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**A0950 – December 13, 2009 – Galatians 1:13-14 – The Former Life
Of Paul**

Last time we worked with Gal 1:10-12 and we concluded that vv 11-12 are setting up a complex chiasm by which Paul is going to argue his case. His case is that the gospel which he preached is of divine origin. That is a crucial case to establish because if the gospel he preached is not of divine origin then it's of human origin and then we're just talking opinion, you're opinion, my opinion, anyone's opinion and all truth is relative. So to handle this rapid decay into relativism Paul says my gospel comes from God and that immediately involves us in the Creator-creature distinction. God is the Creator and as the Creator He has certain infinite (Q)ualities; God is sovereign, righteous, just, loving, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, immutable and eternal. And He has every one of these attributes infinitely. And if He says anything it is true, if He does anything it is right, if He says this is the gospel then this is the gospel over and out. Whether you believe it or not has no bearing on its truth value. That's our ultimate presupposition. The only alternative to this is to say that man is ultimate and all truth is relative but that quickly falls apart because then we have to say that then the truth that all is relative is also relative and they don't want to say that. But our point is you can never escape absolutes, you're just shifting from God as absolute to man, but you haven't gotten rid of absolutes. Now in the Creator-creature distinction we admit up front that God is the absolute speaker, He's the absolute source of truth. Man is the creature and we have certain finite (q)ualities that correspond to God's infinite (Q)ualities. Man has choice, man has conscience, man loves, man knows things, man has energy, man has space or geometry, man is mutable and man has time. These are qualities of man that correspond to but are not identical to God's (Q)ualities. They must correspond because if there is no correspondence then we are like the liberal critic says - completely cut off from knowing anything about God

whatsoever. So there is a correspondence or analog between God's (Q)ualities and man's (q)ualities. God as Creator has absolute authority and man has a finite analog to God's authority. We must admit that there are authority structures in the creation. For example, God gave divine institution #2 marriage and the husband has authority over his wife. The man has authority because God invested him with authority. It's not because the man did something, it's simply that woman was made out of the man, not the man out of the woman and so the unique creation of man and woman is the basis of the husband's authority over the wife. God gave divine institution #3 which is family and the parents have authority over the children. It is the parents who are invested with this authority by God and whether they are good parents or bad parents it makes no difference on the point of authority. They don't earn the right to have authority; God invests them with authority over their children. The state is not invested with authority over the children and the state has no right to tell parents how to raise their children. That responsibility is the parent's job because the parents have God given authority over their children, not the state. The state doesn't come in till divine institution #4, human government, and God set this up to curb evil and as such there are men who hold certain offices that have divinely authorized authority over other men. They hold valid positions of authority that we should submit to and respect. So the divine institutions 2, 3 and 4 mark out authority structures inside the creation. They carry limited authority. But divine institution number 1, responsible dominion marks out that if we are responsible to have dominion properly then we are under His authority. All men are under the Creator's authority issued through divine institution #1, responsible dominion. So there's an authority structure embedded in that first divine institution. Man, the creature, is responsible to God the Creator to have dominion according to His will and purpose. So when the Creator speaks He speaks with absolute authority, He is over all authority structures embedded in creation and therefore if He says something that's the final word. What we mean is that when God speaks it is a perfect statement of what reality is whether people believe it or not. It doesn't matter what you think. It matters what God says. Take for example, Adam in the Garden of Eden. God created the Garden and God told Adam about various parts of His creation. He said this is light, this is darkness, this is the expanse, this is water, this is the sun, this is the moon, those are stars; I give you all green plants and seeds for food except this tree, this is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and if you eat this tree you will surely die.

So these things created came interpreted, they already had meaning, God gave them their meaning and God told Adam the meaning of the tree, it is simply a statement of reality. Did the reality of what God said about the tree depend on anything in Adam? Did it depend on what Adam thought about the tree? Did it depend on Adam's scientific investigation of the tree? No. It simply is a statement of reality that if you eat of the tree, in the day you eat of it you will surely die. God simply makes that as an authoritative declaration. And you can count on it that anytime God has made an authoritative declaration about anything it is true. And so if Paul says the gospel I preached is from God then the gospel he preaches is the final word on the issue. Believe it or not but it is true regardless of what you think, regardless of your investigation, regardless of your sincere belief otherwise.

Now he wants to defend that this gospel is of divine origin and that this divine gospel is so powerful that it not only delivers you from the penalty of sin but also from the power of sin. And we said that in verse 12 he's got to defend against the accusation behind verse 12, that "I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it." Now receiving it and being taught it are two sides of the same coin. He's just saying no human being taught me this gospel, I didn't get it in a classroom, I didn't get it from the other apostles, I got it by a revelation. And beginning in 1:13 all the way down to 2:21 he defends that by going into his autobiography. He's got to do this because he wasn't one of the twelve and that meant his authority was questioned by the Judaizers and so Paul has to defend that he has equal authority to one of the twelve. He's going to give them his life history starting back when he was in Judaism and up to when he came to Galatia. So this section covers a large part of Paul's life and we'll get into the details but don't lose the forest for the trees. Paul's arguments are that all during this history he didn't have much contact with credible Christians so you can't say I was taught this gospel from men. And if I didn't get it from men then what other alternatives are there? Where else could I have gotten the gospel I preached?

Galatians 1:13-14 Hkousate gar thn emhn anastrophhn pote en tw Ioudaismo, oti kath uperbolhn ediokon thn ekkhlsian tou theou kai aporthoun authn, ¹⁴kai proekopton en to Ioudaismo uper pollous sunhlikiotas en to genei mou, perissoteros Zhloths uparkon ton patrikon mou paradoseon. (NA27)

Galatians 1:13-14 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, the fact that I was continually persecuting the church of God to extreme measures and I was continually destroying her, ¹⁴and I was continually advancing in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my nation being excessively zealous for the ancestral traditions. (Author's Translation)

Galatians 1:13-14 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. ¹⁵But when God, and that focuses on Paul's conversion in Acts 9 but this week we're in Acts 6, 7, 8 and 9 before Paul's conversion. So this week let's just work through his former life, next week we'll move into his new life.

Let's break down Paul's former life in verses 13-14. Verses 13-14 nicely break his former life into three parts as indicated by the three imperfect verbs. The imperfect means continual action in past time and so as we go through the grammar I'll point out these three imperfects and then we'll go to the Book of Acts to see what Paul was like.

Verse 13, **For you have heard**, that's an aorist, past completed action, apparently they had already heard all this when Paul was with them, so this is just a summary of Paul's **former manner of life** or conduct in Judaism. Everything here is summarized by the three imperfects that follow and we want to go back to Acts and fill in the details so we get a better understanding of Paul. Who is this guy that wrote half the NT?

The first imperfect is verse 13 **how I used to persecute the church of God**. To see how he used to persecute the church of God turn to Acts 8. Remember, the book of Acts divides into three parts according to Acts 1:8, the witness to Jerusalem, the witness to Judea and Samaria and the witness to the remotest parts of the earth. In Acts 8 the witness is in transition, it's been bottled up in Jerusalem and evidently Paul was in Jerusalem and Paul was a major component in blowing the gospel out of Jerusalem. So let's see how starting in Acts 7:58. This is the stoning of Stephen. Stephen was the first martyr of the Church and we saw his tremendous mentality particularly during his execution. This man was so focused on the Scriptures that he was able to quote the same Psalms Jesus quoted when He was on the cross. And

look who's mentioned in verse 58, "When they had driven him out," that's Stephen, "When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul." Now that Saul is later known as Paul. At the stoning he was probably about 30 years of age. So come to 8:1, this tells you what Saul thought of Stephen. **Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.** Luke puts that in there to show you Saul's mental attitude toward Christianity, because Saul was a vindictive person flat out. He was a violent, aggressive person, highly motivated. And when Stephen took him to school down at the synagogue debate Saul didn't like it too much. Saul wanted to be valedictorian; salutatorian wasn't good enough for him so if you were smarter than him you better watch out because he'd find a way to convict you and execute you. That's the mental attitude of Saul. He was a violent, hateful, prideful and vindictive person. That's the mental attitude of the same guy who will later write half your NT. So if you know someone like Saul and you've written them off as a hopeless case don't write them off. Paul is a case in history of one of the most violent, hateful people coming to Christ. Don't write anybody off, they may not like you, they may hate Christianity, they may rail against Christ but don't write them off, there's hope and God can call anyone He wants because God controls history. History is not controlled by chance, history is not controlled by man, history is controlled by God and often God throws a curveball into history so that the most unlikely thing to occur from the human view point is the thing to occur. Just to get us to stop and consider for a moment - who really is behind the steering wheel of history?

So Stephen was martyred. Verse 1 tells us it was **on that day**, the very day Stephen was martyred that Saul began his mission to destroy the Church. On the day of Stephen's execution Saul went on a wild rage against the Church. And so that caused the Christians in Jerusalem to spread out. Notice the close of verse 1. Where did the word of God go? **throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria**, now notice the two places. Isn't that exactly what Acts 1:8 says? You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria. This is fulfilling Acts 1:8. And notice a significant word in v 1, **scattered**. You've heard of the Diaspora Jew, the Jew living outside of his homeland? Well, this is the word, it means to be scattered. Three of the NT epistles deliberately begin with this word Diaspora because they are specifically written to the Diaspora Jew - 1 and 2 Peter and James. Diaspora - and to get

the flavor of it think of a farmer holding seed in his hand. What does he do with the seed? He scatters it. And that's the picture of the Holy Spirit here scattering the seeds of the gospel into the regions of Judea and Samaria, **except**, and he closes with an interesting note, **except the apostles**. They didn't go anywhere; they stayed snug as a bug in Jerusalem. Apparently the persecution against them has ceased. It's amazing really because they were the one's Jesus commanded in Acts 1:8 to be His witnesses in these regions and yet they don't go into these regions and it's a testimony to their provincialism. They were slow to respond to the word of God, they were slow to move outside of Jerusalem, but not Stephen, not the Hellenistic Jews, they were pushing the boundaries and they were literally forced out due to Saul's rage.

Skip over verse 2, let's come to verse 3, **But Saul began ravaging the church**. That word **ravaging**, if you've seen what wild boars do to property transfer that idea over to the church. That's what Paul was doing to the church. Saul was just like a wild boar and the voice here is imperfect meaning he started this destructive activity and he kept on and on and on. It was his mission in life. And so he **entered house after house**, because at this time they were just meeting in homes. There was one church in Jerusalem but it met in various houses throughout the city, the modern church building is a later invention. There's nothing wrong with it, this is just to say in the early church they met in homes. And Saul would find out what homes they were meeting in and in the middle of the meeting he'd bust in with his warrants and start **dragging off men and women**. Just imagine being one of those early Christians, you knew what could happen, Bible study starts at 7 over at Matthew's house, are you going to go? Many of your brothers and sisters in Christ went and they worshipped the name of Jesus Christ and they were arrested, thrown in prison, convicted and stoned. Thirty to forty pound stones dropped from about three stories right on your chest all because of the name of Jesus Christ.

Now turn over to Acts 9:1, all this is what Paul summarized in Galatians and I want you to get a feel for this man, who is this man? Verse 1 is his zealous application of Judaism. **Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder** the Greek there reads **threats to murder**, in other words the threat is murder, that's his message, "You come silently or I'll kill you," and he breathed this threat **against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high**

priest, ²and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. So this was Saul's standard operating procedure before his conversion. Notice in v 1, he's **still breathing threats**, what do you mean **still**? We mean the persecution that started in 8:3 is still going on, he still hadn't cooled his jets, he was going from house to house, arresting "men and women," The expression **men and women** is used over and over and that's there to show you that Saul is an issues man. He could care less who you are - you could be a beautiful young lady and certainly Paul, you wouldn't haul off beautiful young ladies! Wrong. If you refused to blaspheme the name of Jesus Paul would bind you and haul you off. That's the kind of man Paul was, who you were didn't matter to him, what you believed is what mattered. And so this little expression shows you Saul was an issues man. "What were the issues? What was it that got under Saul's skin?" This is literally his personal crusade. You see in v 1 he was **breathing** this. You've heard the expression, "So and so eats, drinks and breathes football." What do we mean but that they're consumed by football. That's the expression used of Saul. He eats, drinks and breathes this destruction of Christians.

So what was it about these people that caused him to go on this crusade of destruction? The first thing we notice is that he's not persecuting the believers but it says **the disciples**. Now **disciples** in Acts is not a synonym for the believer. Sometimes it's used that way but not here. This refers to believers in training, believers getting doctrine. Saul could care less about the closet Christian, the hush, hush type; they're not going to spread Christian doctrine. It's the trained believers who spread doctrine so they're the threat. Second point: he's not persecuting the disciples in Jerusalem, the apostles Peter and John and so forth, he could care less about them. There's something about the disciples who were scattered out from Jerusalem, the people who escaped his first rage in Jerusalem. These were the Hellenistic types. So there's something about the Hellenistic strain of thought he doesn't like. And what was it? It goes back to Acts 6 and 7; remember the word of God indicates that Saul and Stephen got into debates down at one of the Hellenistic synagogues and Saul got a real thrashing from Stephen so he knew what the issues were. He was no dummy.

Acts 7 records the two-fold issue. First, Stephen had argued that Israel was not the end all of God's plan of salvation in the human race and therefore the two key institutions of Israel with which Saul was so concerned, the Law and the Temple, were not the most important things in God's program. They were important, undeniably they were important but they were not the end. They were a means to a greater end. And therefore, because Stephen made this point Saul was deeply angered because for him as a Pharisee these were not stepping stones to a greater end, these were the end. He could conceive of nothing higher than the Law and Temple. Well, Stephen challenged that and that was one issue that really bugged Saul.

And then to add insult to injury, you remember that Stephen did something else. He showed that God's program came back upon the Gentiles.

Ultimately Israel is involved but for the express purpose of blessing the Gentiles, and therefore Israel was not God's only concern. He was also interested in blessing the Gentiles. And so very obviously the next thing that followed very quickly from those two premises in Stephen's position was that the gospel would have to go out to the Gentiles. This was key to the substance of Stephen's thought.

The net effect of these two issues was an undermining of Saul's way of thinking. Saul had spent years training in Judaism since he was a youth, he had read all the great rabbinic commentaries and now this Stephen comes out of nowhere and literally demolishes it? This is the kind of thing that really gets under people's skin and this is what got under Saul's skin. It wasn't name calling. Name calling doesn't cause this kind of reaction, but when you totally dismantle someone's system, someone who understands the issues, then you better watch out.

Now we know as we compare Acts 9, Acts 22, Acts 26, that it was precisely these two points that most irritated Paul. It says very clearly in Acts 22 and 26; I went to foreign cities by the dozens, all over the ancient world; I went everywhere, seeking the disciples. Why these disciples? Why not the disciples in Jerusalem? It's very simple: it was these disciples that were taking Stephen's framework and spreading it. They, by their mass movement, were undermining Saul's framework. So he had to deal with this and here's the irony. The greatest persecutor the Church had ever seen up to this point was a man desperately concerned to wall in its missionary tentacles. As one

tentacle extended to Damascus Saul would say, "I'll chop it off;" another tentacle would extend to Antioch and Saul would say, "I'll chop it off," but then after his conversion what was the one mission that Saul had? To extend the tentacles that he was chopping off before. And this shows you the tremendously radical shift in this man's thinking and in his life.

And so, v 1 he **went to the high priest**, this was Caiaphas, ²**and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus.** Damascus is 140 miles away, it's in modern day Syria. It's a six day journey so that shows you how much energy this man is expending, and obviously it's being funded by the Pharisees back in Jerusalem. **And if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he was planning to bring them bound to Jerusalem.** The **Way** is the early name of the Christian faith and it's called "the way," sort of like in the modern orient we have the religion called *Taoism* and the word *Tao* means "the way" or "the path." Here it was called "the Way" because Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father but by Me." And Paul said baloney and we'll find out why by the time we finish. Why did Paul say Jesus is not the way, the truth or the life?

That about covers the first imperfect, **how Paul persecuted the church of God**, now let's turn to the second imperfect, Gal 1:13. At the end of the verse, **and tried to destroy it.** Ongoing action in past time, Paul continually **tried to destroy**. Actually **tried** is not in the original text, Paul was destroying it. As you saw Paul murdered Christians. The word destroy is *portheo* and to see why he describes his former life by this word turn to Acts 9:21. This actually comes after Saul had become a believer but the Christians knew about Paul's former life so when he came preaching Jesus Christ they react and their reaction is in verse 21, "All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name," That word destroyed is *portheo* and it refers to someone who's a murderer. Who was the first murderer? Satan. So what the early Christians were saying by using that term of Paul was that Paul was one of Satan's key agents. Drop down to verse 26, "When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple." So the word had gotten out about Paul, he was a threat, he was destroying the church. That's our second imperfect.

For the third imperfect turn back to Gal 1:14, **and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries.** That's the third thing and this is the intellectual side. It was the intellectual side that was underneath the persecution and destruction. And you can see Paul excelled. He went beyond many of his **contemporaries**, those were men in Paul's age group, ongoing action in past time, and Paul was continually advancing beyond them in Judaism. The way they measured who was the top student was to have debates, just put the students up one against the other and let them have at it. And what this expression is saying is that Paul would get up and wipe out one student and he'd go study some more and the next day Paul would wipe out another student and so forth, this went on and on. Paul was an indefatigable opponent. And he would practice with laymen in synagogue and bounce his ideas off them and everything was going real well until one day he met Stephen in Acts 6 in the Synagogue of the Freedmen. It was Stephen, and apparently we gather from the fact that Paul later takes credit for murdering Stephen, who whipped Paul in that debate and Paul was the type that if he wasn't number one then he'd make sure you were out of the picture so he would be number one, and that's what this is describing when it says Paul **was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries**; many, not all, because Stephen whipped him. But Paul's expertise was noticed by his professors in the halls of debate. And through this, as we said last week, Paul was satisfying his approbation lust. Paul's lust was to have everyone praising him and this fed his lust for recognition and it led ultimately to Paul's excessive persecution of the church.

And finally he says in verse 14, **being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.** Now the **ancestral traditions** would be more particularly those enshrined in the oral law or *halakhah* handed down in Pharisaic schools.ⁱ To give you an idea of the ancestral traditions of the Pharisaic schoolsⁱⁱ turn to Mark 7. Paul was a Pharisee and Mark 7 records a number of the traditions that arose after 586BC. In 586BC the Babylonian empire under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and took the southern kingdom of Judah into Exile as the fifth degree of divine discipline outlined in Lev 26 and Deut 28. At that time the Temple was destroyed and since the Temple was central to Jewish worship and they still wanted to worship what they did was develop non-Temple worship. That is the origin of all kinds of oral tradition that grew up around the Law of Moses or Torah and this was transmitted from generation to generation. In the time after Antiochus

Epiphanes, 145BC, the Jews divided into three sects, Sadducees, Essenes and Pharisees. These are the three main sects in the NT, and you can also add the Zealots a bit later, but they each developed their distinct line of oral tradition and thought. And what the Pharisaic tradition did was it grew up and hedged in the Law of Moses so that if you have the Law of Moses here in the center then the oral tradition of the Pharisees was like a fence around the Torah and outside the fence is the nation Israel and they can never get through the fence. It was supposed to keep them from breaking the Torah. They were like extra precautions, but what they did was actually keep them away from the proper meaning of Torah. So they had erected this fence of oral tradition around the Torah which shielded them from Torah and this is what Paul was a part of, this is what Paul was extremely zealous for, this fence that surrounded Torah, not Torah itself. And in Mark 7:1 Jesus says it's was a problem. "The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him [that's Jesus] "when they had come from Jerusalem, ²and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed." and then we get explanation for this strange comment because Mark is writing to Gentiles and Gentiles don't understand all the nuances of Jewish oral tradition so Mark explains it. We're also Gentiles so I bring you to Mark to get the background. Verse 3, "(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders; ⁴and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)" And so Mark is pointing out that this fence of oral tradition had grown up around the Law of Moses. Verse 5, let's see what happens. "The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" ⁶And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ⁷BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" Now that's what Christ thinks about their tradition. He says it's just the precepts of men, the word of man, not the word of God. Verse 8, "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." ⁹He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition." They were experts at getting around the word of God. That's what their tradition did. That's what tradition still does; tradition crosses out the word

of God and puts the word of man in its place. Then Jesus gives an example in verse 10, “For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH’; ¹¹but you say, ‘If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given *to God*),’ ¹²you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; ¹³*thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.” And so what they did was replace the word of God with the word of man and if I can do that enough times and I can tweak this commandment a little bit this way, and if I can re-interpret that one this way then I can get around it and make it work and God says you people are hypocrites; you’ve built a fence around the word of God and substituted the word of man and this is what Paul had done. The reason this was done and the reason this is still done is simply due to the fact that we’re sinners. Man is by nature a sinner. We are sin and so when the standard of the Law of Moses came to these sinners they said, well we can’t keep that and so they lowered the standard. They twisted and distorted and trimmed it here and there to bring it down to man’s standard so they could keep it and that nullifies the word of God. That’s what tradition does and that’s what God hates and that’s what Paul was in. It’s the mentality that I can be good enough and if I do all this ritual - if I wash my hands right, I part my hair on the right side, I rub the lamp just right, then God is going to be impressed. God isn’t going to be impressed. God isn’t impressed by you, He isn’t impressed by me, and He isn’t impressed by anyone but Jesus Christ. So stop trying to impress God and believe on the One who already impressed Him. Alright, now that we know what Paul was into, impressing God through all this tradition, let’s go back to Galatians 1:14 and conclude with a question and some exhortation.

First we want to ask why Paul was so outraged against the Way of Jesus Christ. Why did Paul reject Jesus as the Messiah? Here’s a suggestion: “To Paul as to every other Jew, a crucified Messiah was not only an insult to his national-political messianic hopes, it was also “incomprehensible absurdity,”ⁱⁱⁱ since the Messiah was, almost by definition, one uniquely favored by God (cf. Isa. 11:2), whereas a hanged man was, according to the law, cursed by God (Dt. 21:23). That Paul must have seen in the cross the decisive refutation of the claim that Jesus was the Messiah may be inferred from passages such as Mt. 27:42; Lk. 24:20f.; Jn. 12:34 and does not depend on whether Gal. 3:10–14

can be appealed to as providing evidence of how Paul once thought.”^{iv} Now, what he’s saying is that the 1st century Jew expected a reigning Messiah, the Messiah, whoever he was, would be someone who would deliver them from political bondage. So in their picture of the Messiah that they had in their head they were looking for someone who led an armed revolt against Gentile kingdoms and since Jesus didn’t do that and since Jesus died on a cross then Jesus was not the Messiah. Think with me of Bar Kochba and the Bar Kochba revolt of AD132-135. Bar Kochba was hailed by many, including the most prominent rabbi, as the Messiah. And you say, why did they claim he was the Messiah? Because he led an armed revolt against the Roman Emperor Hadrian. But then when he died everyone said he wasn’t the Messiah. Why did they abandon their messianic expectation in him? Because they didn’t believe the Messiah would die. They believed that when the Messiah came He would simply live forever. Turn quickly to John 12:34. “The crowd then answered Him, “We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, “The Son of Man must be lifted up”? Who is this Son of Man?”

See. They didn’t see the Messiah would be crucified. They didn’t see Isa 53. They didn’t see Psalm 22. They didn’t see Psalm 16. So when Jesus died that was the death knell for Paul believing he was the Messiah. Now do you see why Paul was persecuting this Way to the death? He thought it was total heresy.

Now to conclude we turn to a more recent account of the utter hatred of Christianity and persecution of it and still they came to Christ. We have to be reminded of these facts of history because the moment we forget them is the moment we write someone off, they’ll never turn to Christ, they’re too far gone and we don’t know that, we don’t control history, God controls history and God has some real surprises. And here’s one, the story a mother-daughter duo who set a bomb in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Britain because they were a part of a radical fringe group in the women’s suffrage movement. These two women, Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel who was called ‘the Queen of the Mob,’ were imprisoned several times for their militancy, and for a time fled the country. At the end of the First World War, however, Emmeline picked up a book on prophecy by F.B. Meyer in a second-hand bookshop.^v She later testified that she had earlier been living in “an atmosphere of illusion,”^{vi} and was now awakened to the reality of Christ’s return and her own need of the Saviour. She later wrote:

“Those days of the suffrage campaign were the days of political childhood – now is the time to put away childish things, to abandon the childish, nay, foolish dream of a human-made Utopia, and in its stead hold fast, rejoicing, to the certainty that the Lord cometh.”^{vii}

So maybe you have a family member, a son or a daughter, a father or a mother, maybe a friend and you’ve been sharing the gospel with them for years. And every time you even mention Christ you have a fight. Don’t write them off. God has a plan for history and that plan includes bringing people like Paul who are radically opposed to Jesus Christ, to Jesus Christ. And next week we’ll see why these surprises come in history. Why is it that history is never quite predictable by man?

ⁱ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians : A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Includes Indexes. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 91.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.jewfaq.org/halakhah.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Godet, *First Corinthians*, 1: 105.

^{iv} Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Includes the Text of Galatians from the New English Bible., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 59.

^v Martin Pugh, *The Pankhursts* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 378.

^{vi} Christabel Pankhurst, ‘The Lord Cometh’: *The World Crisis Explained*, 5th edn (London: Morgan & Scott Ltd., 1923), p. 8.

^{vii} Christabel Pankhurst, *Pressing Problems of the Closing Age* (London: Morgan & Scott Ltd., 1924), p. 43.

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