings us back to the language of verses 6–9, after the parenthetical verse 10.¹ Defining the gospel in terms of the one that Paul preaches is not intended to suggest that he preaches a “private” gospel, distinct from other forms of the gospel—for this would make nonsense of verses 6–9. Paul puts it this way because he was the one who first

Γ Textual variants in the Greek text

Υ Textual variants in the Greek text

Γ Textual variants in the Greek text

Υ Textual variants in the Greek text

Γ Textual variants in the Greek text

Υ Textual variants in the Greek text

RSV Revised Standard Version

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

ESV English Standard Version

NASB New American Standard Bible

BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

NAB New American Bible

NET New English Translation

NJB New Jerusalem Bible

NIV New International Version

NLT New Living Translation

CEB Common English Bible

lit. literally

¹ It is an all-too-common kind of overinterpretation of the aorist to think that the form *εὐαγγελισθέν* (an aorist passive participle) refers to Paul’s initial preaching in Galatia (Burton 1921: 37; Fung 1988: 54). The participle probably refers simply to Paul’s previous preaching in general (Dunn 1993a: 52).

evangelized the Galatians, but also because he is highlighting the distinctive focus in his proclamation of the gospel: its law-free application to Gentiles (Bruce 1982b: 88).

This gospel, Paul claims, is not *κατὰ ἄνθρωπον* (*kata anthrōpon*, according to a human being). Interpreting this phrase to mean “not of human origin” (NIV, NRSV, NET, NAB) probably reads too much of verse 12 into this phrase. Paul uses the phrase five other times, and in each case it means a general sense of “human,” with the emphasis ranging from a relatively neutral idea (Rom. 3:5; 1 Cor. 9:8; 15:32; Gal. 3:15) to a distinctly negative one (1 Cor. 3:3). Thus Paul is simply denying here that his gospel is a “human” gospel: “it was no human message” (NJB; see, e.g., H. Meyer 1873: 32).

DAY 5

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¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade human beings or God? Or am I trying to please human beings? If I were yet trying to please human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ. ¹¹ Γ Now Υ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that I preach is not a human gospel. ¹² **For I did not receive it from a human being, Γ neither Υ was I taught it. Rather, it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.** ¹³ For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: that I intensely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it, ¹⁴ and that I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of those my own age among my people, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

1:12 Verse 12 explains the last part of verse 11: my gospel is not a human gospel because I did not receive it from a human being but through a revelation of Jesus Christ. The *γάρ* (*gar*) in this case, therefore, has its usual causal force. Paul makes his negative point with two correlated clauses: οὐδε ... ἐγὼ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου παρέλαβεν αὐτό (*oude ... egō para anthrōpou parelaben auto*, I did not receive it from a human being) and οὔτε εἰδάχθην (*oute edidachthēn*, neither was I taught it).² Why Paul includes both these clauses is not clear (this is the only place in the NT that these two verbs occur together). He may not intend any difference in meaning, the repetition being simply for emphasis (Bruce 1982b: 89). Or the second may prove the first: the fact that I was not “taught” it shows that I did not “receive” it (Bonnard 1972: 28). But it is most likely that the second verb is more specific: Paul is saying that he did not receive the gospel in any way from a human being; specifically, he did not sit under a teacher (such as one of the Jerusalem apostles) to learn it (for similar suggestions, see Schlier 1989: 46–47; Silva 2003: 43–44). Paul’s use of the personal pronoun ἐγὼ (*egō*, I) may put emphasis on himself in contrast to other missionaries (Dunn 1993a: 53), but is more likely simply a stylistic carryover from the pronoun in verse 11 (ἐμοῦ, *emou*, me). Paul’s claim that he did not “receive” his gospel from any human being raises questions about what he might then mean when he says in 1 Cor. 15:1–3:

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received [*παρέλαβον, parelabon*] I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures....

NIV New International Version
NRSV New Revised Standard Version
NET New English Translation
NAB New American Bible
NJB New Jerusalem Bible
 Γ Textual variants in the Greek text
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² The normal correlative combination in Greek is οὐδέ ... οὐδέ (and some MSS read just this; see the additional note on 1:12), but οὐδέ ... οὔτε also occurs (BDAG 740; BDF §445.2). It is possible that *παρὰ ἀνθρώπου* goes with both verbs (see NET: “I did not receive it or learn it from any human source”; and Fung 1988: 52), but it is more likely that *εἰδάχθην* is used absolutely. The verb *διδάσκω* (*didaskō*, teach) occurs only four other times in the NT in the passive, and only once does it have an explicit agent, which is indicated with *διὰ* (*dia*, by/through) not *παρά* (*para*, by; 2 Thess. 2:15; the other occurrences are in Matt. 28:15; Eph. 4:21; Col. 2:7).

How can Paul say that he “received” the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3) and yet claim that he did *not* “receive” it from any human being? Of course, since “receive” in 1 Cor. 15:3 is not qualified, it could be claimed that Paul there is referring to his receiving it from the Lord, or through revelation. But Paul’s use of this same verb to describe the Corinthians’ “receiving” of the gospel from Paul (1 Cor. 15:1) strongly suggests that the verb in verse 3 also has the sense “receive from another human.” Paul uses the verb elsewhere with this sense, in imitation of the Jewish use of the verb קָבַל (*qābal*, receive; often paired with מָסַר, *māsar*, hand down; see παρέδωκα [*paredōka*, I passed on] in 1 Cor. 15:3); see esp. 2 Thess. 3:6: τὴν παράδοσιν ἣν παρελάβοσαν παρ’ ἡμῶν (*tēn paradōsin hēn parelabosan par’ hēmōn*, the tradition that you received from us [NIV note]) and also 1 Cor. 11:23; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 2:13. Nevertheless, these two texts can be reconciled if we pay close attention to their respective contexts. Here in Gal. 1:12 Paul needs to stress that the essential “truth of the gospel”—the fact of Christ’s death and resurrection and its implications for Gentiles and the law³—was revealed to him by God and not taught to him by any human being. In 1 Cor. 15:1–3, on the other hand, he wants to remind the Corinthians that Christ’s death for sins and especially his resurrection are the common teaching of the early church. And so he points out that he has handed on to them the common teaching that he also received. The point is that there is no conflict in Paul claiming that he received information about the gospel from both sources. The indisputable reality of the gospel that Paul received through revelation (and for which no human is responsible) was also confirmed to him by those who were “in the faith” before him. We have here no necessary “either/or” but a “both/and.”

Paul imitates the sequence of 1:1 by following up a pair of denials with a positive assertion:

1:1: ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*, apostle)

οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων (*ouk ap’ anthrōpōn*, not from human beings)

οὔδε δι’ ἀνθρώπου (*oude di’ anthrōpou*, neither through a human being) ἀλλὰ Ἰ ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ

Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρός (*alla dia Iēsou Christou kai*

theou patros, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father)

1:12: οὔδε γὰρ ἐγὼ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου παρέλαβον αὐτό (*oude gar egō para*

anthrōpou parelabon auto, for I did not receive it from a human being)

οὔτε ἐδιδάχθην (*oute edidachthēn*, neither was I taught [it])

ἀλλὰ δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (*alla di’ apokalypseōs Iēsou Christou*, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ)⁴

This positive clause is elliptical, with a verb to be supplied. Many naturally suppose that “received” should be carried over from the first part of the verse (Lightfoot 1881: 80; and so most English versions). But the language of “revelation,” or “apocalypse,” suggests a stronger antithesis with the beginning of the verse. What had been planned by God, yet hidden from human perception, now comes onto the scene of human history, revealing by the very fact of the event the purposes of God. The word also has eschatological connotations, as Dunn (1993a: 53) indicates: “To describe this event as an ‘apocalypse’ not only underlined its heavenly authority but also implied that it had eschatological significance, that is, as the key which unlocked the mystery of God’s purpose for his creation, the keystone of the whole arch of human history” (for similar uses of ἀποκάλυψις in Paul, see Rom. 2:5; 8:19; 16:25; 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Cor. 12:1; Eph. 3:3; 2 Thess. 1:7). Any verb that implies a normal human means of disclosure should thus be avoided, in favor of the simple “came”: the gospel “came through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (RSV; see, e.g., Fung 1988: 53; Hays 2000: 211). While a few scholars deny it (e.g., Bonnard 1972: 30), it seems relatively clear that the “revelation” Paul has in view is particularly the “revealing” (ἀποκαλύψαι [*apokalypsai*]) of Jesus Christ to Paul at the time of his conversion (see v. 16). This being the case, it would seem likely that we should construe the genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive: the truth of the gospel came to Paul when God revealed Jesus Christ to him (e.g., Burton 1921: 41–43; Bruce

NIV New International Version

³ Howard’s view (1979: 34), however, that it was only “the particular form of the gospel preached by him” (e.g., the “non-circumcision gospel to the Gentiles”) that was revealed to Paul is too narrow.

⁴ Indeed, R. Longenecker (1990: 23) suggests that παρὰ ἀνθρώπου παρέλαβον matches ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων in v. 1, while ἐδιδάχθην matches δι’ ἀνθρώπου. However, while the verses share a parallel structure, it is unlikely that the clauses can be matched up in this way.

RSV Revised Standard Version

1982b: 89; Martyn 1997: 144; Hays 2000: 211). But the immediate context of the phrase, with its emphasis on the source of knowledge, could instead suggest a source or subjective genitive: the truth of the gospel came to Paul when Jesus Christ revealed it to him (Légasse 2000: 80; R. Longenecker 1990: 24; Bonnard 1972: 28; Fee 2007b: 229; hence the “from” in many English versions [NIV, HCSB, NLT]). The meaning we have given “revelation” certainly favors the objective genitive over the subjective; but this is one of those texts where it might be best to refrain from locking the meaning into either option: perhaps Paul simply means that the “revelation” he received is bound up with, and has to do with, Jesus Christ (see Silva 2003: 45; Newman 1992: 200–201).

DAY 6

2. Elaboration and Proof: Paul’s Gospel and the “Pillars” (1:13–2:14)

As many interpreters have pointed out (e.g., Vouga 1998: 29), the narrative of Paul’s conversion and early travels is structured by temporal indicators: *ποτε* (*pote*, at one time; 1:13); *ότε* (*hote*, when; 1:15); *επειτα* (*epeita*, then; 1:18); *επειτα* (1:21); *επειτα* (2:1). As we noted above (see the introduction to 1:11–2:14), this section focuses on Paul’s relationships with Jerusalem, almost certainly for apologetic reasons. That is, the way he writes this narrative of his conversion and travels is best explained if he is defending himself against charges that the agitators have made about him. Throughout the account Paul focuses on the Jerusalem apostles, those he calls “the pillars” in 2:9. He insists that his understanding of the gospel did not depend on the pillars (1:13–24), that the pillars themselves agreed with his version of the gospel (2:1–10), and that he defended the gospel when it came under attack from one of those pillars (2:11–14). We can therefore surmise that the agitators were accusing Paul of having learned his gospel from the Jerusalem authorities—“the apostles before me” (1:17)—but then departing from it (or deducting from it) in his preaching to the Galatians.¹ There is good evidence that these agitators claimed to be teaching the “authentic, original Jerusalem gospel” and accused Paul of departing from it (see the “people from James” in Antioch [2:12] and the polemic against the “present Jerusalem” in 4:25). It is for this reason that Paul details the circumstances of his conversion and minimal contacts with Jerusalem in 1:13–24, demonstrates the “ratification” of his own gospel in Jerusalem (2:1–10), and gives his version of the Antioch incident (2:11–14).

a. Conversion and Early Travels (1:13–17)

Paul sets the stage for the narration of his contacts with Jerusalem by reminding his readers of his own radical conversion from persecutor to apostle. Particularly striking in his narrative is Paul’s emphasis on the divine initiative in the whole matter. Far from being “prepared” for his conversion by a time of soul-searching, Paul testifies that he was a convinced and indeed “zealous” Jew until God called him “through his grace” (v. 15) and revealed his Son to him (v. 16). These emphases suggest that, while the revisionist interpreters are wrong to deny the overall apologetic character of 1:13–2:10, they are right to see in this narrative, and particularly in this paragraph, a concern on Paul’s part to present himself as one to emulate (e.g., Verseput 1993). Like Paul, the Galatians have been “called” “to live in grace” (1:6), and like Paul, they should stay firmly rooted in this gracious gospel and not exchange it for any “other” gospel. At the same time, the very syntax of the paragraph points to the overarching apologetic focus. For, remarkably, Paul narrates his conversion in the subordinate clause of a sentence whose main clause is about his contact with other humans: “when God was pleased ... to reveal his Son in me, ... I did not immediately consult with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem” (vv.

NIV New International Version
HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible
NLT New Living Translation

¹ This reading of 1:13–2:10 is often accused of being an invalid mirror-reading—looking at the text of Galatians as at a mirror to see what it might “reflect” about the underlying situation. To be sure, some forms of mirror-reading of NT books make the mistake of constructing rather elaborate structures on very slim evidence. But this does not invalidate mirror-reading in general. As we have argued above, the distinctive way in which Paul writes about his early ministry in Gal. 1–2 demands an explanation. And when he explicitly highlights the entry of agitators with “another gospel,” it is hardly a stretch to think that these distinctive features are designed to counter the claims of these agitators.

16–17a). As we suggested above, these two basic parts of the paragraph develop chiasmically the thesis of verses 11–12:

A my gospel is not from any human source (vv. 11–12a), rather
B it came by revelation (v. 12b);
B' when God revealed his Son to me (vv. 13–16a),
A' I did not consult with any human being (vv. 16b–17).

We have referred above to Paul's "conversion." Some recent interpreters doubt the appropriateness of this language, arguing that what Paul describes in this paragraph is a "call," not a conversion. Alluding to the prophetic calls from the OT (v. 15), Paul claims that the revelation of God's Son to him was for the purpose of preaching Christ among the Gentiles. "Conversion," suggesting a move from one religion to another, is not an accurate description of Paul's metamorphosis since, according to him, he never left his Jewish faith.¹ There is, of course, some truth to these points. Paul always claimed his new "religion" was nothing less than the authentic expression of OT faith in a new era. And he certainly highlights his call to preach among Gentiles in his Damascus Road narratives. But in this very text Paul suggests that the revelation of God's Son to him led him to contrast his new faith with his earlier "Judaism" (vv. 13–14). To label Paul's experience simply a "call" drastically underplays Paul's own claim about the dramatic change that his conversion involved (e.g., Donaldson 1997: 249–60; Kim 2002: 1–19). The "Judaism," as it was then practiced and in which Paul was raised, was clearly something that he left behind when Christ was revealed to him. The word "conversion" is appropriately applied to this thoroughgoing change, and only a difference of fundamental importance can explain why Paul would have persecuted the early Christians and then gone to suffer persecution himself after embracing Christianity. When God revealed his Son to Paul, he was both converted *and* called: "conversion and commission came together" (Bruce 1982b: 93; and see esp. S. Chester 2003: 3–42, 153–72; P. O'Brien 2004b).²

Exegesis and Exposition

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¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade human beings or God? Or am I trying to please human beings? If I were yet trying to please human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ. ¹¹ Γ Now \Uparrow I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that I preach is not a human gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from a human being, Γ neither \Uparrow was I taught it. Rather, it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ **For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: that I intensely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it,** ¹⁴ and that I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of those my own age among my people, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

1:13 The $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ (*gar*, for) at the beginning of this verse probably introduces all of 1:13–2:14 (similarly R. Longenecker 1990: 27; Martyn 1997: 153). In these verses Paul explains and justifies his claim that his gospel is not a human gospel and that it came to him by revelation. Perhaps Paul also intends a more immediate connection, introducing verses 13–16a as an explanation of how he received the gospel "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (v. 12; cf. Betz 1979: 66). The Galatians have "heard" ($\eta\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\alpha\tau\epsilon$, *ēkousate*, you have heard) about Paul's past life in Judaism (vv. 13–14) and perhaps also about his conversion (v. 16a). Paul, of course, may have told them about these matters when he was with them (Lightfoot 1881: 81); but it is also possible that they have heard about Paul's former life from other sources, including the agitators, who may have stressed

¹ See, esp. Dunn 1993a: 63–65 (though Dunn is a bit more nuanced in a more recent work [2005a: 351–58], where he speaks of Paul's "conversion" from Judaism, understood in terms of a cultural emphasis on Gentile distinctiveness); see also Hays 2000: 214–15; Eisenbaum 2009: 132–49; Nanos 2010.

² See also R. Longenecker 1997: 27–29; Barnett 2008: 54–75. Corley (1997) notes that "conversion" is the language that has been applied to Paul's experience throughout church history.

Γ Textual variants in the Greek text

\Uparrow Textual variants in the Greek text

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Paul’s Jewishness for their own purposes (Bruce 1982b: 90; Martyn 1997: 153). As he does elsewhere, Paul stresses the strength of his devotion to his Jewish faith. The temporal notes in the phrase τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ (*tēn emēn anastrophēn pote en tō Ioudaismō*, my former way of life in Judaism)³ suggest that he has left this way of life behind (ἀναστροφή; elsewhere in Paul in Eph. 4:22; 1 Tim. 4:12; see esp. 1 Pet. 1:18: ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου [*anastrophēs patroparadotou*, way of life handed down to you from your ancestors]). Dunn (1993a: 56–57; cf. also Haacker 1986: 96–97; Miller 2011: 48–49) minimizes the significance of this claim by arguing that Ἰουδαϊσμός refers not to “Judaism” in general but to the distinctive nationalist Jewish movement that arose at the time of the Maccabees. He notes, rightly, that the word is first attested in sources from this time (2 Macc. 2:21; 8:1; 14:38 [2x]; 4 Macc. 4:26; cf. Ciampa 1998: 106–7). However, while the word first occurs here, these texts do not suggest the sort of restrictive focus that he argues for (BDAG 479 defines Ἰουδαϊσμός as “the Judean way of belief and life”; and note Ign. *Magn.* 10.3, where “Judaism” is contrasted with “Christianity”). Nor does Paul’s usage of the word here and in verse 14 (its only NT occurrences) suggest any such restriction; indeed, in both verses, “in Judaism” appears to refer broadly to the Jewish faith as a whole, within which Paul distinguished himself for his devotion and zeal.

With a ὅτι (*hoti*, that), Paul elaborates on the specifics of that “former way of life in Judaism.” First, he was “intensely persecuting the church of God and trying to destroy it” (καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐπόρθουν αὐτήν, *kath’ hyperbolēn ediōkon tēn ekklēsiaian tou theou kai eporthoun autēn*). Both verbs are in the imperfect tense, the former because it is a durative idea—“I was persecuting”—and the second because it is conative—“I tried to destroy” (Wallace 1996: 551). The prepositional phrase καθ’ ὑπερβολήν (lit., “according to excess”) is adverbial, stressing the extremity or intensity of his persecuting efforts (the phrase is used only by Paul in the NT; see also Rom. 7:13; 1 Cor. 12:31; 2 Cor. 1:8; 4:17). Paul’s persecution of early Christians is narrated in Acts (8:3; 9:1–2), and is a staple of his autobiography (Acts 22:4–5; 26:9–11; 1 Cor. 15:9; Phil. 3:6).⁴ “The church of God” that Paul was persecuting may refer to a local church, such as the one in Jerusalem (e.g., Bruce 1982b: 90; de Boer 2011: 87). But Paul’s usage of the phrase elsewhere (1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:5, 15) along with the parallel in 1 Cor. 15:9 (ἐδίωξα τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ [*ediōxa tēn ekklēsiaian tou theou*, I persecuted the church of God]) suggests rather that Paul is referring to the “universal church” (e.g., R. Longenecker 1990: 28). The phrase is probably a deliberate echo of the OT “assembly [עֲדָתָא, *qāhāl*] of Israel” (e.g., Deut. 31:30; 1 Kings 8:14); cf. “assembly of the Lord” (e.g., Deut. 23:2, 3; 1 Chron. 28:8) or “assembly of God” (Neh. 13:1; Martyn 1997: 154). God’s people are now to be found in those “assembled” around the risen Lord Jesus.

³ The ποτε modifies ἀναστροφὴν, an article before ποτε not being required in these kind of constructions (BDF §169.1). The possessive adjective ἐμὴν (in contrast to the genitive of the personal pronoun, μου [mou, me]) is probably not emphatic here (BDF §285.1).

BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

Ign. Ignatius, *To the Magnesians*
Magn. Ignatius, *To the Magnesians*

lit. literally

⁴ Schnabel (2004: 927) suggests, following Niebuhr (1992: 60–61), that “trying to destroy the church” means that he was trying to deny the right of Christ-followers to maintain their place in the synagogue.

DAY 7

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should ^ϒ proclaim to you a gospel ^ϒ other than the one that we proclaimed, let that person fall under God’s curse! ⁹ As I said before, so now I say again: if anyone should proclaim to you a gospel other than the one you received, let that person fall under God’s curse.

¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade human beings or God? Or am I trying to please human beings? If I were yet trying to please human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ. ¹¹ ^ϒ Now ^ϒ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that I preach is not a human gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from a human being, ^ϒ neither ^ϒ was I taught it. Rather, it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: that I intensely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it, ¹⁴ **and that I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of those my own age among my people, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.**

1:14 A second facet of Paul’s “way of life in Judaism” is that he “was advancing in Judaism beyond many of those my own age among my people” (προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου, *proekopton en tō Ioudaismō hyper pollous synēlikiotas en tō genei mou*; this phrase is also dependent on ὄτι in v. 13). The verb προέκοπτον is again in the imperfect because it covers the course of Paul’s early life; the verb is used the same way in Luke 2:52: “And as Jesus grew up, he increased [προέκοπτεν] in wisdom and in favor with God and people” (TNIV). Paul was very serious about his Jewish faith and so surpassed many of those his own age (συνηλικιώτας—the only occurrence of this word in the NT) who were “within my people,” or who “belonged to my nation” (ἐν τῷ γένει μου; see also Phil. 3:5 and 2 Cor. 11:26 for other Pauline uses of γένος in this sense). The broad scope of γένος sheds light on Ἰουδαϊσμός earlier in the verse, which seems to be in parallel with it: Paul has in view not a sect within Judaism but Judaism per se.

The last part of verse 14 consists in a participial clause that is loosely tied to his claim in the earlier part of the verse: περισσοτέρως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων (*perissoterōs zelōtēs hyparchōn tōn patrikōn mou paradoseōn*, being extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers). Rather than being causal—“I advanced in Judaism ... because I was extremely zealous ...” (HCSB; see also NRSV, NAB; Burton 1921: 46–47)—the clause probably “specifies in what way the προέκοπτον ... γένει μου found active expression” (H. Meyer 1873: 36; see, e.g., RSV: “I advanced in Judaism, ... so extremely zealous was I ...”). As the RSV translation suggests, περισσοτέρως, while comparative in form, is probably an elative superlative (Betz 1979: 68; contra Lightfoot 1881: 81). Paul’s claim to be a “zealot” (ζηλωτῆς) does not mean that he belonged to the actual Zealot party, or sect (contra Lightfoot 1881: 81–82) but that he had a deep passion for his Jewish faith (see also Acts 22:3; cf. Phil. 3:6).

The great OT example of such zeal was Phinehas: when confronted with a blatant violation of God’s law, he killed the Israelite sinner and his pagan lover (Num. 25:6–15). Phinehas was commended by the Lord himself because he was “jealous [or “zealous”] with my jealousy” (Num. 25:11, 13 NASB; see also Ps. 106:30; 1 Macc. 2:54; 4 Macc. 18:12). Phinehas’s “zeal” was directed toward God and his honor and name (as was Jesus’s zeal; cf. John 2:17). But in a natural development, Jews during the Maccabean Revolt viewed zeal for the laws and regulations that they were certain God had given Israel as an appropriate expression of zeal for God. Indeed, this zeal for God’s laws and for the Jewish culture they fostered became, for many, an all-consuming passion in the face of the danger of assimilation to Gentile culture (see the analysis in Dunn 1993a: 60–62). However, while often exhibiting itself in a concern for Israel’s special role, zeal was ultimately focused on the God who had given Israel the law and special privileges. When Paul, then, claims that he was excessively “zealous,” he

^ϒ Textual variants in the Greek text

TNIV Today’s New International Version

HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

NAB New American Bible

RSV Revised Standard Version

RSV Revised Standard Version

NASB New American Standard Bible

refers to his basic orientation to God and to the demands that God made of him (see Ortlund 2012: esp. 137–49). Paul numbers himself among those who were caught up with this kind of zeal, a zeal that he ultimately sees to be, in his case, as for so many of his compatriots, “not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2 KJV).

Paul’s zeal, he says, was directed toward τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων (πατρικός, used only here in the NT, connotes “that which pertains to my father,” or “the father’s house” [BDAG 788]). This phrase may refer to the OT law per se (e.g., Martyn 1997: 155), or to the “oral law,” what Jesus called “the tradition of the elders” (Matt. 15:2; Mark 7:3, 5; see also Josephus, *Ant.* 13.297; and Lightfoot 1881: 82; Bruce 1982b: 91; Dunn 1993a: 60; Silva 2003: 56). But it is likely that these were not separated in the mind of Paul and other “zealous” Jews like him: they understood the written OT law to have received crucial and definitive interpretation in the oral law (Betz 1979: 68)—just as today, passionate advocates of a certain theological position will decline to distinguish between Scripture and its (for that person) definitive elaboration in a system of belief.⁵¹

KJV King James Version

BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

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⁵ A few interpreters have argued that Paul’s zeal had to do not with the law but with the political position of Jews in their Gentile-dominated communities—the proclamation of a crucified Messiah being a danger to the standing of the Jewish communities (Fredriksen 1991; N. Elliott 1994: 148).

¹ **Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 80-102.**