

## I. Introduction

A. Back in 1984, a friend and I were invited by Dr. William Lane Craig, who at the time was a professor at Trinity down the road, to attend a discussion on religion at Lake Forest College.

1. This was not a debate. The idea was that Dr. Craig and a professor from the college were going to talk, and a handful of us were invited to listen in.
2. The problem is, the discussion never really happened. About thirty seconds into the professor's opening comments he said, "god is trans-rational," and Dr. Craig said, "What does that mean?"
3. And the professor said, "It means that God is above rationality. He is not bound by those limits."
4. And Dr. Craig said, "Well, that doesn't make any sense. If God is above rationality then we cannot know anything about him or have a rational conversation about him or assume that anything He said means what we think it means."
5. And the professor said, "well, we certainly can't have a conversation if you are going to arbitrarily impose your rules on what is said."
6. And Dr. Craig said, "I do not know what you mean. Are you being rational, because if you are not, your words may mean the exact opposite of what you just said, and," well, you get the idea. For the next hour they had a discussion about whether it was possible to have a discussion, which wasn't much of a discussion." But it was memorable.

B. And it prepared me for a similar conversation that I had a few years later.

1. At this point I had graduated and we had moved to Washington where I was serving as a campus pastor. And one day, while I was out talking to students, I ended up sharing the Gospel with one of them and after a pretty robust conversation about the claims of Christ and God's love, he said, "I am excited that Christianity is true for you, but it's not true for me."
2. And I said, "Look, Christianity is either true or not, independent of what either of us believed. It can't be true for me and not true for you."
3. And he said, "I am glad that claim is true for you, but it's not true for me."
4. And I said, "You are violating the Law of non-contradiction. It cannot rain and not rain at the same time in the same place."
5. And he said, "I'm sure that's true for you but it's not true for me." So I punched him in the face. No, I didn't, but I wanted to. Not because he was making me mad, but because I wanted to ask, "Was that true for you or just for me?"

C. A few years later, I learned that the name for what I was running into was postmodernity.

1. If you have a traditional worldview – one shaped by a Judeo-Christian set of assumptions. Or if you have a modern worldview – which means your starting assumptions are based in Enlightenment thinking - then you think post-modernity sounds ridiculous.
2. If you are postmodern in your thinking – which means you are probably younger than I am – you likely think that I just did a very bad job of illustrating postmodernity.

a) You want to say, Modernity is thin and vapid. The Modern mindset gave us World War II. The Nazis were the quintessential Modernists - they were steeped in empirical, scientific, objective thinking. But they were not personally engaged with truth and they did mass evil, and so those who lived through this horror became rightly suspicious of the foundations of modernity and looked for more subjective explanations of reality.

3. I am not ultimately going to defend either one. My point in this illustration is to help you realize that: 1) we are not just shaped by culture, but by the assumptions shaping culture; 2) to point out that those assumptions are changing – the ground is moving beneath our feet right now (we are not just having debates over what things mean but few accept the others starting assumptions – the polarization is greater and everybody runs around talking about fake news, and post-truth and the like.

4. What I want to point out today is that, we are called into a relationship with God that radically reframes everything – including our assumptions. We are not adding Jesus on top of our worldview. Jesus shakes everything down to the foundations.

5. We are working our way through Galatians. Today we move through the end of chapter 1 and first part of chapter 2. As we do so I am going to point out not just what Paul is saying, but the assumptions he is operating with: assumptions so big that they are not even mentioned – they are simply assumed.

6. We need to see them, because they are increasingly different from the assumptions shaping the West today.

II. If you have a Bible turn to Galatians 1:11. And as you are turning there, let me offer a quick review:

A. Paul and Barnabas were the church's first missionaries. Early on their first outing they planted a number of churches in Northern Turkey – an area known as Galatia. After they got them up and running, they moved on to do it again.

B. The New Testament is made up in part of the letters Paul wrote back to the churches they had started. These letters answer questions or address problems going on in the church. Because many of the questions and problems we have are the very same ones they had, these letters are very helpful.

C. We are reading Paul's letter to the Galatians. It has a particularly strident tone because the Galatian Christians had come under the influence of a group claiming that Paul had left out some important requirements about how to have a relationship with God. Paul had told them that Faith in Christ leads to salvation and good works ( $F = S + W$ ). They were moving toward faith in Christ plus good works. ( $F+W = S$ ).

1. In the first sermon in this series I explained that our default approach to life is religious – we appear hardwired to believe that following certain rules and rituals makes us good people (better than others) and qualifies us for God's love.

2. In the second message we focused on the radical, unthinkable, wonderful, good news that is very different from standard fair religion. The Good News, Paul's message - the Gospel – is the claim that God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but gain everlasting life.  $F = \text{Salvation} + \text{Works}$ .

3. Last week we moved on to Galatians 1:10, which explored Paul's motivation. And I challenged you to reflect on yours.

D. Today we pick up with Galatians 1:11

III. Gal. 1:11f: **I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.**

A. These two verses are the key for the rest of chapter one and the first half of chapter two – which is an extended section in which Paul tells his story. Everybody who knew Paul knew his story – he told it three times in the Book of Acts; he tells it to the Philippians. It pops up in other letters. It pops up here. If you met Paul, you were going to hear his story.

B. Stories of people meeting Christ are all the same – and they are all unique. Paul’s story is remarkable but not exceptional. He says: 1) I used to be crazy religious – more religious than anyone else; 2) I hated Christians – I thought Jesus was an “uneducated, hayseed with a Galilean accent from a family of nobodies. I thought he was so inept that he caught in a Sadducee - Roman conspiracy and put to death, only to have his story kept alive by a group of unemployed fisherman and hysterical women running around talking about this crazy idea that he was resurrected;” 3) then Jesus called me to himself. He struck me down on the Damascus road and said I needed to stop being religious, start following him and take this message to the Gentiles.

C. And, as you will see, this time around, Paul tells the story in a way that pushes back on those who were trying to undermine him. They said he was not an apostle and that he got the message wrong. Paul tells his story in a way that points out that he was called by Jesus to be an apostle and that his critics may be nice and well intentioned, but they are doing a lot of damage and should be run out of town.

IV. V13: **For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.** – i.e., Paul says, I was more religiously righteous than you. If it was possible to earn our way to God by being religious, I was ahead of everyone else.

V. **“But when God,** pay attention. When Paul has been talking about how religious he was, all of the verbs were active and the pronouns were personal. Paul was saying, “I did this and this and this.” As he talks about his conversion, God becomes the subject and Paul is being acted on. This is one of the many places where we see that Christianity is not something we do as much as it is something done to us. We are chased down. Some of you are being chased.

VI. V15: **But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.** “I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, He mentions this to counter the suggestion that after his conversion he went to Jerusalem where Peter, James and John took him under their wing. He says, that didn’t happen. He didn’t even go to Jerusalem.

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† Eugene Peterson, *Traveling Light*, p. 49.

**VII. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia.** He is out of pocket for three years. We do not know much about this time. People went to the Arabian desert for personal retreat. Some think he went there and spent time with God in preparation for being an apostle.<sup>2</sup> Others think he went there to preach the Gospel.

**VIII. Later I returned to Damascus. <sup>18</sup>Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup>I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother. <sup>20</sup>I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. <sup>21</sup>Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup>I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup>They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” <sup>24</sup>And they praised God because of me.** Judea is close to Jerusalem. Paul appears to be saying, I really didn’t get close to Jerusalem. My training did not come from the other apostles. It came directly from God.

**IX.** Chapter 2 opens with Paul talking about the next time he went to Jerusalem – which was 14 years later – probably for the Jerusalem Council.<sup>3</sup> I mentioned this event a few weeks back. It is reported in Acts 15. He notes that he went back to Jerusalem to be sure that no one was going to tell his Gentile converts that they had to act like Jews. In verse 3 he says he brought Titus with him – who was an uncircumcised Gentile believer<sup>4</sup> - and no one had a problem with that. In other words – no one in Jerusalem was making Gentile believers follow the religious rules the Judaizers were trying to get people in Galatia to embrace.

**X.** In chapter 2:7, Paul says that when he was with other apostles they recognized that he: **had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised.**

**XI.** And then, in verse 11, we get a story that makes it clear he is not a second class apostle. He notes that after when Peter came to visit him in Antioch, **V11: When he did, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>2</sup>For before certain men came from James, Peter used to eat with the Gentiles.**

A. You need to picture Peter, Paul and others having hotdogs and beer – which was shocking. Peter is about to run away from this group. That is not shocking. What is shocking is that he ever shared a meal with them.

B. The Jews had all kinds of rules to keep them ceremonially clean. Eating certain kinds of meat with Gentiles violated a lot of them. A religious Jew likely went his whole life never eating with a Gentile. In Acts 10, God had made it clear to Peter that this must stop. And so for a while, when he was in Antioch, he hung out with the Gentiles.

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<sup>2</sup> The suggestion is, that is what he did. And I think we could make the case, we need to do more of that. I have been adding more quiet and silent time into my mornings because it feels like the faster everything else goes, the more quiet time with God is required.

<sup>3</sup> There is a debate among scholars about how to match the trips to Jerusalem reported in the book of Acts with the epistles. Some hold this refers to Jerusalem Council. Others say he went there to take aid money to help with the famine (Acts 11:28).

<sup>4</sup> Paul did not have to take anyone. The fact that he took Titus suggests that Titus was a spiritual rock star who could help make the argument that God was working among Gentiles. Some argue that, though Paul writes more to Timothy, Titus is his “true son,” and that the reason he wrote more to Timothy is because Timothy needed more help. Titus was more courageous, competent, etc.

**XII. But when they (the Judaizers) arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.** This is racism, legalism – baptizing your cultural or your habits and saying they are what saves us.

**XIII. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”** Paul confronts Peter. He tells this story to strengthen his credentials.

A. Do not what he says: he doesn’t challenge Peter with being rude or a hypocrite or a coward – he says: You are not acting in line with the Gospel. The Greek is, you are not ortho-walking.

B. So, the middle of chapter 1 thru the middle of chapter 2 is a section in which Paul is arguing: 1) that he is a capital “A” apostle, consequently, his views of Christ’s message come straight from Christ; and 2) the Judaizers are heretics. Gentiles do not need to act like Jews to enter into a relationship with God.

**XIV. OK, so Paul is telling us about his life, coming to faith in Christ and also working to persuade the Galatians that they need to listen to him not the Judaizers. That is all on the surface. As I said in the set up – I want to shine a light on the ideas that are so big they are not stated, they are simply assumed. There are other things we might glean from what Paul writes, but I want to look at what he assumes.<sup>5,6</sup>**

**XV. Back to Galatians 1:11-12: I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. “I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.** My claim is that there are three big ideas Paul sees as foundational – that we can as well.

**XVI. Number One: Truth exists – and it is a person: Jesus Christ.**

A. In contrast to the relativism of today – were everything is up for grabs. Where people feel free to pick and choose what they believe and what is true for them – you have your truth and I have my truth; where post-truth was the Meriam Dictionary 2016 word of the year. Against all of that – against the fear of certitude we see in Postmodernity - Paul claims that absolute truth exists.<sup>7</sup> And it is a person.

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<sup>5</sup> It is also worth noting that at several places in this letter, Paul comes unglued over the damage being done by false teachers. The Bible actually has a fair bit to say about false teachers. We are to love our enemies and be kind to those oppress us, but we are to drive false teachers out of town. In Paul’s eyes, those who lie about God are not guilty of small mistakes, but huge ones and they need to be stopped.

<sup>6</sup> In *Traveling Light*, Eugene Peterson writes: One of the wickedest things one person can do to others is to lie to them about God, to represent God as other or less than he is. It is wicked to tell a person that God is an angry tyrant storming through the heavens, out to get every trespasser and throw him into the lake of fire. It is wicked to tell a person that God is a senile grandfather dozing in a celestial rocking chair with only the shortest of attention spans for what is going on in the world. It is wicked to tell a person that God is a compulsively efficient and utterly humorless manager of a tightly run cosmos, obsessed with getting the highest productivity possible out of history and with absolutely no concern for persons apart from their usefulness. Peterson, *Traveling Light*, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> If God exists, then there are objective standards; and if there are objective standards then we are not free to make things up. It means that some things are right and somethings are wrong. It means some ideas are better than others. It means some worldviews are better than others. It means some cultures are better than others. Those that more accurately reflect who God is and what God thinks and values are better.

B. But against the cold, thin, propositional nature of Modernity, Paul says – truth exists AND IT IS A PERSON. It is not just a fact, it is a person.

C. Paul points to a foundation that is radically objective – that has a very hard edge to it. In Galatians 1:8 he says, he doesn't care what kind of experience you have, nothing should change your understanding of the Gospel. He says, if an angel came down from heaven – and we could verify that it is an angel – and it says to you: the Gospel has changed, do not believe it.<sup>8</sup> There is a hard edge to truth – a radical objectivity.<sup>9</sup>

D. But this truth is also profoundly subjective. Truth is not just hard cold facts, truth is a person, and Paul writes about how truth changed him. He writes at length about his personal experience with truth.<sup>10</sup> After claiming that truth exists, he tells his story.

E. This is amazing. This is unique. This works. Men and women, we need truth. We need standards for all kinds of reasons. People think the way for us all to get along and Utopia to break out is if everyone is free to believe what they want to believe. And to follow their heart. That is chaos. Paul says there is truth, it is based on a person and that person is holy and loving.

XVII. Number Two: He claims that the truth can be know because God has revealed it to us.

A. Galatians 1:11: **I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.** Paul not only believes that truth exists, he believes that it was revealed to him by God.

B. In the margins let me remind you that there are four different ways we “know what we know.” If you believe something is true, you base that belief in one of four things – or some combination of four things: reason, intuition, tradition and revelation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!

<sup>9</sup> If this was a philosophy class and not a sermon – and some of you are thinking, apparently this is a philosophy class. If it were I'd note that the idea that we are free to believe whatever we want to believe creates a few problems: Let's set aside that the immediate problems: the claim that that absolute truth does not exist is an absolute claim. This kind of thing drives people like me crazy. But, hey, I'll take a stress tab and be OK. Leave me out of it. Most of those say, you can have your truth and I'll have mine, believe that if everyone just lived this way Utopia would unfold just like John Lennon dreamed about in his song, Imagine. But nothing of the sort happens. The idea that if we just let everyone let their conscience be their guide we'd have a world that works is nonsense: 1) Woody Allen defends his decision to have an affair with his adopted daughter by stating, “the heart wants what the heart wants.” Serial killers have been letting their conscience be their guide for years. If we had more time we could explore some of the big problems with those who reject Paul's claim of revelation. I simply want you to see that this is a big assumption that shapes things. What Paul gives us in Galatians argues for both the radical objectivity and a subjectivity of that revelation.

<sup>10</sup> In discussing this, Keller argues that we need to understand how people have understood “looking inside” in the past. 1) The ancient Greeks and Romans thought that passions were connected to the body, but reason and will were connected to the soul. Therefore, in their view, to be virtuous required mind > matter. 2) Moderns are now reversing that. Today we are looking inside ourselves to embrace what we find. And we do this to be true to ourselves – i.e., not deny ourselves any desires, etc. So, the ancients thought your emotions were not the true you. Modern people say our emotions are the real you. 3) The biblical view is different – and it is not in the middle. The biblical view is that the heart is grand central and that it impacts our mind, will and emotions – i.e., our heart affects our thinking. What we are called to do is examine our emotions. To sift them. We need to see that: 1) our emotions are not unimportant, but they are not all important; 2) we need to evaluate our emotions and then redirect them to God. We are what we love most. We need to work to make sure that we love God most. And we need our emotions (gut) to kick in and unsettle us when our heart is misdirected. None of this work is easy!

<sup>11</sup> I wrote more about this in FencePost 1.

1. Before the Enlightenment the trump card was revelation. The answers to the big questions – What is ultimate? (What matters most?) Who am I? Where did I come from? What is expected of me? And what happens when I die? – the answers to these questions before the Enlightenment were found in the Bible. The trump card was the truth revealed by God.<sup>12</sup>
2. During the modern era, it was reason. Truth was established based on scientific research. The high priest during this era didn't wear a clerical collar they wore a white lab coat. And they didn't read from the Bible, they share the data collected from the latest double-blind study.
3. Today – we still have people from the previous two eras knocking around – but today a growing number of people trust their gut. They look inside for truth. To quote Jiminy Cricket of Walt Disney Fame, “Let your conscience be your guide.” And because different people feel differently about these, we've simply decided there is no right answer. There is no overarching truth. We live in a post-truth world.<sup>13</sup>

XVIII. Point Three: This truth is Jesus and what He has done for us, and that is too good not to be shared.

- A. Point number one: There is truth; Two: it can be known because God has revealed it. Point number three – and then we go to communion - Paul assumes that it is of utmost importance that the Good News be shared.
- B. In today's culture, this is considered poor form. Because truth is now up for each person to define for themselves, it is believed that faith needs to be kept private - that the simplest way for us to get along is for everyone to keep their views to themselves.<sup>14</sup>
- C. I am not saying this is easy. Paul told well-intentioned, religious people who sincerely believed something, that they were wrong. Those are fighting words today.
- D. The fact that so much has changed around us – means we are going to have to think more like missionaries than we did even five years ago. But love compels us to share the love of God.
  1. At great personal risk Paul looked for ways to persuade people that there is a way to be forgiven and gain eternal life.
  2. There is truth; it has been given to us, it is way too good to keep to ourselves.

XIX. Men and women, this is a challenging time to be alive, but it is also a very exciting time to be alive. We have great opportunities.

- A. And by the way, God wins.
- B. At the moment in the west, people of faith are being pushed to the margins, and secularism is expanding its influence. Do not think the sky is falling. Oh my goodness. God prevails. Secularism does not work. At some point that will become clearer to everyone.
- C. We have a message of love and hope.

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<sup>12</sup> And by the way, this is what you were at college. The first thirty some schools in the United States were started by Christians and were based on the Bible. It was the text book. It wasn't officially until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that you see a definitive move away from that.

<sup>13</sup> Meriam Dictionary's 2016 new word of the year was: Post-truth.

<sup>14</sup> Please note, those who advocate this view see no hypocrisy in advocating it. They force everyone to agree that no one should force anyone to agree.

D. Part of what we need in order to move forward with hope is an understanding of the foundational truths driving Paul. It will not work to add God on top of your life. It will not work to add God on top of our present culture's values. God is shaking things up in a big way.

XX. Transition into Communion