



# GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Sermon Notes

#### *The Conversion of Saul, Part II*

#### *The Persecution of Saul*

Acts 9:10-31

July 15, 2007

- I. **Saul Regains His Sight**
- II. **Saul Preaches Christ in Damascus...and He is Persecuted**
- III. **Saul Preaches Christ in Jerusalem...and He is Persecuted**

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### I. **Saul Regains His Sight**

- Damascus was an ancient city, whose beginnings dated back to the second century, B.C.
- It was an oasis city near the Arabian Desert and on the major trade route between Egypt and Mesopotamia, modern-day Iraq. Today, Damascus is the capital city of the nation of Syria.



- Luke writes, in **Verses 10-12**, that the Lord appeared in Damascus to a man named Ananias, and said, ‘Ananias...Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a

vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain sight.’

- ❑ Note: ‘the street called Straight’ still exists today, although it is north of the ancient street. It is known as the Darb-el-Mostakim, and is Damascus’ main east-west thoroughfare. The traditional location of Judas’s house is at the western end of the street.
- ❑ During the first century, the street would have been lined with porticos or colonnades, as well as large gates at both ends.
- ❑ It is rather peculiar that the Lord informed Ananias of Saul’s vision; however, it further demonstrates the sovereign hand of God moving throughout these events.
- ❑ Unlike Philip, in Acts 8, Ananias questions the Lord concerning this command.
  - Ananias says to the Lord **Verses 13-14**, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’
    - Clearly, the reputation of Saul, the great persecutor of the Church, was well-known throughout the region. Remember, Damascus is some 150 miles from Jerusalem, and Ananias says, ‘I have heard from **many** about this man.’
    - As a Christian at this time, Saul was a man to be feared.
    - Ananias reveals that he is also aware of Saul’s extradition orders from the high priest. These, as Ananias states, gave Saul ‘authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’
    - In short, Ananias knew that, apart from a miracle, it would be suicide to go to Saul and lay his hand on him [in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ].
- ❑ The Lord responded, in **Verses 15-16**, in a way that could not have been any clearer: ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.’
  - The Lord’s response to Ananias reveals several truths concerning Saul:
    1. First, that he was a chosen instrument **of the LORD’s**. In short, it was not Saul who chose the Lord, but the Lord who chose Saul.
    2. Secondly, the Lord chose Saul **for a specific purpose**. Saul was to be the Lord’s **instrument**. Particularly, he was **to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel...**
      - This was but a foreshadowing of Saul’s, later Paul’s, missionary work throughout the remainder of the Book of Acts. Paul would be on trial before Gentile rulers such as Felix and Festus (Chapters 24-25), before kings like Agrippa (Chapter 26), before

local Jewish synagogues and even the Sanhedrin itself (Chapter 23).

3. And finally, the Lord said that 'I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.'

- **The great persecutor of the church was to become the one who was greatly persecuted.** The 'hunter' will become the 'hunted.'
- Most certainly, this statement by the Lord was fulfilled in the Apostle Paul.

### **2 Corinthians 11:22-28:**

'Are they Hebrews? So am I Are they Israelites? So am I Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ?--I speak as if insane--I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.'

- He suffered greatly as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ; however, he considered it the greatest of privileges to be worthy to suffer as Christ did – to be associated in such a way with his Lord and Savior.

**Philippians 1:28-30** states: 'in no way [be] alarmed by your opponents – which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.'

- In **Verse 17**, Ananias goes to the house of Judas, and *after laying hands on him [Saul]*, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'
  - The manner in which Ananias addresses Saul is as moving as it is profound: '**Brother** Saul.'
  - Christ has transformed from an enemy of God, at hater of truth, a persecutor of the Church, to an adopted child of God.

- Only now, through the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, can Saul call God ‘Father’ and, as a result, refer to other believers as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’, as we all share the same Heavenly Father.
- One can imagine how Saul must have felt at this greeting by Ananias. In the past three days, Saul has had a vision of the exalted Christ, who called him by name. He fell prostrate on the ground. He was questioned by Christ, ‘Why are you persecuting Me?’ He was blinded [a covenantal curse from Deuteronomy]. He has prayed and fasted, no doubt reexamining the Old Testament in light of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, most certainly, he is overcome with guilt and shame of his sin against Christ and His Church.
- Yet, despite all of this, Ananias does not condemn Saul, he calls him ‘brother.’
- Then, in **Verses 18-19**, Luke writes, ‘And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.’
  - The Scripture states that, following the work of Ananias, ‘something like scales’ fell from Saul’s eyes.
    - The Greek word could also mean ‘something like flakes.’ The word, *lepidēs* [λεπίδες], can refer to any small, flaky substance, like thinly sliced vegetables or the scales of a fish.
    - However, the significance of the ‘scales’ falling off of Saul’s eyes is something that far exceeds mere physical sight. Saul had been born again and could now see the kingdom of God and the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ for who He truly is, and the Old Testament as the complete, sufficient foreshadowing of the Christ.

John Calvin wrote, ‘The blindness of Paul, as we have said before did not proceed from fear alone or from amazedness; but by this means was he admonished of his former blindness, that he might quite abandon that boldness and vain confidence wherewith he was puffed up. He boasted that he was taught at the feet of Gamaliel, ([Acts 22:3](#);) and undoubtedly he thought very well of his great wittiness, which was notwithstanding mere blindness. Therefore he is deprived of the sight of his body three days, that he may begin to see with his mind; for those must become fools, whosoever they be, which seem to themselves wise, that they may attain to true wisdom. For seeing that Christ is the Son of righteousness, in seeing without him we see not; it is he also which openeth the eyes of the mind. Both things were showed to Paul, and to us are they showed in his person; for he hath his eyes covered with scales, that, condemning all his knowledge of ignorance, he may learn that he hath need of new light, which he hath hitherto wanted; and he is taught that he must let [seek] the true light from none other save only from Christ, and that it is given by no other means save only through his goodness. Furthermore, whereas being pined with three days hunger, he maketh no haste to receive meat until he be baptized, thereby appeareth the earnest desire he had to learn, because he refreshed not his body with meat until his soul had received strength.’

- After the ‘scales fell off’ of his eyes, Luke states that Saul ‘took food and was strengthened.

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- Read in light of Galatians 1, there are at least two powerful lessons that we can gain from this account of Ananias and Saul.
  1. First, Saul’s authority as an apostle was not received through some ‘apostolic succession’ through the laying on of hands from the Apostles [particularly Peter]. His authority came from his commission as an apostle from the Risen and Exalted Christ Himself.

In **Galatians 1:1** Paul writes, ‘Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)...’

**Galatians 1:11-12** states, ‘For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.’

2. Ananias was a relatively obscure, rather insignificant believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; however, he was obedient to the Lord’s commands. Often times I hear Christians say, ‘I know the Lord has great plans for my life [often quoting passages such as Jeremiah 29:11 as ‘proof].’ Typically, what individuals like this mean is that they believe God has great plans for them, as the world would define ‘great.’ However, this may not be the case. Ananias played a simply, yet essential role in salvation history. This may be our calling as well – to support others who, like Paul, were more visible and ‘great.’ Yet, if we are obedient, God is glorified, regardless of the task we are called to – and God’s glory must be our ultimate pursuit.

**II. Saul Preaches Christ in Damascus...and He is Persecuted**

- Luke continues by stating that after the ‘scales fell off’ of Saul’s eyes, **Verse 19**, ‘...for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus.’
  - This Verse demonstrates the truth that true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ seek the fellowship of other believers.

**1 John 3:14a** states, ‘We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren...’

In **Psalms 119:63**, the psalmist states, ‘I am a companion of all those who fear You, And of those who keep Your precepts.’

- ‘And,’ Luke writes, in **Verse 20**, ‘immediately [Saul] began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’
  - This is the only time in all of the Book of Acts that the title ‘Son of God’ is used.
  - However, it was a title that carried great weight with it, both in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the future ministry of the Apostle Paul.
    - In Galatians 1:16 and Romans 1:1-4, Saul refers to Christ as the Son of God when describing his call as an apostle.
  - It is all the more powerful when one reflects back on the ministry and trials of Christ before the Jewish Sanhedrin.
    - **It was Jesus’ claim that He was [and certainly still is] the Son of God that ultimately caused the Sanhedrin to charge Him with blasphemy and sentence Him to death, and that by crucifixion [in order to cause Him to be accursed].**

**John 10:26-36:**

‘[Jesus said] But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.’ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, ‘I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?’ The Jews answered Him, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I SAID, YOU ARE GODS’? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’’

**Matthew 26:63-66:** ‘But Jesus kept silent And the high priest said to Him, ‘I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.’ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ‘He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?’ They answered, ‘He deserves death!’

**Mark 14:60-64** states, ‘The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, ‘Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?’ But He kept silent and did not answer Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, ‘Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.’ Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses? ‘You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?’ And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.’

- Although Saul may have not been present at the actual trial of Christ before the Sanhedrin [and would, therefore, not have heard with his own ears the claim by Christ that He was the Son of God], he most certainly would have heard about it through word of mouth and records kept the Sanhedrin itself.
- Therefore, this makes Saul's **public proclamation [heralding]** of Christ as the Son of God all the more powerful and significant. Through his declaration, Saul is heralding Christ as the Messiah...divine [fully God].

'In all of his references to Jesus as God's Son Paul uses the Greek definite article, not always easily represented in translations. The connotation of the definite article is that Paul views Jesus' divine Sonship as unique, and does not accord Jesus membership in a class of other figures who may be regarded as sons of God such as we encounter in the Jewish or pagan sources (e.g., angels, the righteous, great men, wonder workers, etc.)...From the entire fabric of Paul's Christology, it is apparent that Paul saw Jesus as participating in God's attributes and roles, as sharing in the divine glory and, most importantly, as worthy to receive formal veneration with God in Christian assemblies. So we may say that the One Paul called 'the Son of God' was regarded by him as divine in some unique way.' L.W. Hurtado, SON OF GOD, in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*

- Also, Saul is not only publicly proclaiming Christ as the Son of God, he is doing so **in the synagogues** [of Damascus]. **These were the very places where Saul had intended to arrest both men and women [under the extradition orders of the high priest in Jerusalem] who were doing what he was now doing – following Christ and proclaiming Him as the Son of God – the Way, the Truth, and the Life!**
- This truth most certainly made an impression on the followers of the Way in the respective Damascus synagogues. Luke writes, in **Verse 21**, 'All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, 'Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests.'
- **Verse 22** states, 'But Saul kept increasing in strength...'
- Certainly this is a reference to BOTH his physical and spiritual strength, as he was growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and the strength and power of the Holy Spirit.
- **Verse 22** continues, 'Saul kept increasing in strength and **confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.**'
- First of all, Luke writes that Saul was 'proving that **this** Jesus is the Christ.'
- In other words, it was not some fictional Jesus that Saul was proclaiming. It was no longer some Messiah that *Saul* wanted that he was proclaiming. Saul had not created a Jesus that he was comfortable with. Rather, Saul was proclaiming that **this** Jesus, the One who had revealed Himself to Saul, was

the Christ – the long-awaited Messiah...the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament. And Saul was proclaiming Christ as He is.

- Secondly, Luke writes that Saul was ‘confounding the Jews...by **proving** that this Jesus was the Christ.’
  - The Greek word translated ‘proving’ is the word *symbibazo* [συμβιβάζω], which means ‘to **join** or **put together**.’
  - As one scholar wrote, ‘[It] seems to picture his [Saul’s] assembling Old Testament texts to demonstrate how Christ fulfilled them. No wonder the Damascus Jews were astounded and totally unable to respond to the skillful interpretations of the former student of Gamaliel.’
  - We must remember that Saul, by his own account in Philippians 3:5, had more reason than anyone to boast in his own accomplishments [‘confidence in the flesh’]. He was ‘circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee...’
    - It is certainly possible that no one in Damascus compared to Saul with respect to knowledge of the Old Testament. He no doubt knew it ‘backwards and forwards.’ Likely he had large parts, quite possibly all of it, memorized.
    - This is why Luke writes that Saul was ‘confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus...’
      - Most certainly he was demonstrating powerfully, effectively, conclusively, and irrefutably [although many may have been spiritually blinded to the truth] that the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ **perfectly fulfilled the entire Old Testament**.
      - This scene calls to mind the scene, in **Luke 24**, between the risen Jesus Christ and the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

❖ Read **Luke 24:13-48**.

- In this passage, Luke writes, in Verse 27, ‘Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He [Christ] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.’ Then, later, in Verse 31, Luke continues, ‘Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.’
- Later, in Luke 24, the Lord again appears to a group of disciples and ‘opened their minds to understand the Scriptures [Verse 45].’ Just prior to this, the Lord said to the disciples [Verse 44], ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Shortly thereafter, he said [Verses 44, 46-47] ‘Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the



third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’

- Thus it was with Saul. His eyes were opened, like the disciples to ‘see’ Jesus; and his mind was opened to understand the Scriptures, and he proclaimed Christ in the synagogues in Damascus by ‘proving that this Jesus is the Christ’ in accordance with the Old Testament [‘Moses and all the prophets...’].

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- **Verse 23** then states, ‘When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him...’

- This passage should be read in light of **Galatians 1:15-17**:

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

- Therefore, given Paul’s account in Galatians 1, the ‘**many days**’ which elapsed correspond with the three years he was away in Arabia.
  - Some have suggested that Saul’s journey into Arabia [certainly with the Lord] was intended to correspond with the disciples’ three years with the incarnate Christ during His earthly ministry. However, this is certainly speculation.
- Thus, after proclaiming Christ in the synagogues, Saul went away into Arabia for three years [which was near Damascus], and upon returning from Arabia, ‘the Jews plotted together to do away with him.’

- Luke continues, in **Verses 24-25**, saying, ‘but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.’

- Also, in **2 Corinthians 11:32-33**, Paul gives his account of his escape from Damascus: ‘In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.’

- Here, in 2 Corinthians, Paul mentions the Nabatean ethnarch, or ‘governor’, named Aretas. Paul says that the governor ‘was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me...’

- However, in Acts, Paul says that it was the Jews who were looking to seize and kill him.

- It is important to note that Nabatea was a thriving kingdom in Arabia, just east of Damascus. During the time of Paul in the first century, it was ruled by King Aretas IV (9 B.C. – A.D. 40). Furthermore, Nabatea did, at one point have jurisdiction over Damascus.
- Therefore, what is most likely is that Nabatea, and its king Aretas, had some degree of jurisdiction still over Damascus.
- What had most probably happened was that when Saul was in Arabia, he proclaimed the Gospel to the Nabateans, and angered them.
- Thus, **once Saul returned to Damascus, after three years in Arabia, the Nabateans, who had a presence and possibly jurisdiction there, as well as the Jews, were seeking to kill him.**
- Further, given the account in Acts and 2 Corinthians, it appears that the Jews and the Nabateans had a common enemy in Saul and were cooperating together in order to catch him. It appears that the Jews were watching the gates from within the city [the Acts account], while the Nabateans, particularly King Aretas, was watching the gates from outside the city.
- Yet, through God’s providential protection, Saul escaped.
- Luke writes, in **Verse 25**, that ‘his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.’
  - It is worth noting that Saul already has disciple after three years as a believer. These were possibly those who had heard him proclaiming Christ in the synagogues and had believed in the Lord as a result.

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| <b>III. Saul Preaches Christ in Jerusalem...and He is Persecuted</b> |
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- Since Acts 9:1, we have come full circle. Saul had left Jerusalem for Damascus, with extradition orders in hand, in order to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem as Christians. Now, Saul returns to Jerusalem as a follower of the Way himself, after escaping from Damascus.
- As will be clear, the same pattern of events will occur in Jerusalem as occurred in Damascus.
- **Verse 26** reveals that ‘When he [Saul] came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.’
  - Again, this same thing had happened to Saul when he was in Damascus.

- The change from Saul the persecutor of the Way to Saul a follower in the Way was so radical that the other disciples could not believe it.
- But, then, we read of a man, who, like Barnabas, will play a subordinate, yet essential role in the life of Saul – and consequently the life of the Church.
- **Verse 27** states that it was Barnabas who acted as an intermediary and ‘brought him to the apostles and described to them how He had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.’
- After the work of Barnabas, in **Verse 28**, Saul ‘was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.’
  - In other words, because of the work of Barnabas, and most certainly the work of the Holy Spirit, Saul was fully accepted in the circle of the apostles in Jerusalem.
- Then, in **Verse 29**, we find Saul ‘talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death.’
  - This is a fascinating account. The reason is because Saul is arguing with Hellenistic, Greek-speaking Jews.
  - It is very possible that Saul was arguing with these Hellenists in the **same synagogue, the Synagogue of the Freedmen**, where Stephen proclaimed Christ, in Acts 6:8-15.
  - It was this group of Hellenists who led to the arrest, trial, and stoning death of Stephen.
  - Furthermore, Saul was present at that stoning. Now, Saul may be proclaiming Christ at the very synagogue where the chain of events begin.
- Finally, Luke writes, in **Verse 30**, that ‘when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.’
  - That is, when the fellow believers in Jerusalem heard that the Hellenistic Jews were attempting to put Saul to death, they sent him home to Tarsus.
  - Given Saul’s account in Galatians 1, He had been in Jerusalem for fifteen days.

### **Galatians 1:18-19**

Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

- Given Saul’s account in Galatians 1, He had been in Jerusalem for fifteen days.
- After sailing home for Tarsus, Saul remained there for about ten or so years until Barnabas brings him to Antioch [Acts 11].

- This passage concludes, in **Verse 31**, with Luke's words that 'So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, began built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.
  - Acts 1:8 has not only been fulfilled, with respect to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, [in that the Gospel has not only spread throughout these places] but the Church is growing.
  - The church also is enjoying peace. It is worth noting that Luke writes that they were 'going on in the fear of the Lord.' The peace was a result, in large part, of their fear of the Lord and not any man.
  - And the church increased.

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**John 16:20,22** states: "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy... Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."

- In other words, God does not simply replace our weeping and grief with joy, He turns our weeping into joy. In other words, the very object of our weeping becomes the object of our joy. The greatest example of this is the cross of Christ. It was an object of shame and torture prior to the crucifixion of Christ; however, it is now a symbol of God's saving grace.
- In a similar manner, we are to view our suffering, not as a source of despair, but as a source of joy, as we had the privilege to suffer for the sake of Christ because of our association with Him.
- When we are converted, born again, we are transformed. God does not suppress our personality and character, or reduce us to mindless robots. After all, God created us. He created who we are: our personality, our abilities, our desires, our likes and dislikes. Therefore, when we are regenerated, the Lord takes who we are, how He created us, and transforms all of who we are, giving us the ability to glorify God with the totality of our being.
- On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four airplanes and transformed them into objects of death. Objects that were created for safe, quick travel were transformed into objects of terror. However, God, who is rich in mercy, does the opposite. Indeed, only He can do so. He takes all of who we are, and transforms us from enemies of God into children of God who seek the glory of God in all things.
- So it was with Saul, later the Apostle Paul. When God converted him, He [as He does with us today] took all of Saul, who had been the object of weeping for the followers of the Way, and transformed him into an object of God's glory.

### 1.) The Mouth of Saul

- ❑ In Acts 9:1, the mouth of Saul was ‘breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord...’
- ❑ In Acts 9:20, Saul was proclaiming Christ as the Son of God.

### 2.) The Will of Saul

- ❑ In Acts 7:58-9:3, it was the will of Saul to persecute and ‘ravage’ the early Church – the followers of the Way.
- ❑ However, God **changes the will of Saul** so that after his encounter with the exalted Christ on the road to Damascus, Saul’s will is to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.

#### **Philippians 3:3-11:**

‘for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, **that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;** in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.’

### 3.) The Faith of Saul [and his understanding of the Person and Identity of Christ]

- ❑ Prior to his conversion, Saul’s faith rested in his ability to keep the Law.
- ❑ He believed, as a Pharisee, that *literally*, in the Scriptures [that is the physical writings of the Scriptures] was eternal life [John 5:39]. Therefore, if they could memorize them, such a work would bring about eternal life.
- ❑ Further, because of his [improper] interpretation and understanding of the Old Testament, he Saul rejected Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah.
- ❑ Also, he believed Christ was accursed as he was crucified on a tree and ‘he who is hanged is accursed of God’ [Deuteronomy 21:23].
- ❑ Therefore, Saul thought it unthinkable to worship an accursed Galilean.

- ❑ However, after his conversion, and subsequent blindness [a covenantal curse itself], Saul placed his faith, not in himself, and his ability to keep the Law; but Christ, and His fulfillment of the Law.
- ❑ Further, Saul realized that Christ was accursed in his place. Saul, then, did the unthinkable, by the grace of God placed his faith in the crucified, and therefore accursed, Christ.

#### 4.) The Zeal of Saul

- ❑ Prior to his conversion, Saul was a zealous persecutor of the Church.

‘Paul proved an apt pupil [of Gamaliel]. He outstripped many of his fellow students in his enthusiasm for ancestral traditions and in his zeal for the Jewish law. This zeal found a ready outlet in his assault on the infant church of Jerusalem. The church presented a threat to all that Paul held most dear. Its worst offense was its proclamation of one who had suffered a death cursed by the Jewish law as Lord and Messiah (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). The survival of Israel demanded that the followers of Jesus be wiped out.’  
Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary

- ❑ However, after his conversion, God took that zealous nature and transformed it so that Saul became a passionately zealous herald of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### 5.) The Knowledge of Saul

- ❑ Prior to his conversion, Saul used his knowledge [albeit perverted] of the Old Testament to refute and persecute the followers of the Way.
- ❑ However, once God saved him, and his eyes and heart were open, Saul used his knowledge of the Scriptures to ‘prove’ Christ as the Messiah, the Son of the living God [Acts 9:22].

#### 6.) The Persecutions of Saul

- ❑ Prior to his conversion, Saul was the persecutor, intended to inflict mental and physical harm on the followers of the Way.
- ❑ However, following his conversion, Saul becomes the persecuted. However, because of his union with Christ, he realizes that the persecution he faced was a blessing from God, in that he was considered worthy to suffer as Christ did because of his identification with his Lord.
- ❑ As the Apostle Paul states in **Galatians 6:17**: ‘Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.’

**Philippians 1:28-30** states: ‘in no way [be] alarmed by your opponents – which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.’