

The Transformed Life, Part 4

Scripture: Acts 9:20–31

Code: 1731

INTRODUCTION

Our continuing study in Acts 9 is about the transformation of Saul of Tarsus. The character of this man and the nature of his transformation provides for us a pattern of the transformed life. The characteristics that we see in his life become the features of all the lives that God has transformed and is transforming.

When Lord Nelson reported the great victory over the French fleet in the Battle of the Nile to the British Admiralty he said that victory is not a large enough word to describe what had happened. When the Apostle Paul spoke of that which he had enjoyed through Jesus Christ--having been saved, redeemed, and transformed--even the greatest of all victory words, conqueror, was inadequate, so he said, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him..." (Rom. 8:37). The phrase "more than conquerors" has to be the only phrase that does justice to the Apostle Paul. All of his life he had been in battle, only before the Damascus Road it was a losing battle. After the Damascus Road it was a winning battle, so much so that he was more than a conqueror. Saul was transformed. And it wasn't just a temporary or superficial change; it was deep, it was total, and it was forever. He no longer fought against Christ and His message, but he stood up for Christ and the gospel. He no longer on the side of Satan and evil fought the light; he, on the side of the light, fought Satan and evil. In one day the history of the world was changed when that man was transformed. He is the pattern. And it all began on the road to Damascus when he surrendered his will to Christ. He was broken, he was re-created a new man, and that was the beginning of the transformation.

We have found that there are seven qualities of the transformed life. We have already discussed five of them and we will just briefly review them and then move on to the final two. First of all, the transformed life begins with...

I. FAITH IN THE SAVIOR (vv. 1-9)

On the road to Damascus, as the fire-breathing Saul was moving toward Damascus to bind Christians as prisoners and haul them off to Jerusalem, he was confronted face to face with the blazing glory of Jesus Christ. Having been confronted by Jesus Christ, he fell on his face, and through the circumstances of conversation with Christ, he believed. Having believed, he yielded to Jesus Christ and said, "...Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?..." (Ac. 9:6a). It was at that point the transformation took place. The transformation-- the re-creation, the new birth that occurs at the moment of salvation--is in fact an actual miracle that takes place in a moment. He was changed that fast. As he was re-created by faith in the Savior, the transformation took place.

Now, this was Saul's positional transformation--the change in his nature and in his standing before God. That was what gave him new capacities--the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Then in rapid-fire succession came the six practical features of the outworking of his inner transformation. So, salvation is an instantaneous, total transformation in terms of man's nature, and then it takes awhile for the practical changes to affect his life and living pattern. The one feature is positional and the remainder are practical. The first changed his nature and his eternal destiny, and those that followed changed his living patterns and his effect on the world.

So to begin with, the transformation starts with faith in the Savior--putting faith in who Jesus Christ claimed to be and what the Bible claims He did. It is simply faith in an historic person and an historic redemptive plan. Second, and immediately upon the heels of faith in the Savior, comes...

II. FERVOR IN SUPPLICATION (vv. 10-12)

One of the characteristics of a believer is prayer--he communes with God in his new life. He lives in an atmosphere of the presence of God and breathes the very air of God. A believer who is transformed in his nature will find his first reaction to be prayer--the desire to commune with the God he has just met. And that's exactly what happened to Saul in the house of Judas, at one end of the street called Straight in the city of Damascus. He was blind for three days. He didn't eat or drink, he just prayed--communing with God and Christ.

The Natural Response to the New Birth

Romans 8 indicates that prayer is the natural response to the new birth. Verses 14-15 say, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear...." In other words, before a man becomes a son of God, he approaches God in fear and trepidation. Men approach God knowing they do not really have the right to approach Him and fearing what He might do to them. In fact, around the world, religion is basically built on fear. Men approach God out of fear. But when a man becomes a son of God, he is no more an alien, no more a stranger, and no more an outsider. Something else happens: "...but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (v. 15b). What is this saying? To be a child of God means that you receive the Spirit of adoption, which means that you cry out in a personal way to God. One of the first characteristics of salvation is prayer. Part of being adopted into God's family is the immediate knowledge that you have access to His presence as a child, and that you can cry, "Father!" in response. The same truth can be seen in Luke 11:1. Jesus has chosen His disciples and one of them said, "...Lord, teach us to pray...." The first cry of the new life is for sustenance.

So prayer follows immediately after faith in the Savior. The third characteristic we have seen is...

III. FAITHFULNESS IN SERVICE (vv. 13-17a)

The transformed life involves a commitment to serve: "...Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?..." (Ac. 9:6a). Ananias came to Saul and said, "You have been saved to preach. That's your commission." The transformed life involves faithfulness in service-- the commitment of your life to do the thing which God has called you to do...to use your spiritual gifts to accomplish what God has designed. Restricting your service is restricting the transformation. Get lost in the Lord's service and you will be changed.

So the transformed life involves faithfulness in service as well as fervor in supplication and faith in the Savior. Then, the great practical key is the...

IV. FILLING OF THE SPIRIT (v. 17)

The key to the practical life is the filling of the Spirit. The end of verse 17 says that Saul was filled with the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit means that the Spirit of God controls you. When you are controlled by the Spirit of God, then you are going to see something happen in your life. Trying to live your life without the Spirit of God is like trying to start an engine with no ignition key. He is there, but you have to find out how to turn Him on, and that is by yielding and submitting yourself to Him. The filling of the Spirit of God is a simple thing. The Spirit lives within every Christian. Being filled with Him is simply yielding to Him and letting Him control you. Incidentally, you are either controlled by yourself or by Him. Those are the only options you have, so you have to figure it out. The Christian life is not complicated; all we must do is submit to the Spirit. Incidentally, once you are filled with the Spirit, you go.

A. The Power Of The Spirit In Saul

B. The Performance Of The Spirit In Saul

Now, God having filled Saul, then refined him.

1. Refining the Usable Characteristics
2. Replacing the Unusable Characteristics

Am I really changing?

Many Christians are reluctant, for some strange reason, to really believe that they are being transformed. People say to me, "Well, I'm a Christian, but I don't see the changes; I don't see God doing anything. I have the same old problem." They become very discouraged because they fail to believe God for the work that He is doing. To not believe God is sin, and to sin is to eliminate the filling of the Spirit. As a result, they are trapped in a vicious circle of their own unbelief.

Friends, you must believe God for the process of change in your life and not expect that it's an overnight thing. We change in a physical sense, but we don't see the change unless we are brought face to face with it. Thanks to photography we can. It is only as you are brought face to face with the change at some later time that you can see the process. The process of change is imperceptible. Will you believe God that the process of Christian maturity is imperceptible? Will you not doubt God when you don't see drastic things happening every moment of your life? If you live daily on a diet of the Word of God, you will grow though you won't even perceive it. Very often one of the reasons Christians doubt the transformation is that as they grow, they become infinitely more sensitive to sin. Consequently, they think they are worse than they used to be.

Let God have the privilege of changing you at His own pace. Realize that when He changes your whole nature by the work of re-creation, it is instantaneous--a whole new miracle. But changing you into the image of Christ while you still exist in the flesh, takes a little more time. Give God the time to do it, and don't disbelieve Him in the process. You were created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 2:10). Let God have the right to take His time to do it. Incidentally, the faster you yield the easier it will be. Some of you He molds, some of you He chips and chisels. How He does it is up to you. Let God change you, but don't disbelieve God for the change. Just yield to the Spirit on a day-by-day basis, and accept what's going on in your life as change. Believe God for it, because if you don't, you are sinning. And if you are sinning, you eliminate the filling of the Holy Spirit and you are trapped in a vicious circle. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "...all things are become new." The "all things" has to do with the nature of a man--the re-creation of which brings about a new capacity in Christ. It doesn't mean that the minute you are saved you are perfect from that point on. When a man with a bad temper is saved, he becomes a Christian with a bad temper. For example, let's take the case of a fear-prone individual who has spent all his life worrying about everything. Negative thinking dominates his life. Then he becomes saved and he desires to become filled with the Spirit. But as he yields to the Spirit, he begins to think negatively, "Oh, I'm not changing. I wonder if the Spirit's really there. I wonder if God loves me." What happened? His negative mental attitude results in sin, the filling ends, and he is back in a vicious trap.

Believe God. Even when they are filled with the Spirit, some people feel insecure because they won't believe God. Let Him take His own time to make the changes as you yield to Him. I have changed in the last few years. I can't see the change, but I know it's true because I believe it's true. And I will continue to believe it's true because God says it is so. You have to look at the Christian life in a very practical way. We live by faith. Why can we believe God for salvation, and yet not believe God for the things in our lifetime? We don't really believe that He is changing us. Believe Him, will you?

The Steps of Trust

Let me give you four simple, practical steps to trusting God in the Spirit-filled life.

1. **Make the Filling of the Spirit a Daily Priority**

You have priorities in your life. You wake up, make sure to eat your breakfast, get to work on time, and keep your appointments. You establish priorities. Why don't you establish the number-one priority in your life--being filled with the Spirit? It is an absolute priority.

2. Develop a Keen Sensitivity to Sin

Look for sin, be sensitive to it, and avoid it. Sometimes we let our priorities become misdirected so that the spiritual priorities bring up the rear. Put the priorities of the Spirit-filled life and a sensitivity to sin first.

3. Study the Word of God

God's Word will help you keep both of the previous priorities. It will help to fill you with the Spirit and it will help to clean you up.

4. Don't Grieve or Quench the Spirit

Consciously avoid anything that would grieve or quench the Spirit. As you begin to think positively about the filling of the Spirit and desire not to grieve Him, and then believe God for the change, you will see the change in your life.

The fifth characteristic of the transformed life we looked at was...

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

It is characteristic of a believer to desire fellowship with other believers. This is part of our life--we love the fellowship of the saints. The world knows nothing about the joy and the love that is ours in Christ. There is no human relationship apart from Christ that is anything like it. There is real love in Christ among brothers. The world talks about love and it has its signs about love, but I think Christians are the only people who have the capacity to give the kind of love that is the ultimate in terms of human experience.

Saul fell into the fellowship of the believers in Damascus, he was baptized, he was called "Brother Saul," and he spent some time with them. His whole life did a flip-flop. The people he used to work for became his enemies; the people he used to hate and try to kill he fell in love with. He writes to the Romans and says, "I can't wait until I get there so I can love you" (Rom. 1:11-12). He writes to the Philippians and says, "You are a blessing to my heart. I think about you all the time. I long for you in the tender mercies of Christ. I have to get to where you are and love you" (Phil. 1:3-5, 8). And this is his pattern all the way through the New Testament. These were the same people he had been breathing out fire against. God transformed him when he entered into the fellowship of the saints. It is a glorious existence to live among the saints.

The Tender Plant

I believe that God expects us, as Christians, to be separated from the things of the world. Now, I'm not saying that we are never to contact people who aren't saved. In 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul says, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators." These are the people involved with sexual sin. Now that's very practical for us today. The Corinthians were living in a society that was very similar to ours. He says, "Don't company with fornicators." Now you can't explain that away, it's very apparent what he means. He continues: "Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no, not to eat" (vv. 10-11). He is saying, "I told you once before not to fool around with those kind of people. Now I'm telling you the same thing. Even if the guy calls himself a brother in Christ, don't fool around with him." Why?

The Christian life is a tender plant that can exist fruitfully only in an atmosphere of holiness. That does not mean we don't evangelize the world, it means we don't run with the world. That does not mean we don't love the world, it means we don't keep company with the world. We belong to Christ

in the body. We are members one of another. It is here that is the concentration of our ministry and of our life.

Now, we have seen five parts of the transformed life. The first part had to do with your nature. The next four had to do with your character. The last two have to do with your effect on the world. The sixth one is...

VI. FERVENCY IN SPEAKING (vv. 20-22)

I think it is characteristic of the transformed life that you can't hold back from talking about your transformation. I remember the story my dad told of the man on the train who was looking out the window and saying, "Oh, isn't it wonderful! Oh, it's magnificent!" Then he would feel the seat and say, "Oh, look at that!" Then he would rub the wood and say, "Oh, isn't that beautiful!" The man sitting next to him was going crazy at all of this, so he finally said to him, "Excuse me, I don't want to be rude, but what is it that excites you so much?" And then the man reported to him that he was returning home from surgery in which he had been given back his sight after having been blind since he was a child. Of course everything was beautiful, of course he was ecstatic, and of course everything was fantastic--he had never seen it before. He couldn't hold in his excitement. He didn't care who heard him. That's what it is like when the transformation takes place--you want to talk about it. And that's the way Saul was. He didn't know the meaning of the word tomorrow. Everything he did was now. In fact, most of the people he worked with spent all of their lives trying to keep up with him.

A. The Significance Of Saul's Fervency (v. 20)

"And immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

1. The Characteristics of Saul's Skills

a. His Knowledge of Scripture You say, "He hasn't been to seminary. He hasn't gone to the right school." Do you know that he could preach Christ from the day that he was saved? Why? He knew the Old Testament as well as anyone. All he needed was the key to unlock the box and let out his knowledge, and Jesus was the key. All he needed to do was to meet Jesus Christ, and everything he ever knew from the Old Testament was fulfilled in an instant. He had an education, and when he was saved it all had meaning. That's what is so wonderful about any Jewish person who comes to Christ. They automatically step into a knowledge that I don't understand because they are so familiar with Judaism. When Christ unlocks the lock on Judaism, everything they have learned comes forth. That's exactly what happened to Saul. Jesus Christ was the key, Saul's knowledge was unlocked, and he began to speak. He never wanted to postpone anything, so he immediately preached Christ in the synagogues.

b. His Mastery of Speech Now, he originally was going to those synagogues with the letters to persecute the Christians, but when they gave him his chance to speak, he preached Christ. You can imagine the shock that was. Paul was a speaker. In Romans he dispensed the gospel like a lawyer, stating evidence in a series of masterful arguments. But he could also say it simply. To the jailer he said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." (Ac. 16:31). He could preach simply and quietly, he could preach beautifully and oratorically, he could preach with gentleness and love, or he could fire it out with thunder. Everywhere he went he spoke, and nobody at any time or at any place could turn him off. In fact, he had one fear that haunted him all his life from the time of his salvation: Sometime, somehow he would be unable to speak for Jesus. Most Christians have a fear that haunts them all their life: They might have to speak for Jesus. That is sad. The greatest fear that gripped Paul's great heart was that in his preaching of Christ, he himself might become a castaway--a broken vessel, marred by sin, useless, and corroded, to be set aside (1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Tim. 2:21). That scared him. More than anything else, he wanted to preach Jesus Christ, and he didn't want anything to stain his life and render him unable to do it. I pray to God that every Christian have that kind of fervency.

c. His Obedience in Service The word immediately is used more than thirty-five times in the Gospel of Mark. Mark presents Christ as the

servant of the Father. An obedient servant operates on the basis of one word--immediately. And that's the way Saul operated. So many people stand around and do nothing, but he just moved out. And he went to the multiple synagogues in Damascus.

2. The Content of Saul's Speech

Saul's speech was, "...that He is the Son of God" (Ac. 9:20b). Saul wasn't ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Now, what was his message? Verse 20 says, "...he preached Christ...." The best manuscripts replace "Christ" with Jesus. That certainly would seem to be what he would say: "That Jesus is the Son of God." Now, the term Son of God is very important because it designates Christ as deity. Jesus the man is God. You say, "Well, does Son of God mean that He is less than God?" No, of course not.

a. The Incarnate Title of Christ
Son of God is an incarnate title. Jesus is not called the Son of God before His incarnation. Jesus is God in human flesh. He is only called Son in the sense that He, the Second Person of the Trinity, came to earth. He is the Son because He was born. He is not a Son in terms of rank in the Trinity--He is not less than the Father--He is a Son only in an incarnate sense. Before His incarnation He was God, the Second Person of the Trinity. The title Son belongs to His incarnation. 1) Luke 1:35 -- "And the angel answered, and said unto her [Mary], The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Now, the Holy Spirit selects the verb very carefully--it is still a future designation at the time of the promise. He doesn't say that the Son of God will be born; He says that a child will be born and He shall be called the Son of God. 2) Luke 1:32 -- "...and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father, David." Jesus is a Son in the sense that He is the Son of David. And He is a Son in the sense that He is the Son of God by service. He is not a Son in the sense of inferiority to God the Father. I say this because you will run into some people who will deny that Jesus is God because He is called the Son of God. Since we only know Christ from our standpoint, in terms of His incarnation, we call Him the Son of God...and so did Saul. We call Him Jesus too, and that's an incarnation name as well. We call Him Christ and that too is an incarnation name. So, Saul began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God. And I imagine it was exciting as he unlocked the Old Testament. b. The Inconsequential Testimony of Saul
Now Saul preached immediately, and he preached that Jesus is the Son of God. The content of Saul's proclamation (Gk. *kerugma*) was teaching, or doctrine (Gk. *didache*). It didn't include his testimony...and he had a testimony that wouldn't quit. He could have told a story that would have made their hair stand on end. He could have produced a colossal testimony. He could have said, "Let me tell you what happened to me on the road to Damascus," and related all the circumstances surrounding his conversion. There is nothing wrong with your testimony, it's just that your testimony is relatively inconsequential in relation to the importance of the presentation of who Christ is. Your testimony as a supplement to the gospel is fine, but your testimony as the witness itself isn't enough. All good preaching and witnessing is doctrinal. Unfortunately the church has gone overboard on the testimonies of people and their experiences. I'm afraid that we have created a subjective approach to Christianity.

Subjective Experience or Historical Fact?

Subjectivism is a curse that man has had to live with for a long time. Ever since the Garden of Eden where man sinned, immediately God started looking for man and man started looking at man. Man ran into the Garden and said, "I'm naked. I better cover myself." Man became man-centered and subjective. God has always been looking at man; man has always been turning inside and creating religions that are totally subjective. It's all experiential. And even today, the cultured, philosophical men of our world have found an experiential religion (e.g., the leap of faith, the upper story, etc.). Religion is subjective, but Christianity is not. Romans 10:17 says in the original Greek, "Faith comes by hearing a speech about Christ." Faith comes by hearing a speech about Christ, not a subjective

analysis about what's going on in yourself. Now, it's all right to talk about your own experience in certain contexts, and it's all right to include your testimony in a presentation, but never to the exclusion of the presentation of Jesus Christ. Later, on two occasions, Paul very briefly and concisely states his testimony by saying, "This is what I was, this is what I am, and Jesus was right in the middle of the change." Christianity is not subjective experience.

Salvation is basically a nonexperiential fact. Christianity is based on something that didn't happen in your experience, but nineteen hundred years ago. It happened before you were born. Salvation occurred outside the experience of every Christian, every sinner, and every man who ever lived. Christianity is based on an historical fact in God's redemptive history. It is only a matter of believing in this historical fact that redeems a man. This fact is outside yourself--it is not subjective, it is objective.

The religions of the world don't buy this truth. Everything to them is subjective. On the Berkeley campus there was a poster advertising an Eastern religion that said, "You go in and in and in. And then you go in and in and in. And after that you go in and in and in." Now that is subjective. In other words, you just keep going into yourself and meditating. But what you really do is go deeper and deeper into the pit of yourself, and that is what you have to get out of. The only way to get out of yourself is to put your faith in an objective, historical, redemptive fact. You don't want to go in and in and in, you need to get out and stay out.

Subjectivism is the common denominator in all false systems. It is sad to see that so many Christians and Christian organizations and denominations make Christianity so hopelessly subjective, emotional, and experiential. It is not. When Paul preached the gospel, he said, "Here's the gospel: Jesus Christ died and rose again the third day according to the Scripture." That is historical fact. It is not until you believe what happened outside of you that God ever begins to do anything inside of you. Christianity is not centered on man's life. Christianity is true even if you never experience it, and it's true if nobody ever experiences it. You must let Christianity be what it is. Let it remain outside experience. Christianity is believing in historical redemptive history. Once you put your faith in an outside fact, God begins to move into your life, and then some of the practical things take place and you begin to experience what God is doing. But don't allow the cart to come before the horse. Don't make your faith subjective!

So, Saul preached the objective content of doctrine that Jesus is the Son of God. That is what the people need to hear. You say, "Well, they won't come forward unless you give them a lot of the other stuff." Then you don't want them to come forward, because if they come forward on false pretenses, you have confused the issue.

B. The Strength Of Saul's Fervency (vv. 21-22)

1. Conquering the Persecution (vv. 21-22a)

"But all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is not this he that destroyed them who called on this name in Jerusalem, and came here for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength..."

The man who will confront the world in the power of the Spirit of God will find that persecution doesn't weaken him, it only strengthens him and helps him to exercise his spiritual muscle so that he will be stronger the next time. Paul knew the secret. In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prayed that you might "be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." If you yield to the Spirit, you will have a strong inner man. Paul said, "We get kicked around every day, but we're renewed in the Spirit every morning" (2 Cor. 4:16). He was strong, and the more they shouted at him, the stronger he became.

2. Confounding the Jews (v. 22b)

"...and confounded the Jews who dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ."

Saul confounded the Jews--they lost their debate. They couldn't handle this Saul. He had a brilliant mind to begin with, and when it was sanctified by the Holy Spirit and he was granted revelations from

God, he was invincible. And he used their own Old Testament to prove it. What a preacher he was! The passion of his life was to preach.

Verses 28-29 say, "And he was with them [the Apostles] coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians; but they went about to slay him." He was preaching again. He never stopped preaching. It didn't matter where he was, or what was going on, or what anybody thought or said, he just kept talking about Christ. And he changed the world. He illustrates the fact that God calls a man to serve--to perform the task of proclaiming Jesus Christ--and when he does it, the world is changed and transformed.

Finally, the transformed life results in...

VII. FEARLESSNESS IN SUFFERING (vv. 23-31)

Naturally, when you confront the world like Saul, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

A. The Plot Of The Jews (vv. 23-24)

1. The Recognition of the Plot (vv. 23b-24)

a. Saul's Triumph (v. 23b)"...the Jews took counsel to kill him"Saul comes to Damascus to kill Christians, but a few days later the Jews were after him. That's the way his life went. You could characterize his life as a life of courage.1) Acts 28:15 -- "...he thanked God, and took courage." He would get ready for a battle and say, "Thanks, God, for winning the victory already before I even enter it, because You promised." He thanked God and took courage.2) Hebrews 13:5b-6 -- "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." That's the way this man lived. He wasn't afraid of anything.b. The Jews' Trap (v. 24)"But their lying in wait was known by Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him."The city was walled, and the gates were the only way in and out. So the Jews guarded the gates. They were going to try to kill Saul when he tried to escape.

2. The Reason for the Plot (v. 23a)

"And after many days were fulfilled..."

a. The Interval of TrainingThe statement "after many days" is perhaps misleading. In the literal Greek it means "sufficient days." It denotes a time of considerable duration. In fact, some lexicons say that it means a time of two to three years. So there was a period of a few years between verses 22 and 23.What was Paul doing during those years? According to Galatians 1:17-18, after his conversion Paul says, "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them who were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days." It is very likely that he began preaching in Damascus, then moved to Arabia and preached there. Some commentators say that he went to Arabia just to be taught of God. I'm sure he was, but I know that the best kind of training occurs when you are ministering at the same time. So, he was in Arabia for some time and then he came back to Damascus. After having returned to Damascus, he started preaching again and then they sought to kill him. There is probably a three-year interval between verses 22 and 23 which he spent in Arabia and Damascus. Incidentally, this persecution is the beginning of the fulfillment of Acts 9:16, when God told Ananias that Saul would suffer many things for Christ...and indeed he did.b. The Irritation of the KingNow, what was Saul doing in Arabia? Well, God sent him there, and there are several things to consider. Arabia in that day was a little different than the Arabia we know today. It was farther north and was called Nabataen Arabia. It is very likely that at this particular time in history Nabataen Arabia actually included the city of Damascus. So, Damascus would have been on the very frontier of Arabia, which laid to the east.Nabataen Arabia was ruled by a king by the name of Aretas (2 Cor. 11:32). Aretas had a governor in Damascus, who was in charge of the garrison that guarded the city. Now, Aretas lent his soldiers to the Jews in order to catch Saul. Why did Aretas want to lend a garrison of soldiers to stand at the gates to capture Saul? The only answer I can come up with is that

Saul must have irritated Aretas. Saul irritated all kinds of unbelievers because everywhere he went, he preached Christ. That's why I can't believe he didn't preach for the three years he was in Arabia. I think he was barely through with one lesson before the Holy Spirit was saying, "Hang on, Saul. I have one more point before you leave." He was preaching Christ all over Nabataen Arabia to such an extent that Aretas was just as irritated as the Jews. So they came together to try to eliminate Saul. This points up a great fact. I think that training is absolutely the greatest when it's in the crucible of experience and ministry. To train people in a monastery is absolutely absurd. Even training people in a seminary, detached from any kind of activity within the framework of the life of the body of Christ and the church, is just as absurd. Your lessons are learned best when they are learned as they are broken over the lives and circumstances of people, so that you can find out if they work or not. So, Saul was the enemy of everybody. But the disciples in Damascus came up with a little plan.

B. The Plan Of Escape (v. 25)

"Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket."

You will notice that the age of miracles has begun to fade at this point. Things have to be more contrived than on previous occasions. Although some miracles still occurred, they didn't occur frequently. The disciples found someone who lived on the wall and had a window. So they got a basket and a rope and let Saul down. The only other way of escape was through the gates.

C. The Procurement Of Trust (vv. 26-27)

1. Saul's Futile Attempts (v. 26)

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he tried [imperfect tense--repeated action = 'he tried and tried'] to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid [imperfect tense] of him, and believed not that he was a disciple."

Every time Saul tried to join them, they were afraid. He couldn't crack the fellowship. They didn't believe he was a disciple. They thought, "This cannot be. For three years he's been roaming around up there. This is another one of those tricks of Satan. He's a wolf in sheep's clothing. We're going to get into trouble if we let him in." Saul tried to crack their fellowship, but they wouldn't let him in. They were wary of him...which gives you an idea of his reputation even after three years.

Now God always has some great soul who steps out of the woodwork to believe God for the impossible. While the rest of the Christians are huddled in a corner, scared to death, someone usually stands up, takes God at His word, and moves out in faith. Ananias did, and here's the next guy in line-- Barnabas.

2. Barnabas's Favorable Action (v. 27)

"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

Barnabas put his arm around Saul and said, "I'll give you an introduction to the gang." Apparently, Barnabas was well enough liked and respected and established in terms of his own authority and spiritual discernment to be believed. So on the recommendation of Barnabas, everyone accepted Saul. It's exciting to see how God uses people for specific purposes. The name Barnabas means "son of encouragement," and he must have been an encouragement to Saul.

D. The Preaching Of Saul (vv. 28-29a)

"And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians..."

The Grecians were the Hellenistic Jews. Who was the last man to preach to them? Stephen. So Saul picked up the mantle of Stephen and continued at the point Stephen left off. Saul went right to the Hellenistic Jews, right to their synagogues, and began debating with them. Having just gotten over the shock of dealing with Stephen, it must have been something else for them to try to handle Saul. He was having a great time, but he only stayed fifteen days (Gal. 1:18). Why? That's all the Jews could take of him. You say, "Why do you say that?"

E. The Pressure Of The Grecians (v. 29b)

"...but they went about to slay him"

The Grecians wanted to kill him. It was one thing to have Saul persecuting Christians, but it was almost as bad when he became saved because the whole world turned on the Christians. It was almost better when Saul was the only one after them. So, for their own protection as well as his, the brethren decided to send him out of town for a little while until things cooled down.

F. The Protection Of The Church (vv. 30-31)

1. The Relentlessness of Saul (v. 30)

"Which, when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus." They took him to Caesarea, put him on a ship, and sent him home. In other words, "Go to Tarsus, take a rest. Stay out of town until things cool down." Verse 31 says, "Then had the churches rest...", not only because the persecution stopped, but Saul left...who was part of the cause.

Now, what do you think he is going to do in Tarsus? Rest? Don't you believe it. In Galatians 1:21 he says, "Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia." Tarsus was in Cilicia. The indication of what he did there is found in Acts 15:23: "...The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia." Saul went all over that area founding churches. There was no stopping the man--he was a human preaching machine. He was in Syria and Cilicia and even Antioch, and he preached Jesus. Acts 15:41 says, "And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches." He was fearless. It didn't matter what was going on, even if they tried to kill him he remained bold.

2. The Rest for the Church (v. 31)

a. The Reasons for the Rest (v. 31a)"Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria..."The churches did not have rest solely from the fact that Saul left. At this time in history the emperor of Rome was Caligula. He attempted to set up idols in Jerusalem, but this made the Jews so angry that they concentrated their fight against Caligula and left the Christians alone for a period of time. So, both Saul's leaving and the Jews' preoccupation with Caligula's efforts to set up idols gave the church rest.b. The Result of the Rest (v. 31b)"...and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied."First the church was edified, then it was multiplied. People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. First edified, which is spiritual growth; and then multiplied, which is numerical growth. That is the only way God ever intended the church to grow...and it grew.

In his homily on the book of Romans, John Chrysostom, the great early church father and golden-tongued orator, said that he loved the city of Rome best because there Paul died and there he will be raised up to meet the Lord in the air. He went on to say, "I would like to see the dust of Paul's body that sowed the gospel everywhere; the dust of that mouth which lifted the truth on high, and through which Christ spoke; the dust of those feet that ran throughout the world and were not weary; the dust of those eyes which were blinded, but which recovered their sight again and saw the salvation of multitudes...." What a man Paul was. May he stand for all time in your life and mind as the illustration of what God can do in your life...if you will let Him transform you.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What terminology does Paul use to describe the victory of salvation in Jesus Christ? Why did he choose this particular terminology?
2. What is the natural response to the new birth? How does the natural man approach God? How does a man's relationship to God change after the new birth?
3. As they continue to grow, why do many Christians doubt the fact of the transformation in their lives?
4. How do many Christians allow themselves to be trapped in a vicious circle?

5. What four steps will allow every believer to trust God more in the Spirit-filled life?
6. In what way is the Christian life like a tender plant? Explain.
7. Why was Saul able to be such an effective preacher of Christ from the moment of his salvation?
8. What was the one fear that haunted Paul all of his life?
9. What was the content of Saul's speeches in the synagogues of Damascus? (Ac. 9:20)
10. What significance does the title Son of God have for Jesus? Support your answer.
11. Why didn't Saul include his testimony as part of his proclamation? What part should a testimony play in the presentation of the gospel?
12. What is subjectivism? What is the difference between subjective experience and historical fact? Why is Christianity based on the latter?
13. How does persecution affect the man who confronts the world in the power of the Spirit?
14. Why did Saul go into Arabia?
15. Why did Aretas lend his garrison of soldiers in Damascus to the Jews?
16. Why is training most effective when it takes place in the actual experience of ministry?
17. In what way did Barnabas prove to be a "son of encouragement" to Saul?
18. Why was Saul able to minister in Jerusalem for only a few days?
19. Why did the churches come to have rest throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria?
20. What is the pattern for church growth?

Pondering the Principles

1. Do you find that your spiritual growth is occurring at a much slower rate than you expected? Is the pace slow because of your lack of commitment to grow, or are you not trusting God for the growth that is occurring in your life? Perhaps you just don't recognize the indicators of your growth. Look up the following verses: Psalm 119:97; Philippians 3:10; Colossians 2:6-7; 1 John 5:1-3. Do you find that you are increasing in your knowledge of Jesus Christ? Do you find that you have a deeper delight in spiritual things? Do you find that you have a greater love for God? Do you find that you are able to trust God more now than you have been able to in the past? Do you find that you are more obedient to God? These are all indicators that you are growing spiritually. Take courage if you find that your sin has grown worse--you may be just more sensitive to it as the Holy Spirit is drawing you to greater holiness.
2. Review the four steps for trusting God in the Spirit-filled life. If you are having trouble trusting God for your growth, write each of these steps on a sheet of paper. On a scale of 1-10, how well are you doing in each of these steps? Next to each step, write down how you want to improve in that area. Then list ideas for accomplishing these goals. Finally, commit these steps to God, asking Him to help you to maintain your commitment.
3. When you have an opportunity to witness to unbelievers, how do you present the gospel? What things do you include in your presentation? Do you include your testimony in your presentation? Do you emphasize your testimony to the exclusion of the presentation of Jesus Christ? If so, then you need to reevaluate the reason you were saved by Jesus Christ. If you haven't done so, write out a personal testimony that you could share with someone. Make sure that Jesus Christ and what He has done for you is central to your testimony. Don't dwell too long on your life before Christ. Spend more of the time on the specific changes that God has brought about in your life.
4. In a matter of only fifteen days, Saul confronted enough unbelievers to make life difficult for the Christians in Jerusalem. They had to get him out of the city to give the church rest. What kind of reaction do you bring about from unbelievers? Do they recognize you as a strong, spirited Christian who won't give in, or do they recognize you as no different than they? Perhaps you fall somewhere in the middle. Saul suffered in his preaching of Jesus Christ. And so will you if you confront the world with the truth about Jesus Christ. As a reminder of what to expect as you proclaim and live a life in obedience to Jesus Christ, memorize 2 Timothy 3:12: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus

shall suffer persecution."

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