

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father,

We believe that You are the Sovereign One, the self-existing eternal Creator and Sustainer of all things. We declare that through the sinless life and substitutionary death of Your Son, Jesus Christ, You have redeemed *“us from all lawlessness ... to purify for [Yourself] a people for [Your] own possession who are zealous for good works”* (Tit.2:12). We know that by Your will, Your Son *“gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age”* (Gal.1:4). We readily proclaim that You are our Lord and Savior – the *“King of kings and Lord of lords”* (Rev.19:11). We affirm, and eagerly await, the Second Coming of Your Son and our Savior Jesus Christ who will one day resurrect all people – the saved to eternal life and the unsaved to eternal death (Jn.3:14-18, 36; 5:25-29; 1Jn.5:11-13).

We recognize that we are finite, You are infinite; we are mortal, You are immortal; we are flesh, You are Spirit; we are ignorant/foolish, You are all-knowing/all-wise; we are weak, You are all-powerful; we are needy, You are all-sufficient; we are sinful, You are altogether righteous; we are creation, You are the Creator; we are human beings, and You are the one and only Sovereign God.

Help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, *“the founder and perfecter of our faith”* (Heb.12:2). Give us eyes to see and ears to hear what Your Spirit would teach us this morning from Your Word. Help us to not only be hearers of the Word, but also doers of the Word (Jms.1:22-25).

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

# “Persecutor Turned Preacher”

(Galatians 1: 11-24 ~ Part 2)

## Introduction

➤ In writing this letter to “*the churches of Galatia*” (1:2), the apostle Paul gave a strong rebuke to these Christians for their willingness to embrace a false gospel (1:6). He noted that he was “*astonished*” at how “*quickly*” they abandoned the true Gospel, and instead turned to “*a different gospel*” (1:6) – which he equated to “*deserting*” God (1:6), and being “*severed from Christ*” and having “*fallen from grace*” (5:4).

The “different gospel” they had embraced was legalism – i.e. the belief that (religious/good) works are required for salvation (to either gain or maintain one’s salvation). Specifically, the religious work/ritual that they had accepted was the Jewish practice of circumcision; claiming that this ritual was necessary for salvation (see Gal.5:2-6; 6:12-15; cf. Rom.2:28-29; Col.2:11).

The truth is, there are many different (false) gospels – in Paul’s day and in ours. Satan loves to counterfeit God’s truth. Satan lives to distort God’s words, oppose His will, and pervert His commands. Consequently, Satan has many counterfeit versions of God’s Gospel, and he does not care which counterfeit you believe – whether it’s legalism or libertinism, some combination thereof – just as long as you do not believe in the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

➤ In short, the true Gospel teaches that a person is saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. There is no other Gospel (1:7)! Any changes to the true Gospel – either by addition or subtraction – constitutes a false gospel (a false message of salvation). And, in the words of the apostle Paul, all those who promote a false gospel are under God’s condemnation as false teachers (1:8, 9).

➤ After his initial short greeting (1:1-5), and subsequent rebuke (1:6-10; which he continued later in this letter), the apostle Paul digressed only to defend the divine origin of the Gospel and to defend his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ:

**Gal 1:11-24** ~ “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. <sup>12</sup>For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>13</sup>For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup>And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

<sup>15</sup>But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, <sup>16</sup>was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; <sup>17</sup>nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. <sup>18</sup>Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup>But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother. <sup>20</sup>(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!)

<sup>21</sup>Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup>And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup>They only were hearing it said, ‘He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.’ <sup>24</sup>And they glorified God because of me.”

➤ This passage can be divided into three main sections: the divine origin of the Gospel (vs.11-12), the dramatic conversion of the apostle (vs.13-14), and the divine calling of the apostle (vs.15-24).

## A. The Divine Origin of the Gospel (vs.11-12)

↳ John 1: 11-12; Ephesians 1: 3-6, 2: 5, 8-9; Titus 3: 5

- Paul was quick to point out that God is the author and source of the Gospel. That is to say, salvation is God's idea, God's accomplishment and God's will. In other words, humans did not invent nor in any way contribute to the reality or efficacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation is truly by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
- True salvation is by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Likewise, the true Gospel proclaims a salvation by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We must never tire of hearing, affirming and living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not just important for unbelievers and new Christians. As Christians, our lives are controlled and consumed by the Gospel. It is the foundation of our salvation, of our evangelism, of our marriages, of our ministries, of our lives.
- The apostle Paul made this unmistakably clear in verses 11-12, and he succinctly stated that the Gospel is neither *of* man nor *from* man.

### 1. The Gospel is not of man (vs.11)

- In verse 11, Paul made it clear that the Gospel he proclaimed – the true Gospel – was not according to human ingenuity, creativity or wisdom: *“For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel”* (vs.11). In other words, Paul was stating emphatically that the Gospel is neither human in nature nor authority. Rather, the true Gospel is from God and belongs to God! Paul was undoubtedly countering the argument – from those proclaiming a “different gospel” – that the Gospel he preached was not merely his personal opinion, or his own individual interpretation.

### 2. The Gospel is not from man (vs.12)

- Not only is the true Gospel not according to man (i.e. human ingenuity or intelligence), it also did not originally come from man. That is, the Gospel is of divine origin. The Gospel was not created by humans, nor was it originally transmitted by humans. God is both the author and executor of the Gospel.
- In underscoring this truth, the apostle Paul declared that he personally received the message of the Gospel by divine revelation. First, in the negative, Paul wrote: *“For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it”* (vs.12). While he learned Judaism by human instruction – *“educated at the feet of Gamaliel”* (Acts 22:3) – Paul underwent no such education when it came to his understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rather, stated now in the positive, Paul specifically came to understand the Gospel *“through a revelation of Jesus Christ”* (vs.12). This, among other reasons, is what qualified Paul to be an apostle. He had been personally commissioned by Jesus Christ (by an encounter with the resurrected, ascended and glorified Jesus Christ (see Acts 9:1-7).

## B. The Dramatic Conversion of the Apostle (vs.13-14)

↳ Acts 9: 1-19; 22: 3-21; 26: 9-23

- Paul conversion (from Judaism) to Christianity was unusually dramatic, and he was not shy about sharing the details of it. Paul's Christian testimony included him hearing an audible voice from, and being literally blinded by, the risen and glorified Jesus Christ (three days later Paul was healed of his blindness by a disciple named Ananias; Acts 9:9; 22:13).

➤ While certainly resulting in Paul's [i.e. Saul's] salvation, this dramatic and unusual conversion story was part of Christ's calling Paul to be an apostle – to preach the Gospel of Christ “among the Gentiles” (Gal.1:16; cf. Gal.2:7-8) – God's “chosen instrument” to proclaim the Gospel initially “to Gentiles” and then to “kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15; cf. Acts 22:21; 26:16). Specifically, in his conversion story to the Galatians, Paul highlighted to significant aspects of his “former life” in Judaism (vs.13).

1. His persecution of “the church of God” (vs.13)

- Paul wrote: “*For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it*” (vs.13). Notice first that Paul referred to his pre-Christian days as his “former life” (vs.13). In other words, his receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior did not merely improve his life – it supplanted it. Keep in mind (as we will see again) Paul was very religious, and very sincere in his religious beliefs. He was not, in the eyes of the world, perceived as being a pagan or immoral person. Yet, he rightly understood that receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior meant that his old life was fundamentally and eternally transformed. For even the most moral and religious people are – without Christ – justly condemned by God.
- Ironically, in his conversion to Christianity, the persecutor became the persecuted. Not surprisingly, those who wanted Christians to compromise the truth of the Gospel were vehemently unwilling to compromise what they believed to be truth. This blatant hypocrisy and double standard are still ongoing today. People want Christians to be tolerant of every religious and irreligious teaching, but they themselves are not tolerant of Christianity at all. We must be aware of the deceitful, and demonic, battle for truth.

2. His passion for “Judaism” (vs.14)

- One of the biggest lies in the world today is that “it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere.” To show the damning deceit of this expression, one has only to look to the apostle Paul. No one was more religious, more sincere, more committed to, and more passionate about his religion than Paul – and yet Paul [Saul] was utterly unsaved. He was ‘all in’ when it came to his Jewish beliefs and practices, exceeding expectations and the status quo: “*And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers*” (vs.14). Before his conversion, Saul was a profoundly influential Jewish leader, and (humanly speaking) a powerful enemy of the cross of Christ and persecutor of those who were followers of Christ. At a relatively young age, Saul had quickly climbed the “Judaistic ladder” to become an elite member of the Pharisees, and find prominent stature among those in the Sanhedrin.

After his conversion to Christ, everything else – including his religious prowess, prominence and influence – was garbage or dung compared to the priceless treasure of knowing, loving, worshipping and following Christ (see Phil.3:4-11)!

### C. The Divine Calling of the Apostle (vs.15-24)

✚ 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31; Ephesians 4: 1-6; 1 Peter 2: 9, 21; 5: 10

- It was important for the apostle Paul to recount not only his conversion experience, but also what happened afterward. False teachers were accusing Paul of , and were distorting the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul desperately wanted everyone to know that the Gospel he preached was given to him by Christ Himself, and no man (not even the apostles). He was affirming, and reaffirming, this truth not for his own sake but for the sake of the Gospel.

**Gal 1:15-24** ~ “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, <sup>16</sup>was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I

did not immediately consult with anyone; <sup>17</sup>nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. <sup>18</sup>Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup>But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup>(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) <sup>21</sup>Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup>And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup>They only were hearing it said, 'He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' <sup>24</sup>And they glorified God because of me."

➤ Notice that, in verse fifteen, the apostle refers to the fact that he was "*set ... apart*" and "*called*" by God. Both of these words can be used to describe a historical event, and yet both have significant theological implications.

The Greek word translated "*set ... apart*" (*aphorizō*) can be used to literally describe the act of being separated or even excluded:

**Luke 6:22** ~ "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!"

**Matt 25:32** ~ "Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

**2 Cor 6:17** ~ "Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you"

But the word, in the right context, also carries with it a divine calling (God separating a person for Christian ministry/service):

**Acts 13:2** ~ "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"

**Rom 1:1** ~ "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God"

**Gal 1:15** ~ "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace"

Similarly, the word translated "*called*" (*kaleō*) carries with it a simple/literal/physical meaning (to call or invite), as well as a deeper spiritual calling. All true Christians are called by God – to salvation (Rom.8:30, "effectual call") as well as to spiritual work/service (1Thess:4:7):

**Eph 4:1-6** ~ "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [*klēsis*] to which you have been called [*kaleō*], <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called [*kaleō*] to the one hope that belongs to your call [*klēsis*] – <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

➤ So, when Paul said, "*But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace*" (vs.15) he was referring generally to his salvation in Christ, but also specifically referring to his apostolic calling from God (see 1:1). For those whom God calls to salvation, He calls to service.

**Gal 1:6** ~ "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel"

**Gal 5:8** ~ "This persuasion is not from him who calls you."

**Gal 5:13** ~ "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

➤ In Galatians 1:11-24, we can identify six aspects of Paul's apostolic (and salvific) calling.

### 1. His calling was from God (vs.15a)

➤ Paul understood that both his salvation in Christ, and his calling to be an apostle of Christ, was established in the mind of God from eternity past. Paul did not have to earn God's saving grace, or show himself worthy of God's calling. Rather, God sovereignly ordained the salvation and vocation of the apostle. God called him before Paul "*was born*" (vs.15; lit. "separated from my mother's womb").

**Eph 1:3-5** ~ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (see Acts 13:48; Rom.8:28-30; Tit.1:1-2; 1Pet.1:2)

**Jer 1:5** ~ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (see Is.49:1)

➤ God is sovereign over all things – over all His creation – including our lives, our salvation, our spiritual gifts, our ministries. God works (providentially) through His creation to accomplish His will and glorify His name. While there is great mystery with this truth, as the finite (man) cannot fully comprehend the infinite (God), it must be embraced as true for God's Word declares it so. Paul understood that God's hand was upon His life, and he desired to submit his will to the will of God.

### 2. His calling was by God's grace (vs.15b)

➤ Since God called Paul before he was even born, it should be clear that Paul had not done anything to earn such a privilege and blessing. Paul readily acknowledged that he was "*called by [God's] grace*" (vs.15).

To be sure, Paul (as is true of every Christian) was saved by God's grace:

**Eph 2:5, 8-9** ~ "even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved ... <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (see Rom.3:24; 11:5-6; 2Tim.1:9; Tit.3:5)

But Paul is also acknowledging that his apostolic calling was by God's grace:

**1 Cor 15:8-10** ~ "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

**1 Tim 1:12-14** ~ "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, <sup>13</sup>though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup>and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

➤ Paul was not trying to achieve some elevated social or religious status. He was not trying to promote himself as a "holier-than-thou" religious icon. He was not looking for religious fame, or wanting a massive following. What Paul wanted – what he desperately wanted – was for people to believe the true Gospel (not be deceived by any false gospel), and receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

### 3. His calling was through God's Son (vs.16a)

➤ Before Paul could be used by God, in Christian ministry, he first needed to be redeemed by God through Christ. Before Paul could be an apostle of Christ, he first needed to be a disciple of Christ. Though he was very religious, Paul needed to be saved (by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone).

**Acts 9:3-6** ~ “Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. <sup>4</sup>And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ <sup>5</sup>And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup>But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’”

**1 Cor 15:8-9** ~ “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

➤ God graciously and powerfully revealed to Paul the truth about Jesus Christ. Paul did not come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by human instruction or intuition. In His divine pleasure (“*was pleased*”; vs.16), God had chosen to “*reveal His Son*” to Paul. Not only did Paul have a direct encounter with the risen and glorified Christ (Acts 9:5), but would later receive God’s direct revelations about Christ and Scripture after his conversion – during the time he was in Damascus, the subsequent years he spent in Arabia, and throughout his life (see vs.16-21).

**Gal 1:11-12** ~ “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. <sup>12</sup>For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (see 1Cor.2:14-16; 2Cor.3:12-18)

➤ Believing in “a god” was not (is not) enough. Apart from a saving faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, being devoutly religious, sincerely spiritual, or piously moral only brings God’s condemnation. Everything about our salvation (and true Christian ministry) is from Christ, through Christ, and for Christ! It begins with Christ, it is sustained by Christ, and it is for the glory of Christ.

### 4. His calling was for God's purpose (vs.16b)

➤ Paul knew that his life was not his own; that he had been “*bought with a price*” (1Cor.6:20); that he was a slave of Christ (Rom.1:1), a slave of righteousness (Rom.6:18), and a slave of God (Tit.1:1). This is perhaps one of the most difficult truths for us to acknowledge and embrace. For, in our sinful flesh, we are prone to pride, narcissism and independence (self-reliance). Paul understood that he had been created by God, called by God, loved by God, saved by God, and sanctified by God. Therefore, Paul willingly accepted God’s divine purpose for his life.

**Rom 1:1** ~ “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God”

**Acts 9:15-16** ~ “But the Lord said to [Ananias], ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup>For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’”

**Acts 22:6-10** ~ [Paul before the Jewish people]: “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. <sup>7</sup>And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ <sup>8</sup>And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ <sup>9</sup>Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. <sup>10</sup>And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’”

**Acts 26:15-18** ~ [Paul before King Agrippa]: “And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. <sup>16</sup>But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, <sup>17</sup>delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you <sup>18</sup>to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’”

- In his letter to the Galatians, Paul readily (unashamedly, confidently) declared that God was at work in his life, and that God had a divine purpose for his life: “[*God*] was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (vs.15).
- ✓ **Illust:** Purposelessness is plaguing our Christless society and world. Much of the hostility, animosity, depression and despair that see in our world is directly due to the fact that people are living what they believe to be purposeless, hopeless, lives. Secular schools, universities and institutions continue to declare that there is no God; that there is no absolute truth or objective morality; that there are no eternal rewards or consequences; that there is no heaven and no hell. Is it really any wonder that everyone seems to be doing whatever is right in their own eyes (see Deut.12:8; Prov.16:25; 21:2)? Is it really a mystery why so many people claim to be depressed and suicidal – feeling as though life is not worth living? One reason for this is that people (wrongly) believe that there is not purpose for their lives – that they came from nothing and they go to nothing; a relatively brief, painful and meaningless existence. The Christian Gospel is a brilliant light in the midst of this darkness. It declares that a person has been created by God on purpose and for a purpose – to know God, love God, serve God and worship God.
- Christians can know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God has created and saved them for a purpose – for His divine purpose.

**Rom 8:28** ~ “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

#### 5. His calling was in God’s timing (vs.16c-22)

- As we have already seen, God revealed the truth about Christ to Paul while he was on his way to Damascus to arrest (persecute) Christians (Gal.1:13; Acts 9:2). Paul’s conversion experience happened as he (coming from Jerusalem) neared Damascus (Acts 9:3). In Galatians we read that, immediately after his encounter with Christ (on the Damascus road), after spending several days with disciples in Damascus (Acts 9:19-20), Paul did not immediately return to “*Jerusalem ... but went away to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus*” (vs.17; cf. Acts 9:8ff). Then, “*after three years*” (vs.18) of intensive studying and divine revelation of the Old Testament (for there was no New Testament yet), Paul returned back to Jerusalem (vs.18).

Think about that for a moment. Paul left Jerusalem for Damascus (about 140 miles one-way) in order to arrest Christians in Damascus and bring them “*bound*” back to Jerusalem to stand trial (Acts 9:1-2). A trip that should have taken him weeks, took three years! More importantly, Paul left Jerusalem intending to persecute followers of Christ (in his effort to destroy the church; Gal.1:13) and returned three years later as a follower of Christ! He went to arrest Christians in Damascus, and instead spent years in fellowship with the Christians in (and around) Damascus. He went to Damascus to eradicate the Gospel of Christ, and spend three years there preaching the Gospel of Christ. He left Jerusalem as a persecutor of Christians, and returned to Jerusalem as a persecuted Christian (see Acts 9:23-25).



➤ Paul returned to Jerusalem *“to visit Cephas”* (vs.18; i.e. the apostle Peter; the term Cephas means “rock” in Aramaic, which is translated “Peter” in Greek). He stayed with Peter for *“fifteen days”* (vs.18), and during that time saw *“none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother”* (vs.19). Then, after that period of just over two weeks, Paul back to his hometown in *“the regions of Syria and Cilicia”* (vs.21; cf. Acts 9:11, 30). We know that at least part of the reason why Paul left Jerusalem for Tarsus, via Caesarea (Acts 9:30), was because he had learned that some Jews in Jerusalem were plotting to kill him – because Paul was *“preaching boldly in the name of the Lord”* (see Acts 9:28-30).

➤ Notice the sovereign, yet mysterious, timing of God in the life of the apostle Paul. Two important observations worth noting:

1) Note the mystery of God's providence. In God's sovereign plan, He allowed Saul/Paul to persecuting Christians – Saul giving his authoritative approval to the killing of Stephen (Acts 8:1), and his many attempts to destroy the church (Gal.1:13) – until the day when Jesus confronted Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). In God’s perfect and infinite foreknowledge, He knew that Saul would wreak havoc on the church – leading *“a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem”* causing all the Christians to scatter *“throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria”* (Acts 8:1); *“Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison”* (Acts 8:3); *“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord”* (Acts 9:1) – and yet God allowed it for a time.

Clearly there are times in which God allows Christians to suffer opposition, persecution and even martyrdom, and calls them to be faithful to Him in the midst of it all (see Jn.15:18-25; 16:1-4; 1Pet.2:21-23; 4:12-19; 2Tim.3:12). While God's providence is often mysterious to us, we know that His timing is always perfect and His will is always good.

2) Note the extended time in which God trained/prepared Paul for his apostolic ministry. Paul spend years studying the Scriptures, and preaching the Word of God, before he ever began his first missionary journey. Though Paul was never in monastic isolation, he spent years being instructed not by the apostles but by divine revelation by the Spirit of God. Even though Paul was heavily educated in Judaism, there was much he needed to learn about the Gospel, and much he needed to unlearn about God.

We must underestimate the value on reading, studying and meditating on God’s Word. We must not seek to rush through God’s plan to prepare us to minister in His name. We need to have patience and persistence, waiting on God’s will according to His timing. Mature Christians do not spring up “overnight.” Mature Christians are the byproduct of much time spent in the Word and in prayer.

#### 6. His calling was for God’s glory (vs.23-24)

➤ When we, as Christians, understand and accept that God is sovereign over our lives and that He has a divine purpose for our lives, we are more ready and willing to give God the glory for every good thing about us and every good thing that comes from us.

➤ As it is with every Christian (although not in the same way), Paul’s conversion was amazing and radical. His Christian testimony declared that God had graciously saved him and that God had amazingly transformed his life: *“They only were hearing it said, ‘He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy’* (vs.23).

Remember, while Paul’s conversion story is unusual (most Christians have not had an audible, and literally blinding, encounter with the risen Jesus) it is not unique. Every Christian’s conversion to Christ is dramatically life changing. Though most likely not like the apostle Paul’s, every Christian – the moment they truly receive Jesus Christ as their one and only Lord and Savior – undergoes a complete (though not perfect) transformation in Jesus Christ.

➤ Paul wrote that when people heard what God had done in his life, “*they glorified God because of me*” (vs.24). Notice they glorified (*doxazō*; i.e. praised, honored) God, not Paul. This is the goal of every Christian’s life and testimony – to give God the glory for every great thing He has done.

**Matt 5:16** ~ “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

**Gal 6:14** ~ “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

**Eph 2:8-9** ~ “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

**1 Cor 10:31** ~ “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

## Conclusion

➤ While Paul was here referring specifically to his salvific and apostolic calling, these principles also apply to God’s gracious and transforming call upon every Christian life.

**1 Cor 1:26-31** ~ “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup>But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup>God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup>And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup>so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

1. The Christian’s salvation, and Christian ministry, is from God (vs.15a)
2. The Christian’s salvation, and Christian ministry, is by God’s grace (vs.15b)
3. The Christian’s salvation, and Christian ministry, is through God’s Son (vs.16a)
4. The Christian’s salvation, and Christian ministry, is for God’s purpose (vs.16b)
5. The Christian’s salvation, and Christian ministry, is in God’s timing (vs.16c-22)
6. The Christian’s salvation, and Christian ministry, is for God’s glory (vs.23-24)