

Galatians 1:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.

Analysis

But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. Though unknown by face, Paul was famous by reputation. "But they had heard only" (monon de akouontes ēsan, μόνον δὲ ἀκούοντες ἦσαν) uses imperfect periphrastic construction indicating continuous ongoing hearing—reports kept coming. Monon ("only") emphasizes they had reports but no personal contact.

"That he which persecuted us in times past" (hoti ho diōkōn hēmas pote)—Paul's reputation as persecutor was notorious. Pote ("formerly, once") distinguishes past from present. "Now preacheth the faith" (nun euangelizetai tēn pistin)—euangelizō means "proclaims good news." Pistis (πίστις) here means "the faith," objective body of doctrine, not merely subjective believing. Paul proclaims the very belief system he formerly attacked.

"Which once he destroyed" (hēn pote eporthei, ἦν ποτε ἐπόρθει)—portheō (πορθέω, same verb as 1:13) means "ravage, destroy, devastate" (military language). The dramatic reversal—from destroyer to proclaimer—testified to supernatural conversion. No natural progression or human influence explains such radical transformation. This ironclad testimony to divine intervention silenced accusations that Paul invented his gospel.

Historical Context

Paul's transformation became legendary in early Christianity. Acts records his persecution in detail (7:58-8:3, 9:1-2), his conversion on Damascus road (9:3-9), and initial skepticism he encountered from believers (9:13-14, 26). The irony of the chief persecutor becoming chief apostle displayed God's grace and power. This encouraged believers facing persecution—if God could save Paul, no one was beyond reach. It also validated Paul's apostolic authority—his dramatic conversion authenticated his commission. Later opponents couldn't claim gradual theological evolution corrupted pure original gospel when Paul's transformation was instantaneous and complete.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. In what ways does your personal testimony of God's transforming grace serve as irrefutable evidence of gospel truth?
2. What past opposition to God or His people has He remarkably reversed in your life?
3. Should the possibility of dramatic conversion like Paul's shape our prayers for Christianity's current opponents differently?

Interlinear Text

μόνον	δὲ	ἀκούοντες	ἦσαν	ὅτι	Ὁ	διώκων	ἡμᾶς
only	But	heard	they had	That	G3588	he which persecuted	us
G3440	G1161	G191	G2258	G3754		G1377	G2248
ποτε	νῦν	εὐαγγελίζεται	τὴν	πίστιν	ἣν	ποτε	
in times past	now	preacheth	G3588	the faith	which	in times past	
G4218	G3568	G2097		G4102	G3739	G4218	
ἐπόρθει							
he destroyed							
G4199							

Additional Cross-References

Acts 9:13 (Parallel theme): Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

Acts 9:20 (Parallel theme): And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Acts 6:7 (Faith): And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Acts 9:26 (Faith): And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.