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A1001 – January 3, 2010 – Galatians 1:18-24 – The Three Era's Of Paul's Life

To cover today's text let's start getting a chronology on Paul's life going. We'll break his life into three eras to make it easy. First we will talk about Paul's early life in Tarsus, second, Paul's life in Jerusalem as a Pharisee and third, Paul's life as a Christian. Paul was a Jew from Tarsus which is in the province of Cilicia. Cilicia is in modern day SE Turkey. So Paul was a Diaspora Jew. But his father had Roman citizenship probably due to some act on behalf of a former Emperor by one of Paul's great grandfather's. Paul was also a Roman citizen. Being a Jew from outside of the land but having Roman citizenship he was considered by Jews inside the land to be a Hellenistic Jew. Hellenic just means Greek culture and Jews from outside the land were considered by the native Jews as being tainted by Greek culture. So you had these two categories of Jews: natives and Hellenistic. Native Jews were born in the land; they were the descendants of the Jews who were partially restored to the land after the Exile. They were generally more narrow minded and provincial in their outlook. They were buried in Jerusalem and the Temple and they were a bit snooty, they considered themselves better than Hellenistic Jews because they lived in the land. So you had this narrow minded provincial group of native Jews. Then you had the Hellenistic Jews and they were still living in dispersion. Their parents had never returned to settle in the land. They lived out among the Gentiles. And they were more open minded and cosmopolitan in their outlook on life. They saw something greater than Jerusalem and the Temple. Jerusalem and the Temple were central but Jerusalem and the Temple weren't everything, there was the cosmos outside of Jerusalem and they were thinking in terms of the larger purpose of God for the whole cosmos enveloping Jerusalem and the Temple. Paul was from this more cosmopolitan stock of Jews, he was a Hellenistic Jew but he probably became more narrow minded and provincial as he was

influenced by Gamaliel in Jerusalem during his training. Early on he grew up in Tarsus under strict training by his father who was a Pharisee. Paul's family was very prominent in Pharisaic Judaism; he came from a family that had multiple generations of Pharisees. So he was trained in the strict legalism of the Pharisees from boyhood. But Tarsus was also an intellectual center and all the ideas of the Greeks from Socrates to Plato to Aristotle to Epicurus to Zeno were accessible to Paul in his early years. And we know he picked up on a lot of these ideas and was familiar enough with them to converse with them quite ably. He was very well-rounded intellectually and he probably spent his first 13 years of life in Tarsus.

The second era of Paul's life was his study in Jerusalem as a Pharisee. His father spent a lot of money to send him to Jerusalem when he was 13 to attend the school of Gamaliel, the leading rabbi in Israel. Gamaliel was one of only seven Jews to receive the title rabban which means "the teacher of Israel" rather than rabbi which means merely "a teacher of Israel." Paul entered into this school and excelled greatly beyond many of his contemporaries. Paul had zeal and he had genius and when you put those two together under the greatest living Pharisaic professor you get a rarity. Paul was a theological genius even among the Pharisees. He was being groomed by Gamaliel to take over his position as the next great rabban. So he was taking the doctrinal conclusions and thinking them through and radically applying them to destroy Christianity, which he perceived as a threat. Paul saw more quickly than professor Gamaliel that if Christianity was true then Pharisaic Judaism was false and that if he didn't do something to destroy Christianity then Pharisaic Judaism would be in jeopardy. So in an attempt to squash Christianity he came trotting down the Damascus Road. We don't know how old Paul was at this time. He may have been around 25 years of age.

Let's try to build this all on a time scale. Acts and Galatians are the primary documents for building this chronology. We say that Jesus was crucified and resurrected in AD33. (This follows Harold Hoehner's work *The Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Hoehner was one of the outstanding NT theologians at Dallas Theological Seminary. He taught there for 42 years and published a lot in the area of chronology. One of his key books dates the key events in the life of Christ. He concludes that Jesus was crucified and resurrected in AD33; that would be Acts 1 timeframe). If we start with that as an historical peg we can hang our hat on and then we come down to Acts

15, the Council of Jerusalem, (that's another historical peg), we're pretty sure that's AD50, then we can begin to place the events of Paul's life up to AD50 in that time frame. We're only interested in the time up to AD50. What happened between AD33 and AD50 in Paul's life?

This is the way we'll handle these verses in Galatians. These verses are Paul's case for his apostleship being sourced in God and not man. That's Paul's defense. Once he's established that he can get them doctrinally straightened out on justification and sanctification. But as long as you're unsure if Paul is really an apostle then you are really unsure Paul's doctrine is true. So his chronology is vital to the case.

If you're building a case and you build a case with holes in it then it's not going to hold water. Someone is going to find the holes and then the whole case falls apart. So Paul's case in Galatians 1:13-2:21 cannot have any holes in it. He cannot leave out anything that is important to the case. If something is left out that's pertinent and, for example, we say this is not a strict chronology and Paul left out a few years here and there and didn't say where he was then what would the Galatians say to Paul? "Well, Paul, that's a nice history, but where were you during so and so years? Why didn't you tell us where you were those years? Are you hiding something Paul? What are you hiding from us?" A hole would create insurmountable problems. It would destroy Paul's whole case and his credibility as an apostle would be shot. So that's why the Greek text in verses 18, 21 and 2:1 uses the word "then," *epeita* which means "next," "a succession in time". He's building a case that this is a tight chronology, I'm not leaving anything out that's pertinent to where I was during this time. If he leaves anything out, say an extra visit to Jerusalem for a couple of years, then Paul could have gotten his apostleship from men in Jerusalem and that would put his claim to be an apostle in jeopardy and that would put his doctrine in jeopardy. So this is tight. We can't emphasize it enough: this is a tight chronology, strict succession, everything is pertinent, a step by step chronology with no gaps.

So now we're coming to his third era in life. His first era would have been his early life as a boy at Tarsus, his second era was his life studying in Jerusalem as a Pharisee under Gamaliel and that includes the time he spent persecuting the early Christians. That includes his murder of Stephen in Acts 7 and his going on a rampage against the Christians at Jerusalem in

Acts 8 which caused the Hellenic Jews to scatter out of Jerusalem. Paul was specifically interested in destroying the Hellenic branch of Christian Jews because they saw the greater implications for the cosmos; they saw the Messiah as having dominion over the entire universe, not just Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. And that's what threatened Paul, so Paul went out to destroy the threat. He's a very logical person, he's a very politically active person and he's a very vindictive person. So on his way to Damascus to destroy the threat we come to the third era of his life, his conversion to Christianity. He went to destroy Christianity, but the divine counsels had written that this was the time to call Paul out of Judaism and into Christianity. He was the persecutor of Jesus Christ, now he's going to be the proclaimer of Jesus Christ, a radical transition.

Let's put all this stuff up to his conversion in AD34. We have the death of Christ in AD33, the next year as the church grows in Jerusalem he sees it as a threat, has his debate with Stephen, gets whipped, turns Stephen over to the Sanhedrin, they get whipped by Stephen, they get angry to the point they illegally stone Stephen, they break the law they claim to obey and Saul was there for the whole thing. Then he goes on a rampage which blasts the Hellenistic Jewish Christians out of Jerusalem. He goes out on missions to destroy Christianity before it gets beyond his reach and sometime in AD34 he's converted on the Damascus Road. He's led by the hand into Damascus and three days later he's visited by Ananias. He was physically blind but now he can see spiritually, he can really see the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, that Jesus is the Son of God, that justification by God is not by my righteousness but by Christ's righteousness imputed to my account through faith and that only the Jews that have faith in Jesus are accepted by God. He realizes it's not by my works it's by God's grace that I'm accepted with God. So he's physically blind as he walks into that city but he can really see reality for the first time. Ananias comes to him; his eyesight is restored, all in AD34/35. He takes several days to recover and immediately he goes to Arabia. He's out in Arabia which is the Nabatean Kingdom. The Nabateans were on Rome's eastern front. He's out in the desert for about 2 ½ years, probably getting direct instruction from the Lord Jesus Christ. He's working out the OT Scriptures related to the Messiah; what about Deut 21 Paul, what are you going to do with that? What about Ps 22? The crucifixion prophesied a thousand years before Roman crucifixion was invented? What about Ps 16, the resurrection of the Messiah from the dead? How do you handle Isa 53

Paul, the suffering Servant dying for His people's transgressions, like a lamb led to slaughter? That's Me, Paul. And so he's out there thinking and putting it together and thinking some more and putting it together and he's building a framework like Stephen. He comes back to Damascus and immediately on arrival he goes into the synagogues and starts preaching the framework, he starts preaching that Jesus is the Son of God, he starts preaching advanced doctrine and he's working this over in Damascus. If you'll turn to 2 Cor 11:32 you'll see something happened. We're not sure what Paul said or did exactly but Paul made waves. Everywhere Paul went they either loved him or they hated him but you couldn't be neutral on Paul. Paul was very clear about what was true and what was false. He was a clear thinker, a much better than most people. We really need some well-trained Christian thinkers like Paul who could just nail people to the wall and undermine their whole philosophy. Too often we have these Christians who are so fuzzy in their thinking they don't have a clue why they believe what they believe; they could never give a logical defense of it. It's just what I believe. Paul wasn't like that. Paul immediately saw the underlying issue and he would go straight for it. He was ruthless in debate and he'd rip your position to shreds. He did it in Christian love, of course. Paul wasn't ripping people to shreds, Paul was ripping people's worldview to shreds and this got people upset. People do not like having everything they have built their life on ripped to shreds. But that's what Paul did for a living. He went around and ripped people's worldview to shreds because there is only one way to think and that is God's way. And therefore, if you're not thinking God's way you're thinking is categorized by God as non-thinking. And people don't like it when you tell them the way they're thinking has no substance before God. Try it sometime, try telling someone that and see what kind of response you get. There is a lot of pride and arrogance hidden inside of autonomous men who think their thoughts count. They don't count. It's God's thoughts that count and so every time Paul went into some synagogue out came two sides: those that were for God's thoughts and those that were for man's thoughts. That's what I imagine was causing disruption here in 2 Cor 11:32, "In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, ³³and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands." And we've got to have peace in Damascus, Paul doesn't make for peace, Paul makes for division, the Jews got upset and this was disturbing the peace and so the ethnarch was going to arrest Paul but by the providence of God rescued Paul through a window.

So come back to Galatians 1:18. Where did Paul go after he skipped town that night in Damascus? **Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas**, that's Peter, (that's the Aramaic synonym for Peter and it means the same thing, a small stone, a pebble, a little piece of gravel). It's Jesus Christ who is the rock, not Peter; Peter's just a little piece of gravel you kick down the street. Jesus Christ is the immovable rock of our salvation. So verse 18 is saying three years after my conversion I escaped out a window in Damascus and **I went up to Jerusalem**. He hadn't been there since the day he got letters from the chief priests to go to Damascus and arrest Christians. So for three years, from AD34/35 up till AD36/37 he was in Damascus, Arabia and then back to Damascus. How is he funding all this? Probably his daddy. His daddy was rich and he may have been getting a stipend from the Pharisees. They may have funded his trip to Damascus to destroy Christians. But in any case, after three years in the Arabian Desert he comes back to Damascus; he preaches, gets everyone stirred up, he escapes the wrath of the ethnarch through a window and is now in Jerusalem for the first time since his conversion. Verse 18 says he spent how long there? **Fifteen days**, not exactly long enough to get a crash course on being an apostle. He sees **Cephas** and he sees in verse 19 **James. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother**. So he sees two apostles, he can't get apostolic consensus on his gospel because there's only two apostles there. **Cephas**, who is of the twelve, and **James**, the Lord's brother who is not of the twelve. They're both apostles because they both saw Jesus Christ in His resurrection body. **Cephas**, (we know a lot about him), takes the lead in early Acts and he preaches the main sermons in Acts 2, Acts 3 and Acts 4. Later he writes 1 and 2 Peter and the Gospel of Mark was written by Peter's amanuensis Mark, so the Gospel of Mark largely reflects Peter's theology under the inspiration of God the Spirit, of course. **James** (we know less about him), is **the Lord's brother** and that's interesting. The early church debated whether Jesus had any brothers and sisters or not. Three views came out: one that they were first cousins, that's the Hieronymian view, Jerome imagined that one up. Another view was that they were Joseph's from a prior marriage, that's the Epiphonian view; Epiphanius dreamed that one up. And finally there's the view that they actually were his brothers and sisters, after the virgin birth Mary and Joseph consummated their marriage and had other children, that's the Hevidian view. Tertullian held this and later Helvidius

and it was named after him the Hevidian view. Of course, the Hevidian view is correct, that's the only one that has any Scriptural basis. Joseph and Mary did not remain perpetual virgins. How could they become one flesh if they remained perpetual virgins? Another interesting thing about this **James** is that even though he was the Lord's brother he didn't believe his brother was the **Lord** until after His resurrection. We get this from John 7:5 where he says "not even his brothers were believing in Him." So if you think you're family members or friends don't come to Christ because you have a bad witness or something, get over yourself. Jesus was the perfect witness and still his brothers didn't believe in Him. 1 Cor 15 tells us that Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection and this is the reason James eventually did believe in Him. So if it took that for Jesus' brothers to believe don't beat yourself up when your family and friends don't believe. Just relax, live the Christian life, show them the difference, salvation is up to God not you.

So in Gal 1:18-19 he sees only two apostles in Jerusalem, **Cephas** and **James**. He can't stay there long because again he causes problems. Paul got everyone in Jerusalem stirred up. To see this turn to Acts 9:26-31. It's not necessarily wrong to divide people. Even Jesus said He came to divide a mother from her daughter, a son from his father, etc...so you can't say dividing people is wrong. There are issues worth dividing over and the issues are this, "What is the truth?" Everybody can't get along. You may want to get along. But if you sacrifice truth for getting along you're not getting along with God anymore. So which is more important: getting along with man or getting along with God? Paul loved God and if that caused people to get upset that caused people to get upset.

And the point of vv 18-19 is to say that Paul only saw two apostles in Jerusalem on his visit in AD36/37. Where were the other apostles? Supposedly out evangelizing and teaching in the regions of Judea. They were out and about so Paul didn't meet them. He only met Cephas and James and I'm sure he conversed with them extensively but it's not enough time to get a crash course on apostleship, nor was there a consensus among the apostles on Paul or his doctrine.

So, here's Paul in Jerusalem, lets start in 9:22, here he's still at Damascus, just to catch what we've said, "But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is

the Christ. ²³When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.” And that’s what we saw in 2 Cor 11:32. Where did he go? Verse 26, “When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took hold of him,” (in modern parlance he grabbed him by the shirt collar and said boy, you don’t know what you’re doing here, you’re reputation precedes you and your reputation is that you’re a murderer of Christians), because he’s making a mess of these Christians. And notice what Barnabas does in verse 27. Barnabas is the word that means “son of encouragement,” and we think Barnabas had this spiritual gift of encouragement. Every passage that mentions Barnabas you can see he had a soft heart, especially toward new believers. If he saw a new believer he’d encourage them and build them up and really get them going in the Christian life and that’s what he’s doing here with Paul. So he grabbed him by the collar “and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.” Barnabas came alongside Paul. Barnabas had been watching Paul and Barnabas knew Paul was going to be a mighty instrument, so it says he took him to the apostles, notice that’s plural. We’re not told how many here, we’re just told plural, two or more, Paul tells us over in Galatians it was Cephas and James, so that’s the link here between Gal 1:18-19 and Acts 9:26-30. These are parallel passages. The fifteen days of Gal 1:18-19 span Acts 9:26-30. We should read on through and see what happened and why the stay at Jerusalem was so short. So come to verse 28, “And he was with them,” meaning he was with Cephas and James, (their territory was Jerusalem so he was with them), “moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord ²⁹And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death.” See Paul caused all kinds of division. It isn’t wrong to do that. Some commentators say Paul was wrong, Paul wasn’t ready here, Paul was wrong to go talk to these Jews in Jerusalem. That’s bologna. The problem isn’t Paul; the problem is these people aren’t interested in the truth. Paul is presenting everything he learned on the Damascus Road and out in the Arabian desert and he’s saying here’s the OT prophecies of the Messiah and here’s Jesus, I put the two side by side and I come up with the

conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah. What do you do about that? What do you do with Jesus? So the problem isn't Paul. The problem is they're not interested in the truth. They're just like Paul was four years before. So we have division again. They're trying to put him to death just like he had done to Stephen. The persecutor becomes the persecuted. Verse 30, "But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus." They sent him home, AD36/37. That was the right thing to do at the time because the church in Jerusalem had had enough persecution for awhile and they needed some down time to get doctrine, and you can't get doctrine when you're constantly in a jam. You need some peace and quiet. They ship Paul off, things settle down, verse 31 gives the result, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." That's doctrinal increase; they began to increase in their spiritual maturity. You can't do that when every other moment is an intense moment. You need some peace and quiet so with Paul out of the Jerusalem picture they were growing in truth.

Let's go back to Gal 1, verse 20. There's one more note Paul puts in here sort of as a parenthetical and we want to ask why does he throw this in? Verse 20, **(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)** That's probably thrown in there because they might say, "Now are you sure you only saw two apostles, Cephas and James? Are you sure you didn't see more so you could get a consensus?" No, Paul says, I assure you before God I only saw two and if I only saw two then I couldn't have gotten apostolic consensus on my gospel because we know that the early apostles had to give their consensus as a group and we know that because they all show up at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 to debate the gospel. So if there were only two apostles present then they couldn't pass off on Paul's gospel, there was no possible apostolic consensus. So that's his argument and why he sticks verse 20 in there, **I assure you before God that I am not lying.**

Verse 21. What did they do to Paul after he stirred up trouble in Jerusalem? They shipped him off to Tarsus. Where did he go? Verse 21 tells us, **Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.** Cilicia was the province of his hometown, Tarsus, where his mother and father lived. He probably went home first. He hadn't seen his folks in several years so he probably went

home. We can only imagine the welcoming he received. His father sent him off to become a Pharisee, he came back a Christian. This is what Jesus Christ was saying when He said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword, For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother...and a man's enemies will be the members of his household." Paul didn't get a nice reception from his father, oh Paul, I'm so happy for you that you believe in Jesus, what a precious thing, and would you tell me about Him." That's not what happened. We can only glean what happened from Paul's later writings about how fathers should treat their sons. Paul later wrote in two places, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger." We think Paul wrote that out of his own personal background. Paul had been on the receiving end of his father's wrath when he got home with his new faith. This is not what Paul's father wanted for him. Paul's father expected him to be the next great Pharisee. And we think it was at this point that Paul's father cut him off financially. Later, you see him making tents, having to earn a living by a trade he'd picked up. So we think a lot went down the day he got home and it must have been difficult for the rest of Paul's life to deal with the fallout he had with his father. And that's a principle fathers, don't try to make your sons into something they are not. Proverbs says, "Train up a child in the way he should go," and what the Hebrew means there is train up a child according to his natural bent; don't have your expectations for your son: you're going to be a lawyer, I'm a lawyer, my father was a lawyer, we're lawyers and you're going to be a lawyer or I played baseball...you're going to play baseball and if you don't do it you're not going to please me. That's not being a father, that's being an idiot. A true father will watch his child, will observe very carefully his natural inclination and will encourage him in that direction and if you do that then when he is old he will not depart from it, he will stick with his profession and he will be successful at it because that's God's plan for his life. God makes the plans for your son, not you. Your job is to help him find it, encourage him along the right lines, to direct him into God's plans not your own.

But apparently this was not on Paul's father's agenda and this ruptured the family relationship. We know Paul had some sympathy inside the family from one of his sisters and a nephew, so everyone else didn't write Paul off, but we think his father did and this caused years of hurt. So verse 21: he probably first went to Cilicia to his hometown of Tarsus, then he went out

into these **regions of Syria and Cilicia**. He went out from his hometown. A prophet is never accepted in his hometown. Jesus wasn't accepted in His hometown and neither was Paul. So Paul goes out. What's he doing out there? He's preaching the faith. Notice verse 22, **I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ** (doctrine of the church there, by the way, **in Christ** is a designation of the Church) ²³**but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."** ²⁴**And they were glorifying God because of me.** So he's **preaching the faith**. Gal 2:1 tells us for **fourteen years interval**. It's difficult to tell the starting point of this fourteen years. Is it from the last time he was in Jerusalem which would be AD36/37? Or is it from the time of his conversion which would put it in AD34? It's a difficult question. Probably though, we get a hint in verse 2 but let's finish verse 1, **Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.** ²**It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation...** he goes up because of a revelation. This is the first time the apostles made an evaluation of his gospel. It wasn't back with Cephas and James, it was on this second visit to Jerusalem. And he says **I went up because of a revelation**. Turn to Acts 11:27 to see the revelation. In Acts 11 Paul is in Antioch, there's a reason for that we'll come back to later. But by this time Paul is in Antioch of Syria. Verse 27, "Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch." They had prophets back then because the canon of Scripture was still open and you find prophets through the book of Acts. God was writing Scripture. 1 Cor 13, prophecy was done away with. Verse 28, "One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius." So we have a prophecy and a fulfillment of prophecy. There were a whole series of famines here during Claudius' reign, the most extensive down in Judea was during the years AD46-47, so this is the revelation that took Paul to Jerusalem in Gal 2:1. It says verse 29, "And in proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea." ³⁰**And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.** This is Paul's second visit to Jerusalem. If we do the math, fourteen years from the last time he was in Jerusalem which was AD36/37 then that would put this over in AD49 or 50 and that's

too late. The relief fund would have needed to be there in AD46-47, so that won't work. The other option is to reckon the fourteen years from his conversion on the Damascus Road. His conversion was in AD34 and if we count most of that year and we add fourteen years to that and it would put it over in AD47 and that would fit the famine of Claudius' reign. So I prefer that solution. It works out with the actual famine dates and it would strengthen his argument. By reckoning back to his conversion he covers the whole period and that means there can't be any gaps of time, he's covered it all by that time designation. So what it seems he's doing is reckoning everything from his conversion. Gal 1:18 the three years there are reckoned from his conversion on the Damascus Road and Gal 2:1 the fourteen years is also reckoned from his conversion on the Damascus Road.

He's building a solid case for his incapacity to get his gospel from anywhere else. Now we have fourteen years where Paul is obviously ministering in Damascus, a little in Jerusalem and a lot in Syria and Cilicia for a total of 14 years without having the twelve apostles in Jerusalem check off on his gospel. That doesn't come until this visit with the famine relief fund in Acts 11:30.

So let's conclude Gal 1. While he's gone into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, verse 22 says **I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ**, so he never went to these churches. These churches would have been the most prominent churches because they were in Judea, they were closest to Jerusalem, and he didn't visit them. Verse 23, **but only, they kept hearing**, so they had reports coming in about this Paul up in Syria and Cilicia and here's the summary report, **"He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."** Preaching the faith is the objective genitive, it means preaching the Christian faith, Christian doctrine, he's preaching that Jesus is the Messiah. He's preaching that Jesus is uniquely the Son of God, that Jesus is divine. He's preaching that Jesus' righteousness is what pleases God, not our righteousness, and therefore justification is by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works. Before that he had preached that that our works build righteousness before God, now he preaches the opposite. Only Jesus' righteousness pleased God and therefore salvation is by grace through faith.

Verse 24, **And they were glorifying God because of me.** Because of what God had done in Paul's life. Because of the radical transformation in this man's life. Because the great persecutor of the Christian faith was now the great preacher of the Christian faith. We can all learn from this. Apart from Paul's argument, we can all learn that we never know who God is going to use as His next great instrument. We don't know. I can tell you I never expected to be a pastor-teacher. Not that I'm a great one by any means. We have a small church in a small town with a small but faithful ministry, faithful to the word of God, faithful to the precepts of God. But I can tell you I never expected the transition in my own life. All I can say is I'm humbled by it and I'm thankful for it and I pray there are more young men out there that God chooses to make instruments for His glory. Maybe today they're radical atheists; maybe they bite your head off every time you try to talk about Christ. It doesn't matter what they are today, what matters is the plan God has for their life. He can turn their life around by His sovereign grace. He can do that, He does that and it's my prayer that He does that in America today and the world over, because we are in desperate need for some apostle Paul type material. Whatever you've chosen Lord, for Your glory and Your names' sake. You are the potter, we are the clay, mold us and make us.

Alright, those are the three phases of Paul's life, Paul's early life training in Tarsus, Paul's life in Jerusalem studying in Pharisaic Judaism and Paul's early life as a believer starting on the Damascus Road up to the famine in 46/47. Next time we'll start with the famine relief fund and this incident at Jerusalem in AD47 and we'll get into the doctrine of circumcision and how that corrupts the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone.

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