Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Transformed Life, Part 3
Scripture: Acts 9:17-19
Code: 1730

This morning we come again to the 9th Chapter of Acts in our study, and I'd like to ask you to turn there in your Bible if you will. We're studying through the book of Acts. We find ourselves in the 9th Chapter. We're dealing with the subject the transformed life and this is part two or part three really perhaps if you consider the first nine verses of the chapter as part of the whole transformed life of Saul and certainly it should be considered. We come then to this account of the conversion and the transformation of the man Saul of Tarsus.

Now last week, we began to study verses 9-31 as a unit. And we called it the transformed life. For in these verses, we see the features of the transformation that took place in the life of this man as a result of his encounter with Jesus Christ. We introduced our study last week by talking about the fact that the world cannot really bring about transformation. Anything the world does in terms of change is superficial. It never really gets to the heart of the issue.

The only way a man can really be transformed is when his inside is changed, when his nature is changed. And that is accomplished alone by the power of God through faith in Jesus Christ. That alone recreates men. We look around our world, we see all of the world, the plagues that blight our society and cultures of the globe and we've tried everything, every conceivable kind of government reform economic policy and program, etc., etc., with really no effect at all and in fact, as the Bible says evil men continue to grow worse and worse.

Now, I think everybody admits that we need to be changed, but they don't admit as to who is able to affect that change. We believe that men must be changed. The only way they can be changed is through Jesus Christ Himself. They must be changed to live in harmony with this world. They must be changed to be able to exist in God's forever world. And that change comes about only in Jesus Christ. And when Jesus was on the earth, He was committed to the real ministry of transformation. He was not interested in starting outside reformations for all of the things that He saw, there may have been political solutions. There may have been economic solutions, but He offered none. There may have been some very just revolutions, but He led none and yet Jesus Himself did more to change the world and the men in it than any man who ever lived. He did more to bring love and peace and joy and justice and equity into a world than anybody who ever lived. And He did it by never doing anything to society structurally, but by only changing the hearts of individual men and that's the crux of the issue.

And so our message to the world, the message of this church, and the message of the Word of God is that men must be changed and only Christ can do it. It's interesting too that the result I think of changed men, can be a changed world. You study history, you that are students of history you know a little bit about the fact that the historical reform periods of the world have normally followed times of spiritual revival. Now Paul spoke about his transformation in Ephesians 2:1-10. And the transformation also of the Christians at Ephesus and other places.

And he said "you one time were in darkness, you were dead in sin, you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience. You operate on the basis of the lusts of the flesh, the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and you were by nature the children of wrath." That's a pretty bleak picture. Then he invades that bleakness with a statement "but God who is rich in mercy for His great love wherewith He has loved us." And then he goes on to talk about how Christ has made us alive.

And the transformation is complete in verse 10, when he says, "For you are His masterpiece created in Christ Jesus unto good works." From all the darkness and the sin and the death of the first three verses comes a whole new creation in verse 10. And the transformation in the middle is an encounter with Jesus Christ by faith. That's the message that the Bible offers to men. Now this transformation occurred in the life of the man Saul of Tarsus. And Acts Chapter 9 records for us the character of the man before and after. And incidentally, only five percent of what we know about him was before or maybe less, 95%, at least, is after.

But from the five percent we know about him before his conversion, he was a horrible character. There's no question about that. 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'd just as soon kill you as look at you. He was self-sufficient, independent, inflexible, angry persistent, crusading, unloving, etc., etc. He was everything that a very unpopular, despised individual would be. But on the Damascus Road something drastic, something dynamic, something divine happened to this man.

And 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 self-will, the little potentialities of self will set aside and he accepted the will of God. Now we can only stretch our imagination and probably then we'll run into walls on it to try to understand what this transformation meant. To study the prior life of Saul, as we have, and find out that he was wreaking havoc in the church and he was dragging women and children and Christians out of their homes and he was putting them in jail and he was torturing them and all of the horrible things he was doing. And that he was working for the Sanhedrin and the politicians of Israel and he was hating Christ and hating Christians.

And then to imagine that in a split second, in an instant of choice on the Damascus Road, that whole thing was flip-flopped in exact opposite is absolutely beyond our imagination apart from an understanding of the divine miracle of salvation. Because he exchanged everything. All the old things he hated, he all of a sudden loved. All of the old things he loves, he all of a sudden hated. Everybody he used to serve, he stopped serving and everybody he used to be designing his plans against he was in service to. Everything completely changed. And that's how conversion operates.

Christianity is not an addition to your life. It is a transformation of your life. Once heard a man say, you know, being a Christian is like putting a new suit of clothes on a man. I said that's wrong. It's like putting a new man in a suit of clothes. It's not superficial. Christianity is not a patch up. It's not a repair job. It's a transformation. And that's what happened to this man. You say well, I...psychoanalysis couldn't bring that about, that's for sure. You say resolutions couldn't bring it about. No, there's only one thing that could change a man that fast, that drastically, and that's a divine miracle. And you see, if God created him in the beginning, then it's no problem for God to do another job on him. And that's exactly what the Bible is talking about when it says, "if any man be in Christ, he is a," what, "new creation." Not a patch up job, he's a new creation.

And the change that went on this man's life was far greater than the ugly cocoon, you know, from which bursts the rainbow winged butterfly. Now this chapter records the transformation for us and it gives us and gives to every man hope, every man's sick of himself and sick of his world. It gives to us the pattern for the transformed life. We saw that there were seven of these basic features of the transformed life. The first one was faith in the Savior. The transformed life begins with faith in the Savior. This is where the transformation must take place. When a man, now watch this because you'll misunderstand everything if you don't get this point. When a man puts his faith in Christ at that moment he is totally transformed. It is not process, it is a moment miracle.

However, that is his positional transformation before God. That is his new creation. From there you have six other things that take place in the practice transformation that follows the positional one. It's like a child who's born in an instant and when you look at a baby, you don't say well the baby will be all right in a few years because he'll grow an arm and he'll grow a leg and he'll grow an ear. But all the parts aren't there. No, no. When the baby's born, all the parts are there. It's a total creation. It's only a matter of growth within the framework of what it already is. You see? It doesn't add on anything hopefully.

And so you see, the first one was the creation. It was a perfect creation in Colossians 2:10, "You are complete in Him." There aren't any lacking fingers or toes or anything. Paul was created a new, whole creation. But then there were some experiential things that needed to take place. There was a process of growing and developing and the change continue to go. I'm a different person as a Christian now than I was ten years ago. Aren't you? Well, sure. There's a transformation in a practical

experiential sense that's an ongoing thing from the moment of salvation. And yet salvation is complete.

And so to begin with, he exercised faith in the Savior and that's where the transformation begins. I don't care what you believe or what kind of religious feelings you have apart from faith in Jesus Christ, you're not a new creation. You're the same old thing and you're not fit to live in this world because you're against the grain even of the way God created this world. That's why there's so much sorrow and pain in the world and you'll never make it into God's eternity, because you cannot exist in His eternity unless you're a new creation.

Do you realize that if you're a Christian, you've already been recreated for eternity? The big change is over. Death for you is just an incidental. The biggest change has already happened. You're fit for heaven right now. There will, however, be a few things sloughing off as you go. All right, so to begin with then the transformation begins on basically the principle of faith and the Savior. We've been through that. Secondly, the point that we brought up was fervor and supplication.

The transformation was apparent in the life of Saul because he began immediately to pray fervently. Fervor in supplication. We saw that from verses 10-12. Verses 1-9 was faith in the Savior. 10-12, the end of verse 11, just as a note, it says, "For behold he prays." He spent three days blind without anything to eat and anything to drink, and he prayed just the whole time in communion with Jesus Christ. And I told you last week that I believe somebody who's truly born again into God's family wants to talk to God. He cries out to God for his needs like a newborn baby cries for milk and for care and for love, so does a believer.

To say that somebody's a Christian, but has no desire to pray is a contradiction in terms. A Christian is one who is dependent upon God. Is one who is moved into the atmosphere of God and he just breathes God. He breathes God. That's communing with God. Prayer is the first proof of transformation. If you really have come to know Jesus Christ, conversing with God is part and parcel of your existence. The third thing we saw about the transformed life was faithfulness in service. We saw through verses 13 through the first of 17 that Saul, as is every Christian, was saved for one thing and that was to serve God.

Verse 15, And Ananias said to him... "The Lord said to Ananias," I should say, "go thy way for Saul is chosen vessel unto Me to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and children of Israel." Verse 16 says he'll 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 loaf. 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's no such thing as a salvation unto secrecy. We are saved to get involved in what God is doing to serve Him. And that's exactly what we see in the life of Saul. He knew it from the very beginning. He was right on the Damascus Road. He hit the dirt and looked up and said, "Lord what wilt Thou," what, "have me to do?" I mean,

You're not saving me for nothing. You're saving me on the basis that You've got something for me to do.

We went into this last time. But it's amazing to me, you know, how few of us understand that God only uses transformed people to do His work. You hear people say well, he's not a Christian, but he's serving God in the best way he knows how. No, he's not. You don't serve God unless you come to Christ. You say what about all the people all over the world who think they're serving God. Well, that's very clear. The New Testament says this. "The Gentiles sacrifice unto demons," 1 Corinthians 10. What they think is God is only Satan's mask. And Satan looks like God when it gets them through His benefit. And He'll even look like Christ when antichrist comes.

And so it is that people who do not know Jesus Christ are not serving God. They might think they are, but they're serving Satan. He only uses transformed people to do His work, but uses all of the transformed people. Every Christian has spiritual gifts, right? Everyone is given opportunities for ministry and service. That's what salvation is all about. And once you become a Christian, service becomes everything, becomes everything. I mean, you know going to the job is simply a means of sticking food in your mouth, clothes on your body, having a house, and keeping your car running and adding a few nice little luxuries that God is gracious enough to supply. Really the issue is serving Christ, that's the issue.

Now Saul when he was, of course, active in the Lord's work from time to time had financial problems and he resorted to doing what he did best, that was making tents. And I imagine knowing the kind of a guy he was that he made good tents. And so apparently from time to time when the financial need came up, he made tents and made his living that way. But I'll promise you one thing folks, when the history books are all done and closed and you pick them up and read them, you don't read about Saul the tent maker. He is not world renowned as a tent maker. What you read about is Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ. But he spent a lot of time making tents, but that's not the issue. That's what I closed with last week when I read 1 Corinthians 4, which says, "Let a man so account of us," what, "as stewards of Jesus Christ." Ministers of Jesus Christ. Stewards of the mysteries of God.

In other words, we ought to be known as oh yeah, such and such who serves Jesus Christ. That's the real crux of the issue. All right, so there we have basically the first three points in the transformed life, faith in the Savior, fervor in supplication, faithfulness in service. Now we come fourthly, and the review is over to the great practical key to this, the filling of the Spirit, the filling of the Spirit. In Acts Chapter 9, verse 17, this is introduced to us. "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," and he reminds him that it was, in fact, Jesus that he met on the Damascus Road, Ananias has reached him. And you remember that God sent Ananias to him as he's seated there blind in Judas' house. He says, "hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight." First of all, He sent Ananias to have a miracle to receive his sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ananias was God's messenger, and he came to tell Saul that he would not only receive his sight, but that he would receive the filling of the Holy Spirit. This then is the next step in the transformed life. Immediately upon salvation the believer receives the Holy Spirit. But the transformation comes about visibly, remember now, the positional transformation takes place at salvation, but the visible transformation before the world begins to take place when the believer yields to the Holy Spirit, the filling of the Spirit.

Now we've talked about this many times. If you have questions on it, there are studies available on tape on this subject that you can fill in the gaps with. I'm just going to briefly review it and then hit it from a different angle. But the Holy Spirit, this is a footnote to begin with. The Holy Spirit here I think is bestowed upon Saul. Then a step further he was filled with the Holy Spirit, but let's back up to his receiving the Holy Spirit because it's interesting. The Holy Spirit was bestowed here upon Saul without the laying on of the hands of the apostles. In 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 come and lay hands on them, whether it's the Samaritans, the Gentiles, or the disciples of John. In each case they were saved and then the Spirit they received when the apostles laid hands. Why? Because the apostles were the representatives of the church. They were the authority. And so in a very real sense, God wanted to make sure that all of these other groups, be they Samaritans and Gentiles or Jews realized that they were under the authority of the apostles.

Second point, there was a natural break between the Jews and the Samaritans and a worse one between the Jews and the Gentiles. And had the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit all on their own and the Gentiles all on their own you would have had three churches and they never would have gotten together. So God in His marvelous plan wanted to make the body one made sure that they all received the Holy Spirit in the same way with Jews present at the hands of apostles so that there was only one church. And Peter goes running back Jerusalem and says you guys will never believe it. They got the same gift we got.

And that's exactly what God wanted them to say so that there was one church. But in the case of Saul, very interesting, there are no apostles present. Why? Principle number one, Saul was in no way under the authority of the apostles. Are you with me? He was in no way under the authority of the apostles. Why? Because he himself was what? An apostle. And so God does not subject Saul to other authority. He is an apostle. Sure he's out of due season. He's in the wrong dispensation, but nevertheless, he's an equal. Therefore, the other apostles are not necessary to bring the Holy Spirit to him.

Second point, John 15:16, Jesus said to the apostles, "You have not chosen Me. I have chosen you. I have ordained you that you should go forth." Who appointed the apostles? Jesus Himself. And so here you have Saul being confronted by the Jesus on the Damascus Road appointed by Jesus with a

commission to the apostolate and who gave the Holy Spirit to the apostles on the day of Pentecost? Jesus Himself who said, "when I go to heaven, I'll send My Spirit." And therefore on this day, Jesus Himself does the commissioning, the saving, and the sending of the Spirit in the case of Saul so that he fits the pattern of an apostle. That's why later on he says, "I am an apostle appointed by Jesus Christ." And he says that several times.

So just that little footnote to show why it is that he received the Spirit in a different way. Now in addition to receiving the Spirit, he is to be filled with the Spirit. It's one thing to have something if something has to be filled with it, right? He had the Holy Spirit. He is now to be filled with the Spirit. Now let me just give you a quick definition of this and then I want to show you something that's beautiful to see how the Holy Spirit operates in the Spirit filled life.

To begin with the filling of the Spirit is a common term in Acts. It is also a common term from Ephesians 5:18 where it says every believer is to be being kept filled with the Spirit. This is a part of the transformed life. It means two things, it means control and power. If you want to reduce it to its simplest terms. The filling of the Spirit is a question of control and power. Now as an individual who is a Christian, you have a choice. You can run your life or you can yield to the control of the Holy Spirit. As we've been saying on Sunday night, your life is made up of decisions. You either do what you want or you do what the Spirit wants. Now if you're mature, you and the Spirit want the same thing. And that's the definition of spiritual maturity. When there's no conflict in the two wills.

But to begin with, you can do what your desires say or you can do what the Spirit of God says. The filling of the Spirit is simply controlled by the Spirit. And whenever there is control, there is power in your life. The term for filling, which is used in Ephesians 5:18 is the same word that is used for wind that fills the sails of a ship and it moves the ship along. And there's no such thing as being filled with the Spirit and sitting around. Or being filled with the Spirit and sitting in the corner somewhere meditating. That is not what the filling of the Spirit is. The filling of the Spirit always empowers for some kind of activity. So it's a question of yielding to the Spirit who then empowers you. The Spirit is there. It's a question of obeying Him, His will. That's the filling of the Spirit.

And in every case where individuals were filled with the Spirit they'd begun to do something. It's interesting if you just go through the book of Acts and study that it's a fantastic study. You can do a little study in your own mind on the filling of the Spirit. Acts 2:4, "They were filled with the Spirit and began to speak." Of course. Verse 14, "But Peter standing up with the eleven lifted up his voice." Spirit filled people don't sit around, they do something. Chapter 4, verse 8, "Then Peter filled with the Spirit said," and away he goes, preaches a sermon. Verse 31, "And it says and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the Word of God with boldness."

You come over to Chapter 6, verse 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? Did great wonders, miracles

among the people. And later on, of course, we see him preaching in Samaria. And Stephen, Chapter 7, verse 55, "Being full of the Holy Spirit looked up to heaven saw the glory of the God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God and said and away he went." Whenever there's a filling of the Spirit in a life something happens and you can usually tell the non-Spirit filled Christians because nothing's happening.

In fact, do you realize it is so hard to tell a Christian who is not filled with the Holy Spirit from an unsaved person that sometimes only God knows? That's right. Why? Because watch this, your positional transformation is a fact that God is aware of. The only way I can ever know you've really been transformed is when I see it experientially in your life. So if there's nothing happening in your life, God may know you're saved, but I may not have the faintest idea.

Have you ever had anybody say pray for so and so and so. And you say well, are they Christian? Well, I don't know, you know. Sure. Why? Because they are of either are non-Spirit filled and indistinguishable from being unsaved or they're unsaved. And only God knows and that's why so many times people say do you think so and so are saved. I don't have any idea about that. That's up to God. He knows the fact about whether they're positionally transformed. It's obvious they're not visibly transformed.

So the filling of the Spirit then is that which is really yielding in my life to the control of the Spirit which always results in what? Power. "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you." Dunamis, dynamite, you be literally exploding sticks of dynamite. But some Christians are duds. The reason is, because they're not filled and controlled. If you're controlled, there's power. And it's the responsibility you see 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, every day.

Remember what Paul said? "I die," 1 Corinthians 15 what, "daily." Crucify himself every day, every day, every day. Just crucify my will, crucify my will, crucify my ego and do what the Spirit wants. That's being filled with the Spirit. Now you say, how can you define it further. Let me define it by an opposite. The opposite of being filled with the Spirit is 1 Thessalonians Chapter 5, verse 19, "quench not the Spirit." To quench the Spirit doesn't mean you remove Him from your life. No, you can't do that. The quenching means you say no to Him. When you say yes to the Spirit, you're filled with His control and power. When you say no, you're filled with self and no power. So you're either filled or quenching. And you go through your whole life that way.

The Christian, at all times, is either filled with the Spirit or quenching the Spirit. To put it in a positive sense, to be filled with the Spirit is to always live submissive to the will of Christ. Paul even said in Romans 8:36, listen to what he said, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are counted 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 ushers in power. Now, how does the Spirit

filled life relate to the transformation? Now stay with me on this. It's going to be very simple, but I think very practical.

Whenever the Spirit of God comes into your life as a Christian, there's a little process that He must begin to do. We talk about transformation. We're not necessarily saying that He just completely rips up everything you were and throws it away and starts from scratch. You know a lot of people are afraid of that. In that tape I did on the will of God, I think I mentioned the fact that the kid who came to me and was afraid he was a big athlete and he was afraid of God's will. He thought God wanted to break both of his legs and make him play a flute. You know, that God is in the business of just ripping you apart and replacing with you some kind of thing...like the kid...one kid told me he didn't want to be a missionary. I mean, didn't want to be a Christian, because he's afraid he'd be a missionary and he couldn't think of anything worse, you know, being stuck in Bula Bula with a hand full of tracks, you know, at the local mission.

And that was not for him, but there's this idea that everything you are gets jammed down some sovereign drain and everything God wants you to be He redoes and you might not like it. That isn't so. There are two things that happen. When a person comes under the control of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit filled life, first of all, there are some things the Holy Spirit sorts out to be retained. You got that one? There are some things about you that are good enough to hang on to. Even things about your character and your personality. Saul had a few. There are other things that are worthless and He just chucks them altogether.

So the process of the transformation of the Holy Spirit is the process number one refining what's useful and eliminating what isn't and replacing it with what is. To begin with, let's look at Saul just for the sake of understanding the point. God refines certain things that he already has. First of all, think of it this way. He was a leader wasn't he? He was a leader by nature. Some people are leaders. That's just the way they're made. They just are leaders and he was a leader by nature. People followed him. He led people everywhere he went. He had a whole bunch of people trailing him around on this crusade. He had a natural instinct, a natural active motivation that trapped other people in his causes. He was a leader. He would have been a great leader if he'd have never been a Christian.

God didn't necessarily save him and say now I'm going to give you poor lonely follower some leadership ability. He was born with it. He inherited much of it and it was refined as he grew up. And when God transformed him, God realized that's something to hang on to. So the Holy Spirit had the work of not eliminating leadership, but of refining it. And so He took all that energy of leadership and all that ability to get people to fight his causes and he turned it towards Jesus Christ. And everywhere Paul went, he led. Can you imagine, it's hard enough to begin a work in one church but to found dozens and dozens of churches all over the world and make them all go, you've got to have some kind of leadership ability and he had it. And the Spirit has simply refined it.

You see the Spirit is in the business of redirecting the strengths that are already there within us as well as adding new things. Another of his characteristics that I think is a terrific one is he had strong will power. I imagine he was the kind of a guy you couldn't talk out of anything. I mean, he was disciplined. He could discipline himself to do something and his will couldn't be changed. And I like the fact that he was decisive. He never stood around fumbling, trying to make up his mind. He just set his face and bang he was off. He was very decisive and very disciplined, that's strong will power.

And the thing is he usually accomplished what he was chasing for. And you know, the Holy Spirit looked at him and saw that will power and said that's to be retained. That's a valuable commodity. We can use that. And it was turned toward Jesus Christ and there was never anybody who pursued Christians with more of a vengeance than that man, but there was never anybody who pursued God and God's will any more than that man either, because he had that kind of drive and discipline.

1 Corinthians he says, "Know ye not that they who run in race," Chapter 9, verse 24, "run all but one receiveth the prize so run that you may place." Is that what he said? "So run that you may have win." You don't want to place. You want to obtain the crown. "Every man that striveth for the Master he's temperate in all things." Discipline your body he says. You've got to watch what you do because you're going to be disciplined. "So I run," he says, "not as uncertainly, so fight I not as one that beateth the air." I'm not a shadow boxer, I bang the opponent right on the chops. And I even keep my body and bring it into subjection. Boy that's discipline. I mean this guy used that strong will power to discipline himself and to set his direction and go there and nothing's stopped him.

Another thing about him that the Spirit of God polished off and retained was his persistence and this fits right on the heels of the other one. Nothing stopped him when he set his mind to do something. He chased it down no matter what it cost him. I always think of the time when he was going to Jerusalem and everybody along the trail kept saying don't go to Jerusalem, don't go to Jerusalem. Don't go to Jerusalem. Where did he go? Jerusalem. It never slowed him down. I'm ready to go to Jerusalem and he took off for Jerusalem.

And God turned that around and what did he say? "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians, nothing stopped him, persistent. What a great quality of the Spirit, refined it and used it for the glory of God. He had another quality that I think is good. He had strong inflexible convictions. Now they were all wrong of course prior to his salvation, but he was so strong on his convictions that he was hostile. And after he got 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. He didn't accommodate anybody. He went into places like a bull in a china closet and tore up everything.

And when people started hassling him about what he believed, he said like it or lump it in so many terms. And he created riots everywhere he went. You know, that kind of inflexibility is great when it comes to conviction. Once in a while it got him into trouble. I like the incident of Acts 23, because it shows his humanness and it just shows you what kind of a guy he was. He was so strong and so inflexible. He got himself into trouble. I'll read this to you. "And Paul earnestly beholding the council," he looked at those men, you know, he was so bold anyway. He just looked at all of these leaders in Israel. He said, "Men and brethren I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." They were already indicting him, you know. The fact that he was really a blasphemer of God. He said, "I've lived before God in good conscience and the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by to smite him on the mouth." Somebody whacked him in the mouth.

"Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee thou whited wall." Kind of lost his cool there. "For sittest thou to judge me after the law and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law." Boy he really let that guy have it. And somebody says "Revilest thou God's high priest." Then said Paul, "I knew not." You know, didn't know it was the high priest. For it says, "thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." Oh sorry about that. So you know, this kind of conviction and inflexibility and hostility got him into trouble at least on that occasion, but it was also his genius. Oh he just didn't shed his convictions at all. Aren't you glad? There's something to be said for somebody who believes something and lives and dies for it. And he did.

You know, another thing about him that the Spirit of God didn't eliminate but only refine was his self-sufficiency and his independence. He was a terrifically independent guy. Anybody who would just march off and evangelize in unknown territory all alone and just have a great time doing as independent. I always think of Acts, you know, in the 17th Chapter when he arrives in Athens. Athens is the center of all kinds of anti-god religions, all kinds of world philosophy and culture and all kinds of stuff going on. Here's one little lonely guy and you'd think he'd go hide somewhere in obscurity and pray for re-enforcements.

But you just...you don't know if you say that. What does he do? He busts out in the middle of town and he starts having public debates on the street. Pretty soon he finds his way to the Areopagus on Mars Hill and he starts preaching to everybody. And to whom is he preaching? The educated people of the world. And what's 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. And he tells them the truth. You say he's kind of a bold guy. You better believe it. Self-sufficient, independent, he'd say, I'm going over there and he'd just take off.

As we shall see later in our study, he was so persistent in Jerusalem that finally the disciples packed him up and hauled him off to Caesarea just to get him out of there. But they dumped him off there and they put him on a boat and sent him to Tarsus. You know what he did? He founded churches all over Tarsus, Cilicia. He went everywhere founding churches all by himself, just took off. Completely

independent. Completely self-sufficient. Had a little hassle with the guy who came along with him. John Mark, didn't like him, sent him home. Very independent. Well, that's a commodity that the Spirit of God can use, because you see to do the kind of a thing he needed to do, he had to be independent. You had to be independent.

And so God simply refined and polished that characteristic. He had another characteristic that I loved and that was his boldness. He was so brash. He would just say anything to anybody. Have you ever met anybody like that? You just kind of go oh, you know. They just walk up to anybody and say anything. Have you ever had anybody that shares Christ like that? You know, they go up to a tree and just, hmmm, you know. See? Just completely bold.

Well, he had that kind of boldness. He just said what he thought. And he, in the face of the Christ-hating Jews, God used that ability. God polished off his boldness in Acts 22. He went into the face of those Christ-hating Jews and he started preaching at them right in Jerusalem and it got so hot that they started a riot. He was so bold. He defended himself boldly before Tertullus and Agrippa and Felix and probably before Nero. Another thing about him, the Holy Spirit used was he was a pragmatist. Everything had to be utilitarian. He never wasted any motion. Everything he did was cut and dried. He was the master of using his time and his talent, no wasted effort.

And boy can God use that. I hate to even think back on my days and chart up the wasted motion. Another thing about him that God retained was, he had a spirit of a crusader. He was always fighting a great cause. He was always chasing after some impossible accomplishment and that's exactly what God wanted because he was a crusader from the word go when he got in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Bearing Christ's name where he wasn't named.

Then he was a motivated man. God wants motivated people. You want to read what motivated him, read 2 Corinthians Chapter 5, it's all there. The love of Christ motivated him. The second-coming of Christ motivated. The final and glorious work that Christ could do in changing a life motivated him. So much so that he was beaten within a inch of his life time and time and time again. He just got up and continued doing what he did. After he had been left for dead from being stoned, stood right up packed off, went off preaching again.

There was another characteristic he had that we don't think of very often that God used and that was he was long-winded and liked to talk, which, of course, is a wonderful characteristic. And God can really use this is, this is one he didn't discard. I'm so glad. The Spirit just refined it a little bit. But he...you know, when he went to Ephesus, he preached all the time, all day for all the years he was there. It's terrific. In Acts Chapter 20, we find how God used...and I know he loved to talk even before. He was probably involved in debate after debate, but in Chapter 20 of Acts in verse 7, we have a most interesting occasion when God used his longwinded characteristics.

It says, "On the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread," this is interesting, "Paul preached unto them. Ready to depart on the next day. And continued his speech until midnight." Isn't that terrific. You're not laughing. "And there were many lights in the upper chamber where they were gathered together and there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus being fallen into a deep sleep." It is true that if you go too long some people do nod off. It does happen. "And as Paul was long preaching," the Holy Spirit even acknowledges that, "he sank down with sleep and fell down from the third loft and was taken up dead." He fell out of the window and was killed.

But listen do you think this is going to deter Paul? He's only on point two and there's four. Verse 10, "And Paul went down and fell on him and embracing him said trouble not yourself for his life is in." God gave him power to the heal the man. He brought him back to life. Then what? "When he therefore was come up again," what do you think they all marched back up to the third story again, "had broken bread and eaten and talked along while even til break of day, so he departed." They went back for the second set and that went on from midnight til dawn.

Now, you ought to rejoice. Verse 12, "And they brought the young man alive and were not a little comfort." But here's a characteristic of a man that God even used to bring about a miracle. One guy said "that gives me the right to preach long" and somebody replied to him and said, "well, when you can raise him from the dead..." All right, so first of all then God refines certain characteristics. The second thing that God did was eliminate certain others. Now you see this is part of the Spirit filled life. When a person is Spirit controlled, the Spirit is refining. Just like you've seen Him do in the transformation of Saul.

Not only is there refining, but there's some elimination. You know, there are some things in our lives that are absolutely worthless. And so those are just totally discarded and replaced by other things and those things we see. For example, God replaced his cruel hatred with love. Would you say Paul was a loving man? Oh he was. He was just a terrifically loving person. He had been a hostile, hating, angry, bitter persecutor and his whole temperament put together doesn't spell love. He seems indifferent, cold, impassionate...non-passionate, just really, really indifferent.

But all of a sudden you begin to study him and you find that there's warmth in the man. That there's love in the man. That he just exudes it. And he just...he breaks down with love toward people. He writes unto Timothy and says come and see me. And he says hurry and come and see me because demons hath forsaken me having loved the present world and I'm lonely and I need you. And you find him saying how much I love you to all these people that he writes to in all of his Epistles. And you find that God completely takes away the hate that was in his heart and replaces it with love. And even, you know, the people that he began to be the enemy of His people Israel, he cried over Israel. He said, "I have continued sorrow and heaviness of heart over my people Israel."

He just cried and grieved over them because he loved them. He says, "I almost could wish myself a castaway for the sake of Israel." And so God took away hate and gave him love and that's a miracle isn't it. And then God took away the restless aggressive spirit with which he kicked against the goads and just kept kicking even though it hurt and the conscience and the biting of his guilt, he took it all away and gave him peace and he became a calm man and he was together. And his life is one of peace. He says I learned, Philippians 4:11-12, "In whatsoever state I am to be content. How to be abased. How to abound. How to suffer. Doesn't matter what it is. I can do all things through Christ who," what, "strengthens me." He found peace.

Then God took away the roughness of him, his hardnosed treatment of people, dragging them out of houses and throwing them in prisons and torturing them and He replaced all of that with the most beautiful gentleness you'd ever imagine. When he says to the Thessalonians we came unto you as a nursing mother cherishes her children, gentleness, gentleness. Then at the end of Philippians in the 4th Chapter, he really is saying, show gentleness, show gentleness, show care. And I think, you remember Luke has made a big point about his attitude toward women. How interesting it is that in Acts Chapter 16 the first message he preached to Gentiles was in a ladies prayer meeting. And the first convert was a lady. God even gave him a whole new attitude towards women.

Some people might not necessarily think that when they read 1 Corinthians 7, but it's true. He had another characteristic that God had to junk and that was pride. That had to go. Haughtiness, and you know what God gave him? The sweetest grace of humility. He became the humblest man. I mean, remember he went into Lystra and they started proclaiming that he and Barnabas were gods. Remember that? And they got all...oh they were really shook up. So they started tearing their clothes in revulsion. No, no, we're not. Don't do that. Don't say that word. Just men. We don't want any of that kind of stuff. And I loved what he says in 2 Corinthians 12:7. He says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations." In other words, I've gotten so many revelations from God, people are going to start putting me up on a pedestal. They're going to start thinking I'm something super. Lest that should happen, he says, "there was given unto me a thorn in the flesh the messenger of Satan to buffet me lest I should be exalted above measure."

God keeps smashing me down all the time with this thorn in the flesh. Now we don't know what the disease was. Maybe an eye disease or something like that, but nevertheless, he had it and he was humble. So you see the filling of the Spirit people brings about a transformation. It is a twofold transformation. It is a process of refining some things that are already usable and it is eliminating others to be replaced by their opposite. Do you see?

And that makes the transformation apparent to the world. Fifth and last for this morning. Another characteristic of the transformed life is fellowship with the saints. I believe somebody truly saved wants to be with Christians. I believe that. Somebody said to me about two weeks ago that so and so

was a Christian. I think it was their wife or their husband, but had no desire to come to church. And I said, well, that's very hard for me to believe. Very hard for me to believe that somebody can really know Jesus Christ and not long with all 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." Right? 1 John 3:14, there it is. Don't tell me you love Jesus Christ and have no desire to be with His own. Something wrong.

Salvation means a new fellowship. It means you no longer walk in the council of the ungodly. It means you no longer are unequally...are yoked with unbelievers. That's an unequal yoke. It means that you move in the fellowship of light as in 1 John Chapter 1. "These things are written unto you that you might have fellowship and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son." And you see when God saved you; He saved you to create a fellowship. You were saved to be ushered into a fellowship.

And I believe that one who really knows Jesus Christ above everything else, longs for the companionship of others who love Christ. And I also believe this, that when we are moving in the world, we're a little bit out of our element. We're like a fish out of water. I don't know how you are, but I just have to spend enough time mingling around in the situation with unbelievers that it makes me love and appreciate the fellowship of the saints. It's not that I don't want to reach those unbelievers. It's not that I don't want to extend myself to reach them and touch them for Jesus Christ, because I do, it's just that when it comes down to living my life, I'm so glad that I'm so rich to have the fellowship and love of the saints. And I wouldn't exchange it for anything, nor would I forsake it.

As the writer of Hebrews said, "Oh forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is." And I think at that point, he was urging them to really come to Christ because I believe fellowship is a part of salvation. We're in the family. And you know, Saul had to turn in everything. The people that he formerly hated became his buddies and the people he formerly worked for became the enemies. Everything switched. Chapter 9, verse 23 of Acts tells us an interesting thing, just a little note there. "After many days were fulfilled, the Jews took council to do," what, "kill him." These are the same Jews that used to take council to give him papers to go kill Christians. All of a sudden everything's changed. He's in a new fellowship.

And you know something, he lived in that fellowship and yet he moved in the world of unbelief. And he proclaimed his message and fearlessly preached Jesus Christ in the face of those Jews in Chapter 13, 14, 17, 21, all those chapters he boldly proclaimed Christ, but he always retreated back to the fellowship of the believers because that was his love. You see if you've really come to Jesus Christ, you demand a new fellowship. Let's look at it.

Verse 17, just quickly. "Ananias went his way, entered into the house and putting his hands on him and said," I just love this, "brother Saul." Can't you imagine Ananias said that with a twinkle in his eye and maybe a little bit of fear in his heart. You know, admitting to this guy that you're a Christian is like

signing your death warrant. But by faith in God, he trusted that God had led him and he said, "Brother Saul." It must have sounded screwy, you know? Brother Saul. This guy's got papers here to kill us all, you know.

But that's the transformation. All of a sudden he was born into a new family wasn't he? Yes, the glorious transformation. You know, I've often thought Ananias could have gotten up and said well, you're a Christian now, but let me tell you a few things. Boy you have really been a creepy character up until this time. I mean, all this nonsense of killing Christians is a little bit much. I hope you realize what you've done and how thankful you ought to be. That we'll even accept you. I mean we will open up. We have room for one more. There's none of that in Ananias is there. I imagine his heart was just filled with a kind of a trepidation and love mixed together and he just put his hands on Saul and said Brother Saul.

You see that's a classic illustration of Christian forgiveness. I don't care what you've done to Christ or Christians before you come to Christ, the moment you come to Christ you belong with us and we'll love you as fully as we love any other believer. What you've done in your past is immaterial and irrelevant. Forget the things that are behind. Now you're on a new team. It's a new world. You've been born into a new family pursue the things that God has for you there.

So only Christ can bring such transformation. The bitterest enemy of the cross is subdued by grace captured by the love of Jesus Christ and called brother. And I want you to know something to call somebody brother is a sacred thing. People always say well, why do you call each other brother and sister in Christ? I think it's a very beautiful custom and I think it's something that belongs to us. I react negatively when I hear all this bologna about the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God.

I don't buy that. I don't think that's biblical. I am not in the brotherhood of man. There are two families in the world. I am of my father God. Jesus said to the Jews, "you are of your father," whom, "the devil." And you always hear that liberal line ringing out loud and clear from all the quarters the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Don't you believe it. That's Satan's masking the distinctions of Christianity. No man is a brother of believer unless he's also a child of God. And 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 if they know and love Jesus Christ. And then even Jesus, according to the book of Hebrews, is not ashamed to call them what? Brother. "But be not ye called rabbi for one is your master, even Christ and all ye are brethren." That's Matthew 23:8. "Only ye are brethren when Christ is your master." That's what it says. And so there are two families in the world. And Saul went from one to the next through the new birth.

Look at verse 18 and we'll wrap it up just looking at the verses quickly. "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales." Now this is Luke. Luke is a physician and so naturally he

chooses a little metaphor that would be medical. He didn't really have scales as it were as jose in the Greek, not to be confused with the Spanish jose. But it means as if. It was as if he had some medical problem and scales dropped of his eyes. He uses two medical terms there. "He all of a sudden could see. He received his sight. He arose and was," what, "baptized." And what is baptism? It's a public confession of your faith in Christ. It's saying to the whole world I'm uniting visibly with the believers. Baptism is so important people. If you haven't gotten that message through the book of Acts you haven't been listening. See? Baptism is critically important. Why? Because it's a public confession of your identification with the body of believers.

He entered a new fellowship and he wasn't afraid to stand up and take notice and give notice to the world that I belong to this group. No secret disciple. He wanted to be baptized. Notice the baptism occurred after his salvation, after he received the Spirit, after he was filled with the Spirit. Therefore baptism has no relation to being saved. Now what a thrill it must have been. You say who baptized him? I think Ananias did. You say well, who can baptize people? Anybody can baptize any other believer. There's no sacrosanct baptizer. Anybody can baptize anybody as long as its sacredly done and in front of other witnesses. And so Ananias...what a joy. Can you imagine the thrill that guy got baptizing Saul and all those Christians standing around with grins from ear to ear.

You see transformed people enter into new relationships and Saul went the whole way right into the whole thing. Verse 19, "And when he had received food, then all the Christians took him in and fed him." And if you know anything about how Christians feed, you can imagine the poor guy was almost sick when it was over. "He was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples who were at Damascus." He stuck around for a few days. You say only a few days? Sure, he had to get preaching. You say he'd only been saved a few days. If you don't know the guy very well, verse 20. "Immediately he preached." We'll get to that next time. You see, he knew what he was all about and he knew what it was for. So the Christians minister to his need. What a sweet fellowship it is to come to Christ and enter into this new relationship. David said this, listen to it, "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee and that keep Thy precepts." Isn't that good. Psalm 119:63. I run around in those circles.

Oh may it be so of you that you spend your time cultivating the fellowship with saints. Well, I hope the Spirit of God has given you some insights into the transformed life this morning. Two things to remember as we close. To begin with 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 to quench Him by doing what you want. That involves two things, give yourself to Christ first of all in salvation. Then give yourself to Christ daily every day, every day, every day. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that You've helped us again to see some thoughts that might make a difference in the way we live. We know Father they will if we yield to Thee. May it be so. We pray in Christ's

name. Amen.

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