

**LIFE OF PAUL SERIES**

**THE TWO SILENT YEARS OF PAUL**

As we study the life of Paul, it is important for us to know a few dates. We pray that we will be able to remember them because the dates will be a great help as we read the epistles that Paul had written. It's good to know when and at what point in his life that Paul wrote some of the epistles so that we could understand him better. It's just like our tape library where we have a few tapes of my preaching ten years ago and some of them five years ago. If you want to study a particular subject by listening to some older tapes of mine and then listening to some newer ones, you will realize that there are some differences. If you don't know which tape came first and which came later, you may wonder why some tapes seem contradictory to each other. As you listen to the newer tapes, you would know they give a better explanation and clarification of some teachings that were not so clear years ago. You see, I also grow in revelation knowledge as the Holy Spirit gives understanding in the Word. In the same way as we study Paul's life we have a better understanding of his progressive revelation when we study his revelation in the light of his life history.

In Acts 9 Paul was born-again and that period was about A.D.35. He was sent on his first missionary journey in Acts 13, which was about A.D. 45, a period of about ten years since he was born-again. There are also other dates that are important for us to take note and these dates that are given to you is a summary of perhaps about 20 to 40 concordances, commentaries and historical records. If you were to do this research and study the life of Paul, you will realize contradictory statements and contradictory analysis from different sources. Some will put Galatians as the first book where others will place Romans as the first book and some will put the dates differently. And if you have a study Bible, you find that the introduction gives you certain dates and these dates from different Bible scholars may contradict one another, leaving you in a very confused state.

So what we have done is to give an approximate date and if you like to adjust the dates, you will have to adjust the whole timeline of the chapters. For example if Paul was born again in A.D. 35 and he was sent out on his first missionary journey ten years later in Acts 13, you will have to set Acts 13 as around A.D. 45. However, if you believe that he was born again in A.D. 38 then you have to change Acts 13 to A.D. 48. In other words, you got to move the whole chronological timetable. Therefore we give you an outline of Paul's life and we place the best approximate date after studying many Bible scholars and researchers.

This is the third series of the study on 'The Life of Paul'. The first series we talked about Paul's background before he was born again. Two weeks ago we talked about Paul's conversion and the events that took place on his way to Damascus. Now we are on the third session and we are looking at the training preparation of the apostle Paul, particularly the silent years of apostle Paul before his ministry ever started. There were in fact two silent periods, not one but two silent periods. We call it 'silent' because there is not much record about those periods of Paul's life and many years had passed by over in between the Scripture verses. In Acts 9:6 the apostle Paul was converted when he met the Lord Jesus Christ and we see how Ananias came to him and ministered and prayed for him, which we are going more in details afterwards. We learn how after he was baptized in water it says in verse 19 *So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul; spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. And in Acts 9: 26 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem. It looks as if verse 25 and verse 26 are following one another but if you analyze the Bible record they do not. What happened is between verses 25 to verse 26 is a three-year period. So if you have your Bible you can put a small note there between verse 25 and verse 26 of Acts chapter 9 and you can refer to Galatians 1:17-18 where Paul makes a statement "nor did I go up to Jerusalem" talking about how he was born again and how God revealed Himself to him. *Nor did I go up to Jerusalem or those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and remained with him fifteen days.* When did this incident take place? In Gal.1:18, Paul*

expressed that after he met the Lord Jesus Christ he did not see any apostles for three years. He had no contact with them and he did not have any fellowship with them yet. So the best place to put Gal 1:17-18 is in Acts 9 between verse 25 and 26. You get a better story in Acts 9 of how Paul in A.D. 35 was born again and then he was in Damascus and all those things that took place when he met Ananias who was sent by Jesus Christ to lay hand on him, baptized him with water, got him filled with the Holy Spirit. And how Paul in Acts 9 started preaching the Word in the synagogue in Damascus and how the Jews plotted to kill him. When they attempted for his life, in verse 25 Paul escaped in a basket and was lowered down the city wall. According to his testimony in Gal. 1:17 Paul escaped to Arabia for three years and then later, on his way back to Jerusalem he dropped by in Damascus again. Then in Acts 9:26 he quickly went on to Jerusalem. So between verse 25 and verse 26 of Acts chapter 9, there is a three years gap, therefore Acts 9:25 took place in A.D. 35 and Acts 9:26 took place in A.D. 38.

According to Acts 9:26-30, after three years in Arabia, Paul returned to Jerusalem for fifteen days *And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.* He was with the apostles only for about fifteen days. Minus the few days when he tried to get in contact with the apostles and he couldn't until Barnabas introduced him. So altogether you will say about fifteen odd days.

The second silent period began in Acts 9:30 when again they tried to kill him and Paul had to flee a second time, this time not to Arabia but he went back to Tarsus. Later on in Acts 22 and Acts 26 you will realize that Tarsus was Paul's hometown. So in Acts 9:30 Paul left Jerusalem for his hometown Tarsus and for a period for about six years you never hear of him again. Six years passed by during those second silent period until Acts 11:25 *Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul, And when he had found him he brought him to Antioch.* The year in Acts 11:25 was A.D. 44, one year before his first missionary journey in Acts 13 because they were teaching in Antioch about one whole year. So in A.D. 44, it was almost nine years after Paul's conversion, three years in Arabia and six years in Tarsus. Nine long years have passed by before we hear about Paul again in Acts 11:25

when Barnabas went and sought him and brought him to Antioch, where for one whole year he preached the gospel and he ministered to the church in Antioch.

One year later, in Acts 13:1-3 *Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teaches; Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* Then having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. That will be around A.D. 45 when Saul finally move into what the Lord Jesus called him to do, nearly ten years after his born-again experience. He was born again in A.D. 35, returned from Arabia three years later in A.D. 38 and 'hide' again in Tarsus in A.D. 38 when he eventually came to Antioch in A.D. 44. A year later in A.D. 45, Saul finally was commissioned into the apostolic ministry that God originally called him to, a total of ten long years since he was born-again.

The next point in his life would be when he went a second time to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Council as recorded in Acts 15:2 *Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.* What was the time frame? It was about A.D. 53 when he went to Jerusalem, seven years since Acts 13 when Paul started his apostolic ministry in A.D.45. This seven years time frame harmonizes with Galatians 2:1 *Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and also took Titus with me.* Now the fourteen years refers to Paul's first visit to Jerusalem in A.D. 38 (Acts 9:26) and his second trip to Jerusalem for the Council meeting of Acts 15 in A.D. 53. That gives us some ideas about Paul's life. In A.D. 35 he was born again and had the three years of Arabian experience, thereafter in A.D. 38, he returned to Jerusalem for a short period and then back to his hometown for six years before Barnabas called him to teach in Antioch for a year. Then in Acts 13:1-3, ten years after he was born-again, Paul began his first missionary journey with Barnabas. In Acts 13 and 14 we read about Paul's extensive travel and eventually they returned to Antioch where they stayed for a long time. Then the problem came about the Judaizers in Acts 15 that was around A.D. 53. It was also around this time that he went back to Jerusalem. Now between A.D. 38 to A.D. 45 is a period of about seven years and between A.D. 45 to A.D. 53, which was his second trip to Jerusalem, was another seven years and that is why in Gal. 2:1-3 he mentioned 'after fourteen years'. He has never been to Jerusalem for fourteen years since the last time he went in Galatians chapter one. He has not been to Jerusalem since A.D. 38 but Galatians chapter two tells us that after fourteen

years later he went to Jerusalem where he spent fifteen days with the apostle Peter. So here fourteen years later in A.D. 53, Paul went to Jerusalem the second time. In Gal. 2 it was Paul's second visit to Jerusalem but also the first time they extend the right hand of fellowship to him, because after fourteen years his ministry was accepted and he was given the right hand of fellowship. Gal. 2:9 *And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.* In other words, it was only in A.D. 53 that the apostles officially recognized and accepted Paul's ministry. The first time he went to Jerusalem it was just to confer and just to fellowship and then in Acts 13:1-3 he was just sent out by the Antioch church, not by the Jerusalem church. But seven years later after his first missionary journey, in Acts 15 Paul's ministry was accepted. Therefore you can see how long it took for his ministry to gain acceptance.

Later on you realize in Acts 18 when he was in Corinth during his second missionary journey, Paul wrote four of his epistles. In Acts 17:14 because of the Thessalonians persecution, Paul departed and went off ahead with Silas and Timothy remaining in Berea. When they came and join him in Acts 18:5 Paul wrote First and Second Thessalonians somewhere about that time. Then later in Acts 18:11 when he was in Corinth for one year and six months he wrote Romans and Galatians. So you can see the chronology of his epistles.

Some time later as Paul's ministry progressed, in Acts 19 you see him in his third missionary journey at Ephesus. When he was in Ephesus, Paul rented a school in Tyrannus where he was teaching for two years and preaching with signs and wonders through his hands (Acts 19:1-6). You realize that Paul wrote two other epistles, First and Second Corinthians. You could see obviously that he wrote from Ephesus.

Then later on Paul went back in Acts 20 on his way to Jerusalem again. In Acts 21 prophecies came about his capture. He was captured in Jerusalem. Then he was put on trial in Acts 22 right on until Acts 24 where he was placed in prison for about two years in Caesare waiting for trial.

Here is where I defer from most of the scholars. Most of the scholars claimed Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians and Hebrews and First and Second Timothy

and Titus and Philemon after Acts 28 which the Bible has no record. As I study the Bible carefully, both Ephesians and Colossians were written together. They have the same theme and they were at the height of Paul's burden for the Ephesians. I place it in Acts 24 when he was in Caesare in his imprisonment waiting to go to Rome that Ephesians and Colossians were written.

Later on in Acts 28 he was already in Rome and he was there for two years. During the two year period and after the two year period then only Paul wrote the other epistles: Hebrews, Titus, Philemon and First Timothy and then the last one, Second Timothy. So you could see the chronology of what and when Paul wrote, then you realize that Hebrews was one of his final epistles. That is why the epistle of Hebrews compared to Romans has a vast difference in analytical depth. You could see that the First and Second Thessalonians were very brief and Romans and Galatians were the same way.

So having seen his entire period, which we are going to repeat all these writings later on but for now this morning what is important for you to note is, he was born again in A.D. 35. After that he went to Arabia for a period of three years. Then came back to Damascus in Galatians chapter one. And he came back in A.D. 38 to Jerusalem. Then in A.D. 45 which was Acts 13:1-3 Paul was sent forth on his missionary journey. Seven years later in A.D. 53 he went back to Jerusalem, which was fourteen years since his last visit. These are the prime dates that are most important for this study of Paul's life. You realize that he has two silent periods, three years in Arabia and six years in Tarsus. He 'reappeared' in Acts 11 when he went and taught for one year in Antioch before been sent out for his missionary journeys. So he had altogether nine 'silent' years.

We want to look at four major developments in Paul's preparation for the ministry that God has for him. Firstly is the right revelation because every ministry and the whole church of Jesus Christ is built upon the foundation of the revelation that God has given. If you study the writings of Matthew 16 when Jesus said, "that thou art Simon Bar-Jonah and upon this rock I will build My church", you realize that He refers not just to Peter but it's a feminine Greek word that refers back to 'reveal or revelation', "Flesh and blood has not revealed or given you this revelation but My Father in heaven has given it to you". So that this refers again to revelation and you tie up the two things together you realize that Jesus was talking about how His church is built by revelation. Without a vision the people perish or people perish for lack of knowledge. That truth can be

confirmed again in Ephesians 2:20 *Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.* He is talking about the church of Jesus Christ and Jesus is the foundation. He is the chief cornerstone of the foundation, 'being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone'. Why is it that he mentions apostles and prophets? Because in Ephesians 3:5 *Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.* Why 'built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets Jesus Christ being the cornerstone'? Because the prophets and the apostles have that revelation. It's not because the prophets and apostles were somebody special but it was because they were plain ordinary vessels that contain something special. It is not you that is precious; it's what you contain. Paul stated 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels'. You could say the same thing also, that the church is built on revelation. What kind of revelation? You see for the apostle Paul he has one prime revelation. Paul's key revelation, as you study his life, is that Jesus came to redeem the Gentiles. That was a very controversial truth in those days. You see revelation set people free. Why people have problem? A problem is a lack of revelation. If you have a revelation concerning the problem, it's no more a problem for you've got the solution. All problems and all difficulties stand from a lack of revelation and if we do not know that Jesus died for our sins you will still be in sin. If you didn't know that Jesus died for our sicknesses you will still be sick and we couldn't claim the redemption. If you have not heard about healing how can we receive? If you have not heard the gospel how can we receive the gospel? If we have not heard about the Holy Spirit how can we receive the Holy Spirit? They all come from revelation. To know is to be able to receive. That is why revelation is so important! For Paul, his prime revelation given in Eph. 3 where he talks about his own personal call and revelation and he says in verse 1 *For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made know to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.* What is the revelation? In verse 6 and 7; *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.*

There are four things that we are going to consider, firstly was the revelation in his life. What Paul received was an extraordinary call and revelation. You may have thought that it so simple. I already know that the gospel is for the Gentiles

but you don't know what it was like in those days. If you have been around Christianity for long enough you realize how controversial the Charismatic movement was in the early 1960s. Truth is sometimes perceived as an error and most of the truth that today were accepted as biblical truth and as 'established truth' was once upon a time controversial. Did you know that the simple truth of accepting Jesus and being born again, free salvation by grace was considered heresy in Martin Luther's time. What we all today accept, like little Sunday School kids accept as a basic fact, was just a couple of a hundred years ago treated as heresy. It was heresy to hold a Bible. It was heresy to read the Bible. It was heresy to believe you could be saved by faith and not by works. So you can imagine how much difficulties Martin Luther had. That is why when the Pentecostal truth was restored, people at first went against it and called it heresy but later, as always, truth always proved itself with time and error always shows forth its lack and lie through time. Time is always on the side of truth. So through time you have seen the Pentecostal revival accepted as a third force and accepted as a genuine truth. Other truths have come in the past ten years, for example the faith message; healing is for all; many other truths that Christians initially persecuted. I remember what it was like ten years ago when you preach 'confession is possession'. They said, "No, he is possessed by the devil!" When you say that it's God's will for you to prosper, they say that is not of God and the reality was nobody wanted to teach those unpopular truths but today everybody want to teach those truths. Every church, every creature want to teach those truths because they know it will bring blessings to the people and to the church but what I want you to understand is 'it is nothing to stand up for a truth when it is accepted. It's something to stand up for truth when it's not accepted yet'. And that was what God called the apostle Paul to do. He was called to minister to the Gentiles when it was the most controversial and most unpopular thing to do ever. How controversial was it? Think about it in Acts 10 when Peter was sent to Cornelius who was a pure Gentile. He himself was very frightened to go to them. The first word he said to Cornelius was 'you know that I am a Jew and I am not supposed to be with you'. Look at Acts 10:28 the first word Peter said is 'you know it's wrong for me to do this'. Look at Acts 10:28 *You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation.* Those were his first words. When he came to them he said, "Actually this is illegal meeting". It was very difficult to overcome that cultural and traditional prejudice. Peter himself was frightened as he preached the gospel and God had to show him that He is no respecter of person before he started talking to the Cornelius about Jesus and while he was talking to them about Jesus, Cornelius and his kinsfolk all were born-again, filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. And even after they were born again, baptized in the Spirit, tongue speaking, Peter still dared not say 'let's baptize them'. Instead he handled it in a defensive way in verse 47 *Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?* What kind of preacher is he? Why don't

he just said, "lets baptize them in water and let nobody oppose!" Look at how he approached the thing negatively. Why? Because of the fear, the tradition, that was gripping those people. They could never bring the gospel to the Gentiles for to them, it was controversial, heretical, to do so. Later on when Peter came back in Acts 11:2 he was challenged by the Jews who said, "Why did you go to the Gentiles? Don't you know it's illegal, it's unlawful!" That is the first thing they did. It was controversial to preach to the Gentiles and they were pointing an accusing finger at Peter who had to explain to them. In verse 3 *You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!* In verse 2 they were ready to quarrel with him.

Therefore I want you to know that the revelation Paul received of the gospel being preached to the Gentiles was a controversial truth in his day. That is why it was very difficult for him to move into that revelation. When Paul spent his three years in Arabia, he had to examine that revelation he received. He had to establish that revelation in his life because it was still very fresh and very new. It was a new truth. It was in the Bible all the time but it was a new truth as far as they were concerned. Much later in Acts 24 he writes with confidence in Ephesians 3 that God had given him the revelation that was hidden from men long ago but now is revealed that Gentiles has the free salvation in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He could say with confidence in his later years of his ministry but he was not so in his early days. You could now understand why even in Galatians 1:16 *To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.* He knew that special call of God was on his life to go to the Gentiles but he did not fully understand it and he says in verse 16 *I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia and returned again to Damascus.* That was a period of three years. Now you know why he went to Arabia because nobody wanted to be a controversial man. Deep in all our human nature we always want to be accepted and at peace with people and we want people to speak well of us but God was calling Paul to a ministry that is pioneering a new truth, cutting down the jungle of tradition and spearheading this 'controversy'.

It was not easy. I know something of what that struggle is like because in the early days of my ministry when God called me to preach the faith message, it was the easiest thing not to preach it. If you just preach evangelistic messages of Jesus Christ, born again, every church in town will accept you but then if nobody preaches the faith message, who will? I remember the struggle I had because I said, "God I know this is in Your Bible and I know it works for me. I know meditation because You shown me in my spirit man and I know the power of

confession". Where other critics called it 'positive talking', I said "God I can only give what I know its true and it works but Lord it's not popular".

That reminds me of the time when the Lord called Kenneth Hagin and appeared to him in a vision and the Lord said, "I am calling you to be a prophet" and Hagin nearly cried. He said "Lord call me to be some other things. I heard what they do to prophets. I rather be something else a pastor, evangelist or something. But God I don't want, I don't want". In the end the Lord said, "I'll be with you". Even though he was struggling in his flesh yet his spirit wants to obey God.

That was the struggle that Paul had in Arabia. He had to wrestle with the revelation he had. I know what it's like if ninety nine percent of the people are telling you that you are wrong. It's very hard to believe that you are right and you almost want to agree with them. I remember what it was like in those days and I get back to God and I started to pray and fast and wait on God. You almost question everything you received from God and you examine it over and over again and in the end you said, "God I know that it's in the Word. I know that it's true". I remember what it was like to be a Charismatic and be persecuted by the non-Charismatics. They will tell you speaking in tongue is from the devil and they will tell you that it's not scriptural. I remember what it was like when I was in the seminary because I saw revivals and people been touched by the Holy Spirit in the East Malaysian revival. They came to the same seminary where I was and when they graduated they did not believe the Holy Spirit any more. They were totally mentally convinced that the experience was not correct and I know what it was like because one of them told me before he left, he said, "When I came here I knew when the Holy Spirit spoke to but now if the Hoy Spirit tells me something I am not sure whether it is He or not." Such was the tradition that had caused them to doubt. How sad that it should happen that way when what we need in the ministry is the Holy Spirit.

Therefore it was not easy for the apostle Paul to accept the revelation. He wrestled it within himself. He knew that God called him to the Gentiles because God spoke to him in Acts 26 and God spoke through Ananias the same thing, "God called you to the Gentiles". And Paul had to struggle within himself but what was important is this fact that we need to take note of. In the Acts 9:17 *And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared o you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may received your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. More*

details of what Ananias spoke to him can be found in Acts 22:12 *Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me and he stood and said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, "The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* Now look over at Acts 9:19 *So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.* In other words, before Saul went to Arabia he had followed-up lessons with Ananias and the other disciples and Saul had his foundational class. He was born again on the road to Damascus, baptized in water and in the Spirit by Ananias and Saul went forth to Arabia after his basic foundation lessons. That tells us something, before we want to talk about the revelation of God, the special call and gifting of God, the special emphasis that God calls you in revelation, you must have a firm foundation. Saul had his foundation class as he was with his disciples in Damascus for some days, I don't know how long it was, it could be a few months etc. It doesn't take that long for young Christians to be taught God's Word if you are wide open to the Lord. You could see how well taught he was because by Acts 9:20 he was able to preach the Word, that was before he went to Arabia.

When we talk about revelation we are not talking about some strange spooky thing that is not in line with the Word. A lot of people claimed to have revelation but they cannot support it with the Word and it's not valid. What we are talking about is before Paul went to Arabia and many Christians like to have the Arabian experience but sometime without a foundation it becomes Arabian nightmare! One thousand and one Arabian nights all of the wrong kind! What God wants is to have a right Arabian night, the right Arabian experience. Before you launch into seeking God, before you launch into serious fasting where you really wrestle with what God is showing you for the body of Christ, do you have a firm foundation?

Paul had strong foundation in the Laws and the Prophets and after his basic foundation classes on Jesus Christ, he still needs to wrestle with those truths and finally when he came out of Arabia, he met Peter for fifteen days for he had something to discuss. See Galatians 1:16 *I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.* In verse 17 Paul

said, "I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood". That doesn't mean that he did not confer with flesh and blood.

Now we are dealing with the first area of revelation from God that is you need a foundation and thereafter you have moved into it, and you have to spend the three years of your Arabian experience with God. Your 'Arabian' experience could be anywhere in Cameron Highlands or some seaside where you spent seeking God or your Arabian nights could be the wilderness experience. But my friend before you go in you must have a foundation and after you come in, you must have another foundation. No revelation can be established without these two tied up together.

After Paul came out from the three years he went to see and consult with Peter for fifteen days. Paul said, "I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood", it does not mean that he didn't confer. It just mean he didn't immediately confer. If I say I am not going to Singapore immediately, it doesn't mean I am not going there at all. It means I am not going now but that I may go later. So Paul did confer but he didn't immediately confer. You have your foundation and you have your Arabian nights, after that you have to have a third experience to establish a revelation in your life.

The third experience is to consult and to confer, for in a multitude of counsel there is safety. It is not wrong to have the right counsel but if you read as Ps. 1 there are two types of counsel, wrong counsel and right counsel. So you want the right counsel and right counsel needs a right timing. If you received some special revelation from God, if you don't have your foundation then don't talk about it to anybody yet. Yes you met the Lord Jesus; yes you met five angels for about five nights and gave you about thirty pages each night of revelation. If we were to ask you do you know the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and your answer is no, then you have tried to receive a revelation without foundation. Now what you received could be right but what is important is that you must have a foundation before you move into that revelation.

As far as I know from the revival of 1950s up till now there are men of God who have supernatural encounters with God but some of them have not continued in it. They are dead and gone today because when you begin to move into the supernatural realm, you begin to battle supernatural deceptions also and that's

the level where Satan will appear as an angel of light. Without a foundation anybody who go on a forty days fast and received everything they connect to, without a foundation and checking, is going to move into deception. A lot of cults started that way and that is why before you move into it, get a firm foundation in the Word and then seek God as much as you can, and after you come out of it don't get big headed. A lot of people missed the third one. They got so 'big headed' they are not going to listen to anybody any more and they are not going to counsel with anybody any more, and they boast "because God spoke to me!" "I saw the Lord, I saw an angel". But after Paul had all those fantastic revelations in Arabia he came back humbly and he consulted with Peter for fifteen days to consolidate his revelation but yet it was not time to move in yet, he was still in his silent years to wait for the fullness of time.

Paul mentioned in Galatians 1:22 *I was unknown by face*. In other words, he was not recognized yet, a 'nobody'. What is he going to do now? That tells us what to do if God calls you into ministry, firstly get the right revelation, and foundation, and seek God in an Arabian experience. Secondly you need to establish that revealed truth and thirdly move into godly counsel. The second thing that Paul established in his silent years that was important in his entire life was right fellowship. If you have the wrong fellowship you may never move into what God wants you to. I can assure you that if a Christian does not grow up spiritually and simply attend church out of habit, with this mentality 'any church will do. Never mind if they don't teach from the Bible or they teach wrongly, never mind just attend so long in our heart is right with God', you know what happens, because they don't have the right teaching they may live for the next forty years stagnant and not move into what God wants. If you don't have the right fellowship your ministry cannot take off and you cannot move into what God wants you to do. Paul from the beginning of his life moved into the right fellowship. It's just like for some people who are called by the Lord to the ministry and I asked, "What have you been doing?" He has been hiding all along and not been mixing around with people and then wanted to come out into the ministry, out of the blue like a thunderbolt. That's not God's way, not even if you have the Damascus experience because after that Paul did a lot of other things too. From the beginning of his life and his ministry Paul sought the right fellowship. He submitted to the ministry of Ananias. That is the first man he had contacted as a believer and Ananias was like his follow-up Bible teacher. Ananias was like his home fellowship pastor. Ananias brought Paul up.

Although when I was born again I did not come in from a Charismatic church, I am thankful for those faithful Bible teachers who taught me the Word. That put

the right foundation inside. Who was Ananias? Ananias was a 'nobody' as far as the general church was concerned. We heard of apostle Peter but who was Ananias? See Paul didn't just go for the 'big-shots'. He didn't just seek big named people. What Paul did was he faithfully followed Ananias' instructions and submitted to them and according to Acts 9 he was strengthened with them. Verse 19 *When he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.* These are unknown disciples. They are no big named ministries but he spent his time faithfully with them.

See there are Christians who always go for big named ministry that they don't want to be faithful to the little things. That's one of the surprises that people are going to have. There are a lot of people who don't realize that it's not just a position or a name that equips you in a ministry. There are gifts and callings of God that come without repentance. A lot of the people who really hear the Holy Spirit but perhaps about ten percent of them really obey the Holy Spirit a hundred percent all the time. Forty percent obey the Spirit some of the time. The rest of the fifty percent are usually in the flesh and once in a while they hit the target and move in the Spirit. Among those ten percent that really move in the Spirit, most of them in many churches are not necessary the big fellows who held position or do anything. A lot of them are the humble little housewives who spend about four hours praying everyday. A lot of them are the humble little people who come quietly and pray in church, fellowship a bit here and there but they have such a holy countenance about them. You would know these are the ones led by the Holy Spirit. Ananias was an unknown to the world but it's this people that will establish the Word of God.

I remember in the early days of my ministry when I was completely unknown, we are just a small group together but there were a few wonderful sisters whom God placed together in our midst. One of them is a housewife who was very devout. I remember she would always have a word of encouragement whenever she sees me. Up to this day I know that she is still in the Lord's ministry in her own way and one day she is going to receive her reward. Although I may be called to the full time ministry and she may not but she had been faithful to her part in her ministry. So it's important for us to understand right fellowship doesn't mean going for big names. Right fellowship means seeking where the Spirit of God is Lord and Jesus is Lord. It can be in your small little prayer group or Christians hungry for truth and righteousness of God.

I remember those days when God first called me. I don't know what happened to the other two brothers who used to pray with me on the rooftop. God didn't call them to the ministry but God called me and I remember when I was born again in a little Baptist church together with two of them. Both of them are working they are not called to the ministry but the three of us were praying and decided we get up early at about four in the morning and go to the roof top of the little flat to pray. After that I got back to my house as I have some studies to do and they went to work. I remember it's because of the prayer meeting they started and out of that experience, one early morning God called me to the ministry. I don't know where the other two are as I've lost contact with them but you know how it is to be inspired by one another to pray and out of that I was called out. Today I may move into the front line ministry and I don't know where they are but I remember they were with me in the early days praying in the rooftop. So remember the right fellowship. You don't just fellowship with big names, you fellowship with people who are spiritual and really know the Lord, have the right counsel. Ananias may be unknown to everybody but Paul remembered him throughout his whole life.

Barnabas was the other person who is important in Paul's life. Acts 9:26 *When Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.* That was the first time that Paul met Barnabas and Barnabas was the one who introduced Paul to Peter. We must realized how important not to under-estimate the friends you make in Christendom during your silent years because during the years ahead, you never know what may come forth. When you are unknown by face and your ministry is not launched out yet, never underestimate the friends you make in the ministry, the Christian friends you make and some of you getting to know each other because ten years time some of you will realize how important the friendship you have made with one another.

I remember in the early days of ministry in Penang we were just one small group of seven of us. I was the only one full time, the others are called but they didn't move out yet. Among those of us who were called was a Sunday School and kindergarten teacher and today she is a pastor. But when we started she was just teaching Sunday School and I remember how in the early days in the ministry there was not much food to eat and there were not much finances either. Once in a while I would find this money on my window. Of course I realized angels could put it there but I was sure it was some human beings as our window had a grille and it looked as if somebody put a hand through the grille and dropped the

money on the floor, sometimes it was five dollars, and sometimes it was ten dollars and I was interested to find out how the money came. So one day when I came out after prayers and I saw the money there, I quickly went to the window and there was this dear little kindergarten teacher walking away, closing the gate and going out and I knew she was the one who had been dropping the money from time to time. Today she is in the ministry and we are great friends. Today we are able to be in a position to help her back. I am sure she would never have realized that perhaps ten years later the person she helped will be in a position to help her back. We never know the grace of God. Up to this day and up to the time when I go home to the Lord you can be assured that I will always send some finances back to her. Whether she needs it or not I don't care but that's my way of saying 'I have never forgotten those days when you dropped the five dollars and the ten dollars. I have never forgotten those days.'

It's important for us to know that you don't need your Barnabas and your Peter when you are recognized, you usually need them when you are not recognized. So never despise the day of small things. Some people don't realize it during the silent years when they are not recognized that two things need to be established, namely the right revelation and right fellowship. A lot of people are struggling against these two, especially the second. Some don't mind the first but they struggle against the second. They are always getting into relational problems during the time when they are not recognized because they don't realize that God is training them in fellowship. If they could pass the test of fellowship and humble themselves and be willing to accept other as God accepted them and be accepted by one another, then they will move into the other phase of the ministry but these two things are what God will establish before the recognition comes. Then the two other important truths will come at a point when he has completed his training.

That was what Paul discovered in the silent years, the third truth. The first is right revelation, second right fellowship, and the third is the right timing. Paul discovered that there is such a thing as timing. In Acts 9:20 when Paul was converted he tried to start preaching the gospel but he was rejected. Three years later, in Acts 9: 29, he tried again in Jerusalem. *He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists but they attempted to kill him.* Again rejection. What is he going to do? It was A.D. 38 when he was in Jerusalem the first time and he spent fifteen days with Peter and also was preaching the gospel. Towards the end of those fifteen days, just before he left for Tarsus, Paul had a vision in Acts 22:17-18. Verse 17 *Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him*

saying to me, "Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me." That was when the Jews were trying to kill him and Jesus appeared in a vision to Paul and said "Paul get out, they are trying to kill you". In verse 19-21, Paul recalled, "Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him. Then He said to me, "Depart for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles." In other words, after the first three years Paul had established the right revelation, when he was in Jerusalem he established the right fellowship. But there is one more thing he didn't establish, the right timing. So Jesus said to him 'depart from here for I will send you to the Gentiles'. Only God knows that the Paul He will send will take place seven years later in A.D.45. From the time that Jesus appeared to Paul and says 'depart and I will send you' it was seven years later when in Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them". That's why a lot of Christians when they hear Jesus said 'I send you'; straight away they want to go. For Paul it took seven more 'silent' years of which six of them he was totally unknown and the last year he was at least known in Antioch. So Paul had to wrestle with right timing.

Even though you have the right revelation and you know the right people and you are in fellowship with believers, there is still such a thing as the right timing. Before Acts 11, nothing is mentioned about what Paul did in Tarsus for six years. We only know one thing, it was right timing. There is such a thing as timing of God and Paul discovered that after six silent years. In Acts 11 and it was A.D. 44, Barnabas, his old friend came to seek him out of the blue and Barnabas said, "Paul I have a work in Antioch, where there are many new Gentile Christians". When Barnabas mentioned Gentiles, Paul's spirit leaped up because God had called him to the Gentiles. The first door was eventually opened after six years from the time he left Jerusalem, nine years since he was born again. The first open door and it was not a big open door. God had told Paul earlier in Acts 9 that He would send him to the Gentiles, to the kings and to the people of Israel. I am sure at the back of his mind Paul is wondering when is he going to appear to the kings. Yet he did appear to the kings and to the rulers but nearly twenty years later. Only God knew the timing. So Paul had to learn the right timing and never despise small things. Barnabas just came and said, "Paul I just need your help here for the Gentiles" and immediately Paul responded. He didn't wait for big open door. A lot of people are waiting for the big opportunity and they missed the small things that will lead to the big ones. Don't miss in your time of silent years when you are unknown by face. Don't miss out the small little doors that God opens. God is not going to open a huge big giant door and then you are that

one small tiny little fellow entering it! God will only open the door that fits your size. So when your spiritual stature is that big, He will open the big door but when your spiritual stature is only six inches He is going to open a door about six and half inch wide. Some people whose spiritual stature is only six inches want a door that is six feet. That doorknob is about three feet up and you can't even reach the doorknob! How can you reach the doorknob? That is why the door will never open. God opens door in proportion to your spiritual stature.

The fullness of timing came in Acts 11 and it was A.D. 44, one year before Acts 13 and Paul was ready for home fellowship groups with the church in Antioch. He was just called to be a teacher there and he faithfully followed Barnabas back and he ministered there and while he was there, God worked on the timing and prepared him. Why was it important? Do you notice in Acts 13:2 God mentioned two names; not one? God said, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul". If you read carefully, you would understand what God was doing. God wanted Paul to firmly established working together with people before He promotes him. If you cannot work in a small group you cannot work nationally and internationally. If you have problems in a small little group, you will have problems everywhere you go. What God did was for one year He made Paul and Barnabas work together and together they built one another up. Paul was not married and when both are ready, Barnabas will be partner for the first stage. You see you may be ready but your partner may not be ready, therefore wait for the right timing. The right timing means that not only you must be ready; people involved in your life must be ready for the manifestation of what God wanted to do. That's the third truth that Paul discovered.

The fourth truth that is vital for us is the ending part when he was accepted in Acts 15. You notice here in Gal. 2:9 *When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to the pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship* is the same event as in Acts 15 and it was around about A.D. 53. That was about fourteen years after Paul's first Jerusalem trip, seven years after the first Jerusalem trip Paul started his ministry and spent another seven years of apostolic ministry before he returned to Jerusalem the second time. He said 'after fourteen years I went back'. This is what he said in Gal verse 2:2 *I went up by revelation and communicated to them that gospel which I reached among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run in vain.* Who are those who were of reputation? The apostles James, Cephas and John. Look at his humility here. Even though he had the Arabian experience for three years and seven years of silent period before he launched into his apostolic ministry and another seven years

more before he went back to Jerusalem in acts 15. Fourteen years from the last trip and seventeen years from the time that he was born again. Seventeen years altogether! After seventeen years Paul said in Gal. 2 "I still check with them about the revelation that God gave me about the Gentiles". He said, "Lest I run in vain". He was referring to his ministry to the Gentiles, the call and the revelation of the gospel to the Gentiles was still controversial. You can see it is obvious. In Acts 15 there was still great controversy but after Acts 15 it was settled once and for all. After Acts 15 his apostolic ministry to the Gentiles was accepted. From that time onward any controversy against the gospel going to the Gentiles became heresy. In other words, before that, the traditionalists who were accepted as main line was main line. Now the main line became the sideline and the main line was the gospel is for the Gentiles. You see in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, they made a major decision that the Gentiles are a part and parcel of the church and Paul's ministry is right, correct, accepted and they gave him the right hand of fellowship. They gave Paul authorized letter to bring to Antioch church to declare that they received the message that Paul has. What humility that Paul could go through with all these things.

That's the fourth truth you learn in your silent years before acceptance, that is you must prove your fruit before you ask for acceptance, because the silent years end with major acceptance here in A.D. 53. No fruit no acceptance. That is God's pattern. God never made you a pastor and then you try out, rather He made you a trainee and then a pastor. In Acts 6 when they elected deacons they didn't look for people who were new. They looked for people who were already recognized and successful. Men filled with the Holy Spirit, of good reputation. Men who have been faithful, who have proved in their life to demonstrate that they are capable. So recognition comes because you proved yourself and you proved yourself in the back roads of the wilderness. So Paul proved his ministry, he was faithful and he had results. In Acts 15 when Paul and Barnabas stood up before the great Jerusalem Council and Paul and Barnabas talked about all those things that God has done, the wonderful salvation, the signs and wonders, nobody could question the fruit. How important it is to listen to God so that you will bear fruit in its season. Don't ask for acceptance until you proved yourself. Don't expect the body of Christ to accept you and accept your ministry until you have proven yourself. People who ask for acceptance before they have proof are people who are not ready. People who are ready don't ask for acceptance, they will say, "It doesn't matter whatever any work that I find my hands to do, I will do faithfully and the fruit comes out, and then the acceptance is given. That's the fourth principles that acceptance comes after Paul proved himself.

