

# Adult Teaching Resources

June 5, 2016



## Getting On in Galatia: Paul's Angriest Letter (May 29-July 3)

**Saul's Call Makes Paul — Galatians 1:11-24**

Do You Feel "Justified"? — Galatians 2:15-21

No More Lines — Really? — Galatians 3:19-29

What Will Prevail? — Galatians 5:1, 13-25

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# Saul's Call Makes Paul

*Galatians 1:11-24*

## FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Before the Lesson:** Have blank paper and pens for the Transformational Exercise.

## Fellowship Question

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Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

You probably have a first, a middle, and a last name. Which of these names do you never use?

If you know it, what is the etymology of your name? (e.g., Richard is Germanic and means “brave power.”) [Of course, anyone who has a smart phone could search Google if they do not know.]

## Information

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We recognize Paul as one of the key leaders and influencers of the early Church. He traveled throughout the Middle East and Europe preaching, teaching, and establishing churches. Most of the New Testament is made up of letters that Paul wrote to those churches or to leaders of those churches. Without Paul, it is easy to imagine that Christianity would have remained a small sect of Judaism. However, before Paul was an evangelist for Jesus, he was a persecutor of Jesus' followers.

The first story we have about Paul is in Acts, where he is named Saul. A deacon of the church, Stephen, has been charged with blasphemy.

[Have a class member read Acts 6:8-14.]

We might argue that the persecutors were twisting Stephen's words to persuade a conviction, or we might give them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe they were misunderstanding what Stephen was actually saying, or could not hear him without bias due to their own convictions and fears. Either way, we have evidence that the church was facing persecution. Christians were the enemy.

Stephen preaches as his accusers are selecting their stones. At the end of his sermon, his accusers became his executioners.

[Have a class member read Acts 7:54-8:3.]

## Information *continued*

Stephen, facing imminent death, has a vision. What was the vision? (He saw Jesus in heaven.) We know from his conversion story that Saul also had a vision of Jesus. Why do you think Stephen's vision of Jesus did not affect Saul or the others who were stoning Stephen? (They may have thought he was crazy; maybe they thought he was hallucinating; it was not a vision that they could see, etc.)

Although Saul does not seem to have personally taken part in Stephen's death, it seems to have inspired him to instigate a surge of persecution. Like sharks that smell blood, Saul and his followers attack the followers of Jesus. He refers to this as he opens his letter to Timothy.

[Have a class member read 1 Timothy 1:12-13, 15-16.]

[Read or summarize the following quote:]

“Before his conversion, Paul called himself ‘a man of violence’ (1 Timothy 1:15). The word he actually used in the Greek...was *hubristes*...Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher and tutor to Alexander the Great, warned his warrior-student of the temptation to become ‘hubristes,’ which he defined as ‘to hurt, to grieve...to cause shame and injury...finding delight in cruelty and the suffering of others.’ Paul, in his confession of his previous life, uses this definition to describe himself. William Barclay...describes the pre-conversion Pharisee Saul's attitude as ‘arrogant sadism, ready to inflict pain and injury for the sheer joy of it.’ So, when Paul says, ‘I am the foremost, the chief of sinners,’ he is not joking.” [David Jordan. *Living with Faith*. Charlotte: Pure Faith. 2015. p. 168f.]

Obviously, the Christians were afraid of Saul and of his zeal to persecute them. After his vision of Jesus, Saul converts. However, the disciples and others were afraid of him.

[Have a class member read Acts 9:26-28.]

As we continue our lessons in Galatians, Paul refers back to his pre-conversion days as well as his relationship with the church leaders in Jerusalem.

[Have a class member read Galatians 1:11-14.]

If you had known Paul before his vision of Jesus, could you have imagined who he would become after his conversion? Why not? (Our imagination of what God can do with a human life is very limited; we believe, deep down, that people remain the same and do not change; we doubt God's power, etc.)

Paul's accounts about his meetings in Jerusalem and Luke's accounts in Acts do not match up exactly. We can assume that Paul knows what he did when, whereas Luke was collecting stories, selecting which stories to include in his books, and was not as concerned about chronology as he was impact. We read Luke's version about Paul's meeting with the disciples in Jerusalem just after his conversion, but Paul gives a different account.

[Have a class member read Galatians 1:15-24.]

Often, when we talk of “God's plan of salvation” we are talking about a “personal relationship

## Information *continued*

with Jesus.” That is what we mean by conversion. We convert from not being a follower of Jesus to becoming a follower of Jesus. We believe that this is a personal choice. It affects our eternal destiny. For Paul, however, conversion mandated a conversion not to a different religion, but a radical reconsideration of everything anyone knew about God up to the resurrection of Jesus.

Part of that reconsideration had to do with who God loved and who could be considered the children of God. Paul realized that God’s love and salvation were for all people — Jews and non-Jews (aka Gentiles).

As The Bible Lesson writer says, “while we typically speak of Paul’s ‘conversion’ on the Damascus road, Paul saw it as a fuller revelation of God and a prophetic call to proclaim the gospel of Christ among the Gentiles — to all nations.”

Again, this was not something anyone expected. Salvation was for the *Jews*. *They* were God’s chosen people. Now, a man steeped in Jewish teachings says that this is not a complete picture of God’s dream for the world.

It should be noted that Paul knew the facts of the Christian faith before he became a Christian.

“He must already have known a good deal of the content of Christian belief when he was persecuting the Church; he was no fool, and would not have wasted time and energy in persecuting a group with which he had no quarrel. He knew what they believed; he learnt it from them when they were his enemies. Elsewhere he stresses his agreement with those who were Christians before him. ‘I handed on to you that which I also received’ (1 Cor. 15:3). There follows the basic outline, not of theology but of the facts in which Christian theology rests: Christ died for our sins, he was buried, the third day he was raised from the dead... The question that was settled by Paul’s conversion was not what Christians believed, but whether what Christians believed was true; and it was settled not by a paper proof but by the personal appearance of the central character.” [C.K. Barrett. *Freedom and Obligation: A Study of the Epistle to the Galatians*. Philadelphia: Westminster. p. 9.]

This personal confrontation with Jesus Christ changed Paul dramatically. Some use Paul as the model for conversion or coming to Christ. How do you feel about that? Must a person have a time certain and a testimonial story before they may call themselves a follower of Jesus?

We have been calling this man both Saul and Paul. Unlike “name change stories” that we have often read in the Bible, apparently, he was given both names at birth — one a Hebrew name, one a Greek name.

[From the online resource, “The Hardest Question: Why was Saul’s name changed to Paul?”] “The most likely answer is that Paul didn’t change his name altogether, but changed which name he used in public... Born as a Jew and as a Roman citizen in the city of Tarsus, it’s not surprising that he would have both a Hebrew name and a Roman name. Saul (*sha’ul*), the name of Israel’s first king, is a Hebrew word that means ‘asked.’ Paul (*Paulus*) is a common Latin name that could be translated as ‘little’ or ‘small.’ When we read about the young zealot’s

## Information *continued*

persecution of Christians, he was acting within a fully Jewish context, and used his Hebrew name, Saul. After meeting Christ and coming to believe that he had been called to a special evangelistic ministry among the Gentiles, Paul apparently decided on his own to switch to his Roman name.”

So, although God did not change the apostle’s name, Paul changed the name he used. It signified the changed life he would now live in reaching out to non-Jews with the good news of God’s love for them.

## Transformational Exercise

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[Distribute paper and pens.]

There is something within us that hopes that people will change for the better, but is surprised when it actually happens.

Often change happens in a person because of dramatic situational changes. A new love, an epiphany, a betrayal, a sudden loss or a sudden windfall — situations like these may put our lives on pause long enough that we reflect on how we must now change. Those situations may change our attitudes and our behaviors. They may affect our spiritual life.

On this sheet of paper, draw two lines to make three columns. In the first column, jot down three significant changes that have happened in your life. In the second column, jot down how that situation changed you. In the third column, jot down any impact this had on your spiritual life.

[Give time for class members to reflect and write. After some time of silence, invite any who will to share insights they have gained from this exercise.]

[Close in a prayer something like this: *O God, as our lives change, we change. Some of us have had traumatic, Damascus road experiences. Others of us have more ordinary spiritual stories. In all of them, you are there. Help us not to waste any experience that could lead us closer to you. Amen.*]

**Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan?** You may send comments to the lesson plan author at [rjordan@cbfnc.org](mailto:rjordan@cbfnc.org). Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Double dipping** — The lectionary text for last week was Gal. 1:1-12, and the text for this week is Gal. 1:11-24, which means that vv. 11-12 are included in both weeks’ lessons. That’s one of the reasons we didn’t dig too deeply into it last week.

**Gospel** — Our word “gospel” comes from an Old English term that means “good story,” and it translates the Greek word *euangelion* (pronounced “you-ahn-GE-li-on”), which means “good news.” For Paul, any teaching that contradicted the message of salvation by grace through faith was bad news. By definition, it couldn’t be called “gospel.”

**Preached preaching** — English translations do not reflect an emphatic wordplay in Paul’s message: “the gospel that was proclaimed by me” translates to *euangelion to euangelisthen*, using both the noun for “gospel” and the verb for “preach the gospel.” Thus, it has the sense of “the gospel that was gossiped by me.”

**Objective or subjective?** — Translators struggle with the proper interpretation of Paul saying he received a revelation “through (or by) a revelation of Jesus Christ.” Did he mean that Jesus Christ was the source of revelation about himself, or that Jesus was the subject of a revelation he received from God?

In Greek, words that would follow “of” or sometimes “from” in English have an ending that marks them as being in what is called the genitive case, but genitives can serve many functions. They can be attributive, possessive, partitive, appositive, subjective, objective, and more. In Gal. 1:12, the question is whether “Jesus Christ” is a *subjective* genitive, meaning that Christ is the subject of the verbal idea implied in the governing noun, or an *objective* genitive, meaning that he is the object of the verbal idea implied in the governing noun. In this case, the governing noun is “revelation.” If we read “of Christ” as a subjective genitive, Jesus Christ would be the subject responsible for the revelation to Paul. If we read it as an objective genitive, Jesus Christ is the object of revelation, presumably from God.

Luke’s account of Paul’s conversion on the Damascus road clearly says that he saw a vision of Jesus (Acts 9:3-6), in which case Jesus would have both a subjective and objective role, revealing himself to Paul. In v. 16, Paul will say that God “was pleased to reveal his Son to me,” in which Christ is the object of revelation. Perhaps Paul’s language is intentionally ambiguous, indicating that Christ in God is both the subject and the object of revelation.

**Breathing fire** — In his earlier life as a devout and zealous Jew, Paul had sought to quash the emerging church through persecutions designed to frighten Jewish Christians away from Jesus and back into the fold. Saul had watched as a Christian preacher named Stephen was stoned to death, and did so with approval (Acts 7:54-8:1). He probably took a lead role in a “severe persecution” that broke out against the church in Jerusalem, causing many Christians to abandon the city and scatter throughout the countryside. Saul was

## Digging Deeper *continued*

not satisfied, but pursued Christians wherever they gathered in hopes of stifling their movement. Luke described his actions this way: “Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2).

**Arabia** — Paul’s claim to have gone into “Arabia” does not mean that he travelled deep into Saudi Arabia, as we would now know it. During the first century, “Arabia” generally referred to the Nabatean kingdom that reached almost to Damascus in the north and into the Arabian peninsula east of the Red Sea in the south, extending westward beneath the Dead Sea as far as Gaza, on the Mediterranean Sea.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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### Why was Saul's name changed to Paul?

The most likely answer is that Paul didn't change his name altogether, but changed which name he used in public. Readers often assume that Jesus changed Saul's name to Paul, as God had changed Abram's name to Abraham (Gen. 17:5), and Jacob's name to Israel (Gen. 32:28). But, when Christ appeared in a vision to the zealous Pharisee as he traveled to Damascus in search of Christians to prosecute, he called him Saul, saying "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). When the Lord appeared to Ananias, a respected believer who lived in Damascus, so that he could go and pray for the blinded zealot, he told him to "look for a man of Tarsus named Saul," who was praying (Acts 9:11). Later, after Saul/Paul had spent some time among the Christians in Antioch, the Holy Spirit directed the church to "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). There's no suggestion, then, that God instructed the new missionary to change his name.

How, then, was it changed — and why? The most likely explanation is that Saul probably had two names. Contemporary Americans usually have a first and middle name in addition to their last name, and this was also common in the first century: Paul was apparently given two names at birth. Born as a Jew and as a Roman citizen in the city of Tarsus, it's not surprising that he would have both a Hebrew name and a Roman name. Saul (*sha'ul*), the name of Israel's first king, is a Hebrew word that means "asked." Paul (*Paulus*) is a common Latin name that could be translated as "little" or "small."

When we read about the young zealot's persecution of Christians, he was acting within a fully Jewish context, and used his Hebrew name, Saul. After meeting Christ and coming to believe that he had been called to a special evangelistic ministry among the Gentiles, Paul apparently decided on his own to switch to his Roman name.

We first learn of this in Acts 13:9. On his first missionary journey, during a visit to the city of Paphos on the island of Cyprus, Paul was witnessing to the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus (!) when they were interrupted by a "magician" named Elymas (Acts 13:4-8). In response, Luke wrote, "Saul, *also known as Paul*, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ..." before accusing the man of opposing God and declaring that he would become blind (Acts. 13:9-12). The proconsul, suitably impressed, became a believer.

From that point on, Luke consistently uses the name Paul, and that is likewise how Paul identified himself in his letters. It appears, then, that Paul himself chose to use his Roman name as he traveled through Roman territories as an "apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13). It was a logical and appropriate thing to do.

Paul may also have been motivated to embrace his Roman name as a gesture of humility. In forsaking the royal name Saul for a Greek name meaning "small" or "humble," Paul may have intentionally diminished himself to honor Christ the more.