

Acts 9:1-31: Conversion of Saul (Part 2)

Preparation for Ministry

I. Why is this passage here?

- A. Provides context and background for Paul's apostleship and ministry
- B. True Conversion Produces Fruit
- C. Demonstrates God's Faithfulness to Prepare His Chosen Instruments for Ministry
- D. Demonstrates God's Faithfulness to Build His Church

Acts 9:31: "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."

II. The First Fruits of Saul's Conversion (v. 19a-22)

A. He was with the disciples

1. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers." - 1 John 3:14
2. "One sure mark of a transformed life is the desire to be with fellow Christians."¹

B. Saul proclaimed Christ

1. Immediate - salvation produces a desire and ability to proclaim Christ from Day 1
2. Marks of Saul's Witness²: 1) Christ Centered, 2) Empowered by the Holy Spirit, 3) Courageous, 4) Costly

C. Saul increased in strength

1. Saul was growing in his ability to preach Christ
2. God doesn't stop at saving us, he continues to transform and mature us.

"But Saul was not yet ready for front-line ministry. In fact, the Lord had a long program of preparation in store for him—longer than he or we would have ever imagined. Saul's impressive abilities and background, even combined with a dramatic conversion experience, did not qualify him for ministry. God still had some work to do to get him ready for what lay ahead."³

III. Continued Preparation (v. 23-25)

A. Preparation through waiting

1. "Many days had passed" - likely three years in Arabia (Gal 1:15-20)
2. Time of reflection, communion, receiving revelation, and preparation
3. Time-tested, proof of genuine change
4. "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil." - 1 Timothy 3:6

B. Preparation through difficulties

1. "Jews plotted to put him to death"
 - a) First of many plots to kill Saul.
 - b) His message is not always received.

¹ MacArthur, John. New Testament Commentary: Acts 1-12. pg. 274

² Stott, John. The Message of Acts. pg. 178

³ Hughes, R. Kent. Acts: The Church Afire. pg. 134

2. "...took him by night and let him down through the wall..."
 - a) Paul places this event in the context of the Lord working through "weaknesses" (2 Cor 11:32)
 - b) We can experience discouragement when our efforts seem thwarted. However, it can also lead us to a deeper dependence on God.

*"God does everything possible to do away with the energy of our human flesh in order to teach us that without him we can do nothing."*⁴

IV. Saul's Reception and Rejection (v. 26-30)

A. Received by his new brothers

1. Saul had a right desire to commune and connect with other disciples. But was met with some resistance.
2. Required patience and time for him to build trust.
3. God used the "son of encouragement" to bridge the gap.

*"It is not only that converts must join the Christian community, but that the Christian community must welcome converts...There is an urgent need for modern Ananiases and Barnabases who overcome their scruples and hesitations, and take the initiative to befriend newcomers."*⁵

B. Rejected by his former brothers.

1. Saul was boldly proclaiming Christ to his former "brothers", but he was rejected.
2. "...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." - 1 Cor 1:23-24
3. "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you...A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." - John 15:18,20

V. God's Faithfulness to Build His Church (v. 31)

A. The Church has expanded to Judea, Galilee, and Samaria

B. The Church experienced peace

1. In one sense there was a respite from persecutions
2. But we can also have peace in the midst of persecutions (Phil 4:7, Col 3:12-17)

C. Luke provides two reasons for the increase:

1. Walking in the Fear of the Lord (Prov 9:10, 14:27)
2. Walking in the Comfort of the Holy Spirit (John 15:26, Eph 3:16, Rom 8:16)

VI. Key Take Aways

A. Fruits of Conversion: 1) Communion with Christians, 2) Proclaim Christ, 3) Growing and Maturing.

B. God prepares us for His service through: 1) seasons of waiting, 2) trials and difficulties, 3) other believers.

C. May we be a church that fears the Lord and is comforted by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Hughes, R. Kent. *Acts: The Church Afire*. pg. 140

⁵ Stott, John. *The Message of Acts*. p. 178