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

The Transformed Life, Part 4
Scripture: Acts 9:20-31
Code: 1731

1973

Father, we thank You that we now can approach Your truth. What a joy Lord, what a privilege to meet like this. To be able to open the Book. God help us to consider carefully the privilege that is ours to set our hearts to learn. May we hear with spiritual ears. We pray the Spirit of God will be our teacher, keep the human voice from error. May only that which is true and from Thee be spoken. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

We're continuing our study in Acts Chapter 9 this morning. The study of the transformation of Saul of Tarsus and because of the character of this man and the nature of his transformation, he sets for us what is a pattern for the transformed life that can really be followed by every man. The characteristics that we in his life become really the features of all the transformed lives that God is transforming.

When Lord Nelson reported to the British Admiralty the great victory over the French Fleet in the battle of Nile, in his report he said this. "Victory is not a large enough word to describe what has happened." And when the apostle Paul spoke of that which he had enjoyed through Jesus Christ having been saved and redeemed and transformed, even the greatest of all victory words, the word conqueror was inadequate and so he said in Christ we are more than conquerors. And more than conqueror has to be the only phrase which really does justice to the apostle Paul. All 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 is more than conqueror.

The man was transformed. We know little about him before, but enough to put together some pieces to see what the transformation was like. Before the scene on the Damascus Road that we encountered here in Chapter 9, we know that he was Saul of Tarsus a city in Cilicia. A city of academics. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was also a Roman citizen. He was a pupil of Gamaliel, and that means that he had studied at the feet of the finest Jewish scholar in the world of his day. He was a student of Jewish tradition. He was a man who was all wound up in a passionate clinging to the hopes and expectations of Israel. He was like other Jews looking for the Messiah and the kingdom that He would bring.

This, I believe, was a sacred hope within him as it was with every zealous Jew. And then when traveling preachers began to announce to him and the rest of the world that a nary do well carpenter

from Nazareth was the Messiah, this man began to convulse in antagonism. So much so that he began a one man war against Jesus of Nazareth. And Acts Chapter 29 reflecting back he said, "I sought to do many things to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And the next verse he begins by saying, "which things I did." He became the great persecutor of the heresy connected with Jesus. His mind literally smashed to pieces the thought that this man was the Messiah of Israel.

And so he fought and it was hard to fight and it hurt and there was guilt. But he did it any way, and he did it without success. But after the Damascus Road, he continued to fight, only his battle switched and he became more than a conqueror. And it wasn't just a temporary change, and it wasn't superficial. It was deep. It was total and it was forever. He know longer righteously fights against Christ and His message, but he takes up for Christ and the gospel. He no longer on the side of Satan and evil fights the light, but he on the side of the light fights Satan and evil.

In one day the history of the whole world was changed when that man was transformed. The blasphemer became the preacher of Christ's love. The hand that wrote in anger, the execution paper for Christians, now writes in love with tears, the letters of the redeeming of love of God in Christ. The heart that beat with thirst for the blood of Christians now desires that the blood of Christ be applied to every heart for sin. He's a changed man. And it happened in a moment. From a volatile, energetic, dynamic enemy of Jesus Christ, persecutor, blasphemer came the greater part of the New Testament. Came the noblest statements of Christian theology. Came the sweetest songs of God's love. And he became the most saintly, heroic person whoever named the name of Jesus Christ. What a transformation.

Because of that, he serves as the greatest and classic example of the power of the resurrection and the greatest illustration of the Christian life. And he sets for us the living and permanent pattern for the transformed life. The features which characterize him in the 10th Chapter are applicable to every transformed life. So he's the pattern. It all began on the Damascus Road when he surrendered his will to Christ. He was broken. He was recreated a new man. And that was the beginning of the transformation.

Now, we've already studied this for several weeks and it's so important that we have spent time on it and we found at the very beginning that there were to be seven qualities of the transformed life. We have already discussed five of those and we'll just very briefly mention those in review and then we'll move on to the final two of the seven.

First of all, the transformed life begins with faith in the Savior, faith in the Savior. Now in verses 1-9 of Acts, that is what we learned. On the Damascus Road, Saul, fire-breathing, moving toward Damascus to bind Christians as prisoners and haul them off to Jerusalem was confronted face to face with the blazing glory of Jesus Christ. And having been confronted with Jesus Christ, he fell on his face and through the circumstances of conversation at that point, he believed. And having believed,

he yielded to Jesus Christ and said, "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?"

At that point, the transformation took place. The transformation, the recreation, the new birth that occurs at the moment of salvation is, in fact, an actual miracle that takes place in a moment. And he was changed that fast. He was recreated. By faith in the Savior, the transformation took place. Now let me hasten to say this. That was the positional transformation. That was the change in his nature. That was the change in his standing before God. That's what gave him new capacities, spiritual gifts. The gift of the Holy Spirit. All of that happened then. That changed his nature.

Then in rapid fire succession came six other features that were the practical features of the outworking of that inner transformation. And so while saying that salvation is a momentary total transformation that is true in terms of a man's nature. Then it takes a while for the practical changes to reach his life and his living pattern. So one is positional and the remaining are practical. The first changed his nature and his eternal destiny and the series that followed it changed his living patterns and his effect on the world.

But to begin with transformation starts with faith in the Savior, putting your faith in Jesus Christ to be who He claimed to be and to have done what the Bible claims that He did. It is simply faith in an historic person and in a historic redemptive plan. Secondly, and immediately upon the heels of faith in the Savior came fervor in supplication. One of the characteristics of a believer is that he prays. That he communes with God in this new life. He lives in an atmosphere of the presence of God and he breathes the very air of God. A believer who is transformed in his nature will find the first reaction to be prayer. The desire to commune with the God he has just met.

And that's exactly what happened. Beginning in verse 10 and through verse 12 we find Saul in the house of Judas at one of the street called Straight in the city of Damascus and he spends three days blind, without eating or drinking, praying, communing with God and Christ. In Romans Chapter 8, just to add a dimension to this, in Romans Chapter 8 we have the indication that prayer is the natural response to the new birth. In Romans 8:14 it says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." So we want to just pull the phrase out, "sons of God."

Verse 15, "For ye, that is ye who are sons of God 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 are to approach God in kind of a fearfulness, not really having the right to approach God, fearing what God may do to them. In fact, around the world religion is basically built on fear. And men approach God out of fear, but when a man becomes a son of God he is no more an alien. He is no more a stranger. He's no more an outsider. Something else happens, "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption." He becomes a what? a son. "Therefore, we cry Abba Father."

What's it saying? It's saying this, to be a child of God means you receive the Spirit of adoption which means 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 you cry in response Father. And so we see the same thing, I think, in Luke Chapter 11, verse 1 where Jesus having chosen His disciples and meeting with them and this is what they said. "Lord, teach us," what, "how to pray." You see the first cry of new life is for sustenance. And so prayer follows immediately on faith and the Savior.

Third thing that we've already seen is faithfulness in service. The transformed life involves a commitment to serve. Saved to serve as the phrase goes. "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" Right on his lips immediately. And in verses 13-17, Ananias came and said you've been saved to do this. You're going to go and you're going to preach and that's going to be your commission. The transformed life, beloved, involves faithfulness in service. It involves a commitment of your life to do the thing which God calls you to do. To use your spiritual gift to accomplish what God designed it to do.

Restricting your service is restricting the transformation. Get lost in the Lord's service and you'll be changed. So the transformed life involves faithfulness and service as well as fervor in supplication and faith in the Savior. Then the great practical key and the one we spent a lot of time on last time was the filling of the Spirit. The key to the practical life is the filling of the Spirit in verses 17-18. The end of verse 17 it says he was filled with the Spirit.

The filling of the Spirit means that the Spirit of God controls you. We saw this last week. And when you're controlled by the Spirit of God, then you're going to see something happen in your life. Trying to live your life without the Spirit of God is trying to live with an engine, but no ignition key. He's there, but you've got to find out how to turn it on and that is to yield to the Spirit of God to submit yourself.

The apostle Paul all his life and all his ministry, from the time that he was Saul right here in the house of Judas lived a life under the control of the Spirit of God. Oh there were times, of course, like any believer when he wavered from that, but that was the commission and the commitment of his heart. He began at the start to do the bidding of the Holy Spirit. Now the filling of the Spirit of God is a simple thing. We've gone over it before. The Spirit lives within every Christian being filled with Him is yielding to Him and letting Him control you. That's all it is.

And incidentally, in your life you either are controlled by yourself or by Him. That's the only option you have, so figure it out. It's that simple. The Christian life is not complicated. All we must do is submit to the Spirit and incidentally, the Spirit filled life moves by definition. Once you're filled, you go. Now we saw in the filling of Saul that God then having filled him refined him. Remember? We talked about the fact that he had leadership, strong will power, he was self-sufficient. He was independent. He was self-disciplined. He was extremely motivated man. He had some kind of persistence that just never

said die. He was kind of inflexible in his convictions. He was very practical. He was very bold. He had a lot of great qualities the Spirit of God didn't eliminate, He only refined them.

That's part of the Spirit filled life. You'll find that the good things that you possess, God will never eliminate, he'll only refine. So you don't ever need to fear to do God's will. You don't ever need to fear to be filled with the Spirit. He'll only eliminate the bad. He'll refine that which is usable. Secondly, in the case of Saul, he did eliminate some things. For hatred, He gave him love. For pride, He gave...for pride, He gave him humility. For meanness, He gave him gentleness. And for restlessness, He gave him peace.

So He did some replacing as well, but He changed him and then he became effective. The Spirit filled life then when yielding to the Spirit, the Spirit of God begins to change and to refine. Now, let me add a footnote here that I think is very, very important, because I want you to be clear on this. Many Christians, and this is a very practical thought, 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. And I see the same thing, I can't get over the hump and I can't get over the hump." And they become very discouraged. And you know what happens, they fail to believe God for the work that He is doing.

Then to not believe God is sin. To sin is to eliminate the filling of the Spirit. They're trapped in a vicious circle of their own unbelief. Friends, you must believe God for the process of change and expect not that it's an overnight thing. I mean, now we change in a physical sense, but we don't see the change do we. Only when we're just brought face to face with it thanks to photography. Lenny, for Christmas, gave me a picture that he took of me all framed and everything when I was a freshman in college. Go ahead it's funny. It was hilarious. You know, you have all outdated clothes and you don't have any wrinkles and you have lots of hair and lots of wonderful things and it's great. And you know, but then you say to yourself oh have I changed. I'm old see.

But it's only because you're brought face to face with then and now, not because you can see the process. The process of change is imperceptible. Believe me Christian, you will believe God that the process of Christian maturity is imperceptible and will you not doubt God because you don't see drastic things happening every moment of your life. The people who live their Christian life trying to see one great giant zap from God every so often don't ever grow any way. You live daily on the diet of the Word of God and you will grow though you won't even perceive it. And you know, one of the reasons that Christians doubt the transformation very often is that because as you grow you become infinitely more sensitive to what? To sin.

Consequently you think you're worse than you used to be. Let God have the privilege of changing you at His own pace and realize that when He changes your whole nature, when He does the work of re-creation that's instantaneous. That's a whole new miracle. That's bang and it's done. But changing

you into the image of Christ while you've still got the cruddy flesh that you have and that I have takes a little more time. Give God the time to do it. Don't disbelieve Him for the process. You were created into Christ...in Christ Jesus unto, what, good works. Now let God have the right to take His time to do it. And incidentally, the faster you yield, the easier it'll be. As I've always said, some of you need molding, some of you need chips and chisels.

That's up to you. But the changes are coming and they're going on. Let God change you, but don't disbelieve God for the change. Just yield to the Spirit, accept what's going on in your life as change and yield on a day by day basis, believe God for it because if you don't believe Him for it, you're sinning. If you're sinning, you eliminate the filling of the Holy Spirit and you're trapped in a vicious circle.

I know 2 Corinthians 5:17 says "All things will become new." But the all things has to do with the nature of a man with the re-creation of that which is his nature and his capacity in Christ. It doesn't mean that the minute you're saved you never lose your temper or you're perfect from then on. Of course not. A Christian with a bad temper...or a man with a bad temper gets saved and you know what you have? You have a Christian with a bad temper. You take...take for example, a fear prone Christian and this is the case that comes up so often. A fear prone individual, he gets saved, okay? He spent all of his life worrying about everything. All of his life doubting everything. He's got negative thinking from clear through him. It's just completely negative thinking. Negativism, anxiety about everything, he gets saved.

He desires to get filled with the Spirit. He yields to the Spirit. Then he begins to think negative. Well, I'm not changing. I wonder if the Spirit's really there. I wonder if God loves me. I wonder if things are going...what happened? Mental attitude sin filling in and he’s back in a vicious trap. Believe God. Even when filled with the Spirit some people feel insecure. They feel insecure even when they're under the control of the Spirit, because they can't believe God. Let Him take His time at His own pace as you yield to Him to make the changes.

I'm changed. I've changed in the last few years, but I can't see that change, but I know it's true because I believe it's true. You got it? And I will continue to believe that because God says so. You say well, I don't notice it. Well, that's your tough luck. I believe I'm changing. I don't want to talk to you. Now you've got to look at the Christian life in a very practical way, you see and it's by faith that we live it any way. Why can we believe God for salvation and yet we can't believe God for the things of our lifetime. We can't believe God for little things that come and go in our life. We don't really believe He's changing us. Believe Him will you?

Let me just put it practically. I'll give you four little simple steps to trust in the Spirit filled life. Number one, make the filling of the Spirit a priority every day. I mean, you've got priorities. Number one is to get up and make sure you get your breakfast and then you get to work on time, meet your

appointments, do whatever you're going to do. You've established priorities, why don't you establish the number one priority in your life being filled with the Spirit one day at a time. Absolute priority.

Second priority in your life is develop a keen sensitivity to sin, look for it. Be sensitive to it and avoid it. I mean, what are our priorities. Boy sometimes we get our priorities so misdirected. The spiritual priorities bring up the rear. Put the priority of the Spirit-filled life and a sensitivity to sin first. Third thing, study the Word of God. It'll do both things for you. It'll fill you with the Spirit and it'll clean you up. And the fourth one, don't grieve the Spirit or quench it. Consciously avoid that, consciously, consciously avoid anything that would grieve or quench the Spirit.

Now you begin to think like that. You begin to think positively about the filling of the Spirit and your desire not to grieve Him and then believe God for the change and you'll see the change in your life. All right, that's just added on. The fifth thing that we saw about the transformed life was fellowship with the saints. It's characteristic of a believer that he desires fellowship with other believers. This is part of our life isn't. I mean, we're all here, aren't we?

And we love the fellowship with the saints. There's nothing like it. 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 signs about love, but I think Christians are the only ones who have the capacity to give the kind of love that is absolute ultimate in terms of human experience. And so what happened to this man as indicated there from verse 17 to 19, as he fell into the fellowship of the believers. He was baptized. He was called Brother Saul. He spent some time at the end of verse 19 certain days. And his whole life did a flip-flop. The people he used to work for and like became his enemies. The people he used to hate and tried to kill, he fell in love with. And he writes to the Romans and says I can't wait until I get there so I can love you a while.

And he writes to the Philippians and says it's a blessing to my heart. I think about you all the time. I long for you and the tender mercies of Christ. I've just got to get where you are and love. And he does that all the way through the New Testament. Those are the same people he was breathing fire against. God transformed him. When he entered into the fellowship of the saints. Believe me that is a glorious kind of existence to live among the saints. And I believe that God expects us as a Christian to be a separated Christian from the things of the world. Now, I don't...I'm not saying that we're never to contact people who aren't saved obviously.

But listen as I read and you can interpret it yourself. 1 Corinthians 5:9, he says, "I wrote unto you an Epistle not to company with fornicators." Those are people involved in sexual sin. Now that's pretty practical for our lifetime today. Corinthians were in a kind of a society we're in and that's a rampid thing. "Don't company with fornicators." You can't really explain that away. It's very apparent what he means. "Yet not together 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, covetous, an idolater, a railer, a drunkard, extortioner, with such an one, not don't even have lunch."

That's what it says. He said, first of all, I told you once before don't fool around with those kinds of people and now I'm telling you the same thing. If the guy even calls himself a brother in Christ don't fool around with him. Why? Get this. This is worth a quarter. Get it. The Christian life is a tender plant that can exist fruitfully only in an atmosphere of holiness. Did you get that? The Christian life is a tender plant that can exist fruitfully only in an atmosphere of holiness, believe me. Believe me.

That does not mean we don't evangelize the world, it means we don't run with them. That does not mean we don't love the world. It means we don't make our company with them. We belong to Christ in the body. We are members one of another. Here is the concentration of our ministry and of our life. So the transformed life involves those things. Now, we've seen five parts of the transformed life. Part number one had to do with your nature. The next four had to do with your character, right? The last two have to do with your effect on the world. The first one had to do with your nature, the next four with your character, the last two with your effect on the world. These are terrific.

The sixth one, fervency in speaking. I think it is characteristic of a transformed life that you can't hold back talking about the transformation. I always remember my dad telling the story about the guy on the train that was looking out the window and saying "oh isn't it wonderful, oh it's magnificent." And he'd feel the seat. "Oh look at that." And then he'd rub the wood. "Oh isn't that beautiful." And the guy next to him was going crazy at all this dramatization. And 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 the man then reported to him that he was coming back from surgery where he had been given sight and he had been blind since a child. And of course, everything was beautiful. Of course, everything was ecstatic. Of course, everything was fantastic. He'd never seen it before and he couldn't hold it in and he was saying oh isn't it beautiful, isn't it beautiful. He didn't care who heard.

And that's something what it's like when the transformation takes place. It just kind of happens and you kind of talk about it. And that's the way Saul was. Saul didn't know the meaning of the word tomorrow. He was now. He was only now and everything he did was now. In fact, you know, most of the people that he worked with spent all their life trying to keep up with him. Look at verse 20. What's the second word? "Immediately, straightway, he preached Christ in the synagogues that He's the Son of God." You say, wait a minute he has been he hasn't been to seminary, regarding the right school. You want to know something? That man could preach Christ from the day he was saved. Why? Because he knew the Old Testament as well as anybody around and all he needed was the key to unlock the box to let it out, and Jesus was the key.

All he did...all he needed to do was meet Jesus Christ and everything that he ever knew in the Old Testament was fulfilled in an instant. He had an education before he got saved and it all came into meaning. You see, that's what's so wonderful about any Jewish person who comes to Christ. They automatically step into a kind of knowledge that even I don't have, because they're so familiar with Judaism. When Christ unlocks the lock on Judaism everything comes forth. That's exactly what happened to Saul. Jesus Christ was the key and it was unlocked and he began to speak. And he never wanted...he never postponed anything.

"Immediately preached Christ in the synagogues." Now when he got to those synagogues he came with letters to persecute the Christians. And they gave him his chance to speak and he got up and preached Christ. You can imagine the shock that hit them. But you see, he spoke. He was a speaker. He was...he could dispense the gospel in Romans like a lawyer stating evidence in a series of masterful arguments or he could say it simply to a jailer when he simply said "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

Or he could do it simply and quietly or he could do it beautifully and oratorically and he could do with gentleness and love or he could fire it out with thunder. But he spoke and everywhere he went, he spoke and nobody ever, any time, any place, turned him off. In fact, you know, he had one fear that haunted him all his life. From the time of his salvation he had one gnawing fear that haunted him. And that fear was that sometime somehow in his life he would be unable to speak for Jesus. You know, most Christians have a fear that haunts them all their life. The fear that they might have to. It's sad.

The greatest fear that gripped his great heart was that in his preaching of Christ he, himself, might become a castaway. A broken vessel marred by sin, useless, corroded to be set aside. That scared him. He wanted more than anything else to preach Jesus Christ and he didn't want anything to stain his life and render him unable to do it. Oh isn't that a great thing. Oh would to God we had that kind of thing. Would to God every Christian had that kind of fervency. Imagine what would happen.

It's reversed in many cases. The word immediately is a great word. It's used 35 times in the gospel of Mark. And you know Mark is the one that presents Christ as the servant of the Father. You know, an obedient servant only operates on the basis of one word. What is it? Immediately. That's the way Saul operated, immediately. So many people stand around doing nothing. He just moved out. And he went to the synagogues, there were multiple synagogues in Damascus. The Jews were a lot like the Baptists. They divided up into all sundry and diverse fellowships and so they were all over town. Everybody suited for everybody's particular attitudes and he hit them all. And he got there and His speech was that He is the Son of God. Boy I just can't even believe what kind of shock it must have been.

Already he's not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Now what was his message? Notice one little footnote. It says he preached Christ. The best manuscripts have Jesus there. And that seems

certainly to be what he would say that this Jesus is the Son of God. Now the term Son of God is very important. This designates Christ as deity. This Jesus, the man is God. You say well does the Son of God mean that He's less than God. No, of course not.

Son of God, now stay with me, I'm going to give you a footnote here, Son of God is an incarnate title. Jesus is not called Son of God before His incarnation. Jesus is God, He is very God of God in human flesh. He is only called Son in the sense that as the second person of the Trinity He came to earth. He is a Son in the sense that He was born. He is not a Son in terms of rank in the Trinity. He's not less than the Father. He's only a Son in an incarnate sense. Before His incarnation He was God the second person of the Trinity. The title Son belongs to His incarnation.

And I show that to you in Luke 1:35. It says, "And the angel answered and said unto her, Mary, the Holy Spirit shall come unto thee. The power of the highest shall overshadow thee, therefore, also that Holy thing which shall be born of thee," watch future tense, "shall be called the Son of God." Now the Holy Spirit chose the verb very carefully. It's still a future designation at the time of the promise. He doesn't say the Son of God will be born. He says, a child will be born and He shall be called the Son of God. Verse 32 says the very same thing in the instruction that the angel gave there. It simply says, "shall call...shall be called the Son of the Highest." Now watch, "And the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David." He is a Son in the sense that He's the son of David. He's a Son in the sense that He's a Son of God by service.

He is not a Son in the sense of inferiority to God the Father in any way, shape, or form. And I only say that because you'll run into some people who'll deny that He is God because He's called the Son of God. Since we only know Christ from our standpoint in terms of incarnation, we call Him the Son of God and so did Saul, because we know Him in His incarnation. We call Him Jesus too, but that's an incarnation name as well. We call Him Christ and that's an incarnation name as well. So he began to preach that he is the Son of God. And boy I imagine he unlocked that Old Testament, and it was exciting. And that's how he became known his whole life as a preacher of Jesus Christ.

You know, if I never knew anything more about John the apostle than what I know from the last two verses of his gospel, it'd be enough to endear him to me forever. I love what it says in 21:24. Listen, "This is the disciple who testifieth of these things and wrote these things." Wouldn't you like to be known as the guy who always talked and wrote about Jesus? Let me add one other note here. I want you to notice something. Immediately he preached and he preached that Jesus is the Son of God. Now this leads me to just a tangent I'd like to share with you. I was thinking about it recently.

I want you to notice that the content of his kerugma or his proclamation was didache or teaching, doctrine. He didn't give his testimony, did he? Now listen friends, he had a testimony that wouldn't quit. I mean, he could have rung them in. He could have told of stories that would stand their hair on end. Why let me tell you what we did to this and this Christian. Why we threw them in here and we did

this and he could have gone on and on. He could have given a super colossal testimony. Then he could have said, let me tell you about what happened to me on the Damascus Road. And he could have gone through the whole thing on the Damascus Road.

Now there's nothing wrong with your testimony, it's just that your testimony is relatively inconsequential in terms of the importance of the presentation of who Christ is, you see? Your testimony as a supplement is fine. Your testimony as a witness itself isn't any good at all because it's got to be more than that. All good preaching and witnessing is doctrinal. And really, you know, the church has gone overboard on people's testimonies and people's experiences and we have created, what I'm afraid, is almost a subjective approach to Christianity.

Now subjectivism is a curse that man has had to live with for a long time. Ever since the Garden of Eden when man sinned, immediately God started looking for man and man started looking at man. He ran in the Garden, I'm naked, I better cover myself. Man became man centered or subjective. God's always been looking at man. Man's always been turning inside. And man creates religions that are totally subjective. It's all experiential. And even today the cultured philosophical men of our world have found an experiential religion, you know. The leap of faith. The upper story, whatever you call it.

But religion is subjective, but not Christianity. Romans 10, "Faith comes by hearing a speech about Christ." Did you hear that? "Faith comes by hearing a speech about Christ." Not a subjective analysis of what's going on in me. Now it's all right to talk about your own experience in certain context and it's all right to include your testimony in terms of presentation, but never to the exclusion of the actuality of the presentation of Jesus Christ. Later on in the book of Acts on two occasions, Paul goes backwards and picks up his testimony very briefly and very concisely only simply saying this is what I was and this is what I am and Jesus is in the middle.

But mark it friends, Christianity is not a subjective experience. Let me put in another step. Salvation is basically a non-experiential fact. Christianity is based on something that didn't happen in your experience. It happened 1,900 years ago. It happened before you were born. It happened outside the experience of every Christian, of every sinner, of every man who ever lived. Christianity is based on an historical fact of God's redemptive history. It is only a matter of believing in that historical fact that redeems a man. It's outside yourself. It is not subjective, it is objective.

Now the religions of the world don't buy that, everything is subjective. On Berkley campus there's a poster advertising an Easter religion and this is what it said. You may have seen this poster, it's been around. It says this, here's this religion, "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. You just keep going in yourself. You meditate, you do all this in, in, you know what you do? You just get deeper and deeper and deeper into the pit of yourself that you've got to get out of and the only way to get out of it is to put your faith in an objective, historical, redemptive fact. You don't go in and in and in and in, you go out and you

stay out.

But subjectivism is the common denominator in all false systems and it's sad to see too that many Christian organizations and denominations make Christianity so hopelessly subjective, that they want to feel it all, you know. It's all emotional, it's all experiential. It is not. When Paul preached the gospel, he said here's the gospel that Jesus Christ died, that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures. Historical fact, that's the gospel. And my friends it is not until you believe in what happened outside of you that God ever begins to do anything inside of you.

Christianity is not centered on man's life. Listen, Christianity is true if you never experience. It's true if nobody ever experienced it. And you must let Christianity be what it is. Let it remain outside experience. It is believing in historical, redemptive history. And then once you put your faith in an outside fact, then God begins to move into you and then some of the practical stuff begins to take place and you begin to experience what God is doing. But don't get the cart before the horse and don't make your faith subjective.

So he preached...that was a tangent. He preached the objective content of doctrine. Jesus is the Son of God. That's what the people need to hear. You say well, they don't come forward unless you give them a lot of that other stuff. Well, friends then you don't want them forward. Because if they come forward on false pretenses, you've confused the issue.

All right, verse 21, we did pretty much half an hour on one verse. Verse 21, "But all that heard him were amazed." Of course, they were shocked out of their minds when he arrived in their synagogue and started announcing that Jesus is the Son of God. "Is not this he who destroyed them?" It's an interesting word there. It means to really kill and it indicates that Stephen probably wasn't the only one to die under Saul's persecution. "He destroyed them who called on this name in Jerusalem," boy have things changed, "and came here for that intent that he might bring the bound unto the chief priest." What's going on?

What a switch. They were shocked. Verse 22, "But Saul," you think fell apart under the pressure. No, you don't know him very well. He is a rock. "He increased the more in strength." You see the man who will confront the world and the power of the Spirit of God will find that persecution doesn't weaken him, it only strengthens him. How many times have we gone through this in this early part of Acts. It only fires him. It only helps him exercise his spiritual muscle so that he's stronger next time out. Paul knew the secret, Ephesians 3:14-16, Paul prayed that "you may be strengthened by His Spirit with might in the inner man." See, yield to the Spirit, strong inner man. It doesn't matter what happened on the outside.

Paul said, we get kicked around every day. We get banged around every day, but we're renewed in the Spirit every morning, you see. And so he was strong and the more they shot at him the stronger

he got. And he confounded the Jews. That means the Jews lost their debates. They couldn't get this guy. He had a brilliant mind to begin with. When it was sanctified by the Holy Spirit and when he was granted revelation from God he was invincible. He confounded the Jews who dwelled at Damascus proving that this is very Christ. And believe me, you know what he used to prove it? Their own Old Testament.

What a preacher he was. And a passion of his life was to preach. Over in 28 when he got to Jerusalem he was going with the apostles in and out and "he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Grecians. They went about to slay him." He was preaching again. He never stopped preaching everywhere he went. It didn't matter where it was or what was going on or what anybody thought or what anybody said. He just kept talking about Christ. And you know something he changed the world. People do you believe that? Do you really believe that? That's what it takes. He illustrates the fact that God calls a man to serve to perform a task of proclaiming Jesus Christ and when he does it, the world is changed and transformed.

All right, then there's the last thing. The transformed life results finally in fearlessness in suffering. Naturally, when you confront the world like that, all they that live godly will suffer persecution. You're going to get it. And he got it, verse 23. "And after many days were fulfilled, the Jews took council to," do what, "to kill him." Boy this thing has switched so fast it's almost shocking to stay up with it. He comes to Damascus to kill Christians. A few days later, the Jews are after him.

That's the way his life went. You know, you could characterize his life, a life of courage, you can characterize his life in one little phrase. It's at the end of Acts 28:15, it says this. "He thanked God and took courage." Isn't that great? He gets ready for a battle and he'd say thanks God for winning the victory already before I even enter because you promised, took courage and went in. Boy I like that. He thanked God and took courage. The end of the book of Hebrews is a terrific statement. The last part of verse 5, Hebrews 13, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," the promise of the Lord. Then he says this, "So that we may boldly say the Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

Now that's the way this man lived. What was he afraid of? Not afraid of anything. Verse 23, "They took this counsel to kill him, 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 and so they guarded the gates. And they were going to try to kill him when he tried to get away.

Now notice a little statement after many days. This is interesting. In verse 23, we want to just back up and pick that thought up. "After many days," is a statement that perhaps is misleading, because in the literal Greek it means sufficient days and denotes a time of considerable duration. In fact, some Lexicons would say that it means a time of two to three years. So that there was a period of time between verses 22 and 23 of a period of a few years. Now we wonder what is Paul doing in those

years and we find that out in Galatians 1:17. He says after his conversion, "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." So it is very likely that he began preaching in Damascus, then he moved for a while over to Arabia and I believe he preached there too. Some say he went to Arabia just to be taught of God. I'm sure of that. I'm sure of that, but I know that the best kind of training goes on when you're ministering at the same time.

So he was in Arabia and I'll show you why. We'll do that in a minute. He was in Arabia for a while and then he came back to Damascus. Having come back to Damascus he started preaching again and then they sought to kill him. So there's probably between verse 22 and 23 this three year interval when he spent time in Arabia and in Damascus. And incidentally, this persecution that is the beginning of the fulfillment of Chapter 9, verse 16 when Ananias told him he was going to suffer many things for Christ, and indeed he did.

Now let me give you a footnote. What was he doing in Arabia? Well, God sent him there, no question about it, but there's several things to consider. That part of the world had an Arabia that's a little different than the Arabia we know today. It's much north of that and it was called Nabatean Arabia. And it is very likely that at this particular time in history Nabatean Arabia had actually included the city of Damascus. According to some geographical indications, Damascus would have actually been in what was known as Arabia. So that Damascus would be a city on the very frontier of Arabia which would be to the east of it.

Now this Nabatean Arabia as it's called was ruled by a king by the name of Aretas. That's indicated to us in 2 Corinthians 11:32. It tells us that. And Aretas, it says in that same verse, had put a governor in Damascus and put a garrison to guard the city. Now that's interesting. Aretas lent his soldiers to the Jews to catch Saul. Now why? What does Aretas care about Saul? Why does he want to give a garrison of soldiers to stand at the gates to capture Saul? The only answer that I can come across in my own thinking and this is my own thinking, is that somewhere along the lines Saul has irritated Aretas.

Now Saul had one thing about him that irritated all kinds of unbelievers. That is he everywhere went preaching Christ. That's why I say when he was in Arabia, I cannot believe that for three years he sat anywhere and didn't preach. I think he was barely through one lesson before he was out the door. And the Holy Spirit was probably saying hang on Paul, I've got one more point before you leave. And he was gone preaching Christ all over Nabatean Arabia so much so that Aretas was just as irritated as the Jews were. So that they came together to try to get rid of the guy.

It points up a great fact and that is that I think training is absolutely the greatest when it's in the crucible of experience and ministry. To isolate...to train people in a monastery is absolutely absurd.

To even train in a seminary detached from any kind of total activity within the framework of the life of the body of Christ and the church is just as absurd. Your lessons are learned when they're learned being broken over lives and people and circumstances so that you find out whether they work or not.

And so he was the enemy of everybody. Well, the disciples have a got a little plan, kind of neat. The disciples took him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket. And you'll notice that age of miracles begins to fade at this point and things have to be more contrived than previous. Although some miracles still continue on. They don't always occur. So the disciples found somebody who lived on the wall had a window opening there and he got a basket and a rope and they let him down. Which is one way to get him away. The only other escape would be through the gates.

Verse 26, "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem," this is great, he finally gets there three years after his conversion, "he tried to join himself to the disciples." Now the word tried is imperfect tense in the Greek, which means it's repeated action. He tried and tried and tried and tried. And you know what, they were all afraid. And that's also imperfect. Every time he tried, they were afraid. So continually he couldn't crack the fellowship.

And they didn't believe he was a disciple. They thought this cannot be. Three years, but it's only hearsay. Nobody's seen him. He's been roaming around somewhere up there. And this is another one of those tricks of Satan. It's a wolf in sheep's clothing. We're going to get in trouble if we let him in. And so they wouldn't let him. He tried to crack the nut and he couldn't get in. They were wary of this man, which gives you a little idea of his reputation even after three years.

I love verse 27, you know, God always has some great soul who steps out of the woodwork to believe God for the impossible. While all the rest of the Christians are huddled in a corner, scared to death, some guy always stands up and takes God at His word and moves out. Here's Barnabas. Ananias did it, didn't he? Here's the next guy in line Barnabas. "But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord on 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 him and says come on I'll give you an introduction to the gang.

Now apparently Barnabas was well enough liked and respected and established enough in terms of his own authority and spiritual discernment to be believed. And so on the recommendation of Barnabas everybody accepted Saul, which is a great thing. It's exciting to see how God uses people for specific things. Barnabas' name incidentally means son of encouragement and he must have been an encouragement to Saul at this point.

Verse 28, "And he was going...he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." He just joined right in on the movements and he was going in and out preaching, declaring Christ with all the Christians. "And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and," watch this, "disputed against the

Grecians." Remember who those were? The Hellenist Jews. He was one of them. And you know who was the last guy to preach to them? Stephen. He picked up the mantle of Stephen and took off right at the point Stephen quit. He went right back to the Hellenist Jews. Went right back to their synagogues and started debating with them again. Boy just having gotten over the shock of Stephen, it must have been something to try to handle this guy.

And so he was having a great time. He only stayed 15 days. Why? Because he wanted to get away? No, that's all they could take of him. You say why do you say that? Well, at the end of verse 29, it says, that the Grecians wanted to kill him. It only took 15 days for that. And, you know, it was one thing to have Saul persecuting you. It was almost as bad when he got saved, because it turned the whole world on him. It's almost better when only him...when only he was after them. Now since he'd been such a fireball, he'd gotten everybody after them.

So for their own protection as well as his, they decided we've got to get him off and out of town for a little while until things cool down. And so it says in verse 30, "Which when the brethren knew," they found out they were going to kill him, "they brought him down to Caesarea." That's down too. Jerusalem is up on a mountain, you go right down to the Mediterranean Sea, Caesarea, beautiful spot. And they took him to Caesarea and they put him on a ship and sent him home. Go to Tarsus, take a rest, vacation, get out until it cools down.

And I love verse 31, "Then had the churches rest." Not only because the persecution stopped, but because Paul left which is part of it. Anyway, they sent him to Tarsus. Now what do you think he's going to do there? Go home and rest? Don't you believe it. Don't you believe it. They put him on a boat and Galatians 1:21, he says, "Afterwards, I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia." Tarsus was in Cilicia. What do you think he did there? It's terrific. The indication of what he did is in Chapter 15:23 of Acts. Just listen and don't look it up.

It says, "The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting," watch this, "unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Syria and Cilicia." Guess what he did? He went all over the place founding churches. He was absolutely inexhaustible. There was no stopping the man. He was a human preaching machine. You couldn't stop him. He got to Syria and Cilicia and even in Antioch and he took off preaching Jesus. Over in verse 41, he went through Syria and Cilicia later on confirming the churches that he had established. Fantastic. And he didn't worry about anything. He was fearless. It didn't matter what was going on. If they tried to kill him or not try to kill him, he was so bold.

Fantastic man. Verse 31, "When he finally left then had the churches rest in all Judea and Galilee and Samaria. Now let me add a footnote. It's not only that he left that the churches had rest, but at this point in history a very interesting footnote comes out that you must understand. At this point, the emperor of Rome was Caligula. And Caligula attempted to set up idols in Jerusalem. And this got the Jews so angry that the Jews concentrated their fight against Caligula and consequently left the

Christians alone for a period of time. That occurred at the same time. So Paul's leaving and the Jews preoccupation with Caligula's efforts to set up idols gave the church rest and as a result of the rest of the church it says "the church was edified and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was," what, "multiplied."

First it was edified and then it was multiplied. You want to know the pattern for church growth? People say to me, how do you build a church? You don't build a church, you build a believer and the church will build itself. There it is, first edify, what kind of growth is that? Spiritual. Then multiply, what kind of growth is that? Numerical. You people who are here today aren't here because we had a contest to get you here. You're here in most cases, in fact, if not in all cases, because some Christian’s lives were changed and they touched your life. That's the only way God ever intended the church to grow. And it grew.

Well, in his homily on the book of Romans, John Christisum the great early church father, the golden tongued orator, said that he loved best of all the city of Rome. And somebody said why the city of Rome? And he said because Paul is buried there and at the rapture he'll come out of the ground there. And that's why I love it. And then he went on to say this, "I would just 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 never grew weary. The dust of those eyes which were blinded, yet received their sight and saw the salvation of thousands."

What a man he was. May he stand for all time as he has and in your life and in your mind as the illustration of what God can do in your life, if you'll let Him transform you. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that we've seen again what You can do by Your power in transforming people. Thank You for this man's life. May it be a living testimony to us of the power of God in the life of a man, no matter how bad he is to turn him around, to change him into something miraculous and usable for Your glory. Father change some people even this morning. May some come to You by faith and be changed in their nature and God being in a fresh way that change in their life. And then Lord, continue at even a faster pace to change Christians into the image of Christ. God may we yield more of ourselves to that change. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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