

God Makes All Things New

Acts 9:17-31

Sermon by Phil Kayser

My first sermon the life of Saul focused on his conversion. And if you've ever had doubts about whether one of your loved ones or one of your enemies could be converted, pray verses 1-9 to God. They will stir up faith in the power of sovereign grace to change any heart. It is a wonderful passage.

The second sermon looked at Saul's call to ministry in verses 10-16. We saw that over the centuries this has been a favorite text for evaluating all calls to ministry. Of course, Reformed people have recognized that there are things that are unique to each call. Even the other apostles had aspects of their call that were different from Paul's. But the five-fold ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher all have calls to the ministry that share certain features. And if you weren't here, I would encourage you to get a CD of that. PCA leader Mike Ross has pointed out that the church is facing a crisis on this issue of calling, and that this chapter gives a helpful corrective.

Today I would like to continue to use Saul's life to show how God makes all things new in a believer's life. There is not just a new heart, a new calling, but also a new family, a new worldview, a new warfare, a new fellowship and a new future. 1 Corinthians 5:17 says, **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.** That doesn't mean that every change a believer will experience happens *fully* at the time of conversion. Our whole life is a call to change and to growth. But the change in orientation is all there in seed form at the time of our conversion.

In fact, some of you have shared with me testimonies of how confusing it was when you first got converted. You were so excited about what had happened to you, but as you started sharing the Gospel with others, they didn't share your enthusiasm. In fact, some people backed away from you. Some of you lost close friends who just weren't interested in the things you were interested in. Without realizing it, your whole orientation to life was different. All things had become new. You had new values, new feelings, new ways of thinking, a new perspective on the past, the present and the future. And its true - those things will continue to change and be shaped throughout your life time, but it is clear that a major change happened at the time of your regeneration. The things that used to interest

you suddenly became utterly distasteful, and the things that used to bore you suddenly engaged your attention. Some of you even had family members turn against you because you no longer seemed to be interested in the sinful things that interested them. And this transference from one kingdom into another can sometimes be a little bit of a painful process. And as we go through this passage I hope you not only appreciate the incredibly wonderful change that God brought into your life when he converted you, but that it will help you to minister to new converts in a whole new way.

I. A new family (vv. 17-18)¹

A. Family relationship (v. 17)

Let's look first of all at Paul's new family. Verse 17: **And Ananias went his way and entered the house;** In verses 13-14 Ananias had been arguing with the Lord that Saul was an enemy, not a friend. He was not so sure that he wanted Saul in his spiritual family. But adoption is the choice of God, not us. For that matter, how many of you even had the privilege of picking who your *natural* brother and sister would be? We didn't have a choice, did we? God was the one who picked our siblings for us. But in the spiritual realm the same is true. We may prefer to decide which Christians we are willing to be in relationship with, but God has already made that choice. And that's what God tells Ananias in verses 15-16.

And so verse 17 continues: **and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul..."** What incredible words. Just three days before Saul had been, "Enemy Saul." Saul had been intent on stamping out Christianity. He was one of those Pharisees whom Jesus had told, **You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you will do** (John 8:44). He wasn't brother Saul. He was a member of Satan's family. He had a different father. Yet conversion had instantly changed Saul's status from that of an enemy to that of a brother. This is the marvel of God's grace. The first new thing that we find here is that Saul has a new family; new brothers and sisters. Saul would still have to learn the ropes of what it would mean to live like a brother, and the rest of the church would have to learn how to relate to him, but all things had been made new to Saul at the moment of conversion. There was an adoption that took place and he was de facto a brother even before Ananias recognized it.

The hymn writer says, "Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above." What brings the family relationship is not our preferences. It is our union with

¹ The idea for this outline was provided by John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*.

Jesus by the Holy Spirit. God is the tie that binds us together. So Ananias said, **Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.** In a similar way, God calls each of us to reach out in relationship to fellow believers. One of the all-new things that God has made is that Arminians are brothers with Calvinists; dispensationalists are brothers with covenantalists. We may not see eye to eye anymore than natural brothers and sisters always see eye to eye. But we must treat each other with love and respect because we have a common Father, a common Savior and a common indwelling Spirit. There is a family relationship.

B. Family provision (v. 18)

Verse 18 speaks of a family provision. **Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once, and he arose and was baptized.** It's interesting that God didn't heal Saul until he came into family relationship. He could have. And He sometimes does so. But here, it's almost as if God does not want Saul to start off with an independent spirit. He makes Saul dependent upon Ananias and upon the body. And as a family member Saul has new privileges and new responsibilities. The privileges can be seen in the healing and hospitality that he received. The responsibilities can be seen in the baptism which ushered him into his family relationship.

And in the same way, conversion instantly ushers a new believer into numerous family provisions. In Philippians 4:19 Paul says, **And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.** All your need. Just as 1 Timothy 5:8 says that a father must provide for His children or he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever, our heavenly father provides for us. You can count on it. He is a faithful Father. God's family prayer for you is in 3 John 2: **that you may prosper in all things and be in health, even as your soul prospers.** Now that runs so contrary to the asceticism of many believers who assume that to be a believer means to be deprived. But that is not the case. God is a faithful Father. There is a family provision that begins to happen the moment you are converted. God has a spiritual bank account in Christ Jesus in the heavenlies, and as needs arise, you have the privilege of getting provisions from that family bank account. It's a part of the all new things. Is this not an encouragement?

C. Family fellowship (v. 19)

Verse 19 speaks of a family fellowship. **So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples of Damascus.** Some have concluded from Philippians 3:8 (which says that

Paul had suffered the loss of *all* things when he became a believer) that Saul lost his family and that they had severed all ties to him, and cut him off from his family inheritance. There are many people who suffer a similar heart-rending loss when they become Christians. And this makes the family fellowship within the church all the more precious. Mark 10 says that there is no one who has lost family for the sake of Christ and His kingdom who will not receive back 100-fold, and fellowship is one of the things that He restores to us. Saul spent some days with the disciples.

II. A new worldview (vv. 20-22)

A. Preaching it (vv. 20-21)

1. The importance of his preaching (v. 20)

The second thing that happened to Paul was that he was given a whole new perspective on truth. We speak of this as a shift in worldview. He had a brand new worldview. Now it wasn't fully developed, but in seed form the worldview was there. And what is remarkable about this is that Saul was a man who knew the Scripture. But he suddenly sees those Scriptures in a whole new light. Where three days before he was preaching that Christ is a blasphemer and that Christians must be executed, now verse 20 says, **Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He was the Son of God.** Not just a human Messiah, but the Son of God. This was a radical shift in Saul's thinking.

And in the same way, even the most religious people think about Christ quite differently after they are converted than before their regeneration. Even if they happen to believe that Jesus was God before being saved, they think of Christ in personal terms afterwards. His lordship takes on a whole new meaning. His atonement takes on a whole new meaning. Fellowship with Christ takes on a whole new meaning.

2. The impact of his preaching (v. 21)

And as Saul begins to preach this new worldview, the people are astonished at the change that they see. Verse 21: **Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"** His reputation had preceded him, and the people are amazed at the change that they see. This is the first part of apologetics, and the second part is verbal. But the change in our lives is probably one of the most important parts of apologetics. In surveys that have been done over the past 50 years, most people say that they became Christians by witnessing the change they saw in a friend or relative. On the

other hand, a bad lifestyle can be a turn-off in apologetics. But in the case of Saul, it was hard to argue with the changes that they saw.

B. Proving it (v. 22)

But verse 22 goes on to say that Saul got better and better at the verbal part of apologetics as well. **But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.** Saul preached with a power that was not his own. When it says that he increased all the more in strength, the word for “strength,” is the word used in Ephesians 6 for spiritual warfare where Paul says, **Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.** It is mighty, irresistible power. It’s the word used in Hebrews 11 to describe the heroes of the faith in the Old Testament. It’s the word used in Philippians 4:13 – **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.** So Saul’s worldview is more than intellectual. It is a dependence upon something outside himself.

And the results were explosive. The word for confounded is the word used in Acts 2:6 to describe the Jews running together and being confounded at the miracle of the wind and the tongues. God had unleashed a mini-Pentecost upon this city that confounded them. And it could only lead to one of two reactions: conversion or opposition.

III. A new fight (vv. 23-25)

And this opposition is another new thing that most people receive when they first become believers. They find a new fight that they had not anticipated. Verses 23-24. **Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.** The opposition that you received at conversion may not have been as dramatic as this, but there is usually some kind of opposition that Satan stirs up to discourage a new believer. And we need to be aware of that, and be read to encourage them.

These disciples did so. Verse 25 says, **Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.**

Whether the battle is visible or invisible, it is impossible for a new believer to avoid the battle field. When you left the kingdom of Satan and joined the kingdom of God, you instantly became an enemy of Satan. And here’s the interesting thing: *God is the one* who by His grace puts you at enmity with Satan and Satan’s seed. God does it. He’s the one that makes this new fight. Turn with me to Genesis 3:15 to see that this has been the case right from the time of Adam and Eve. Satan had successfully gotten Adam and Eve to rebel against God. They run from God and hide, but God in His sovereign grace reaches out to them and makes all things new. And

one of the new things he does is to produce a new fight; a new enmity. Genesis 3:15. Speaking to Satan, God says, **And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel.** Notice that God puts the enmity between the devil and the woman. Previously she had covenanted friendship with the serpent and followed his advice. She was the friend of Satan, and like the Pharisees she was the child of Satan. But now God is putting her into a new position of being an adversary to Satan. It is part and parcel of grace that we are ushered into a new battle. Every believer has it.

IV. A new fellowship (vv. 26-29)

A. Fellowship sought & thwarted (v. 26)

Back to Acts chapter 9 we see a provision that God gives to sustain us in this battle. It is a new fellowship. Saul already had fellowship with the believers in Damascus, but as he seeks this needed fellowship in Jerusalem, he is shunned. Verse 26 says, **And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple.** You can appreciate their skepticism, but Saul needed this fellowship. And it was being thwarted.

There are many things that can thwart the fellowship of believers in our own day. It may be insecurity, pride or bitterness. Or it may be cultural, economic or doctrinal differences. Satan will use anything that he can to try to keep new believers from experiencing the joy of God making all things new. And in some ways it is disappointing to see that even the great apostles did not have the faith to test Saul. Did none of them have a gift of discernment? What happened to bold Peter? What happened to Andrew who was in the past the one to reach out and include? We aren't told. And we need to be on guard against the things that hinder our fellowship with one another, because fellowship is one of the all things that Christ has made new. We ought not to despise His gift of fellowship.

B. Fellowship gained through Barnabas (vv. 27)

But God uses Barnabas to minister to Saul. How discouraging it must have been for Saul to have no one believe him; everyone suspicious of him. And there are people with the gift of mercy like Barnabas who reach out and befriend them. Even here, we see the usefulness of God making every person in the body different. Verse 27 says, **But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.** Barnabas was his advocate. And it would have been gratifying to see suspicion giving way to

big fisherman bear hugs as Saul was welcomed into the fellowship. Maybe God has called some of you to be Barnabases – people who see the lonely visitor standing in the hallway, and reaching out to them.

C. Fellowship provides support (vv. 28-30)

We should not underestimate the importance of fellowship in the life of a believer. If it was important for Saul, it is important for all of us. Verse 28 says, **So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.** The fellowship was the base out of which Saul was strong in his ministry. Notice that the coming in preceded the going out; the fellowship preceded the ministry. We need it. Even a tough old cookie like Saul needed fellowship. When we seek to minister in isolation, we become more and more vulnerable to stumbling and failure. I have seen it over and over again. Just as coals from a bonfire stay hot for days when they are grouped together, but go out within minutes when the coals are scattered, saints can lose fire when they are isolationistic. But because Saul ministered with the help and the accountability of the church, when trouble came in verse 29, the church was able to help in verse 30. God made us for fellowship. At the first creation He said, **It is not good for man to be alone.** Sin broke that fellowship and Christ in His new creation restores it.

V. A new future (vv. 30-31)

A. One of controversy (v. 29)

The last new thing that is mentioned in this passage is a new future. Instead of being a leader in the Jewish community like he used to be, verse 29 gives hint of what was to plague him for the rest of his life – opposition from the Jews. It says, **And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.** This must have been hard for Paul. According to Galatians 1:14 Paul was one of the most eminent citizens in all of Israel. He was used to being in charge, calling the shots and being respected. His credentials were impeccable. He received reverence, honor and respect anywhere that he went. But now, the very people who held him in esteem were out to kill him. How fickle is the praise of man! If it is the praise of man that is keeping you from being out and out for Jesus, forget it. You will eventually be disappointed, and you will eventually be disappointing to man and God.

Paul determined that there was only one person that he was going to serve and please: the Lord Jesus. Everyone else he would serve through Christ. And because he was sold out to Jesus completely, he was able to be an explosive force in every place that he went. He broke through the high places and strongholds and led men and women into liberty. And the more

successful he was, the more opposition he received. The opposition is not a bad thing. It was a sign of his success. His future was to be one of controversy and persecution. Not everyone's new future looks like Saul's, but every believer has a new future because all things are made new.

B. One of constant travel (v. 30)

Saul's future was also to be one of constant travel. Verse 30 says, **When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.** And this would be the beginning of a long series of moves as he was chased from one part of the world to the other. He had constant travel. Again, this won't be the calling that all people receive. After all, Paul was an apostle – a sent one. But Paul's new future was all mapped out – the good works that God had foreordained for him.

C. One of spiritual success (v. 31)

The last indicator of a different future was the spiritual success that God sent in the wake of Saul's ministry wherever he traveled. Verse 31 says, **Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.** Notice that it is not only the times of persecution that produce the growth of the church – times of peace do as well. Some Christians actually pray that America would have persecution. But Paul commands us in 1 Timothy 2 to pray that we wouldn't have persecution, but that we would be able to lead quiet and peaceable lives. Psalm 122:6 commands us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Jeremiah 29:7 commands us to seek the peace of the city that we dwell in for in its peace we will have peace. Let's not be masochists. The early church was not. They were grateful for this respite from persecution. It says that they had peace and were edified. It was good for them to finally have peace.

And the edification was manifested in three ways: they walked in the fear of the Lord, they experienced the comfort of the Holy Spirit and they were growing like crazy. Isn't that something that we should pray for our own church? Isn't that something you should pray for your own families and for your own ministries?

God's goals for our future are for good and not for calamity. Jeremiah 29:11 says, **For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.** Whereas previously all things were working together for your bad, now God has given you a new future – a future in which all things work together for your good. Is this not encouraging?

Brothers and sisters: you have a new family that you need to value. You have a new worldview that you need to study and live consistently with.

You have a new fight that you must not run from – a spiritual battle that every believer is called to. You have a new fellowship and a whole new future.

And there are times when Satan tempts me to act as if I am still the old Phil Kayser, and as if all things are not new. But it is important that I align everything that I am with the new things that God has created. I must be driven by God's vision of the future, not by my past. And it is my prayer that you too would embrace the all new things that Christ has created for you, and that you would help other new believers to do so.

Augustine was one of the most important church fathers in the fourth century. But before he was converted, he lived a pretty loose life. He slept around, cursed, gambled, stole. And when God made him a new creature it did not mean that he didn't have any of the old temptations. He did have temptations to live in light of the old rather than in light of the new. One day a woman he used to sin with called out his name and approached him as she used to. He ran away from her with all speed. And she said, "Augustine, it is I." He turned around and said, "But it is not I. The old Augustine is dead, and I am a new creature in Christ Jesus." He resisted temptation because he kept his eyes fixed on Christ and the new future Christ had for him. I would urge you to do the same. View everything in a new light. The verse I started with continues with that theme. It says, **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, *all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*** A new life, a new calling and a making of all things new by the power of His grace. Brothers and sisters, embrace it, enjoy and it and live it to God's glory. Let's pray.