

Are We Walking in the Fear of the Lord and the Comfort of the Holy Spirit?

Acts 9:26-31

Pastor Jason Van Bommel, Forest Hill Presbyterian

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. - Acts 9:31, ESV

How many of us would love to see the church enjoying peace and being built up in the Lord? This is an ideal description of the life of the church, something which every true Christian longs to see. But notice that it comes on the heels of hard times. The peace and growth of the church follow a time of intense evangelism and persecution. This seems to be a regular pattern.

Paul escapes from Damascus and eventually ends up in Jerusalem. His arrival there initially fills the disciples with fear. After all, the last time we saw Paul in Jerusalem, Stephen was being stoned to death and Paul, then known as Saul, was approving of Stephen's death and then imprisoning believers. The fear of the disciples is understandable.

Paul soon puts the disciples at ease, but then his great success in evangelism and apologetics makes him a target for hatred and violence: "*So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.*" (vv. 28-29) So often, what brings success also brings persecution. This is the nature of God's kingdom.

The church decides it will be best for everyone if Paul moved on, so he leaves Jerusalem, heads back to Damascus and then back to his home of Tarsus. This exercise of prudent wisdom bears fruit for the church. After Paul leaves, the re-invigorated church experiences relief from persecution. After all, the target of the Hellenists' anger has left. More importantly, the peace the church experiences comes with spiritual growth, which then leads to fresh numerical growth.

The description of the church in Acts 9:31 is very convicting and encouraging at the same time. It should prompt us to ask a question: Are we walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort (or encouragement) of the Holy Spirit? Too often, I fear we're just going through the motions in our Christian lives, not really enjoying the fruit of our fellowship with God because our walk with Christ has become dull and predictable.

We need a renewal that only the Holy Spirit can bring, a renewed sense of God's holiness and His presence with us that would cause us to walk in real fear of the Lord. Sometimes we need to take risks, engage in evangelism and apologetics and suffer some persecution in order to experience this renewal. After all, what we're not willing to share with others, even at risk to our reputation and social standing, must not be that precious to us, right?

Heavenly Father, revive and renew Your people. Give us a new zeal for reaching out to others with Your Gospel, proclaiming the faith and defending the truths of the Gospel, even if it's scary or risky. May we always do so in love and with respect, but may we never lose sight of the preciousness of the Gospel and our calling to be Your ambassadors to a world in need. In Jesus' name, Amen.