

LIFE OF PAUL SERIES

THE THIRD PHASE OF PAUL'S MINISTRY

In Acts 18 we see the closing of the second phase of apostle Paul's ministry and one of the finer things he did was he started to write letters. In Acts 18:5 *When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.* Because of persecution in Berea, Paul had to flee to Athens where he waited for Timothy and Silas to join him (Acts 17:14-17). Upon their arrival in Athens, Paul wrote First Thessalonians. 1 Thes.1:1 *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* We assume that the time of this letter was about A.D. 57, probably close to A.D. 58 because Paul was about to move to Corinth (which was around A.D. 58) where he stayed for about a year and six months.

In 1 Thes.3:6 *Now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you – therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.* Timothy's arrival brought good news, which is also reported in Acts 18:5. Shortly after that they possibly journey from Athens to Corinth and Paul was already drafting out the letter of First Thessalonians. During his stay in Corinth, Paul had finished writing First Thessalonians. A couple of months later he wrote Second Thessalonians in response to some reports of doctrinal problems regarding Jesus' second coming because some believed that Jesus had already come. So between First and Second Thessalonians was just a few months period and in that few

months their faith had grown but there were some doctrinal issues and Paul wrote Second Thessalonians.

Finally in Acts 18:11 Paul was in Corinth, he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them. And it was in Acts 18:11 Paul wrote the other epistles that took place about A.D. 58. Those two epistles that were written close to each other are Romans and Galatians. So in our study of Paul's life the first two epistles that Paul wrote was First and Second Thessalonians. If you study them in chronological order you will notice Paul's growth even when he was writing those letters. Obviously to all of us the level of his writings in the letter to Ephesians and in the letter to Colossians was far greater than the level of First and Second Thessalonians. We realize that Paul had grown spiritually during this period of time and there are two other epistles he wrote in Acts 18:11, namely Romans and Galatians. In his second phase Paul wrote four epistles altogether. He may have written more letters that were lost to us but we have on record four epistles of Paul that were written in his second phase.

After his second phase, Paul very quickly moved from the second phase to the third phase. The most interesting thing is that between the second and the third phase there was not a very clear line of division. Sometimes I realize that when people transit between phases there is a very clear demarcation point. For example when Paul started the first missionary journey and began his first phase of ministry, it was a very dramatic start. Acts 13:1 tells us how the Holy Spirit spoke to the people there about Paul and Barnabas and to anoint them, separate them for the ministry He has called them to. There was a very clear demarcation point. There was a milestone that marks the changeover from one to the other but between his second and the third phase there was no clear-cut mark. It seems as if there was such a smooth flow from one to the other.

We mention this point so that some of us who are moving from phase to phase in our ministry or in our various work and occupation, realize that the transition may be obvious or they may be very insignificant and nothing spectacular but yet something inside you bear witness that you have moved into the next phase of your life. This is how Paul's third phase began. Acts 18:18 *Paul still remained a*

good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. That ended his second phase.

In some other teachings of mine I divided into five phases because I took pre-Acts 13 as phase-one but officially we can classify into four phases and his second phase ended in Acts 18:23 when he went back to Antioch. Exploring Paul's third phase, we began to see some changes in the life of the apostle Paul and in God dealing with his life.

The first point to note in the third phase of Paul's ministry is the manner of God speaking to his life has changed. The manner in which God spoke to him was less spectacular but the work of God and the manifestation of God in his life became more spectacular. You notice that in verse 19 when he set foot in the city of Ephesus, which was to be his central point for his third phase, there was no open vision, unlike in his second phase when he went to Corinth. Notice in Acts 18:9 *The Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."* That was a tremendous word in a vision to apostle Paul in his second phase at Corinth but yet here there was a mighty work in Ephesus that was about to take place and all Paul had was that little tinkling that he felt in his spirit as he told the Ephesians "I will be back God willing." That means he only sensed it in his spirit but he had no clear vision or voice or spectacular leading to come to Ephesus. He had to go by his inward spirit.

It doesn't mean that the more you grow in God and the closer you come to God that God's manifestation becomes less spectacular, it does not mean that. However it means that the closer you come to God the more God expects you to depend on your spirit man. For by that time your spirit man should have grown

and your spirit man can hear something that long ago he could not hear before. There is a dramatic change of God's dealing in his life.

You would notice something happened in Kenneth Hagin's life after his eighth vision. In his biography *'I Believe in Visions'* the Lord told him this, "I will not speak like this to you again" He had eight visions of Jesus Christ and in all his eight visions there was a change over and a changing point in his transition and the Lord specifically told him, "I will not speak in this manner to you again". It doesn't mean that the Lord will not appear to him again for we know that a few years ago, when he was in a camp meeting, the Lord did appear to him. It does not mean that the Lord will not appear in any vision any more but what the Lord was saying was that He was not going to lead Kenneth Hagin's life in such a manner any more, for the reason that the Lord expected him to grow.

We must understand this point because when many people grow in their spiritual life, in their closeness with God, they get disappointed with themselves because the former manifestations have stopped and actually new ones had begun but they are more quiet. They are more on the within of us than on the outside, so some of them thought that they have backslided when they no longer have the earlier manifestations.

I am reminded of Kathryn Kuhlman who told of this narration and how it helped her life tremendously. She said this person who saw the Lord Jesus with three other people in the dream. The Lord Jesus came to the first person and put his hand on him and prayed for the first one. Then the Lord went to the second one and stopped over the person and sort of lifted His hand and blessed the person. Then the Lord came to the third person and sort of smiled and went off His way. The person who had this dream asked the Lord why is it that He acted differently towards these three people, for he was saying in the heart there is favoritism because perhaps the first person was more obedient. The Lord smiled and said, "No, the first person is younger in spirit than the second and third persons." The Lord said to him, "The first person needed My personal touch. The second had grown in Me and just needs My blessings. The third is perfectly in My will and had known My ways and My Spirit and My voice and he doesn't need Me to manifest in the same way." The reason Kathryn Kuhlman mentioned that vision

in her biography was because throughout her entire life Kathryn Kuhlman never saw a single vision of Jesus. Some of you thought that God would never use you if you never saw a vision. You felt like a second-class citizen of heaven compared with those who are always seeing visions. No, Kathryn Kuhlman has never heard God's audible voice nor has she ever seen a vision of Jesus. Others had seen a vision of Jesus above her in a meeting but personally she had not. Yet she has learnt to hear the Holy Spirit in her own unique way.

We can put that to God's diversity of dealing in our lives but one of the things that we need to be aware of is that as we grow and as we transit from phase to phase, be prepared that God's personal dealings in your life and His personal voice or way He speaks or normally talks to you will change. I know some people will always cling to the old things and the old manifestations almost like a child clinging to the milk bottle. These are some of the statements they may end up making, 'I know that every time God wants me to transit He will always appear close to midnight after three days of fasting. And He will appear like a ball of fire. Then I know that I know'.

It sounds very spiritual but if you look at it from the Bible perspective, Paul was never like that. To do that is to demand that God works the same way all the time in our lives. Why God changes His dealings in our lives is because we have grown. Like Paul says when he was a child he needed certain things but when he has grown he doesn't need those things any more. He can get rid of the spiritual milk bottle. In his third phase, he doesn't need somebody to lay hand on him and send him out. He has grown in God.

The basic principle is that the more you grow in God, the more God expects you to depend on your spirit man whereas long ago every time you have the same major kind of decision, you expect a thunderbolt from heaven and it does come by the mercy of God. But as you grew in God your spirit man grows. We realize there is a difference between the voice of the human spirit and the voice of the Holy Spirit but the voice of the human spirit as it grows becomes close to the voice of the Holy Spirit in its accuracy and in its revelation. There will still be a difference between voice of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the human spirit.

There will always still be a major difference but what happens is where before ninety percent of God's major direction come to your life through the voice of the Holy Spirit and ten percent through the human spirit but as you grow in God it comes to a stage where fifty percent of it can be from the Holy Spirit and fifty percent is from your human spirit. And as you grow even more God may even require just ten percent from the voice of the Holy Spirit and ninety percent from your human spirit. Do not forget that a perfect person's spirit, soul and body is perfectly in tune with the Holy Spirit so that your human spirit hears perfectly and communicates perfectly to your renewed soul. Therefore God doesn't need to clarify His instructions any more to you. You are receiving it well.

It will be like the vision told earlier by Kathryn Kuhlman where the third person knew what God said, so they didn't need to struggle as much to hear from God. Notice in Acts 18:23 *After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.* Now that looks like his own leading. Even at the beginning of his second phase in Acts 15 it was more a burning desire in his life, in verse 38 *Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia.* But in verse 36 it says *After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren."* His second phase of ministry began by a stirring in Paul's heart, just a desire to visit the brethren. When Paul came back to Antioch, his spirit was a bit uneasy because the Holy Spirit wanted him to do something and he felt like he wanted to visit the brethren whom he had ministered to in his first missionary journey. So Paul moved along with that desire in his life.

At first when you start off in the ministry of God you may hear the audible voice of God and you may even pray and see a picture of a person coming to you and you know God wants you to contact and minister to that person or do something in reference to that. But as you grow in God suddenly the same kind of ministry demanded of you requires just that faint impression and you got nice feeling in your spirit about ministering or phoning somebody up and ministering to him or her. That's all it was and God expects you to obey it. See we must be obedient to the voice of our human spirit as much as to the voice of the Holy Spirit for our human spirit has been reborn to the image of God and has been nurtured and grown in it.

But the difference between the second and the third phase of Paul is this; when Paul obeyed the human spirit with a desire to visit the brethren, as he reached into those regions every time he hit the bull's eye in exactly what God wanted him to do and that was also spectacular manifestation. Example in Acts 16 verse 6 and verse 7 they were just going by their inward witness. They were just going by the voice of the human spirit. They were obedient to God in the moving by the human spirit. See the first time you ever travel on a missionary journey you may have a prophet of God called you up from where you are sitting and said, "Thus says the Lord, I want you to go to Timbuktu in Africa". And the anointing of God came on your life it was a confirmation. You went back home and at night you had a vision of a Timbuktian saying, "Come over here and help us." So you have no doubt about it. You finally went there and complete the work. Then you came back and as you come back, now God wants you to do another work and don't expect another prophet to come. What may happened in the second round is that you have grown in God, so what God wants to do now in your life, suddenly you may have a faint impression to just go over to the region of China to do some work there. You prayed and prayed but there was no open vision. All you have is this desire burning in you. God expects you to obey that. You say, "God why can't you do the same thing?" He doesn't want your milk bottle to get glued to you. So you are growing and then you obey God. Supposing God told you to go to China. Then you prepare for the journey. And as you are going there you landed in Hong Kong. That night you prayed about the how and the what. Then came this Chinese man in front of you that said, "Come over here and help us." That was a spectacular vision. Then the Lord Jesus appears and says, "Do not be afraid for I have much for you to do over there." That is like Paul's second phase. When he obeyed God there are certain places to go and certain places not to go and he has only his human spirit to go by. Your human spirit is your best security.

In Acts 16 as he was obeying God in verse 9 there was a vision. Then in Acts 18, he hit the bull's eye in the right place at the right time, and in verse 9 again the Lord appeared in a vision. So in the second phase there was a combination of spectacular leadings. I am not talking about a spectacular manifestation. A spectacular manifestation can include a leading but not all spectacular manifestations may include a leading. In other words, all spectacular leadings include spectacular manifestation but not all spectacular manifestations include a

leading. What we are talking is not that the more you grew in God; the less you see God. No, in fact the more you grew in God the more you see God. In fact you could grow to the stage where almost every time when you pray; you could see God and you could see angels and you could see the realm of the spirit. You could grow to that stage and there is no problem about it. The more you grow the more you see the spirit realm. However, seeing the spirit realm and being led supernaturally from the spirit realm are two different things. To be led by the spirit realm and from the spirit realm directly requires you to see the spirit realm.

So what God was saying to Kenneth Hagin was not that He was not going to manifest spectacularly any more. No, what God was saying is He is not going to lead him spectacularly any more. What God was doing in Paul's life was saying that in his third phase He is not going to lead him spectacularly. He expected Paul to discern the leading from his spirit. He will manifest spectacularly from time to time into Paul's life but He will not lead him in the same manner. And that's where many failed when they move from one phase to another for they wanted to cling on to their spiritual milk bottle.

By manifestation we also talk about God's tangible anointing. At different phases in our life the tangibility of the anointing is still there but it changes. It changes in its form and its manifestation. For example, at first you are in the presence of God you are always weeping and crying for over three months of attending church with red eyes. As you grew in God you still weep but it's more controlled. You still feel that same presence, and you still have the same surrendered heart but there was more a liberty that comes. In other words, the tangibility changed. You don't weep as uncontrollably as before. You do still weep to a certain extent but now it is different. Sometimes when you first operate in the word of prophecy, especially your first time you come to the front and you wait your turn but the anointing of God is so strong you could hardly stand and you are shaking all over and you say this is embarrassing. By the time the mike was given to you and as you prophesy your voice shook more than you speak but somehow or other by the grace of God you managed to speak forth the word. Then through time as you began to obey God in that area, you are now different. After one year of shaking, you can come to the front and wait your turn coolly and calmly. You still carry the same voice, the same anointing, and the same spiritual authority as you speak 'thus says the Lord'. But now your spirit man has grown, so we must

expect these things to change as we grow.

Sometimes some of you who have been in this church since the beginning and you feel the services have changed from time to time. Is it the lack of the anointing? Many times it's because you are the one who have grown. Somebody who is new came into that same service still felt the same thing you felt when you first came in four years ago. That proves to you that the same anointing is there but your sensing of it has change as you have grown. Look at it as a positive point. The difference between the second phase and the third phase is this, in the second phase as Paul obeyed the human spirit God confirmed by a spectacular leading after he obeyed. In the third phase it looks like it was a hundred percent all the way even without confirmation. He has to get it right in his spirit and there were a few records of spectacular anointing but no record of spectacular leading in his life. It looks like from stage one to stage three, stage one where it was hundred percent spectacular, stage three was where it is hundred percent by the spirit man. And stage two was half-half. Now it was in stage three there was the first major change that took place in Paul's life. In the first stage, the decisions that you made would need some spectacular leading, but now in this third stage, you do not need such spectacular leading. There is a change because there is a growth in your life. Your spirit man has grown.

The second point or major change is in the Acts 19:9 *But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years so that all who dwell in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.* It tells us that now instead of Paul going out to all of Asia, all of Asia was now coming to him. It's the opposite now. All who dwell in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus from that central pulpit in the school of Tyrannus at the city of Ephesus. It was now reversed where before Paul used to travel round and round but now he centralized his ministry in Ephesus. Of the three years that Paul stayed in Ephesus, two of those years were in the school of Tyrannus and one year outside. We see that the traveling ministry has changed to a stationary ministry. It's almost like when Paul launched out, he was like an eagle that waited on God. So Isaiah 40 takes place in all the four phases. They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. Then the first phase they shall mount up like wings like the eagle. Second phase they shall run and not be

weary. Third phase you shall walk and not faint. Fourth phase it goes back to waiting on God and preparing others to wait on God. There is a cycle that goes round. In Paul's fourth phase that we are just touching a little bit it was almost all prison ministry. And most of his work was done through writing. All the phases can be seen in Isa. 40. This is a phase of walking in Ephesus. Walking tells you it's less spectacular. Running is reasonably spectacular. Flying is spectacular. So at first you were flying in the spirit. Everyone said look at that spiritual eagle. At the second phase he was still running. For example if you are in the supermarket and you start running everyone will look at you. But when you are walking nobody takes notice of you. That's the level that Paul was. It was now a ministry solely based from the maturity of his human spirit and they were partaking of his life in God in Acts 19. Some of you are in the traveling ministry today. One day God will turn your traveling ministry to a stationary ministry. What is most important is that it must be a stationary ministry and not a monument. A monument is also stationary. But a monument is dead while a stationary ministry is alive. There is a great change in Paul's life to be stationary.

I can tell you it's not easy when you have been in a traveling ministry to be stationary. It will take a phase change in your life. Neither is it easy for you who are in a stationary ministry to start moving in traveling ministry. It will have a lot of commitments and a lot of changes need to come. Most of all we need to obey God. Whatever He tells you just obey Him. That's our purpose on this earth; to fulfill his will.

The third point or change that took place in Paul's life is in Acts 19:11 *Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.* In his third phase, God worked even more powerfully. As we have mentioned earlier it has nothing to do with the lack of power in a person's life but of God's method of dealing in your life. Where before God used to speak to you perhaps through a video camera and you see God face to face, in the second phase God speaks to you through the telephone. In the third phase God sends you a fax. Here at his third phase although the spectacular leadings have been reduced to purely the leadings in his human spirit, yet the spectacular manifestations still remain, not only remain in phase one, but to phase two and to phase three. The peak of Paul's power ministry was

in his third phase. His third phase if you analyze it was is most powerful but the highest phase was his fourth phase because in his fourth phase he reached across a span of time to the modern world. In his third phase, in his public physical ministry he was at his peak. A tremendous power was demonstrated in his life such as the word here in verse 11 *God worked unusual miracle*. In your third phase that God moves you into; He will bring you to the peak of your anointing in terms of power and publicity. We realize that in the ministry your publicity has nothing to do with God's perfect will. It can be God's perfect will in your life and yet you could be a private person but God has His plan in our life.

You notice the graduation scale as far as public ministry is concerned; in the beginning he was unknown, hiding behind some bush somewhere. Then his first phase began people can now see him where he is. Then his second phase people can now recognize him and he was accepted and recognized by the church in Jerusalem. Then his third phase everyone has heard of his name. He was a public figure. But his fourth phase he went down again not just two steps, he went down almost three steps where very few people saw Paul again. Paul himself mentioned at the end of his third phase in Acts 20:25 *Indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more*. So in terms of his publicity, you got to differentiate between the public, the powerful and the eternal. You have to differentiate all these because many people equate popularity and fame with the perfect will of God. That is not necessarily so. Some people are doing God's perfect will and they are unknown to people. But in terms of Paul's public figure, you are moving from first, second, third and fourth phase in your life. Each of us has basically four phases in our lives but they can come at different times and different moments. So Paul as a public figure he moved from being unknown to partially known, well accepted, to famous and then he went down again to obscurity in his fourth phase. But in terms of the power and extent of Paul's ministry, when he moved into first phase there was a certain measure of power. He moved into the second phase it was even more powerful and when he moved into his third phase it was very powerful. In fact it was the most powerful demonstration. When he moved into his fourth phase it was powerful in a different way; hidden somewhere behind the curtain. Hiding but yet in terms of level of reach and extensiveness it was higher than the third. So the phases as far as God is concerned, in God's book it goes one, two, three, and four. But in man's book it goes one, two, three and down.

Look at Jesus life. You can notice four phases in his life too. Before He went into the Messianic ministry, Jesus was hiding in obscurity in a little carpenter's shop for thirty years. And many people have come and gone. And finally Jesus launches into His first phase of ministry. He went through all Galilee and He ministered and He preached and He was well known to a certain extent. Then Jesus went into His second phase where His disciples now began to work together with Him. Those whom He had chosen now He has trained them and He began to launch them out two by two. To a certain extent, it was just like Paul and Timothy whom we saw in his second phase. In this phase Jesus demonstrated certain miracles that were never mentioned previously and many signs and wonders like the raising of Lazarus. In His third phase there was the voice of heaven coming down and many marvelous demonstrations that were present that even the whole of Jerusalem proclaimed 'Hosanna to the Son of David' when Jesus was coming in. In terms of the human eye, the climax of Jesus' ministry took place in His third phase. When Jesus went into His fourth phase, which was to die on the cross for the world, in the world's eyes, it looks like a defeat because He went back to obscurity. So please do not judge by popularity or fame. When Paul went into obscurity in his fourth phase it looks like a defeat but it was in the order of God for his life. But it is third phase that is special. In your third phase, everything that you ever dream, everything that you ever heard, in a vision, in terms of the power of God in your life will be demonstrated at that peak.

Like our friend Hagin is now in his fourth phase. In his third phase his power was very powerful. But by 1981 when I visited the US he was already moving into his fourth phase. Most of his writings were in his fourth phase. He demonstrates only once in a while but his peak was during his third phase in terms of publicity and special signs. Every ministry that God has called is given special signs to demonstrate to this generation. Why is it that so few demonstrate it? It is because some have not even passed the first phase or the second phase. But it's in my heart that I know that my spirit bear witness to the Spirit of God that to everyone who is called to the ministry, God has reserved special signs to demonstrate in your life to each of us if you are faithful to your first two phases because the vast majority of so called ministers do not pass the second phase.

The reason we are teaching this is maybe one day when I completed the third

phase after I moved into it, I will move back into obscurity. As long as you understand the Word of God; you are prepared but sometimes a man of God gets so used to the publicity they don't want to get back to obscurity. So it's important for us to undergo all four phases so that as we move into each phase we are prepared for what God is doing at each time. And I know that the second area here God is working in my life to go into the third but I haven't moved into the third at all yet. But at least I know what to expect and what will come as I begin to move from phase to phase. Like one of the things I would expect is that there can be greater fullness of the signs but personally leadings have to be from my spirit. So I am more prepared for that. But if I am not taught the Word and I am not prepared and having examined phases in ministries I will be thinking of expecting spectacular leadings all the time and then I would miss God. Which is why we must be aware of the different phases of God. Special signs and wonders is in the third manifestation.

The fourth point or change in Paul's third phase was actually the result of his second phase. In Acts 20:3 *and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia – also Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.* Paul has a team of committed, high quality and keys personnel following him, Aristarchus, Secundus, Timothy, Tychicus. By the end of your third phase if you ever move into that and then move out of that, you will have a lot of people whom you have raised to that stature. In the second phase Paul was training them and in his third phase he released them. You will notice in the third phase of Jesus' life He releases His disciples totally. The second phase was when He picked up His disciples and He was training them, instructing them from time to time but at the third phase He released not only the twelve disciples, He released in Lk. 10 even the seventy who followed Him. Two by two they went all over the place. And by the third phase Jesus was set to go to Jerusalem. He doesn't want to go anywhere else. See He knew where to go and He knew where to end His ministry and His life. So here we have a third phase that is important because it is one thing to select and train, it's another thing to let go. A lot of people have trained and prepared and some of the disciples are the same disciples for the past forty-five years. The disciples are growing so much older and we wonder whether the disciples are going to die first or the master die first. Therefore when we select and train a person we must learn to let go. I tell

you letting go is not easy because you must be prepared and be patient like God, that your disciples will have to learn through some mistakes they made. There is no such thing as being faultless because of our human imperfection, even in the Bible as we see here the leaders that Paul had left behind in Corinthians made some mistakes. Paul even has to send Timothy and Titus back to some of the people whom Paul have trained and left behind because some of the leaders are going to make mistakes.

Look at what Paul says in Acts 20:29 *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.* Paul knew it but remember no man is a superman, no one can do all things and everyone must know where their responsibility is because all of us are one piece of the jigsaw puzzle of which God is the maker and the arranger. So we must recognize our limitations. Paul says he knows that savage wolves had come. Then look at the next verse that is incredible, verse 30 *And from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.* Sometimes you can't help it. People have to learn through their mistakes. What happened here in verse 30 is that some are going to be so caught up with the publicity game and they are gathering people to themselves. And people have to reap what they sow; they have to learn from their mistakes. In your third stage, it's not easy to let go, it's not easy to see your little child learn from a mistake and you know no matter how closely you brought your child up, one day your child will have to make a decision without you alone. If your child has never made a decision without you hanging around breathing on the neck your child haven't really grown. The test is when your child has grown up and has a critical decision to make and he or she makes a right decision without you. What a relief and how rewarding it is for you! You know you have trained them in the right way and they now follow the Lord the right way. This is so important for your child could be well behaved in front of you but at the back of you a monster, a different person when you are not around. And that is the hardest thing for people to take because the third stage requires supernatural patience and long suffering.

Some of these people listed in Acts 20 have proved themselves very well and Paul now had to depend on them like his right arm. In his second stage he depended on them more like in the ministry of help and from time to time but in phase three he depended on them totally. That's a different thing altogether. That's

where the third phase can be rewarding when you began to see the very people you trained succeed and made the right decision. It's not easy but when you let them go, some may make disciples after themselves, some will follow through. See there is no such thing as maintaining the status quo. Every ministry will be different and we have to expect this that when a ministry takes over another, Elisha will be different from Elijah, no matter how much you try to make them the same. You cannot make people to be puppets of one another. Everyone has to discover their gift, their talent and even some of the most similar ministry will yet have some differences that we have to learn to accept.

Which is why, for example, one of our good friends who was a pastor in a foreign country. He left his church for some other minister. And he made a decision that I would think was quite commendable of him. He left in a right way and he was sent off by the church and launched into a traveling ministry. The new pastor, which he had groomed up, took over and all the people were happy with this arrangement. In his letter to me he said he made this decision to purposely pull out of that city which he loved very much and went to live in another city so that he will not be a hindrance to the other person's leadership. I think this is commendable of him. He inconvenienced himself that much so that the people will not keep looking to him just because he is still around but learn to now yield to the new leadership. That's like a person moving into the third stage where they have to let go and letting go is as hard as holding on.

Some of us think holding on is easy. Letting go is one of the most terrifying, horrifying, miserable, self-denying, experiences you ever go through. I remember when we were leaving the second church that we planted, I could feel the weight of that burden in my life because I gave five years of my life to that church. Leaving was not easy but there were principles that I adhere to. I told my wife all our lives has been based there and we are grateful for all those things that had transpired. I said we must let go and start a new work that is this present work. It was one of the most crucifying and difficult decisions I've ever made and when we made it, all our emotions inside came gushing out. I know perhaps in ten years time, perhaps in thirty years time when I will have to say to the folks, "Third phase has closed and the fourth phase begins," I know it will be one of the most difficult times because the heart has been attached with years spent together, life poured together, and there you are surrendering each to God and

that is one of the hardest thing to do. You can imagine that letting go is even harder than holding on. Now holding on is already hard but letting go is much harder. It was not easy for the Lord Jesus Christ to tell His disciples and said, "I must now go". It was not easy for His disciples and it was not easy on the Lord Jesus Christ. It was not easy for the Lord Jesus to say that all of you will go away from Me and be scattered like sheep. It was not easy for Him to take up the cross and follow that road knowing that everyone think that He was wrong in going that way.

One of the most difficult phases is to move from fame back to obscurity because many will ask why. What happened? What has he done? People expect you to die in fame in your pulpit. People who do that haven't completed fourth phase, they've only finished third phase and died. If you really have lived your full life out in your ministry in God, you will finish also the fourth phase. I know human beings are like that. For example, when we started our ministry in the Singapore meeting, after about six months we had a short break. During that one or two or three months break, I heard hundreds of rumors such as, 'he has been banned', 'he has done this', 'he has collected the offering for certain projects, and therefore he is banned'. We had a short little break to complete the necessary legal process to conduct the meetings properly and I heard thousands of rumors. When we resumed our ministry in Singapore, people say, "O I see!" I wished that they had seen earlier. The problem is that 'O I see' doesn't come that fast because not many people has 'O heaven is in their heart'. They have the 'O don't know what's going on'. But when they have the 'O heaven is in my heart' you begin to understand and see the true picture. Throughout all that time you know what God told me to do, "Keep quiet". You don't have to justify yourself and you don't have to say anything. Some of my best friends who were ministers rang me up, "We understand brother what you are going through". In my heart I said, "I don't understand what you mean by what I am going through. I am not bothered by all these rumor-mongering." So it's important for us to understand that the hardest thing is letting go. Yet it's a part and parcel of the third phase.

The fifth point to note in regard to the third phase is Paul's sensitivity in his spirit. In Acts 19:10, Paul ministered in Ephesus for two years. Verse 9 he taught the word of God daily in the school of Tyrannus. So altogether he was in Ephesus for about three years, two of those years were in Tyrannus. How do you know he

was in Ephesus three years? Because Acts 20:31 tells us he was altogether three years with the Ephesians. This final point in regard to the third phase is you got to be led to a certain extent by your human spirit. By the mercies of God Paul learned what he didn't learn earlier, that the ministry comes to an end when your work and the burden of your heart had been poured out. Acts 19 Paul had poured out his entire heart just before Acts 20, you find in Acts 19:20 *So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.* Incidentally while he was for three years in Ephesus he wrote two other epistles, the First and Second Corinthians. When Paul began his third missionary journey you notice in Acts 19: 1 *while Apollos went to Corinth Paul went to Ephesus.* Some time after Apollos went to Corinth, the Corinthians problem came up because some followed Peter, other preferred Paul and some after Jesus, some after Apollos. So sometime after Apollos had gone to Corinth, news of the division had come to Paul when he was in Ephesus, which was about A.D. 60. Around this time Paul wrote First and Second Corinthians to correct the problems that were in Corinth. After these three years, Paul's ministry in Ephesus was ending. In verse 21 *When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying. After I have been there, I must also see Rome.* Verse 23 *about that time there arose a great commotion.* Paul perceived in his spirit and knew that the work was completed and just about that time a commotion arose and Paul knew it was time to leave. See the fifth point is that your sensitivity to the human spirit can be so precise and this is the truth we must get, if you are in the right place, at the right time, no matter what kind of opposition may come, which does happened to Paul's life, God will take care of it. But if you are in the right place and the right time has been completed, don't stay a minute or a second longer because when the cloud of God moves on, you must move on.

Some people want to claim Psalms 91. Psalms 91 only avails for you if you are at the right place and at the right time. When Paul's life was in danger he didn't just claimed Psalms 91. When his life was in danger sometimes he ran away in a basket, other times he ran away secretly. Why didn't Paul claim Psalms 91? Because Psalms 91 is only available when you know you are doing the right thing in the right place at the right time. But when the cloud moves on, see the protection is under the shadow of the Almighty and the protection was when you are in His shadow. When His shadow moves you better move because when the Lord moves His shadow moves, you find yourself naked without His shadow.

Paul was sensitive to this fact in his later life. In his earlier life he was not. There were times when he wanted to continue to go into a place where God's Spirit denied access. He almost got into trouble as he learned his Roman citizenship in his second phase but now Paul was extremely sensitive. At the right time when he knew he was about ending, he knew he got to move on and also about that time there was uproar. In Acts 20:2 *Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him, as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return to Macedonia. He knew how to go his way.*

In the third phase it is very vital and important to be at the right place at the right time doing the right thing. For without that there is no shadow of the Almighty upon our lives. The thing about this third phase is that it all depends on your human spirit. So even more in your third phase you must constantly keep the sensitivity of your spirit by a life of prayers and fasting. It is not as easy to hear the voice of the human spirit, as it is to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit because when the Holy Spirit speaks there is always some sort of manifestation and it's very powerful and it is not easy to miss. I mean if you have a dream you know it's there and you could write it down and get the interpretation. If you have a vision you know He is there. You know He has spoken something without doubt and it's only left for interpretation. But when it's your human spirit speaking God's voice, it is so gentle. Sometimes circumstances roar and God's soft gentle prompting can be easily ignored. Yet in the third phase ignorance of that gentle voice will spell disaster for you. For in your third phase your entire leading depends on your human spirit. So in your third phase, if you don't train your human spirit properly nor listen to your conscience and inner witness, it can turn out to be very, very dangerous for your life and ministry. In your first phase you got roadblock, second phase some roadblocks, and third phase the only roadblock is your spirit. God expects you to mature to that realm. So Paul was vitally sensitive to the leading of his human spirit.

