

But I Certify You, Brethren, That the Gospel Which Was Preached of Me Is Not After Man. for I Neither Received It of Man, Neither Was I Taught It, but by the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

by Martin Luther

Paul defends the Gospel against accusations, emphasizing its divine origin and importance, and urging believers to diligently hear and read God's Word.

Scripture: Galatians 1:15

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Martin Luther preaches on Paul's defense of his Gospel, emphasizing that he received it directly from Jesus Christ through special revelation, not from men. Luther highlights the fragility of the article of justification in believers, cautioning against losing the joy of the Gospel and the dangers of despising God's Word. He stresses the importance of diligently hearing and reading God's Word to create, strengthen, and preserve faith, as believers face constant spiritual battles against various enemies like the flesh, the world, sin, and the devil.

Transcript

This passage constitutes Paul's chief defense against the accusations of his opponents. He maintains under oath that he received his Gospel not from men, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In declaring that his Gospel is not after man, Paul does not merely wish to state that his Gospel is not mundane. The false apostles made the same claim for their gospel. Paul means to say that he learned his Gospel not in the usual and accepted manner through the agency of men by hearing, reading, or writing. He received the Gospel by special revelation directly from Jesus Christ.

Paul received his Gospel on the way to Damascus when Christ appeared to him. St. Luke furnishes an account of the incident in the ninth chapter of the Book of Acts. "Arise," said Christ to Paul, "and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Christ did not send Paul into the city to learn the

Gospel from Ananias. Ananias was only to baptize Paul, to lay his hands on Paul, to commit the ministry of the Word unto Paul, and to recommend him to the Church. Ananias recognized his limited assignment when he said to Paul: "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." Paul did not receive instruction from Ananias. Paul had already been called, enlightened, and taught by Christ in the road. His contact with Ananias was merely a testimonial to the fact that Paul had been called by Christ to preach the Gospel.

Paul was forced to speak of his conversion to combat the slanderous contention of the false apostles to the effect that this apostleship was inferior to that of the other apostles.

34If it were not for the example of the Galatian churches I would never have thought it possible that anybody who had received the Word of God with such eagerness as they had, could so quickly let go of it. Good Lord, what terrible mischief one single false statement can create.

The article of justification is fragile. Not in itself, of course, but in us. I know how quickly a person can forfeit the joy of the Gospel. I know in what slippery places even those stand who seem to have a good footing in the matters of faith. In the midst of the conflict when we should be consoling ourselves with the Gospel, the Law rears up and begins to rage all over our conscience. I say the Gospel is frail because we are frail.

What makes matters worse is that one-half of ourselves, our own reason, stands against us. The flesh resists the spirit, or as Paul puts it, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." Therefore we teach that to know Christ and to believe in Him is no achievement of man, but the gift of God. God alone can create and preserve faith in us. God creates faith in us through the Word. He increases, strengthens and confirms faith in us through His Word. Hence the best service that anybody can render God is diligently to hear and read God's Word. On the other hand, nothing is more perilous than to be weary of the Word of God. Thinking he knows enough, a person begins little by little to despise the Word until he has lost Christ and the Gospel altogether.

Let every believer carefully learn the Gospel. Let him continue in humble prayer. We are molested not by puny foes, but by mighty ones, foes who never grow tired of warring against us. These, our enemies, are many: Our own flesh, the world, the Law, sin, death, the wrath and judgment of God, and the devil himself.

The arguments which the false apostles advanced impress people to this day. "Who are you to dissent from the fathers and the entire Church, and to bring a contradictory doctrine? Are you wiser than so many holy men, wiser than the whole Church?" When Satan, abetted by our own reason, advances these arguments against us, we lose heart, unless we keep on saying to ourselves: "I don't care if Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine, Peter, Paul, John, or an angel from heaven, teaches so and so. I know that I teach the truth of God in Christ Jesus."

When I first took over the defense of the Gospel, I remembered what Doctor Staupitz said to me. "I like it well," he said, "that the doctrine which you proclaim gives glory to God alone and none to man. For never can too much glory, goodness, and mercy be ascribed unto God." These words of the worthy Doctor comforted and confirmed me. The Gospel is true because it deprives men of all glory, wisdom, and righteousness and turns over all honor to the Creator alone. It is safer to attribute too much glory unto God than unto man.

You may argue that the Church and the fathers are holy. Yet the Church is compelled to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses." I am not to be believed, nor is the Church to be believed, or the fathers, or the apostles, or an angel from heaven, if they teach anything contrary to the Word of God. Let the Word of God abide forever.

Peter erred in life and in doctrine. Paul might have dismissed Peter's error as a matter of no consequence. But Paul saw that Peter's error would lead to the damage of the whole Church unless it were corrected. Therefore he withstood Peter to his face. The Church, Peter, the apostles, angels from heaven, are not to be heard unless they teach the genuine Word of God.

This argument is not always to our advantage. People ask: "Whom then shall we believe?" Our opponents maintain that they teach the pure Word of God. We do not believe them. They in turn hate and persecute us for vile heretics. What can we do about it? With Paul we glory in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What do we gain? We are told that our glorying is idle vanity and unadulterated blasphemy. The moment we abase ourselves and give in to the rage of our opponents, Papists and Anabaptists grow arrogant. The Anabaptists hatch out some new monstrosity. 36The Papists revive their old abominations. What to do? Let everybody become sure of his calling and doctrine, that he may boldly say with Paul: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than ye have received, let him be accursed."

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