

• *Paul's former life in Judaism*

**Why do people reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ?**

• *Many good reasons to consider the gospel seriously!*

**1. Nothing to do with intellectual ability**

**2. Inherited traditions are a hindrance**

Paul is explaining that his apostleship came through a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to say how he first experienced this revelation. He says, '*For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it*' <sup>1</sup>. We remember the story of how he went down the road to Damascus 'breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord'.

Why do people reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? There is good reason to consider the gospel seriously. It offers forgiveness of sins and Jesus is a wonderful Saviour. He went around doing good and healing many people. He was kindly to outcasts and needy people. He was welcoming to those who were rejected by others as sinners. The gospel-message claims to be the only answer to the world's problems, and the world is in such bad trouble you would think it would be willing to try almost anything. You would think that men and women would at least be interested in considering whether perhaps the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ might be the answer? But generally speaking they do not even give it any thought at all. Why do they not take the gospel-message more seriously. Paul's story gives us the answer.

**1. It has nothing to do with intellectual ability.** If you ask people why they do not receive the Lord Jesus Christ they tend to say, 'Well, this gospel of yours is just an old-fashioned religion. I am too intelligent to believe in something like that. I have lots of questions. I am too intellectual to become a Christian.'

But consider this apostle Paul. He certainly was a highly intellectual person. You only have to read his letters to see that he was a highly logical and intellectual person. He was obviously a brilliant scholar. He clearly was a man of great energy. He studied under a famous rabbi, Gamaliel (mentioned in Acts 5:34). Sometimes very brilliant people become Christians. Saul of Tarsus was a brilliant scholar but he also came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet it was not his cleverness that made Saul a Christian. Despite all of his intelligence there was nothing intelligent about the time when he rejected Jesus! Saul of Tarsus was once spiritually blind. People claim to reject the gospel because of their intelligence, but is there anything intelligent about sin? Was there anything intelligent in the fury of Saul of Tarsus against the Christians? Is there anything intelligent about a heart full of hate? Intellectual people can be full of spiritual problems, and their intellect gives them no help!

**2. So what hinders people from coming to faith? Our inherited traditions are a hindrance to us.** Paul speaks about his 'former life in Judaism'. People inherit a certain way of life. They have their nationality, the ways in which their clan or their family like to live, their religion. Before we come to faith we tend to be in the grip of our traditions, our denomination, our tribe, our family habits. We somehow feel that the way in which we grew up is the right way and everyone else is not quite so lucky as we are! Paul was quite convinced that his

Judaism, his Hebrew language, his Pharisaic denomination, was the way God wanted everyone to be. Christians (he thought) should be persecuted!

**3. Prejudice is a hindrance**

**3. Prejudice hinders people from coming to faith.** Paul says he ‘persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it’. Prejudice hinders people from coming to faith. Paul says he ‘persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it’. He did not think it was sinful to kill Christians. He encouraged the murder of Stephen. He thought he ought to destroy the Christian church completely. But it was sheer prejudice. He could not think straight. He had never really considered the Christian faith. He was convinced he ought to oppose it, but it was blindness, a kind of ‘fog in the mind’.

**4. Selfish ambition is a hindrance**

**4. Selfish ambition hinders people from coming to faith in Jesus.** Paul says, ‘*And I was making progress in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers*<sup>1</sup>’. Paul never would have wanted to give any real attention to the Christian gospel. He was doing so well in life. His friends of his own age would envy his success. Paul himself was so full of burning zeal for the Jewish ways he had inherited from the people of Israel. He was eager to do well as a Jewish rabbi. How could he consider throwing aside all of his ambitions?

1:14

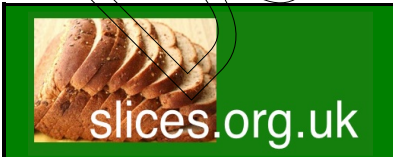
**Paul’s story?**

• It explains how Jesus turned him around

Why does Paul tell his story? There are perhaps two reasons:  
 (i) People were puzzled by the fact that they heard Paul was once a persecutor. Even now they heard that he was opposed to the kind of Mosaic Christianity that was popular in Jerusalem. Was Paul still a persecutor of Christians? There were Jewish Christians who did not know Paul very well and who were not sure whether Paul was a friend or an enemy of the Christian faith. So Paul explains. He was once a persecutor of the Christian faith but then God revealed the Lord Jesus Christ to him and turned him around.

• Paul was a great example of his message

But there was another reason why Paul should tell his story.  
 (ii) He himself was a great example of the very message he preached. In Paul’s own story it was clear that Paul was saved by God’s grace and not by anything that Paul did to save himself. He was a very wicked person and, like all unbelievers, he was in the grip of prejudice. He was saved only through God’s mercy and grace.



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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