

## **LIFE OF PAUL SERIES**

### **TRANSITION OF MINISTRY PHASE**

We are continuing the series on the 'Life of Apostle Paul' and we are looking at the book of Acts 15. Paul had completed his first missionary journey and he had gone back to Antioch for a period of time. While he was there, certain brethren from Jerusalem visited Antioch but they had a wrong teaching and insisted that the Gentiles must become circumcised like Jews in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas had a confrontation with them. That leads us to what we call the transition phase of Paul's life, a transition from the first phase of his life into the second phase.

We all know what a transition is like. A transition can be a chaotic period. It can be a period full of confusions. Even as young teenagers grow up and enter into adulthood and take responsibility as adults, they can sometimes go through a period of confusion to discover their goals, their inclinations, and their talents in their life. If we have been in life long enough we know that in life there are period of turmoil and chaos and then there are moment of great calm. We need to learn that every time there is a transition there will be great turbulence.

Turbulence is the word we describe how when an aeroplane travels into an air pocket, a place where there are different air pressures. You notice that when a plane goes through a huge white cloud there is great turbulence, for within a cloud is a cycle of air-pressure going on and therefore the plane experience turbulence. Turbulence is something almost everybody want to avoid as much as

possible. Yet in the Bible it tells us in the beginning when God created the heaven and the earth and after sometime it says the earth was a great void and there was chaos and the Holy Spirit was hovering over the chaos. In God chaos and turmoil or a turbulent period is a period of great pregnancy, something about to burst forth or about to come forth.

So in Paul's life there is this great period of turbulence that come about. What we are going to consider this morning is a very turbulent period. In Acts 15 you see three quarrels, or three debates, or three arguments. Three periods when there seem to be strife in the Body of Christ. The first began with the Judaizers (Jewish Christians who insisted that Gentile Christians must observe the law of Moses, including circumcision) when the apostle Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch. The second was in Jerusalem when both Barnabas and Paul went up to Jerusalem to settle the issue of Judaizing and there was great turbulence. Then when Paul came back to Antioch at the end of Acts 15, he had a turbulent time with Barnabas. So it's a period of transition. Yet in the midst of all these periods, it is one of the most important periods for Paul's life for he is going to move forward into a new phase, a new dimension of ministry. But before this new phase, there is turbulence.

So we look here at Acts 15:1 *And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them. That is a very polite way of saying they had a big quarrel. During this time Paul and Barnabas disputed and argued point upon point, line upon line, precept upon precept, and it was a draw. Finally the church couldn't settle the issue. In verse 2 they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this matter. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles, and they caused great joy to all the brethren.*

So Paul and Barnabas finally went all the way back to Jerusalem to declare and to resolve the issue. Turbulence had started but that turbulence that you see in Acts 15 was only the climax. It was not the beginning. It began way back in Acts 11

when Peter went over to Cornelius' house. When he came back there was this small group of people who said, "Peter, why did you go to the Gentiles?" In Acts 11, Peter had to tell them it was God who sent him, "while I was praying God showed me this vision and I followed the vision, that's how I ended up there." There was already a slight turbulence or small ripple but it was gaining momentum. When a problem is not nipped in the bud, it will gain momentum. If you keep sweeping a problem under a carpet, the carpet will grow into a mountain and before long somebody is going to walk by your house and say, "Your carpet is unique, it's extra thick!" After some time, lumps are going to appear and that's when the ripples have turned into a tidal wave.

So there was this group of people and now they were even going on official mission and in Acts 15:1 'certain men came down from and taught the brethren'. You'll notice what they've said in Acts 15:24 '*since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words*'. In other words, these people claimed to have authority from Peter and John and they claimed to be sent by the church in Jerusalem and they caused great confusion among the Antioch Christians. Finally the church of Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas all the way to Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem they had another argument. Acts 15:4 is a happy result; I mean after hearing all the testimonies of Paul and all the wonderful things that God has done. They reported all these good news and they were all praising God. Then come this group of people who insisted that in order to be born again they must be circumcised. These people just took the joy out of their lives at the moment they were rejoicing. Acts 15:5 *But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."*

Have you ever come for a great meeting and God has touched you, you are on fire, baptized in the Holy Ghost and you just received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. And you began telling all your friends that you had received the Holy Ghost. They look at you with a look of skepticism. Here you are filled with joy bubbling with the grace of God on you and they say, "Watch out, speaking in

tongues can be of the devil". Straightaway fear comes and they take your joy away.

That's what this group of people did in Acts 15. They came at a time when there were great joy and they stood up and said, "There is unsettled business here". They had great debates and in verse 6 *The apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.* And when there had been many disputes, some more quarrels, some more arguments and after many debates, they finally settled the issue basing on three things.

Firstly, after all the quarrelling Paul and Barnabas stood up and they talked about what God has done among the Gentiles. Don't let the devil steal your joy because if the devil can't steal your joy he can't steal your goods. After all these arguments Paul and Barnabas stood up and still talked about all the wonderful works of God. When after they have finished everyone of them kept silent. In verse 12 *Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.* Then James stood up and declared what they were saying was correct and was agreeable to the Word of God and it should not be forced upon the Gentiles to be circumcised. Basically they settled the issue by three principles, firstly by testimony, secondly by the Word of God which James stood and declared it is written, and thirdly by their inward witness of the spirit in their heart. In verse 28 *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.* So the Spirit bear witness with their spirit that it was the right thing to do.

Therefore the three principles are necessary when you want to resolve any issue of conflict. Firstly examine the testimonies involved. You judge a prophet by the fruit. You don't judge something regardless whether it appeal to you or not but you judge it by the fruit. Secondly, you judge by the written Word. If it conflicts with the written Word, if anything is not in line with the Word, forget it. Finally, it must bear witness to your spirit that it is right and true. That was how they resolved the issue in the end. They had a big quarrel but finally it was resolved and they happily sent Judas and Silas along with Paul and Barnabas. In verse 22 *Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas who was*

*also named Barsabas and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They were matured people. Matured people can disagree without being disagreeable; 'to disagree without being disagreeable' means you must have your emotions in check. When your emotions comes in it blur the issue and it's hard to be agreeable while disagreeing.*

After they resolved the issue based on testimonies, the written Word, and in the inward witness of their heart, everybody was happy and they sent Paul and Barnabas back and you would have thought they lived happily ever after. Not so, for after some time in verse 36 *Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing. Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. Paul and Barnabas were the best of buddies; remember those things Barnabas did for Paul. They had been through the floods and through the mud together. Barnabas was there when Paul was stoned and he was there when Paul was persecuted. And here comes that split in their midst. It was possibly a time of great turmoil and "confusion" in Paul's natural life.*

That's why we want to understand what the Bible says about transition and chaos in a person's life. We may not realize it but God plans transition and when the transition is occurring, in the natural it looks like chaos. Chaos to the natural man is when we cannot control any more. Anything beyond the control of the human being is described as a chaotic situation. Yet we realize in the book of Genesis, to God all chaos is a period of great pregnancy, the birthing of something new. Gen. 1:2 *The earth was without form and void.* The Hebrew word describing 'without form and void' means it was chaotic. The world began in a chaotic situation with just a great emptiness and darkness was on the face of the deep but 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters'. Some translations say 'flattering', like a mother hen sitting on the egg. When the egg is ready for hatching there will be chaos because the eggshell has to break. If the eggshell doesn't break the chicken can't come out. In fact if the eggshell doesn't break the chick inside it will die but just before the chick is about to be hatched it starts pecking its way out. A crack develops. That lovely egg is broken but it's broken for good. It's broken so

that the chicken can come out. That's why chaos to God is a pregnancy and birthing situation.

And in order to understand this biblical concept of chaos, we take a scientific concept of chaos into the situation. The average man in the street doesn't realize that chaos has order. In 1940 a student in the M.I.T. was researching the world weather pattern, which to the natural man, is chaotic as it is very hard to predict the weather. His name is Lawrence and he came out with what I call a 'Lawrence Equation'. He was calculating using the computer to calculate to six decimal points and he tried to run it off to three decimal points. He went out for lunch and when he came back he had the shock of his life. Just by rounding up from six decimal points to three decimal points, the whole prediction of the weather was different. He said, "How can such little thing affect the entire world weather?" He did a research in that and as a result pioneer a new field of mathematics and science research that they call 'fatal mathematics'.

I just quote a bit from that in order to tie up to the message that we have because if I just preach from the Bible and claimed the Bible says that the chaos is orderly, some of you will be sitting there thinking this guy doesn't know what he is talking about. Let me tell you that the top scientists today understand that chaos is systematic. It's only the average man who is not aware of what is being discovered and researched today, and they don't realize that to the scientist, chaos is a pregnant or birthing situation too. The figure 'zero' to them is something. 'Zero' in mathematics is one plus minus one [ $0=1+ -1$ ] but zero is a very pregnant situation to them. For those of you who are mathematics students, one of the ways that they do is to make an equation go round and round. They found that this thing affects all things in the universe, from the bees to the butterflies to everything. It was a revelation to them when scientists in the 20th century discovered that chaos is as what the Bible declares, that chaos produces system!

Here are some situations I like to read to you in what they understood to be chaotic behavior. Taking for example a small little bee or ant or a small little insect. Let the insects reproduce themselves and if the insect reproduce according to certain exponential law the whole world will be filled with insects but of course we know that couldn't be. There are some other factors that will hold them

back like food etc. Just like if you go to any lake you could dump in one thousand fishes but the ecosystem of the lake can only sustain five hundred fishes. If you put one thousand fishes inside, five hundred will die because there is a limit to the oxygen in the lake to sustain fishes. That's what the scientist are discovering today, if the insect has a population of growth of 0.1 to 0.99, it will all die off.

We all know if the population growth is less than one ( $<1$ ) very soon the whole country will die. If every couple has a minimum of two children, then all things being equal, the population will be stable. But if every two parents have one child, after some time the population is halved to, say, eight million. After that, it is halved to four million and then finally the whole population dies. If there are five hundred thousand insects, logically in your mind you think that after a certain number of cycles of reproduction, its population should double. Logically, if every couple has four children (i.e. two children replacing an adult) and if two replaces every person in this nation, after some time it will double.

By the same reasoning, if three persons or insects replace every person or every insect, logically the population should triple but that's not how it works because if that's how it works, those two little rabbits that got into Australia would have overpopulated Australia by today. If that's how it works, the whole world will be filled by insects rather than people, for insects reproduce faster than people. There are other laws that come in for checks and balances. Remember they are just using calculation and they don't even touch the insects.

Even numeral figures seem to be 'magical' to the scientists. When mathematicians multiply certain numbers by one they get back the same result (e.g.  $5 \times 1 = 5$ ) but if they multiply by two they get different result (e.g.  $5 \times 2 = 10$ ). If they multiply by three they get a certain things (e.g.  $5 \times 3 = 15$ ). And to their surprise when they multiply the birth rate by certain number something happens. When they multiply anything above 1.5, in fact up to nearly three (e.g. 2.999) but not three, they found a very strange result! The population will steady out and settle to 66% or two third of its original size. Logically if it is multiplied by two it should double but it doesn't. It settles to about sixty six percent (66%) of its original size.

The population will swing with growth and decline, growth and decline but it will finally settle and steady itself. It will experience a chaotic period. It will actually double at first, then from the double it will double again. Let's say from one million, it doubles to two million and from two million, it doubles to four million. You think from four million it will double to eight million but it doesn't. When it starts doubling, the factor that work against itself causes a decrease, then an increase and then a swing downward and again upward until it stabilizes at two third the original population. So the scientists seem to be scratching their heads, chaos seems to have some system!

But what system are they trying to uncover? The question will be answered as you read further down. But for now, supposing that they multiply the birth rate by three (birth rate  $\times 3$ ), something strange happened, the population rate will stabilized in two possible areas, from three up to three point five six (3 to 3.56) no matter how the birth rate increase or decrease. Then anything after that suddenly it goes on a different cycle again. What actually happened is this, they found that it began to go into a certain pattern after 3.56, then they add it in again and it goes into chaos. From a stability of sixty six percent (66%) it goes into the stability in two possible areas but above three point five six (3.56) it began to go chaotic again. Then suddenly it stabilized to four branches. The more they increase, the more possibilities there are until it can be any possibility and then you thought that the whole thing was the end. No! They keep increasing it and they found that it reached a certain level where once again suddenly it stabilize and then chaotic again. They keep increasing the number to ten, eleven, twelve with a resultant longer period of chaos but yet there will still be a period of stability between the chaos.

That was what puzzled all the scientists from 1940 onward. They were wondering why should it be that by mathematical equation, after every period of chaos there will be period of stability. And since that time they are scratching their heads wondering what to do about this new thing that they discovered. Not until finally when this satellite started taking photographs of all the planets. All of you know most of the planets. Every of you know that if you were to look at the telescope you will recognize the planet Jupiter because it is famous for the big red spot. The scientists know that the planet Jupiter is an entire planet by itself and it's very gassy and has a famous big red spot. There will be many other spots but

there is a huge big red spot that seems to be moving all the time around the planet. People have all kind of theories. In the early days before they could go near and photograph it, some people thought that some aliens were building something. Some people thought that there were creatures in outer space but when the scientists were able to go nearer and photograph it, they realized it is just some sort of red spot that is always there and it is constantly moving but they could not understand what it was. But in 1940 when this new mathematics came about, they had a new understanding. This new understanding could explain even the rings around that planet Saturn.

So when they discovered this, two scientists took gasses similar to Jupiter, put them in the test tube where one side was feeding the gas and the other side was taking in the gas and they caused the middle section to revolve round and round like the planet Jupiter to see if they can produce the same red spot. This is what they discovered, if they get the incoming gas and the out going gas correct and the revolution correct, they were able to produce the exact same red spot that Jupiter had. Then the scientists realized that what they saw through their telescope was 'ordered-chaos'. They were wondering how could something that is chaotic last so long as if there is an order, that red spot had began ever since men started looking at the stars. It looks like a permanent red spot. How could it last for centuries? We all know that when you burn something the smoke just disappears. They discovered that within all the chaos, there will be a break of system and it will flow into an orderly way that comes about.

Basically as we tie it to our message here is that they discovered - chaos is produced when you have a controlled environment. For example, if you have a system of plants and you control the amount of nutrition with everything else under control, you will produce a 'perfect plant'. But then what happens if you begin to increase on one of those areas, something is going to change. You could have fertilizers for plants. One fertilizer is for green plants and other fertilizer is for flowering plant. They know that certain chemicals will produce more leaves and certain chemicals will produce more flowers. So by introducing it into those plants they could change those plants. But before those plants change, there is a chaotic situation in the plant.

Another example of a controlled or 'closed' system, you have exactly four people working in your office and everything running well. After four years of wonderful time, you add in a new staff and logically it is supposed to increase productivity. When you introduce a new staff you have a new situation. It depends on the old staff accepting the new one. If it is not a Christian environment it can be terrible. Number five new staff comes in and everyone looks at him and wondering if this guy going to threaten my job. So there is a period of 'chaos'. Then after sometime they adjusted and they found that they like him and productivity increases. Then you grow again, you add number-six staff. Again there is turbulence. So as I said every new addition creates turbulence before it settles.

Lets suppose suddenly some scientists go to outer space and managed to pull one of the asteroids back to the plane of earth and make it moon number-two. Wouldn't it be nice to have two moons instead of one? They don't realize they will create chaos to the earth's system. Why, because the tides are controlled by the moon. If they actually did that the earth will go through turbulent periods. What we need to understand is that every time you add something new to an old system you always get turbulence. In science we call it 'adding energy into the system'. You will always create turbulence before you create an ordered-system.

And so every time when Almighty God wants to do something new He will add something extra and the moment God add something extra to the system, it is going to be turbulent before the old orderly system disintegrates and establishes into a new orderly system. It's mathematically proven. For example in a high-pressure situation when you add more energy, the old system began to be stretched right to its limits. Some of you notice when you are boiling water over a pot that when the water reaches a boiling point all the bubbles come from the bottom of the pot. The air bubbles always come from the bottom of the pot and they rise to the top and form those bubbles that look disorderly. A pot of boiling water could be an ideal illustration of a disorder. Why do the air bubbles come from the bottom? This is the actual scientific finding. If the water is to be a hundred percent pure and the pot is to be a hundred percent pure and there were no dust particles in H<sub>2</sub>O, you could boil the water past a hundred degrees and it will not boil. Do you know that clouds cannot form if there are no dust particles? Because of the impurities that are in it, it produces those bubbles. So what

happens if you take pure water and a pure pot and you boil it to a hundred degrees? You don't see any bubbles. It's actually boiled but you don't see the bubbles. If you take a pinch of dust and put it in, the whole thing will explode because it has stored energy within the system. So what the scientists have discovered is that when they keep energy into an enclosed system there will always be chaos before settlement and a new order takes place.

That is the thing that we must get into our understanding mathematically, scientifically, biblically, that chaos occurs before every new order. I had chaotic periods and unless we learned to accept that as a part of life we will be discouraged every time chaos comes because we are so used to a controlled system that when a disorder comes we panic and question God, "Why, why?" We don't realize when God puts more energy into that system there will be turbulence at first and in the natural world, they are discovering there is chaos before there is order. What do you see if you go to the Sahara Desert? You realize that desert and sand dunes go together. Sand dunes are caused by the wind and you would have thought that the sand dunes are all messy but from an airborne photograph of the desert you will find that each of the sand dunes form a hexagonal shape. In the seemingly messy sand dunes there is an order to the system. So chaos comes and continues over a period of time and eventually stabilizes into a systemized order.

There are all kinds of experience and I quote a last one before we get back into the Bible. Another experiment involves a long cylindrical tub of water. In the middle of the cylinder is a small little metal rod and if I were to keep turning the center rod continuously, we all know that naturally the water inside will turn. It will cause the water to turn round and round and the scientists ask what would happen if we keep turning the rod faster and faster. By turning faster I am creating more energy inside. The average person know that if you put your hand into a tub of water and turn, the water will keep turning and you will get a depression in the middle. So when they turn that rod they will see that the middle part goes down and the water to the side goes up. What happens if the turning is speeded up? As the speed is turned up, a strange thing happens. Instead of the water turning round and round, you will find that the water inside have two other movements. It has a movement going round and round but it has another movement that goes round it. It is similar to the earth rotating on its own

orbit and then the earth had the moon rotates round it and then the earth rotates round the sun. All kind of orbits but there is a system. The strange thing is when they keep turning the water; there will be a moment of disorder before it reaches this systematic stage. Again the same principle applies; there are disorders before an ordered system takes place.

That is what the Bible is trying to tell us all the time and we need all these explanations to come from the natural so that people realize that what we are telling them are from the Bible. The Bible says that there was chaos and the Holy Spirit was hovering over it. It just means that God has added more energy into that enclosed system so that He could change it into something new, a new dimension, a new ministry, a new gifting. So whenever God does something new in our life, He has to increase the spiritual level and energy that He works in our life. When He is increasing it in your life, you have a disorder initially and I know of some people when God starts moving in their life they have a slight disorder. One of them came to me and said, "I can't sleep for the past two weeks". Why? Because of the presence of God! He was frightened because he had to work and was concerned what will become of him with this sleep disorder. See he had a physical reaction to what God was doing but later on it settled down and he was able to sleep properly again but it was a new dimension that God brought him into.

There are some slight reactions to it before an ordered system come about in your walk with God and so as Paul walked with God, he experienced a period of disorder in his transition from the first phase into the second phase. Doesn't Acts 15 looked disorder? But behind it was pregnancy! When a lady is pregnant, she has a little bit of disorders. Depending on different ladies, some times she has morning sickness. Doesn't that look like a disorder? But it's a new order coming and her body system is getting used to the new level of hormone that is required for that little baby to grow. So there is great discomfort but later when the child is born there is a new order that has come and the family readjust itself. The whole family takes on a new order because of the new life and you learn from any family man that they have to adjust their life as their children came. Ask anyone who has children and they will tell you life has become different.

But sometimes when the new order comes, you still want the old order. That's why many times ladies frustrate themselves. They keep saying, "I wish for those days when I was free". No, don't keep looking back. Look to God and ask God how shall I adjust myself to the new order. As you are able to move into it you will move into a new orderliness. You will find time in areas where you never found time to spend with God. When your children grow up to be teenagers at different stages, you had to adjust to the new order that come about. Even those who are not married I have something for you too. When you fall in love your life readjust itself. Your free time is no longer free alone. Your expenses and economic planning includes someone else. It's no more the old order but a different order. You ordered your life differently.

So we realize that before every new order comes, mathematically and scientifically we have proven to you and from the Bible point of view that before God does something, there looks like a period of disorder, as in Paul's life with all the dissension and the strife. And average young Christians panic because they don't see beyond it. They don't see beyond the pregnancy to the little baby that was forming, for beneath all those things is a new system that's flowing out.

Two vital things take place in Paul's life during the chaotic transition from first phase to second phase. In order for me to explain clearly, I shall break the whole process into steps. Step one is new energy is added in order to move out from an old phase, step two is into a chaotic situation of adjustment and disorder, and step three is into the new system or new order. From step one and two, and then up to step three, two things take place. Firstly is the separation, and secondly is the unification, and they are necessary for the outcome of the third step fundamentally. They are not sequential, that is step one, followed by step two and then step three. All three can take place at the same time. They are numbered one, two, and three so that we could classify them and teach. For teaching purposes, I explained systematically to you in sequential order, this is step one and you cannot pass step one to go to step two. They are just explained sequentially but in real case they are not in sequential order, they take place at the same time because they are three fold. So when we classify here one, two, and three; in reality they can take place at the same time. And we need to be aware that in a transition point three things will be happening at the same time, separation, unification and foundation.

You will realize from close examination in the Book of Acts that the time Paul and Barnabas were together in Acts 13, Barnabas was always senior and Paul was always junior. Their relationship was the old order and they always held to the old order even though Paul's gifting surpassed Barnabas at various times in their ministry. You could take an indication from the way the Holy Spirit records it in Acts 13:2 *As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate Me Barnabas and Saul."* You may think this is not significant but it is very important. If you are standing up to give a speech in an official function you don't say, "Ladies and gentlemen and most honored Chairman." You never say that. The Chairman will be offended. You always start with the highest rank in an official meeting; from the highest rank you greet them and then you come lower and lower to the common people. That's how you make an official speech. You greet according to level and in the Bible there is an element of that where you notice Luke who wrote the Book of Acts with its emphasis on Paul's apostolic ministry but yet there were many times when Luke purposely put Barnabas before Saul. Though Paul's ministry was coming up but the seniority belonged to Barnabas. And that was the old order and Paul would not be able to move into the second phase if God didn't deal on this area in his life.

In Acts 13:2 it is 'Barnabas and Saul'. Then you look at verse 7 again *who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, and intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul.* Again Barnabas is mentioned first. But after that verse, Paul became more mentioned first because in ministry he was more in the public area than Barnabas. But yet people recognized that there was some thing of Barnabas who had an influence on Paul's life and Paul always must have given the last word to Barnabas as a respect to his seniority. He had a call far beyond Barnabas' but yet in teamwork Barnabas was the senior person and he made the last decision. In team work there is always one more senior than the other, there will be seniority and the one with the greatest influence carry the weight.

As we look on in Acts 13 the situation changed and in verse 13 and 16 Paul was mentioned prominently. Then in verse 46 it became "Paul and Barnabas." So you notice that in the ministry Paul was now getting more prominent and if that was so and continue on towards the book of Acts; no problem. But here was

something that we must not miss out. When it came back to Acts 14:12 the people who were around and who had seen Paul and Barnabas said, "Barnabas they call Zeus and Paul Hermes". And they were thinking Paul and Barnabas were like foreign gods but if you analyze this mythology of the Greek; Zeus was above Hermes. Although Barnabas was the one who is quiet; doesn't say much and Paul was always the public speaker but they recognized Paul always come back to Barnabas and Barnabas was impressed on them as the senior guy who seems to make the final decision.

Then by the time you come to Acts 15:2 again it's Paul and Barnabas. Paul is now taking the higher position in ministry but he was lower in position in organization. You could have a higher position in ministry but a lower position in the organization. Just like in your business world, you could have a person who is highly gifted and talented yet he is a junior in the organizational position. That is happening here and something must change if Paul was to go on further with the Lord. Even when they went back to Jerusalem and I want you to know in Jerusalem they regarded Barnabas as above Paul. In verse 12 *Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.* That tells you suddenly they reversed it. Why suddenly within the same chapter they reversed it? Because when they go to Jerusalem, Barnabas had the most senior position in the Jerusalem church than Paul, as Barnabas was the one sent to Antioch by the apostles. So naturally they will recognize them first.

It is just like if we were to send an elder in our church together with one of our normal members together on a missionary journey and in the mission field that member had a more powerful evangelist anointing than the elder and people there recognize his ministry and the member is mentioned more than the elder. The elder is in the background but whatever you do out in the field and when you return, we will still regard the elder as senior and you a junior because of that framework that is already there. So when you come, we are not going to ask the junior to report first. We are going to say, "Sir you are an elder, would you give a report?" And so the elder will report first. He may not have many things to share but he will still report first. Then he reported this junior member has a wonderful anointing there and he wants to give him a chance to share too.

It would have been the same situation that would have taken place in Jerusalem when Barnabas took the chair first before Paul because in seniority Barnabas was above Paul. But in ministry Paul was above Barnabas and God knew that if this situation were to continue to exist, it will not work in the end. For many reasons, first of all, Paul was a humble man who doesn't want to purposely clash with people and overthrow people. Paul would never want to move into something until Barnabas could see it too. He would have patience to wait and be long-suffering. Yet God has His timetable. It's almost like a person working in a denomination atmosphere. You want to do something that God tells you to but you know you need official approval. So on one hand, your legs want to go that side but on the other hand, your hands are tied up here. You want to go forward but yet you are lagging behind. So what do you do? There has to be a separation that comes about for good.

It's just like Abraham and his father. Abraham loved his father so much that he doesn't want to offend the father. So when God spoke to him in Genesis 12 to go out of the land into the Promised land, Abraham was still following his father Terah. And it was only when Terah died that Abraham went on but yet when Abraham went on he was still tied up to Lot. He was not completely separated and God could not fully work what He intended in his life. It was a new thing God was doing in Abraham's life but there were these affection, emotional ties and all these other things in Abraham's life that were hindering God's plans and purposes in his life.

But remember we can disagree without being disagreeable. But there are areas where we recognize and we said, "Look here. This is the way I work." When I travel to a place and organize a campaign, the first thing I do is to lay all the cards on the table, figuratively speaking. I say, "This is what you get, this is what happens, and this is how we handle this thing. If you agree take the whole thing. If don't agree; disagree now. Don't disagree when we are half way through." That's the way I like to do things.

That's the same way that God was dealing with Paul's life. Because of his loyalty

to Barnabas, Paul found it very difficult to move. Which is why sometimes even though we can train some people up that it's a different thing when you are around. I realize that you could teach and train a Bible student. But then when he is delivering his maiden sermon, and he knows that his lecturers are watching him, he may be inhibited and may take extra precautions to deliver a "politically correct" or "denominationally correct" sermon. We really want that student to really be free to do what he or she wants without being intimidated by the pairs of eagle eyes watching them. So you want to give a small liberty and freedom and yet have a feedback and counter-check system. I know what it's like. It's a different thing when you are a Bible school student and you are learning all those things and you begin to preach and you know that your lecturer is watching you. No matter how renewed your mind is you have an uncomfortable sense of his presence. And you need to renew your mind to overcome that and let it not stop you.

It was almost like Abraham and his father. It was almost like Isaiah and king Uzziah. In Isa. 6:1 *In the year that King Uzziah died.* Then only Isaiah had a fresh vision of God. Why, because Uzziah was more senior than Isaiah. So we realize that there was a separation that was necessary. Of course we believe that it may not have come to a sharp contention but it so happen that the small issue in Acts 15 whether to take Mark along or not. Small issue was only the volcano eruption of something else that is deep inside. If you examine Acts 15 very carefully, it was only the tip of the iceberg. That was not the main issue. The main issue was whether is now going to be Paul and Barnabas Private Limited or Barnabas and Paul Private Limited. That's the real issue. Some of you may think this is not so important. Wait until you set up a company with a Christian partner then you are going to find that there will be a difference between Tan and Partners or Lee and Partners. It's different. It boils down to the fact as to who is head of the organization, who has the last word if there was ever a contention?

See in of Acts 15 John Mark was only the spark that lit the fire. The petrol has already been poured all over. You notice in verse 36 – 39 it was between Paul's decision and Barnabas' decision. Who is going to have the last word? They both have their points but who will now be senior? That was the undercurrent behind their quarrel. Since they couldn't agree it was better that they work separately because now the question of who is the senior and who is the junior comes in.

But there is what I call a “fullness of time”.

The thing I believe is this it should not have come about this way. You see even in this case in verse 36 it was no more Barnabas who had the impression to go but it was Paul who had the impression to go. In Acts 13 it was different. It was Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called them. But now it is Paul for the work I called him. People react differently; some people who all the time are looking for power will kick that superior and go on. That’s the extreme. The other extreme is ‘No, not me. Why me?’ Opposite reaction! The balance is always to realize what the will of God is.

The remarkable thing is that during this time God brought a new person into Paul’s life. He was a prophet and his name was Silas. Remarkable the separation and the unification took place at the same time. At that very moment Paul came to know Silas who came from Jerusalem in verse 32 and he was a prophet. In Acts 15:34, Judas returned to Jerusalem but Silas chose to remain in Antioch for some unknown reason, which we know today. For some unknown reason Silas thought it would be good for him to stay back with the folks in Antioch. Now when Paul began his second missionary journey, obviously by Acts 16 it was now Paul and company. Before that it was Barnabas, Paul and company. Now it was Paul, Silas and company. Paul was now in the headship position and he could move into something that God has wanted all his life. So separation, unification and foundation! Through all these things Paul was already secured.

As we have mentioned earlier, Acts 15 is about A.D. 53, it was about fourteen years after he had last seen the apostle Peter in Acts 9. Paul already had his ministry established and something wonderful took place at this time. As we all know the event in Gal. 2 is the same event that took place in Acts 15. Gal. 2:8 *For He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me towards the Gentiles, and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that has been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship.* In other words, there was a foundation for Paul’s ministry. Paul’s ministry by that time had become recognized, ordained, accepted, and welcomed among the apostles. He was regarded as one of them. So he already had a firm foundation after fourteen

years since he had last met them.

It was almost like in Acts 6 if you were in Philip's position or if you were in Stephen's position. How does it feel after all the many months or years of faithfulness in Jerusalem? There is this church problem about feeding the widows and they selected you as one of the leaders. You feel good and honored that finally you been recognized and hands are laid on you. And from that moment onward you see that Philip and Stephen's ministry literally exploded because they had a foundation. They did not push their way but instead they waited for their turn. That's the difference.

So when we talk about transition we don't want you to have the idea that you are going to go about pushing your way around. No, wait your turn. Everyone will have their turn in God to fulfill God's purposes and plan and it so happened that it was Paul's turn to launch forth. So he accepted it and because he already had a foundation, he was accepted. So all three were fulfilled during this period of transition. This was the most important turning point in Paul's life before he launched into a great ministry of his letter writing. The epistles that we read started only in his second phase. God was waiting for him all these time.