

Grace Church
Roanoke, Virginia

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Lesson #23

ACTS
Paul, the New Creature
Acts 9:10-31

Saul of Tarsus was converted to Jesus Christ in about the year 33 A.D. His conversion was supernatural from beginning to ending. Saul was apprehended or laid hold of by the glorified Christ as he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. Saul of Tarsus, the brilliant Jewish Pharisee was born from above. He was a twice born man. He was born in the flesh thirty-two years before his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. He was born from above when Christ sovereignly invaded his life and he said, "What will you have me to do, Lord?" Saul was born from above just as the Lord Jesus taught what must happen when the new birth occurs. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again (from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God'" (John 3:3).

Saul of Tarsus, in a moment of time, became positionally a new creature in Christ. "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (II Cor. 5:17). Everything about him was new because he had been taken out of Adam as a lost man and placed into Christ as a saved man. He even received a new name. Prior to his conversion his name was Saul; after his conversion his name was changed to Paul, which means "little." The high and mighty Saul became the humble Paul, who had been touched by God's grace and changed by the glorified Christ.

The moment Paul was converted, he was a new Christian, a baby Christian, and Acts 9:10-31 is filled with things which mark a new creature in Christ. This section of Scripture is a fascinating study of the experiences and activities of a new Christian. It is also a sobering study on some of the pitfalls and lessons a new Christian must learn before he can be effective for Christ. As a new Christian, Paul still had to grow in grace and wrestle with ignorance, prejudice and sin in his own life. We shall find that it took years for him to come to the place where he could be an effective instrument for Jesus Christ.

NEW EXPERIENCES IN CHRIST (Acts 9:10-19a)

New Acquaintances (9:10-11a)

"Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Behold, here am I Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, . . .'" -- The glorified Lord appeared to Ananias, a simple disciple of Christ, and told him to go to Straight Street to the home of Judas and inquire about Saul of Tarsus. You remember how Saul was led off by the hand to Damascus because he had been blinded by the brilliant light he saw. What was one of the first things Paul experienced as a new Christian? He experienced the life of the body of Christ. He met two Christians, Judas and Ananias. He was ministered to by two unknown, obscure Christians. This shows how important it is for new Christians to be ministered to by more spiritually mature Christians. Without new Christian companions a new Christian will never grow in a healthy way.

Ananias was a Christian man in fellowship with Christ and when the Lord spoke to him, he was obedient and said, "Here am I, Lord."

We know nothing about Ananias. He was an obscure Christian who was very useful to the Lord. An obscure Christian was used by Christ to minister to Paul who would become a great, renown Christian. Ananias touched the life of Paul and Paul touched the lives of thousands.

Church history is filled with cases in which a famous Christian was reached by an unknown Christian. Justin Martyr was saved when a little old man of “a meek and venerable spirit” met him while walking along the ocean at Ephesus. Martyr became famous but the insignificant old man played a major part in his life. Augustine heard a little child say, “Take up and read.” He picked up his Bible and was saved. We do not know the child, but because of this child we have the legacy of Augustine. John Wesley was saved when a simple Moravian layman was reading the preface to the Book of Romans by Luther. Wesley said he felt his heart strangely warmed. Yet no one but Christ knows who that dear Moravian brother was. D. L. Moody was challenged by a simple Sunday school teacher as he worked in a shoe store. The result was the conversion of Moody who God used to reach multiple thousands. C. H. Spurgeon, to get out of a rainstorm, went into a simple little church which had an old, unlearned man preaching that day. As a result of this simple man's words, Spurgeon was saved and went on to be the greatest preacher of all time.

New Communications (9:11b-12)

“. . . for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.” -- Paul, as a new Christian, was praying. What makes this statement so unusual is that this was probably the first time he had ever really prayed in his whole life. As a Pharisee, Saul prayed all the time, for a Pharisee spent three hours every day in prayer, not counting the hours of preparation for prayer and meditation after prayer, but these prayers were based on ritual and rote tradition. A Pharisee's prayers were memorized or read and often they were said on street corners so that people could see how spiritual he was. Now, for the first time, Paul was praying real prayers from the heart and he was communicating with his God. Even though Saul prayed as a Pharisee, God did not hear these prayers because He does not answer any prayer of any unsaved man except, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner.” God hears but never responds to the unsaved man's prayers. “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him” (John 9:31). It is impossible for an unregenerated man's prayers to get any higher than the ceiling because true prayer can only be offered by one who has experienced the new birth.

One of the marks of a new Christian is there is a desire to pray from the heart to Christ. The new Christian cries out, “Abba, Father,” or a loose translation may be, “Daddy, Daddy,” because a spiritual relationship with God has been established through Christ.

New Purpose for Living (9:13-15)

“But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;’” -- Ananias was reluctant to go to Paul because of his vicious reputation. However, Paul was to get a new purpose for living and Ananias was chosen to give him this message. Paul was a special chosen vessel to take the message of Christ to men. The greatest evangelist of the Jewish faith was to become the greatest evangelist of the Christian faith. First, he was to bear the name of Christ to Gentiles, that great mass of pagans outside of Israel, who did not know the name of God and were involved in all kinds of abominable heathen practices and worship. Paul's primary task was to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Second, he would bear the name of Christ to kings. He would penetrate the power structures and the establishments of his day with the gospel. Paul spoke before governors, procurators, kings and finally to the emperor of Rome himself. Paul's ministry was to the “up and outers.” Third, he was to minister to the sons of Israel and that would be to Israelites outside the land of Palestine. From the book of Acts and Paul's epistles, it appears that he wanted to put his ministry to Israel first and not last. He apparently felt that he was God's instrument to reach the Jewish nation. He struggled with God over this issue but finally got the order straight in his own mind. It took a long time for Paul to learn that he was first to reach Gentiles and then Israel.

New Burden (9:16)

“... for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” - As a new Christian, Paul had to learn that he was called to suffer for the name of Christ. As he took the gospel out into a hostile world, he would encounter opposition which would cause him great physical and psychological suffering. To be associated with a rejected Messiah, would bring Paul much affliction and heartache. Being a Christian involves suffering for Christ. “For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, . . .” (Phil. 1:29). Satan hates it when Christians move out and challenge men to come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul said, “What will you have me to do, Lord?” he meant it. All bridges were burned; all personal desires were thrown overboard. Cost what it may, he would be Christ’s true and loyal disciple. The sufferings were great but the blessings were far greater.

New Power (9:17)

“And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’” -- To be effective in service for Christ and to endure the sufferings for Christ, Paul had to be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit would be his power to live the Christian life. Paul was saved but he needed the filling or control of the Spirit for power to be effective for Christ.

Notice Paul is called, “Brother Saul” by Ananias. This must have been a tremendous comfort to Paul. Because of his stand for Christ, Paul was cut off from his former Jewish companions and forfeited the friendship of every Jew in the then known world. He needed the words “Brother Saul” to know he was loved and accepted by his Christian brethren.

New Commitment (9:18)

“And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; . . .” - As a new Christian, Paul wanted the experience of water baptism. He wanted to outwardly identify himself with Christ even though he had already been inwardly identified by faith. One of the marks of a new Christian is that he wants to take his public stand for Christ in water baptism.

We do not know how Paul was baptized, but we do know that his baptism had nothing to do with his salvation. He was saved three days before so his baptism had absolutely nothing to do with his salvation.

It was probably Ananias who baptized Paul. Ananias was not an elder or a deacon but he baptized Paul. Ananias was never ordained but he baptized. Some of the great saints of the church were never ordained - John Calvin, John Bunyan, H. A. Ironside and D. L. Moody to name a few. According to the New Testament, it is not necessary for an ordained man to administer baptism or the Lord's Table. Any layman can water baptize a believer in Christ.

New Communion (9:19a)

“... and he took food and was strengthened.” - Paul broke his three days fast and ate, but there may be a hidden meaning here. He probably ate with Judas and Ananias and they together observed the Lord's Table (Eucharist) before the meal (Agape). Perhaps this was Paul's first observance of the Lord's Table. He had a new experience of communion with Christ through partaking of the bread and the wine,.

NEW LESSONS FROM CHRIST (Acts 9:19b-31)

Need for Fellowship (9:19b)

“Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, . . .” -- Paul learned his need for Christian fellowship right here, for Christ would minister to him through fellow believers. Paul got into a group of Christians and spent time with them. Being in close association with other Christians is one of the most important things a new Christian can do, spending time with them, fellowshiping with them, being taught

by them and learning from them. A primary need of a new Christian is small group fellowship.

Need for Right Knowledge (9:20-21)

“. . . and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus .in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’ And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, ‘Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?’” -- Paul immediately began to preach Christ as the Son of God, the sovereign Lord to the Jews in Damascus but apparently he did not meet with a great deal of success. Perhaps Paul found himself unprepared Biblically and theologically to preach Christ effectively. He felt inadequate for the task of proclaiming Christ to men. Remember, he was a new Christian and, even though he was a brilliant man, he did not have it all together in his spiritual understanding and experience.

Between verses 21 and 22 we need to put in an account not mentioned by Luke in Acts 9. From the book of Galatians, we discover that a period of about three years in Arabia occurred for Paul between verse 21 and 22.

“But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days (Gal. 1:15-18).

Paul needed more training; he needed right knowledge about Christianity to be more effective for Christ. So, taking the Scriptures under his arm, he went away into the desert of Arabia. He was probably there about three years. What was happening in Arabia? Paul was having Christ revealed to him. “. . . to reveal His Son in me, . . .” (Gal. 1:16). Paul during this time poured through the Scriptures page by page learning about Christ in the Old Testament. He learned that the Prophets, the Psalms, and the Law all speak of Christ. While Paul may have ministered some in Arabia, he went there primarily for quiet and solitude. He needed time to rethink his theology. He had been a self-righteous, legalistic Pharisee who believed in works for salvation, and now he was learning about the grace, love and mercy of Christ. He had to understand the gospel of grace before he could be effective. This tells us that it takes time to learn the doctrines of grace and it takes time to become an effective instrument for Christ. Every Christian must reorient his thinking to the gospel of grace if he is to have an effective ministry.

Something else probably happened to Paul in Arabia. As he studied the Scriptures, he had a great desire to discover his spiritual gifts and to find his place of service. As a young Christian, he probably tried to second guess God on his place of service. Paul, as a zealous new Christian, tried to force his will on God's will and decided that he would be the main instrument to reach Israel. He had a great desire to reach his own people. “For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, . . .” (Rom. 9:3). He felt that he had the background, the culture, the education and the standing to reach the Jews. Paul had God's order backwards. He was to reach Gentiles first and Jews last, but being young he felt he knew more than Christ on this matter. Paul still had more lessons to learn.

Need for Humility (9: 22-25)

“But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ. And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.” -- After three years of intensive study in Arabia, Paul returned to Damascus and preached Christ with great intensity. Surely at this point he was confident, even cocky, knowledgeable and a skilled teacher and preacher, but he still had some basic lessons to learn. With his D. D. degree, (Doctor of Desert), with his intellectual skills and the arm of the flesh, he tried to argue these stubborn Jews into the kingdom of Christ. He won his debates. However, while he won some battles, he lost the war. He won all the arguments but he

never won a soul for Christ. All he did was stir trouble as an overconfident, cocky preacher who had all the answers but did not have the humility of Christ flowing from his life. What humiliation! Paul thought himself to be God's super-evangelist to the Jews and he was run out of town as a young, arrogant troublemaker. Paul was going to show the world how much he could do for his new Master but instead he was lowered in a basket to escape persecution and not one person responded positively to Christ through his ministry (as far as we know.)

Years later when Paul was discussing some of these things he can boast about, he recalls this incident of being lowered in a basket as one of the great events of his life. 'In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands (II Cor. 11:32-33). This was one of the most meaningful experiences in Paul's life. Why? He was learning humility and dependence upon Christ for success. He was learning that heritage, education, background, position and even zeal did not make one a success for Christ. He was learning that God did not need his abilities as much as his availability. Without this humiliating experience Paul would have never learned how much he needed Christ to carry out His ministry through Paul. Paul also had to learn that when he preached primarily to the Jews, he caused trouble, for God was slowly teaching this young man that his preaching ministry was to the Gentiles primarily.

Need for Patience (9:26-27)

“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.” -- Paul came down to Jerusalem and stayed for about fifteen days. When he got there no Christians, including the Apostles, wanted to meet with him. They refused to believe that the mean, vicious, tyrannical Saul of Tarsus had been truly saved. Perhaps they thought he was some Jewish spy. Right here Paul was learning patience in dealing with Christians. They were dead wrong in their attitudes about Paul but only time and prayer could change those attitudes. Then there was Barnabas, the son of consolation and comfort, who was mature enough that he saw Paul as a true brother and sponsored him before the Apostles. Thank God for a man like Barnabas. He believed that any man in Christ is a new creature and even a man like Saul of Tarsus could be saved and have a new life style in Christ. Paul also learned here that there are always a few Christians, like Barnabas, who have it all together and can become the dearest of friends, as Barnabas and Paul did.

Need for Dependence (9:28-29)

“And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death.” -- This is the same old story. Paul came to Jerusalem full of fleshy zeal, still determined to show the world how much he could do for Christ, still trying to argue men into salvation, still thinking he could convince men by the power of his intellect that the gospel is true. What was the result? No souls, and the Jews were so angered that they tried to put him to death. Paul before his conversion was a very self-sufficient man, but now he had to learn that his sufficiency was in Christ. “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). He still had to learn that Paul had to die. Ambition and pride must be crucified. Self-sufficiency must be put to death. He had to learn what Jesus taught His disciples, “. . . apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Nothing, nothing can be done to further Christ's kingdom without explicit trust in Jesus Christ to sovereignly work for us. Pride, culture, education, tradition, position and ancestry always die hard but they must die if a Christian is to be an effective witness for Christ.

In Acts 22 Paul gives us an account of why he left Jerusalem.

“And it came about when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used

to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee. And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.’ And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles’” (Acts 22:17-21).

The Lord appeared to Paul and told him He did not want him in Jerusalem. He was to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul argued with the Lord and still thought he was the best man to reach Israel. He implied that Christ was throwing away the greatest servant and greatest opportunity to reach the Jews through his own life. Paul really thought that his conversion would be the single greatest impact on the Jewish world. But God had other plans and programs for Paul. He said, “Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.” Paul had to learn that all that is important in life is God's program for him. He could add nothing to make God's plan for his life successful. He had to learn that all he needed was Christ. All he needed was the Sovereign Christ working in him and through him. Paul had to learn that lesson before he could be a valuable servant to Christ.

Need for God's Will (9:30-31)

Concerning Gifts and Calling (9:30) -- “But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.” -- The Christians in Jerusalem, seeing the need in Paul's life for more tempering, sent him off to Tarsus, his hometown. There Paul would work very closely with the local church and become a seasoned warrior for the ministry of reaching the Gentiles. At least Paul was now in a Gentile city and he was undoubtedly learning methods and techniques to effectively reach Gentiles for Christ.

Paul was probably in Tarsus for ten years and for that ten years nothing is heard about Paul. These ten years of Paul's life are passed by in silence. During this time he was not a leader in the church. Think about this for a moment. The first fourteen years of Paul's life as a Christian were not too significant in the eyes of men, but God was using these years to train and teach this man about grace and honing him as a sharp razor to be His instrument. Paul's main ministry came after these fourteen years of obscurity when he was about forty-five years old. Fourteen years later God led Barnabas to go to Tarsus and get Paul to help him in the ministry at Antioch. And even then he went there as Barnabas' assistant and not as the chief “honcho.” When Paul came to Antioch, he came a broken, humiliated, humble man, who no longer boasted of himself or trusted in himself but trusted only in Christ. He had learned the lesson that God is not so interested in our ability as much as our availability. He learned the lesson, “Without Me you can do nothing.”

Concerning When to Leave a Work (9:31) -- “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.” -- The church in the Palestine area had peace when they got rid of Paul. Why? Because Paul was a young Christian and, in all of his zeal of the flesh, trying to do what he thought God wanted him to do, win Jews, he became endless trouble and actually became a roadblock to the furtherance of the gospel. Paul had to leave Jerusalem before he tore the church apart.

CONCLUSION

To the Saved - All of us have had essentially the same experience as Paul. For years we may have lived on our emotions rather than trust in Christ's promises. Perhaps we tried to live the Christian life in our own strength instead of Christ's power. We argued with people about Christ, believing in our mistaken zeal we could win men to Christ. We naturally tried to second guess God on His will for our lives, telling Him what He should do rather than giving Him the right to do whatever He pleases. Perhaps we became hindrances to the gospel because we became stumbling blocks operating in the arm of the flesh. God had to bring us to a place where we realized God does not need our abilities but wants our availability. The life of a self-centered, overly zealous Christian, trying to serve God in the flesh, is not the Christ-centered life. It is a subnormal kind of Christianity, and it often turns people away from Christ. The goal of every Christian is to come to the place where he says, “Without Me you can do nothing.”

To the Unsaved -- If you are not a Christian, I want to remind you that Christ converted Saul of Tarsus and made him the Apostle Paul. If Christ could save the “chief of sinners” He can save anyone. Do you sense a

need of conversion in your life? Do you sense a need for fellowship with God? Do you sense a need to escape divine judgment? Do you sense a need to be delivered from guilt due to sin? If you do, then you can know that Jesus Christ came to die for your sins. You can be converted. May God, through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, allow you to see your sins and grant you the grace to lay hold of Jesus Christ by faith, trusting Him as your Lord, who has the right to rule your life, and your Savior, who died for your sins.