



Sermon Growth Guide

August 28, 2022

No Human Invention



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Freedom - No Human Invention

Galatians 1:11-24

Key Verse: 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."

Big Idea: We don't make up our own truth. Truth is revealed to us by God.

Foundations

Paul was upset with the churches in Galatia. He had founded them, preaching a gospel of grace. But new preachers had moved in, telling these converts that they had made a good start but that they needed to "grow" in their new faith by adopting Jewish Law and customs. Paul was carefully angry about this because it confused what *we* do with what *God alone* can do. The *truth* is that only God can set us free from the dominion of sin and death.

Before he met Jesus, Paul had been adamant about observing all the legal requirements of Jewish religious practice. He had thought that followers of Jesus were corrupting Jewish religious truth and he sought to wipe them out. He was so violent in that mission that he could have been called a "religious terrorist." How does someone so completely committed to his own understanding of truth change so radically?

His total transformation occurred when he encountered the risen Jesus who revealed the truth of God's gospel of grace. Paul was so freed by this truth that he was able to serve others in love, no longer bent on violent reprisal. Even his stern words to Galatian churches were prompted by love. He did not want them to give up their Christ-won freedom and become enslaved by the practices of self-righteousness.

Understanding God's Word

Together read Galatians 1:11-24.

Paul says in verse 11 that what he preaches is not of human origin. In his autobiography that follows, how does Paul's life story bear witness to his assertion that his gospel preaching has been revealed *to* him, not created *by* him?

Applying God's Word

"The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." (Gal. 1:23)

Paul's encounter with Jesus turned his life upside down, from human-sourced truth to God-revealed truth. In what ways has God's truth revealed in God's Word turned you around?

The gospel is not an opiate for the masses, it is adrenaline for mission.

Witnessing God's Word

Paul said, "God called me by his grace" and he was changed from persecutor to preacher, but it would have been easier for him to "go along" with the false preaching. What do you think it takes to hold onto and speak truly to your neighbors and co-workers?

FREEDOM • Galatians 1:11-24 • Tim McConnell • August 28, 2022

In 2018, Oprah Winfrey, in a powerful acceptance speech at the Golden Globes encouraged the women who were speaking out against abuse they had suffered in Hollywood. Now, she used the phrase “your truth;” “speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have.” This was important. Many victims (most probably) were suffering the double injustice of being dismissed or even attacked for uncovering the abuses they suffered. Winfrey encouraged them to stand up. But at the same time, this was one more indication. We had landed somewhere as a culture. Truth is now something that takes a personal possessive pronoun. Your truth. My truth. Their truth. Our truth. What happened to *the* truth? If Oprah says it, that’s the way it is! Truth takes a possessive pronoun. This is one of the most disorienting twists in our lifetimes, isn’t it? How can truth be a personal possession?

This is post-modernism full bloom. French philosopher Michele Foucault said there is no objective truth; all truth claims are simply projections of power—attempts to control others. Truth and reality are individual constructs, product of your own perspective. And we get this, because we can remember when we were duped. Somebody told us something was true, and we later found out it wasn’t. But this doesn’t really work all the way down. It doesn’t work in the hard sciences. You can’t have chemistry when chemists think chemicals react differently depending on who’s mixing them. You can’t have biology if a trout is a brown trout to one and a rainbow to another, or male to one and female to another. But the “freedom” this philosophy promises is just too enticing to pass up. If we are all just making up our own truth, we can really do whatever we want. And no person, no institution, no company, nobody at all can speak against anyone else’s personal construct of their “truth.” This promises great freedom. But does it deliver?

Jesus won a better freedom. The freedom that Jesus won, the gospel freedom we started talking about last week, it is not a personal construct or a

human invention. This is really important to understand. Many people will tell you that it is a human invention, that Christianity is one expression of the human tendency to gather in groups and construct philosophies or religions to make sense of life and death. Paul did not see it that way. Jesus did not see it that way. They said, as Paul says here, truth enters the world vertically from another plane. Truth is not cooked up by us. Truth comes from God on high, and it drops down on us. Even if you can’t see it fully or understand it completely, it is there. It has an impact. Dallas Willard said, “Truth reveals reality, and reality can be described as what we humans run into when we are wrong, a collision in which we always lose.” Truth leaves an impact—like banging into the coffee table in the dark. We all bump into it eventually.

“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.” (Galatians 1:11-12) This is truth from above, Paul says. No human invention. I wasn’t told it, I wasn’t trained in it, I wasn’t taught it. I wasn’t brainwashed. It was a revelation from Jesus. Paul was interrupted by Jesus. He was knocked off his feet. Paul was headed off to persecute more Jesus followers when “About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied.” (Acts 22:6-8) Paul calls it a “revelation.” This is no human invention. Jesus often explained that the people who didn’t understand His teaching didn’t get it because His teaching, his kingdom, his very existence was from above. “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world...Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” (John 8:23,47) Jesus is saying, My teachings and My Kingdom are not of this world, not a human invention, but revealed by God to those



who belong to God. The real question is whether you believe God is there or not. Most do. Most believe God is there. If God is there, God can do this. God can stop you in your tracks. Jesus can just show up. Maybe you are here this morning because Jesus has stopped you in your tracks. There is more to learn from the God who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. It's no human invention.

See, if you think about it, the cross isn't anything someone would make up anyway. If you were inventing a religion, you would not have the Son of God die on a cross. But even more compelling is this: human religion—religion of human invention—always flatters you with confidence in your capability. It gives you a path to run and says, "You can do it, if you try. Just try harder. Buy the book; subscribe to the podcast; come to the conference. I'll show you how you can do it if you try hard enough." Christianity is an opposite message. The gospel says, "You can't do it. Give up. But good news, Christ has done it for you." It is a humbling road. First give up! Then you find your purpose, your meaning, your actual life, when you throw your lot in with Jesus and allow Him to accomplish it, allow Him to be your Savior. This is what Paul did. He started out zealous to make himself. He was zealous for righteousness. "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." (Galatians 1:13-14) This is how it goes. When you have it in your head to earn your own justification, establish your own righteousness, create your own freedom, you can never push hard enough, perform well enough, try enough—there is no enough, and it makes you crazy. It made Paul intensely fanatical, desperate, until his heart turned violent. When life is a ladder, you step on anyone to take the next rung.

Then Jesus interrupted him. A truth from above. "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." (Galatians 1:15-16) He is saying here, again, I didn't get this from a handbook or a class or from a human invention. Jesus stopped him in his striving. Jesus deeply frustrated, interrupted, Paul's plan, Paul's career. Stopped short! Crash! God was pleased to reveal his Son. That's where Paul gave up, gave in, gave over to the Lord. And the conversion is radical. Churches who heard of it were blown away. "They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' And they praised God because of me." (Galatians 1:23-24) There is no greater picture of the power of Christ than a transformed life. All the energy Paul had for disintegrating the church, destroying the faith, it turned to creating, building, sustaining the church of Jesus Christ. Revealed to him, now Jesus is revealed *through* him.

Now, in the loss of his own plans and the failure of his personal drive to establish his righteousness through good works, when all of that fell apart, that's when Paul found the purpose of his life. A purpose that, looking back, he could see was part of his story from the time God called him when he was still in his mother's womb. Do you see that? Verses 15-16 again. "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." (Galatians 1:15-16) Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles. That's his true purpose in life. That's his life of meaning. That is what he was meant to do and to be in this world. I found my purpose, my reason for getting up in the morning, the reason why I am here on this planet. I found it in Jesus. A lot of people get stuck trying to find their purpose. It seems freeing to have so many possibilities; but the open range leaves you paralyzed by choice. Paul found his purpose, and that too was no human invention. He found his purpose in Christ. That is a better freedom. Jesus has won a better freedom. There is no freedom like bending the knee to serve Jesus. He has



a purpose for you too. That's Jesus. To know Him is to love Him; to trust Him is to grow confident; to bend the knee and serve Him is to finally be free.

So, Paul establishes a ministry of the gospel, a truth that is no human invention, but a revelation from God, from above. We who believe as he believes would say then that truth is not my possession or your possession, but is out there, outside of us all, and is something to pursue and grasp together, to debate and search out, and, when found, to submit ourselves to and subordinate our opinions before and to, maybe, even revere. Maybe now we can understand just a little bit better when Jesus says, "I am the truth." "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (John 14:6) He also said, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) Knowing Jesus. This is truth.

What do we do in a world that demands truth as a personal possession? What do we do with fractured truth? Live our lives rooted, established and made whole in Jesus Christ. See, the only way to maintain the illusion that truth is a personal expression is to disintegrate life, to compartmentalize life, to say that physical life is different from spiritual life, mental life is different from biological life, something that is true privately may not be true publicly, or economically, or politically, or ethically. The world is actively disintegrating everything in life in order to maintain these illusions—that's why we get the nonsense we get. What can we do? Well, there is no point in getting mad at the world. It's not the world's fault that it is confused. You can't get mad at people for bumping into things when they live in total darkness. It's on us, believers, children of God, to live lives of joyful integrity in a fractured world. Strive to reintegrate what has been disintegrated, bring your life together in every way. We say this a lot in this church: the devil divides, but Christ unites. The devil disintegrates; Jesus puts things back together. Let Him reintegrate your life.

What do I mean? Well, we get called hypocrites as Christians, and sometimes with reason. Resolve to root out hypocrisy in your life. Bring together your work life and your family life, your public and private life, your social media identity and your personal identity, strive to reintegrate every aspect of your life into one, whole, imperfect but healing, repaired, restored unity. Integrity. They say, "You stand for the life of the unborn, but you don't advocate for the lives of the born." Admit if there is hypocrisy. Reintegrate. Okay, I will advocate for the born. I will help Hope & Home or stand up for a family in poverty. "You stand for biblical marriage, but you justify your own private sexual immorality." Reintegrate. Admit your hypocrisy. Strive for wholeness; resolve to root out sexual immorality with as much fervor as you stand for conservative values. "You say you stand for generosity, but you hoard wealth like a dragon with gold!" Let us be men and women of integrity, wholeness, every aspect of our life brought transparently before the Lord. No fracture. Truth. It is a better freedom. Jesus is a *reintegrator*; a healer. Let Him. When we allow Christ's integration in a fractured world, our lives demonstrate fullness, solidity, peace, the truth that is no human invention.

Truth is not fractured. It is one. Whole. Jesus proved it on the cross. Atonement is not just a doctrine, an idea. Jesus knew it wasn't something that existed only in the mind. It would take His body. He gave his whole self on the cross for our sins. Jesus says, "My saving love for you, it isn't true only as a sentiment, it is true as an action; not only as a mental truth, but a physical truth; it is not only a religious or spiritual truth—the truth comes together, it is whole, as I give my whole self, body, mind, soul, blood, spirit, breath...I give it all." Jesus died on the cross not as a fractured, personal truth. Jesus died as a whole self, integrated, all together on the cross. Then, after His body was buried, and after He rose again from the dead, Jesus was reunited, body and soul, and ascended to heaven. One. Whole. Complete.

