

The Transformed Life, Part 3

Scripture: Acts 9:17–19

Code: 1730

INTRODUCTION

We have called Acts 9 "The Transformed Life." In these verses we see the features of the transformation that took place in the life of Saul as a result of his encounter with Jesus Christ.

A. God's Masterpiece

Paul spoke about his transformation and the transformation of the Christians at Ephesus in Ephesians 2:110: "And you hath He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins; in which in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our manner of life in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us" (vv. 14). In verses 59 he goes on to talk about how Christ has made us alive. The transformation is complete in verse 10 when Paul says, "For we are His workmanship [masterpiece], created in Christ Jesus unto good works...." From all of the darkness, sin, and death of the first three verses comes a whole new creation in verse 10. The transformation that occurs in verse 5 is an encounter with Jesus Christ by faith. That is the message that the Bible offers to men.

B. God's Man

Acts 9 records for us the character of Saul of Tarsus before and after his transformation. Only about five percent of what we know about him was before, about ninetyfive percent is after.

1. Before His Conversion

From what we know about him before his conversion he was a horrible character. He was cruel. He was hostile. He was strong willed. He was zealous for his own opinion; and if you didn't agree with his opinion, he would kill you. He was self sufficient, independent, inflexible, angry, persistent, crusading, unloving, and so on. He was everything a very unpopular, despised individual would be.

2. After His Conversion

But on the road to Damascus something drastic, dynamic, and divine happened to this man. It occurred when he confronted Jesus Christ face to face, and at that moment he submitted his will to Christ. Under the crushing power of the sovereignty of God, he had little choice; but he did have enough choice to at least do it. He rejected his selfwill and accepted the will of God.

It is hard for us to understand what this transformation meant. In his life prior to the transformation,

Saul was wreaking havoc in the church, dragging Christians out of their homes, putting them in jail, and torturing them. He was working for the Sanhedrin and the politicians of Israel and hating Christ and Christians. Then to imagine that in an instant of choice on the road to Damascus that his whole life flipfopped to the exact opposite, is absolutely beyond our imagination apart from our understanding of the divine miracle of salvation. Saul exchanged everything. All of the old things he hated, suddenly he loved; all of the old things he loved, suddenly he hated. Everybody he used to serve, he stopped serving; and everybody he used to design plans against, he was in service to. Everything completely changed, and that's how conversion operates.

C. God's Miracle

Christianity is not an addition to your life, it is a transformation of your life. I once heard a man say, "Becoming a Christian is like putting on a new suit of clothes." I said, "That's wrong. It's like putting a new man in a suit of clothes." It is not superficial. Christianity is not a repair job, it's a transformation. And that's what happened to Saul.

You say, "Well, psychoanalysis couldn't bring that about." That's for sure. You say, "Resolutions couldn't bring that about." No. There is only one thing that can change a man that fast and that drastically, and that is a divine miracle. If God created man in the beginning, then it is no problem for God to do something else to him. That is exactly what the Bible is talking about when it says, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation..." (2 Cor. 5:17a). The change that occurred in Saul's life was far greater than the ugly cocoon which bursts to release the rainbowwinged butterfly.

REVIEW

Acts 9 records the transformation of Saul for us, and it gives to every man sick of himself and sick of his worldhope. It provides for us the pattern for The Transformed Life. There are seven basic features of the transformed life. The first one was...

I. FAITH IN THE SAVIOR (vv. 19)

The transformed life begins with faith in the Savior. This is the point at which the transformation must take place. When a man puts his faith in Christ, at that moment he is totally transformed. It is not a process, it is a miracle. However, that is just his positional transformation before Godhis new creation. From that point there are six other things that take place in the practical transformation of Saul, which follows his positional transformation.

It is like a child who is born in an instant. When you look at a baby you don't say, "Well, the baby will be all right in a few years when he grows an arm, a leg, and an ear." No, when the baby is born, all the parts are therehe is a total creation. The only thing left for him is to grow within the framework of what he already is. Nothing is added on. So, the first thing is the creation, and it is a perfect creation. Colossians 2:10 says, "And ye are complete in Him...." There aren't any fingers or toes lacking. Saul was created a whole creation, but then there was some experiential development that needed to take place. There was a process of growth and development that continued. I'm a different person as a

Christian now than I was ten years ago. There is a transformation in a practical, experiential sense that is an ongoing thing from the moment of salvation, but salvation is still complete. To begin with, Saul exercised faith in the Savior.

Can you exist in eternity?

I don't care what you believe or what kind of religious feelings you have, because apart from faith in Jesus Christ, you are not a new creation, you are the same old thing. You are not fit to live in this world if you live against the grain of the way God created this world. That is why there is so much sorrow and pain in the world. You cannot exist in God's eternity unless you are a new creation. If you are a Christian, you have already been recreated for eternity. Death for you is just an incidental thing because the biggest change has already occurred in your life. You are fit for heaven right now. But there will be a few things that God will remove as you grow.

So, the transformation begins on the principle of faith in the Savior. The second point that we looked at was...

II. FERVOR IN SUPPLICATION (vv. 1012)

The transformation was apparent in the life of Saul because he immediately began to pray fervently. Acts 9:11 says, "...for, behold, he prayeth." Saul was blind for three days, without anything to eat or drink. So he prayed, spending the three days in communion with Jesus Christ. And I believe that someone who has truly been born again into God's family wants to talk to God. In fact, he cries out to God for his needs like a newborn baby cries for milk and care and love. To say that someone is a Christian but has no desire to pray, is a contradiction in terms. A Christian is one who is dependent on God and who breathes the atmosphere of God. That is communing with God. Prayer is the first proof of the transformation. If you really have come to know Jesus Christ, conversing with God is an inextricable part of your existence.

The third thing we saw regarding the transformed life was...

III. FAITHFULNESS IN SERVICE (vv. 1317a)

Saul was saved in order to serve God...as is every Christian. Acts 9:15 says, "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Then verse 16 says, "Saul will suffer for it." So the Lord said to Ananias, "You go tell him that he has been saved to serve Me." No Christian is ever saved to go to a monastery and lock himself in. No Christian is ever saved to be a hermit or a recluse. There is no

such thing as a salvation unto secrecy. We are saved to become involved in what God is doing to serve Him and that's exactly what we see in the life of Saul. He knew this was true from the beginning. His reaction on the road to Damascus was, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?..." (Ac. 9:6a). In other words, "You are not saving me for nothing; You are saving me based on the fact that You have something for me to do."

Using the Transformed

Few of us understand that God only uses transformed people to do His work. People often say, "He's not a Christian, but he's serving God in the best way he knows." No, he's not. You can't serve God unless you come to Christ. You say, "What about all of the people all over the world who think they are serving God?" It is very clear. First Corinthians 10:20 says, "...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons...." What they think is God, is only Satan's mask. Satan looks like God when it is to his benefit (2 Cor. 11:14). And he will even look like Christ when the Antichrist comes. And so it is that when people who do not know Jesus Christ think they are serving God, they are really serving Satan. God only uses transformed people to do His work, and He uses all of them.

Job vs. Service

Every Christian has spiritual gifts. Everyone is given opportunities to minister and serve that's what salvation is all about. Once you become a Christian, service becomes everything. Going to your job is just the means of putting food in your mouth, clothes on your body, maintaining your house, keeping your car running, and adding a few little luxuries that God is gracious enough to supply. But the real issue is serving Christ.

Now, while Saul was active in the Lord's work, from time to time he had financial problems. He then resorted to doing what he knew best, and that was making tents. And I imagine he made good tents. From time to time when the financial need arose, he made his living that way. But when the history books are finished and closed, you won't read about Saul the tentmaker, you will read about Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ. The fact that he spent a lot of time making tents is not the issue. First Corinthians 4:1 says, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." In other words, we ought to be known as people who serve Jesus Christ. That is the real crux of the issue.

We have seen the first three points in the transformed life: faith in the Savior, fervor in supplication, and faithfulness in service. Now, we come to the...

IV. FILLING OF THE SPIRIT (v. 17)

"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

A. The Power Of The Spirit In Saul

Ananias was God's messenger to tell Saul that he would not only receive his sight but would receive the filling of the Holy Spirit. This is the next step in the transformed life. Immediately upon salvation, a believer receives the Holy Spirit. Now the positional transformation takes place at salvation, but the transformation visible to the world begins to take place when the believer yields to the Holy Spirit when he is filled with the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is bestowed on Saul at this time and further, he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

1. Receiving the Spirit

a. The Reasons for Apostolic Affirmation

The Holy Spirit was bestowed upon Saul without the laying on of hands by the Apostles. On every other occasion in the book of Acts, when a new group of people received salvation, they never received the Holy Spirit until the Apostles came to lay hands on them. Whether it was the Samaritans, the Gentiles, or the disciples of John, in each case they were saved and then they received the Spirit when the Apostles laid hands on them (Ac. 8:17; 10:44-45; 19:16). Why?

1) The Authority of the Representatives

The Apostles were the representatives and the authority of the church. God wanted to make sure that all of these other groups (be they Samaritans or Gentiles or Jews) realized that they were under the authority of the Apostles.

2) The Avoidance of Rejection

There was a natural break between the Jews and the Samaritans, and an even worse one between the Jews and the Gentiles. Had the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit on their own, and had the Gentiles received Him on their own, there would have been three churches. They never would have come together. So God in His marvelous plan to make the body one, made sure that all these groups received the Holy Spirit in the same way, with Jews present and at the hands of the Apostles. Peter went back to Jerusalem and said, "They have the same gift we have" (Ac. 11:21-27). That is exactly what God wanted him to say so that the church would be confirmed as one.

b. The Reasons for Apostolic Absence

Now, in the case of Saul, there are no Apostles present. Why?

1) A Unique Commission

Saul was in no way under the authority of the Apostles. Why? He himself was an Apostle. So God did not subject Saul to other authority. It is true that he was not an original Apostle, but nevertheless, he was an equal. Therefore, the other Apostles weren't necessary to bring the Holy Spirit to him.

2) An Apostolic Commission

In John 15:16 Jesus said to the Apostles, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go...." Jesus appointed the Apostles. On the road to Damascus Jesus appointed Saul with a commission to the apostolate. And Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. He said, "When I go to heaven, I will send My Spirit" (Jn. 16:7). Jesus did the commissioning, the saving, and the sending of the Spirit to Saul so that he would fit the pattern of an Apostle. Later on Paul says, "I am an Apostle appointed by Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2

Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1).

2. Receiving the Filling of the Spirit

Now, in addition to receiving the Spirit, Saul is to be filled with the Spirit. It's one thing to have something, it's something else to be filled with it. He had the Holy Spirit, and now he is to be filled with the Spirit.

a. Saying Yes

1) Yielded Rule

"The filling of the Spirit" is a common phrase in Acts. It is also referred to in Ephesians 5:18, which says that every believer is to be kept filled with the Spirit. This is a part of the transformed life. It means control and power. The filling of the Spirit is an issue of control and power. Now, as a Christian you have a choice. You can run your own life or you can yield to the control of the Holy Spirit. You either do what you want or you do what the Spirit wants. If you are mature, you and the Spirit want the same thing. And that is spiritual maturity when there is no conflict of the two wills. You can do what your desires say or you can do what the Spirit of God says. The filling of the Spirit is simply being controlled by the Spirit. And whenever there is control, there is power in your life.

2) Powerful Results

The word for "filled" which is used in Ephesians 5:18 is the same word that's used for the wind that fills the sails of a ship and propels it along. There is no such thing as being filled with the Spirit and just sitting around and meditating. The filling of the Spirit always empowers an individual for some kind of activity. So, the Spirit is there, it's just a question of obeying His will so that you will be empowered. In every case that individuals were filled with the Spirit, they began to do something.

a) Acts 2:4 "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak...."

b) Acts 2:14 "But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice...."

c) Acts 4:8 "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said...." And then he preached a sermon.

d) Acts 4:31 "...and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."

e) Acts 6:8 "And Stephen, full of faith and power...." Where did he get the power? Verse 5 says he was full of the Holy Spirit. What did he do? Verse 8 continues: "...great wonders and miracles among the people." And later on, he preached in Samaria.

f) Acts 7:55-56a "But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said...." And he testified about what he saw.

Whenever there is the filling of the Spirit in a life, something happens. You can usually identify the unspiritual Christians because nothing is happening.

Nothing's Happening!

It is very hard to distinguish a Christian who is not filled with the Holy Spirit from an unsaved person. Sometimes only God knows. Why? Your positional transformation is a fact that God is aware of, but the only way I can ever know that you have really been transformed is when I see it manifested in your life. So, if there is nothing happening in your life, God will know if you are saved but I may not have the faintest idea. Have you ever had someone ask you to pray for a person and you said, "Is he a Christian?" and they said, "I don't know"? He doesn't know because the person in question is either not filled with the Spirit and therefore indistinguishable from someone who is not saved, or he is not saved. Only God really knows. Many times people will say to me, "Do you think this person is saved?" and I don't have any idea. God knows if he is positionally transformed, even when it's

obvious to us that he is not visibly transformed.

The filling of the Spirit is the yielding of my life to the control of the Spirit, which always results in power. Jesus said to the disciples, "But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you..." (Ac. 1:8). The Greek word for power is *dunamis* from which we get the English word dynamite. In other words, you will be exploding sticks of dynamite, but some Christians are duds. And the reason is that they are not filled and controlled. If you are controlled, there is power available.

3) Daily Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the child of God to submit to the will of God, not only at the point of salvation on a once-for-all basis, but every day. Paul said, "...I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). He was crucifying himself his will and his ego every day, and doing what the Spirit wanted. That is being filled with the Spirit.

b. Saying No

You say, "How can you define it further?" I will define it by an opposite. The opposite of being filled with the Spirit is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, "Quench not the Spirit." To quench the Spirit doesn't mean that you remove Him from your life. You can't do that. The quenching means to say no to Him. When you say yes to the Spirit, you are filled with His control and power; when you say no to Him, you are filled with self and no power. You are either filled with the Spirit or quenching the Spirit. The Christian lives his whole life either filled with the Spirit or quenching the Spirit. In a positive sense, to be filled with the Spirit is to always live submissive to the will of Christ. In Romans 8:36 Paul said, "As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." In other words, "I'm so committed to Your will, I'll die if need be." And he did. So, being filled with the Spirit is a question of control which issues in power.

B. The Performance Of The Spirit In Saul

Now, how does the Spirit-filled life relate to the transformation? When the Spirit of God comes into your life, there is a process that He must begin. When we talk about transformation, we are not necessarily saying that He completely removes everything you were and starts over from scratch. There are two things that happen. When a person comes under the control of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit first of all sorts out the things in his life that are to be retained. There are some things about you that are good enough to hang onto, even aspects of your character and personality. Saul had a few. There are also other things that are worthless, and the Spirit eliminates them altogether. So, the transformation by the Holy Spirit is a process refining what is useful, and eliminating what isn't and replacing it with what is useful.

1. Refining the Usable Characteristics

To begin with, let's look at Saul. God refined certain things he already had.

a. Leadership

He was a leader a leader by nature. Some people are just made to be leaders. Saul was a leader by nature. People followed him everywhere he went. When God transformed him, He knew that it was an important characteristic to hang onto, so the Holy Spirit was given the work of refining Saul's leadership ability. The Spirit took all his energy of leadership and all of his ability to get people to fight

his causes, and turned it toward Jesus Christ. As a result, everywhere Paul went, he led. Another of his important characteristics was his...

b. Strong Willpower

I imagine that he was the kind of man you couldn't talk out of anything. He was disciplined. He could discipline himself to do something and his will couldn't be changed. He was decisive. He never had trouble trying to make up his mind. He just made a decision and acted on it. That is strong willpower. And he usually accomplished what he set out after. The Holy Spirit saw that willpower and said, "That is to be retained. That is a valuable commodity We can use," and it was turned toward Jesus Christ.

There never was anyone who pursued Christians with more of a vengeance than Saul, but there never was anyone who pursued God and His will any more than he did because he had that kind of drive and discipline. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 Paul says, "Know ye not that they who run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things...." He says, "Discipline your body. Watch what you do because you're going to be disciplined." Paul continues: "I, therefore, so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection..." (vv. 26-27a). That is discipline. He used his strong willpower to discipline himself, set his direction, and go, and nothing stopped him.

Another thing the Spirit of God polished off and retained was his...

c. Persistence

Nothing stopped him when he set his mind to do something. He chased down his goal no matter what it cost him. And God turned this around. Paul said, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). His persistence was a great quality. The Spirit refined it and used it for the glory of God.

He had another good quality:

d. Strong, Inflexible Convictions

They were all wrong prior to his salvation. He was so strong in his convictions that he was hostile. But after he was saved, the strength of his convictions was the genius of his ministry. He stood his ground nobody pushed him. He didn't give in his theology, and he didn't accommodate anyone. He went into places like a bull in a china closet and tore up everything. He often created riots everywhere he went.

That kind of inflexibility is great when it comes to conviction. But once in a while it got him into trouble. The incident in Acts 23:1-5 reveals his humanness. He was so strong and so inflexible that he got himself into trouble. Verse 1 begins, "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." The leaders were indicting him, saying that he was really a blasphemer of God. Verse 2 continues: "And the high priest, Ananias, commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I knew not, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (vv. 2-5). So, this kind of conviction and inflexibility and hostility got him into trouble at least on this occasion, but it was also his genius. He didn't shed his convictions at all. There is something to be said for someone who believes something and lives and dies for it...and he did.

Another thing about him that the Spirit of God didn't eliminate but only refined was his...

e. Selfsufficiency and Independence

He was terrifically independent. Anyone who could march off, evangelize an unknown territory all alone, and have a great time doing it, is independent. In Acts 17 he arrives in Athens--the center of all kinds of antigods, religions, world philosophies, culture, and so on. You would think he would hide

somewhere in obscurity and pray for reinforcements. But what does he do? In the middle of town he begins to have public debates in the street. Pretty soon he finds his way to the Areopagus on Mars Hill and begins preaching to everyone gathered there (v. 19). And who were these people he preached to? The educated people of the world. And what is he telling them? "You people don't know what you're doing. You don't understand that this unknown God is none other than the only God." Paul tells them the truth. You say, "He is a bold guy." He was self-sufficient and independent. He would say, "I'm going over there," and he would take off. That is a commodity the Spirit of God can use. To do the kind of thing he needed to do you had to be independent. So God simply refined and polished that characteristic.

Another characteristic that he had was his...

f. Boldness

He was so brash. He would say anything to anybody. Have you ever met anyone like that? They will walk up to anybody and say anything. Have you ever met anyone who shares Christ like that? Paul had that kind of boldness--he said what he thought. In the face of the Christ-hating Jews, God used that ability. God polished off his boldness in Acts 22, and Paul went into the face of those Christ-hating Jews and started preaching to them right in Jerusalem. It got so hot that they started a riot. He even defended himself boldly before Tertullus, Agrippa, Felix, and probably before Nero (Ac. 24-26; Phil. 4:22).

Another thing that the Holy Spirit used was his...

g. Pragmatism

For Paul, everything had to be utilitarian. He never wasted any motions. Everything he did was cut and dried. He was the master of using his time and his talent with no wasted effort. God can use that. I hate to think back and chart all my wasted motions.

Another thing about him that God retained was his...

h. Crusading Spirit

Saul had the spirit of a crusader. He was always fighting a great cause or was always chasing after some impossible accomplishment. And that's exactly what God wanted. Paul was a crusader from the moment he entered into the ministry of Jesus Christ--bearing Christ's name where He wasn't named.

i. Motivation

He was a motivated man. God wants motivated people. Second Corinthians 5 contains what motivated Paul: The love of Christ motivated him; the Second Coming of Christ motivated him; and the final and glorious work that Christ could do in changing a life motivated him, so much so that he was beaten within an inch of his life. But time and time again he just picked himself up and continued. After he had been left for dead after being stoned, he got up and went off preaching again (Ac. 14:19-20).

There was one more characteristic that God used and that was his...

j. Long-winded Speaking Ability

Paul liked to talk. And God could really use this wonderful characteristic. This is one He didn't discard, the Spirit just refined it a little. When Paul went to Ephesus he preached all the time, daily for all the years he was there (Ac. 19:8-10).

So, first of all, God refined certain characteristics.

2. Replacing the Unusable Characteristics

The second thing that God did was eliminate certain other characteristics. This is part of the Spirit-filled life. When a person is Spirit controlled, the Spirit is refining, just like He did in the transformation of Saul. Not only is there refining, but there is also some elimination. There are some things in our lives that are absolutely worthless. So the Spirit totally discards those and replaces them with other

things. For example, in Saul's life God replaced his...

a. Cruel Hate with Love

Would you say that Paul was a loving man? He was a terrifically loving person. He had been a hostile, hateful, angry, bitter persecutor. His whole temperament put together did not spell love. He seemed indifferent, cold, and nonpassionate. But when you begin to study him, you find that there is warmth and love in the man--he exudes love to people. He writes to Timothy and says, "Come and see me because Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present world. I'm lonely and I need you" (2 Tim. 4:9-11). You find him expressing love to all of the people he writes to in all his Epistles. God completely took away the hate that was in his heart and replaced it with love. And even the people that began to see him as an enemy, Israel, he cried over: "That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren..." (Rom. 9:2-3a). So God took away his hate and gave him love.

b. A Restless, Aggressive Spirit with Peace

Then God took away the restless, aggressive spirit with which Saul kicked against the goads, and the pain of his conscience and the biting of his guilt, and gave him peace. He became a calm man and his life became one of peace. In Philippians 4:11-13 he says, "...I have learned, in whatever state I am, in this to be content. I know both how to be abased...both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." He found peace.

c. Roughness with Gentleness

God took away the roughness in him and his hard-nosed treatment of people--dragging them out of their houses, throwing them in prisons, and torturing them. He replaced all of that with the most beautiful gentleness. To the Thessalonians he says, "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children" (1 Thess. 2:7). At the end of the fourth chapter of Philippians he really is saying, "Show gentleness and show care." This became a characteristic of Paul.

Now, Luke has made a big point about Paul's attitude toward women. It is interesting that the first message Paul preached to Gentiles was in a ladies' prayer meeting and that the first convert was a lady (Ac. 16:16-24). God gave Paul a new attitude toward women.

d. Pride with Humility

Another characteristic that God had to eliminate was his pride and haughtiness. And God gave him the sweetest grace of humility. He went to Lystra and the people started proclaiming that he and Barnabas were gods (Ac. 14:8-11). Paul and Barnabas became so shook up that they started tearing their clothes in revulsion and said, "No, we're not gods, we're just men! We don't want your worship" (vv. 13- 18). In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations...." In other words, "I've received so many revelations from God people are going to start putting me up on a pedestal." He continues: "...there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." Now, we don't know what the manifestation of this thorn in the flesh was (maybe an eye disease or something like that), but he nevertheless had it, and he was humble.

So, the filling of the Spirit brings about a transformation. It is a twofold transformation: a process of refining some things that are already usable, and eliminating others in order to be replaced by their opposite. And that makes the transformation apparent to the world.

Another characteristic of the transformed life is...

V. FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SAINTS (vv. 17a, 18-19)

I believe somebody who is truly saved wants to be with Christians. Somebody said to me that someone was a Christian but had no desire to come to church. I said, "Well, it is very hard for me to believe that somebody can really know Jesus Christ and not long with all of his heart to be in the fellowship of others who love Him. I can't understand that." I say what the Bible says, "If you really love the Lord, you will love the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:14). Something is wrong if you love Jesus Christ but have no desire to be with His own.

Salvation means a new fellowship. You no longer walk in the counsel of the ungodly; you are no longer unequally yoked with unbelievers; you move in the fellowship of light. First John 1:3-4 says, "These things are written unto you that you might have fellowship, and our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son." When God saved you, He saved you to create a fellowship. You were saved to be ushered into a fellowship. One who really knows Jesus Christ, above everything else, longs for the companionship of others who love Christ.

When we are moving in the world we are out of our element. We are like fish out of water. I don't know how you are, but I only have to spend a little time mingling in a situation with unbelievers to make me love and appreciate the fellowship of the saints. Now, it is not that I don't want to reach out to those unbelievers and touch them for Jesus Christ—I do! But when it comes to living my life, I am so glad to be so rich with the fellowship and love of the saints. I wouldn't exchange it for anything, nor would I forsake it. As the writer of Hebrews said, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is..." (Heb. 10:25a). I believe that at that point he was urging them to come to Christ because fellowship is a part of salvation. We are in the family.

Saul had to turn everything around. The people he formerly hated became his friends, and the people he formerly worked for became his enemies. Acts 9:23 says, "And after many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him." These were the same Jews that used to take counsel to give him papers to go kill Christians (Ac. 9:2). All of a sudden, everything has changed. He is in a new fellowship. He lived in that fellowship, yet he moved in the world of unbelief and proclaimed his message, fearlessly preaching Jesus Christ in the face of those Jews (Ac. 13-14; 17; 21). He boldly proclaimed Christ, but he always retreated back to the fellowship of the believers because they were his love. If you have truly come to Jesus Christ, you demand a new fellowship.

A. Saul's New Family (v. 17a)

"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul..."

I imagine Ananias may have said that with a twinkle in his eye and maybe a little fear in his heart. Admitting to him that you are a Christian would have been like signing your own death warrant. But by faith in God he trusted that God had led him, so he says, "...Brother Saul...." Saul had papers to kill all of them, but that's the glory of the transformation. All of a sudden he was born into a new family.

1. Captured by Love

I have often thought that Ananias could have said, "Well, you are a Christian now, but let me tell you

a few things. You have really been a creepy character up until this time. All of this nonsense of killing Christians is a bit much. I hope you realize what you have done and how thankful you ought to be that we will even accept you." But there is none of that attitude in Ananias. I imagine his heart was filled with a mixture of trepidation and love. But he put his hands on Saul and said, "...Brother Saul..." That is a classic illustration of Christian forgiveness. I don't care what you have done to Christ or to Christians before you came to Christ, because the moment you come to Christ you belong with us. We will love you as fully as we love any other believer. What you have done in your past is immaterial and irrelevant. Forget the things that are behind, you are on a new team now. It's a new world; you have been born into a new family. Pursue the things that God has for you in the new family. Only Christ can bring such a transformation. The bitterest enemy of the cross is subdued by grace, captured by the love of Jesus Christ, and called "brother."

2. Called a Brother

To call somebody "brother" is a sacred thing. People say, "Well, why do you call each other 'brother' and 'sister' in Christ?" I think it is a very beautiful custom and something that belongs to us. I react negatively when I hear all this baloney about the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. That is not biblical. I'm not in the brotherhood of man. There are only two families in the world. Jesus said, "I'm of My Father, God" (Jn. 8:42), and He said to the Jews, "Ye are of your father the devil..." (Jn. 8:44). You may often hear the liberal line ringing out loud and clear from all quarters, "The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man!" Don't you believe it! That is Satan masking the distinctions of Christianity. No man is a brother of a believer unless he is also a child of God. No man is a child of God unless he comes by faith to Jesus Christ. Now, we want to do all we can to make men our brothers, but they are only our brothers if they know and love Jesus Christ.

a. Hebrews 2:11 -- "...for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren."

b. Matthew 23:8 -- "But be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." You are only brethren when Christ is your Master.

So, there are two families in the world. And Saul went from one to the other via the new birth.

B. Saul's New Vision

(vv. 18-19)

1. Visible Proof (v. 18a)

"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales..."

Now this is Luke writing, and since he is a physician he naturally chooses a metaphor that would be medical. Saul didn't really have scales. It was as if (Gk. hosi) he had some medical problem and scales dropped off his eyes.

2. Visible Profession (v. 18b)

"...and he received sight, and arose, and was baptized."

Baptism is a public confession of your faith in Christ. It is saying to the whole world, "I'm uniting visibly with the believers." Baptism is critically important because it is a public confession of your identification with the body of believers. Saul entered a new fellowship and wasn't afraid to stand up

and give notice to the world that he belonged to this group. He was no secret disciple. He wanted to be baptized. Notice that his baptism occurred after his salvation, after he received the Spirit, and after he was filled with the Spirit. Therefore, baptism has no relation to becoming saved. What a thrill it must have been!

You say, "Who baptized him?" I think Ananias did. You say, "Well, who can baptize people?" Anyone can baptize any other believer. There is no sacrosanct baptizer. Anyone can baptize anyone else as long as it is performed sacredly and in front of other witnesses. Can you imagine the thrill that Ananias had baptizing Saul, along with all of the Christians who watched with grins from ear to ear? Transformed people enter into new relationships, and so did Saul.

3. Visible Participation (v. 19)

"And when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples who were at Damascus."

Saul stayed around for a few days. You say, "Only a few days?" Sure, he had to begin preaching. You say, "But he's only been saved a few days." Verse 20 says, "And immediately he preached...." He knew what he had become and he knew what to do.

So, the Christians ministered to his needs. What a sweet fellowship it is to come to Christ and enter into this new relationship. David said, "I am a companion of all those who fear Thee, and of those who keep Thy precepts" (Ps. 119:63). May it be that you spend your time cultivating the fellowship of saints.

There are two things to remember. The transformed life is a question of coming to Christ in faith--that's the positional transformation. The key to the practical transformation is to let the Spirit of God control you, rather than allowing yourself to quench Him by doing what you want. And that involves two things: first, giving yourself to Christ in salvation; and second, giving yourself to Christ daily.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was Saul like before his conversion? What did Saul initially reject but then later accept?
2. Christianity is not an _____ to your life, it is a _____ of your life.
3. Why do all Christians need to experience a practical transformation in addition to the positional transformation?
4. Who are many of the people in this world really serving when they think they are serving God? Why?
5. According to Acts 9:17, what were the two reasons for Ananias being sent by God to Saul?
6. When did Saul receive the Holy Spirit? When was Saul filled with the Holy Spirit?

7. In the book of Acts, what part did the Apostles normally play in the receiving of the Spirit by new believers? Why did God have them perform this function?
8. Why were the Apostles not present when Saul received the Holy Spirit?
9. What two things does the Spirit-filled life mean to the believer?
10. For what purpose does the filling of the Spirit produce power in the believer's life? Give some examples.
11. If someone does not appear to be a Christian, does that mean he is not a Christian? Why?
12. What is the daily responsibility of the child of God?
13. What is the opposite of being filled with the Spirit? What does it mean?
14. What are the two things that the Spirit of God does when an individual comes under His control?
15. What were the characteristics in Saul's life that the Holy Spirit refined? In what way did He refine them?
16. What worthless characteristics in Saul's life did the Holy Spirit discard? What characteristics did He replace them with? Give examples of how these new characteristics were manifest.
17. What fellowship has God saved Christians to be a part of? Why is the fellowship not to be a part of the world?
18. In what manner did Paul move in the world? What was his purpose? Who did Paul fellowship with?
19. What characteristic of all Christians does Ananias reveal when he accepts Saul into the family of God?
20. What is the only way that a man can become a brother of another Christian?
21. Why is baptism important?

Pondering the Principles

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. What verses identify the fact of our positional transformation? How have we been transformed? What does our positional transformation consist of? According to verse 10, why have we been transformed? What were the works that we did as unbelievers? What are the

good works that you have done in your life that manifest to others the fact of your transformation? What works have you done that would make others wonder if you have truly been transformed? What is the purpose of your good works (see Mt. 5:16; Jn. 15:8)? What changes do you need to make in your life to make sure your works are fulfilling what God has designed you for?

2. In what ways have you experienced the control and power as a result of yielding to the Holy Spirit? Give some specific examples. What has been the result of the times that you have quenched the Holy Spirit? Be specific. How did you feel when you realized that you did quench the Spirit? Read Ephesians 4:25-32. What are the results of grieving the Holy Spirit? What is the result when you allow the Spirit to control you? Will you make the commitment, as Paul did, to die daily to self and live for God? It is your responsibility as a Christian to do it.

3. Reflect back on your life before you became a Christian. Make a list of those things that characterized your life then. Of those characteristics, which ones did God retain? In what ways has He refined them to better suit His purposes? Which characteristics did He eliminate altogether? What did He replace them with? How has your transformation changed your perspective on life? Take this time to thank God for all of the changes that He has made in your life.

4. With whom do you spend the majority of your time, Christians or non-Christians? With whom should you be spending most of your time? Most of us have been able to spend time with both groups. What has your experience been? Which kind of fellowship do you prefer? Read Hebrews 10:24-25. What is the purpose of our fellowship? What has been your purpose as you participate in the fellowship of the saints? What changes in your perspective of fellowship do you need to make, based on Hebrews 10:24-25?

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