

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

The Hunter Becomes the Hunted

Acts 9:19b–31

Let's turn together to **Acts 9**. Before we talk about the amazing transformation of a man named Saul in the first century, let me tell you about the transformation of another man named Junker George.¹ Junker George was an alias for a famous sixteenth century dissident monk in Germany, who dared to differ with the Catholic church. His transformation was remarkable, because at one time this monk was the most devout and scrupulous monk in all of Germany. He memorized Scripture. He confessed his sins continually. He battled the devil. And yet his conscience was tortured by the notion that he hadn't done enough to atone for his sins.

All of that changed when he read the Apostle Paul and he realized that Christ had done something for him that he couldn't do for himself. And he became a tireless advocate for *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *solus Christus*. He was also committed to *sola Scriptura*, so much so that he began translating the Scriptures into the vulgar language of German. And as part of that, he became a tireless critic of the Catholic church, especially because of its unbiblical practice of selling indulgences. His criticism became so acute, that he was put on trial for his life and barely escaped certain death.

So Junker George (better known as Martin Luther) secretly moved his operation to Wartburg Castle.² He grew out his hair and his beard. He stopped looking like a monk. And he took on the pseudonymous code-name Junker George, which roughly translated means Knight George. And he worked on the translation of the Bible into German for the German people.³

How does a man go from scrupulous but unsaved, German monk to a saved and convictional protestant Christian, the first of many protestants to come? Very simply, it happens through the power of transformation.

Speaking of transformation, let's look now at this man named Saul in **Acts 9**. Because before the Apostle Paul was writing the book of **Romans** and influencing the likes of Junker George, he had his own transformation experience. He goes from hunter to hunted in this chapter.

Saul in **Acts 9**, as we've seen already, was a broken man. At the beginning of **chapter 9**, he was breathing out threats and murder against the church. Saul was full of rage, and he went after Christ-followers like a wild animal. But God met with him on the road to Damascus. **God broke him like a wild stallion**. And during a three day period of blindness, God delivered to Saul spiritual sight. And when fearful, faithful Ananias came, Saul was healed, saved, baptized, and filled with the Holy Spirit. It was a radical conversion. Saul would never be the same after that Damascus-road experience.

Saul went from a furious, uncompromising, persecutor of Christ and his church, to a broken, submitted, faithful follower of Christ. And all of this happened in about a three day period. That's how quick this transformation was.

¹ The German "Junker" is the equivalent to the English "Knight." It's derived from the two German words *jung* ("young") and *Herr* ("sir"). To be consistent we should probably refer to him as "Knight George" or "Junker Jörg."

² Technically he was kidnapped and deposited there. But his stay in Wartberg Castle was mostly voluntary. Until eventually it wasn't, and he returned to Wittenberg, taking his life in his hands.

³ See the biography on Luther by Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (Viking, 2017). Also see Herman Selderhuis, *Martin Luther: A Spiritual Biography* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017). A great overview of Luther's life and ministry is also given by John Piper in his biographical message, "Martin Luther: Lessons from His Life and Labor," 1996 Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, 01-30-96: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/martin-luther-lessons-from-his-life-and-labor>.

As further evidence of this radical transformation, look at **verse 18**.

¹⁸ And immediately [immediately after Ananias laid hands on him] something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days⁴ [Saul] was with the disciples at Damascus.⁵

So Saul gets converted. He gets saved and baptized and filled with the Spirit. Conceivably Ananias was the one who baptized Saul. And maybe he even spent some time with Saul in Damascus discipling him. And now, according to **verse 19**, Saul is friends with the very people whom he came to Damascus to arrest and drag back to Jerusalem. Foe has become friend for this guy, Saul.⁶ He has become that which he hated just a few days earlier.⁷

By the way, we never hear another word about this guy, Ananias, in the NT. He's one of those guys who faithfully follows the Lord. His fame and his influence is nothing in comparison to Saul, but God used him mightily in this new convert's life.

Most of us, by the way, are just Ananiases in this world. "Here I am, Lord." We are unknown, anonymous, faithful servants of Christ lost to obscurity and lost to history. And yet, God may use you to minister to a Saul or a Peter or a Martin Luther. And if that's the case...if someone you disciple goes on to make 100 times the impact on this world that you do, praise God and celebrate that. Most of us are just Ananiases in this world!

Now watch what happens with Saul during his time in Damascus. **He starts preaching the name of Jesus like he was shot out of a cannon.**

²⁰ And immediately

Not after ten years of study! Not after he was discipled for a few years! No, Luke says, "immediately."

²⁰ And immediately [Saul] proclaimed⁸ Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."⁹

This is a radical departure from what Saul believed just a few days before this. This was blasphemy to Saul when he was arresting Christians in Jerusalem. But now, it's not blasphemy, because he knows it's true. It would be blasphemous if it wasn't true. But it is true! Jesus *is* the Son of God.¹⁰

⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 452: "The phrase 'several days' (ἡμέρας τινάς) [ESV: 'som days'] is vague. According to Gal 1:17, Saul went to Arabia, the Nabatean kingdom located south of Syria, ruled at the time by king Aretas IV, extending from the Hauran Mountains in the north to the regions east and west of the Gulf of Aqaba. The Jewish people regarded the Nabateans (who occupied the regions of Moab and Edom) as descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham, and thus as kindred tribes. The Nabateans would thus be a natural first 'step' for the newly commissioned envoy sent by Jesus to the Gentiles.... since the escape from Damascus in 2 Cor 11:32–33 corresponds to Acts 9:23–25, the 'several days' in v. 19e may refer to the time that Saul stayed in Damascus before he embarked on his first missionary project in the towns of Arabia/Nabatea. He may have used the church in Damascus as his base to which he returned periodically (cf. Gal 1:17: 'I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus'). The phrase 'after considerable time had passed' in v. 23 refers to the three years that Saul mentions as the interval between his conversion and stay in Damascus and his return to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18)."

⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 451n2124: "Verse 19c is usually regarded as the beginning of a new section; the Greek text does not require this; the new section could begin with 9:20; on the other hand, no section in Acts or in the Gospels begins with the introductory phrase καὶ εὐθέως (v. 20)."

⁶ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 216: "Saul was now the guest of those whom he had come to persecute... The persecutor became the proclaimer. His topic was Yeshua, and the content of his proclamation was *that he is the Son of God*."

⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 451: "Saul joined the 'disciples' (μαθηταί, see on 5:11) in Damascus whom he had wanted to arrest and take to Jerusalem for interrogation and punishment (vv. 1, 2)."

⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 365: "What Saul's sermon was like is suggested by his sermon on a later occasion in Acts 13:16–41."

⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 238–9: "It is noteworthy that Luke described Paul as preaching Christ as 'Son of God.' This is the only occurrence of the title in all of Acts, and yet for Paul it was a central concept." Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 453: "The title 'the Son of God' (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) here is not simply synonymous with the title 'Messiah' (ὁ χριστός; v. 22) but expresses 'Jesus' unique standing and intimate favor with God, and God's direct involvement in Jesus' redemptive work.' The imperfect tense of the verb 'proclaimed' emphasizes that Paul's preaching in the synagogues was going on for some time."

¹⁰ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 300: "The Old Testament saw the ideal king of the future, the Messiah of David's line, as the Son of God (Ps. 2:7)."

Paul tells us in the book of **Galatians** that he spent three years in the vicinity of Damascus preaching the gospel.¹¹ He even traveled as far as Arabia during this three year period, preaching that Jesus is the Son of God.¹² So, he didn't sit on his hands. He didn't wait for apostolic approval of his ministry.¹³ He didn't even wait for his spiritual maturity to reach a certain level before he got to work proclaiming the name of Jesus.

That word in **verse 20** is as important as it is striking—"immediately" (εὐθέως).¹⁴ It's like Saul couldn't contain this good news about Jesus. Now that he knows the truth, he's got to get the message out to the world. And so "immediately" he starts proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues.

Look at **verse 21**.

²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not¹⁵ this the man who made havoc¹⁶ in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"¹⁷

This wasn't just some run-of-the-mill conversion story. This was **"I was lost, but now I'm found."** This was **"I was blind, but now I see."** This was **"I was going 100mph in the wrong direction, killing Christians and breathing out threats against Christ and his church. But then, wham! Christ got a hold of my life, and now I'm going 100mph in Christ's direction, building up the church and telling people about Jesus. And people were amazed by this."**

And I don't know who this refers to. Who was amazed? Who was saying, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem?" Luke says, "all who heard were amazed." So, is that a reference to Jews or Christians in Damascus? Maybe both? Maybe neither? Maybe it was unbelieving Gentiles? Probably it was all of those.

The Jews were like, **"Wait a second! We brought you up here from Jerusalem to get rid of these Christ-followers. But now you're up here preaching Christ instead!"** They were amazed. And the Christians were like, **"I thought this guy was here to arrest us. I thought this was the guy who terrorized men and women and children in Jerusalem. But he's out there preaching Christ instead!"** They were amazed. And the other people in Damascus (the non-Jews and non-Christians) were like, **"I don't know what's going on here."** And they were amazed too.

And this is understandable. The force of Saul's personality and his reputation were so strong, there was no way that he could just continue inconspicuously in Damascus. People were starting to notice his ministry. **Imagine if some terrorist in our day, like a leader of Hamas, got saved and started preaching the gospel. Or imagine if some famous Atheist in America, some well-published scientist who was always attacking Christianity, got saved and started preaching the gospel. If that happened, all of us would be in shock. "Is this really happening?" That's pretty close to what we have here with Saul's conversion.**

And look what Saul starts to do in **verse 22**.

¹¹ BEDE: "Therefore Luke seems to have disregarded Arabia because he [Paul] preached very little there, as he himself said later, when he was speaking to King Agrippa, 'I preached first to the people of Damascus and Jerusalem, and in every region of Judea, and to the Gentiles.'" Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 112.

¹² Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 217: "Arabia (not to be confused with today's Arabian Peninsula) was then Nabataea, the region just beyond Damascus. At times, Damascus was its principal city."

¹³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 239: "Paul gave another picture of his experience following his conversion in Damascus. He stated in Gal 1:15-17 that he did not consult anyone or go to the apostles in Jerusalem, but rather he went off for a period in Arabia before returning to Damascus. "Consult any man" does not rule out Paul's interaction with the Damascene Christians or the Jewish synagogue. The "consulting" to which Paul alluded was the idea that he received his apostleship and his apostolic credentials from the apostles in Jerusalem."

¹⁴ This word is cognate to Mark's favorite word in his gospel, εὐθύς (*euthys*) meaning "immediately."

¹⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 365: "The negative interrogative οὐχ (*ouch*) means that the question expects a positive reply."

¹⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 365: "Saul is described as one who was pillaging (ὁ πορθήσας, *ho porthēsas*) believers or seeking their complete destruction... The Greek term appears only here and in Gal. 1:13, 23. Paul uses it in Galatians to describe his own persecution of the church. In the LXX it is used of Antiochus against Jerusalem and of the murderers of Jewish martyrs (4 Macc. 4:23; 11:4)."

¹⁷ Sproul, *Acts*, 170-1: "[Saul] hadn't come as a one-man vigilante against Christians; he had come with the full authorization of the high priest... However, something happened between the beginning of that mission and his arrival in Damascus: he met *the* High Priest. He met the eternal High Priest, who will never retire or abdicate His office by dying as all the lines of high priests in Israel had, one after another. Their term was limited, but *the* High Priest changed the orders, gave a new commission, overruled the high priest in Jerusalem, and gave Paul a whole new mission, which he began to carry out immediately."

²² But Saul increased all the more in strength [literally Saul “was empowered”],¹⁸ and confounded the Jews¹⁹ who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.²⁰

The word “proving” there in verse 22 means literally to “unite” or “to bring together into a unit.” F.F. Bruce, in his commentary on Acts, believes that this word indicates that Saul was uniting or bringing together the OT prophecies concerning the Messiah with Jesus who was crucified and rose from the dead.²¹ And in doing this, Saul confounded or befuddled the Jews in Damascus.

Go ahead and write this down as the first point from the message today. We see with Saul here in Acts 9 a radical transformation. And...

1) Jesus’s followers experience **transformation** (9:19b–22)

Now I realize what we see here with Saul is extreme. This was not your garden-variety conversion story. **This is “Osama Bin Laden got saved, and now he’s preaching Christ.”** But what we see here in the extreme with this guy, Saul, is true to a lesser extent of every Christian convert. **Christian conversion is transformation.**²² **The word conversion intimates as much. You change, you convert, you transform into something else.**²³ C.S. Lewis called himself “the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”²⁴ **But he was still a “convert.”**

This is true spiritually, as the Holy Spirit indwells you and you become a new creation in Christ Jesus. But that’s true empirically too as you start to do things you didn’t do before. Your talk changes. Your heart changes. Your passions change. You start to have friends and relationships that you didn’t have before. Your relationships with unbelievers becomes different than before.

In Saul’s case, his friends become foes, and his foes become friends. And instead of putting people in jail for their commitment to Christ, he starts confounding the Jews. And he starts proving, to the people whom he used to agree with, that Jesus was the Christ. That happened to Saul! **And in your case, conversion is going to mean a change in your friendships. It’s going to mean a change in your lifestyle. And it’s going to mean a change in your commitments, your passions, and your relationships. Stasis is not possible. God’s people change.**

And look at what happens as Saul starts to preach the gospel. Verse 22 says he was empowered. He grew in strength. The pattern that we see here is that as Saul shares his faith with others, and the Holy Spirit empowers him, he grows in influence and effectiveness. So let me say it this way—Saul’s spiritual vitality, Saul’s empowerment as a Christian, accelerates as he shares his faith. He doesn’t grow spiritually so he can share his faith better. He shares his faith so that he can grow spiritually. Are you catching my drift? **Don’t**

¹⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 453: “The verb translated as ‘grew stronger’ (ἐνεδυναμοῦτο) may refer to Saul regaining his physical strength after his traumatic conversion and the three days of fasting (cf. v. 19); most interpreters and many translators follow a manuscript of the fifth century which adds after ‘grew stronger’ the phrase ‘in the word’ thus relating Saul’s increasing strength to his preaching. The expression could refer to both Saul’s physical recovery and to his increasing confidence and ability of proclaiming Jesus as Messiah.”

¹⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 366: “‘The Jews’ (Ἰουδαίους, *Ioudaious*) as a group separate from Christians appear here for the first time in Acts.”

²⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 454: “Paul knows quite well, as he later writes to the believers in Corinth, that faith in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and Savior who has been crucified and raised from the dead is not the result of logical argumentation or rhetorical brilliance (1 Cor 1:18–2:5). For Jews, the center of the Christian message is a stumbling block (σκάνδαλον), and for pagans it is nonsense (μωρία)... This does not mean, however, that Paul does not argue. It means that he does not rely on his rhetorical and argumentative capabilities but on the power of God and his Spirit to move Jews and Gentiles from unbelief to faith. Saul is ‘effective’ not because of his persuasive argumentation or brilliant rhetoric, but because of the reality of the power of God present in the proclamation of the gospel.”

²¹ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*. NICNT, 191n50.

²² Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 302: “The English word ‘conversion’ comes from the Latin *convertere*, meaning ‘to turn around.’”

²³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 459–60: “*Conversion is a change from enemy to servant*. While not many Christian converts resemble Saul in that they persecuted followers of Jesus before their conversion, all human beings, prior to coming to faith in Jesus, are God’s enemies exposed to and threatened by God’s wrath and judgment (Rom 1:18–3:20). It is always true that ‘while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son’ (Rom 5:10).”

²⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955), 228–29. Quoted in Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 302.

pursue spiritual growth, so that you can share your faith. Share your faith so that you can accelerate spiritual growth! That's the paradigm we see here.

Now, as you know, Saul had an incredible background as an OT scholar. He was trained under the great teacher, Gamaliel, as a Pharisee. He knew his OT inside and out, and so he was uniquely gifted and equipped by God as a first-century apologist. And some of you might say, **"Yeah, that's why Saul was so effective as an evangelist. He knew the OT. He was a genius. And I could never do what Saul did."**

Well, yes, Saul knew his culture. And he knew the Scriptures.²⁵ And he knew how to argue with people like himself, other Jews (and Gentiles too) in the first century. **But don't sell yourself short in that. You know twenty-first century American culture in ways that Saul never would. Some of you remember what it's like to be separated from Christ and in need of a Savior. So capitalize on that, and use your knowledge of our world today to build a bridge with people to the gospel.**

Here's something that I think is applicational for us in this passage. Saul went to work immediately preaching the gospel. He didn't wait around for spiritual maturity to germinate. He didn't wait around for the apostles to authenticate his gospel witness. The Bible says "immediately" he started sharing his faith with others. And you can do that too as a new believer. It's not the same as being an elder in the church.²⁶ You don't need a seminary degree to share the name of Christ with lost people. You don't need to be an elder or a deacon or a leader in the church to do that. You can do that immediately after conversion.²⁷

Go ahead and write this down as the second point from the message today. Jesus's followers experience transformation. But also,

2) Jesus's followers suffer **opposition** (9:23–25)

Saul's foes become friends. That's great! But now we'll see that his friends become foes. And that's not just a first-century phenomenon. **Why did the Catholic church want to kill Junker George? He was a monk. He was part of the church for years. Well, his commitment to the gospel and to the Scriptures had changed the equation of his relationships with others.**

So, look at **verse 23.**

²³ *When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill [Saul],*

So, not only were they arguing with him, but they were also plotting against him. The irony of this is so pronounced here. Saul came into Damascus to persecute Christians. Instead he met Christ and became a Christian. Instead of persecuting Christ and the church, Saul began preaching Christ. And the persecutor becomes the persecuted as the Jews are now plotting to kill Saul.²⁸ The hunter becomes the hunted.

By the way, just an applicational aside for a moment. If you preach Christ boldly... if you plead with people to convert... if you proselytize, you will encounter opposition. Just get ready for it. That has been true for twenty centuries.

People may not threaten to kill you in this country. They may not plot to kill you like they did with Saul. But opposition is part of the process of evangelization. It's part of the gig as a Christian. Get used to it.

Look at **verse 24.**

²⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 452: "Since Saul arrested followers of Jesus and as he was presumably involved in their interrogations, he would have witnessed not only the courageous commitment of the believers to these convictions, but learned more details about Jesus' life and teaching. And as a trained Torah expert who had probably memorized the Scriptures, he quickly would have linked relevant passages in Scripture with Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, and he would soon have been able to formulate the implications and consequences of Jesus' identity—who spoke to him from the light of God's glorious reality."

²⁶ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 300: "Later he wrote that new converts should not be leaders in the church (1 Tim. 3:6), but the fact that he preached did not mean he was a leader."

²⁷ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 307: "For Saul conversion and commission went together. We must teach converts about Christian service and get them active the moment they come to Christ."

²⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 239: "One could even say that his zeal as a Christian was even stronger than his former zeal as persecutor."

²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, ²⁵ but his²⁹ disciples took him by night

Notice that statement in **verse 25**, “his disciples.”³⁰ Do you see that? Saul’s disciples “took him by night.” Saul had already by this time started to disciple people. And he had his own cohort of disciples.³¹

Like I told you already, **Galatians** tells us that there was approximately a three-year period where Saul was in and out of Damascus. He was probably going back and forth to Arabia at this time. And he was effective enough as an evangelist and a leader that he had started to disciple people. **Verse 23** says, “after many days have passed.” So this is some three years after his conversion, and Saul had been busy.³²

And now his disciples come up with a plan to save his life. And you might think, “**Maybe these guys plotting against Saul are just going to kill him in Damascus! They’re going to do with him like they did to Stephen in Jerusalem.**” Yeah, if only Saul had gotten off that easily. Jesus told Ananias in the previous passage, “I will show him [Saul] how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (**9:16**).

I know this might sound a little morbid, but in many ways Stephen got off easily. Saul would have to face a lifetime of suffering, whereas Stephen had a few moments of agony and then he went home to glory. Saul’s suffering would follow him from Damascus to Jerusalem to Tarsus to all the places that he travelled throughout his lifetime.

So no, Saul doesn’t die in Damascus. He’s got a lot of suffering to come in the pages to follow. And this is just the first of many brushes with death that Saul has throughout his life.

²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall,

Damascus had really high walls. And of course, Saul’s enemies are watching the gates of the city. So the disciples had to get creative to help Saul escape.³³ So they...

took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.³⁴

Paul recounts this story about the basket in Damascus in **2 Corinthians**. Paul says, “At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands” (**2 Cor 11:32–33**).³⁵

King Aretas, by the way, was the Gentile ruler over the province that encapsulated Damascus.³⁶ And so not only were the Jews after Saul, but the Gentiles were after him too. Probably Saul’s preaching had been so effective and had gotten so much traction in the area that people were starting to get nervous. And so Jews and Gentiles both went after him together, not unlike how the Jews and the Gentiles together worked in Jerusalem to

²⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 367: “The reading “his disciples” (i.e., Saul’s disciples) is the more difficult reading and is likely original, as disciples are usually tied to Jesus. Luke is making a point here: Saul’s ministry is effective. This is the reading of P^{74} , x , A, B, C, and 81^e . Given the normal usage, the deletion of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ (*autou*, his) was natural, resulting in “the disciples.”

³⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 218: “The fact that Saul had disciples shows that his preaching had borne fruit.”

³¹ BEDE disagrees. He writes, “That is, Christ’s disciples, for in the Greek the ‘his’ is not stated, but only ‘disciples,’ so that we may understand it in general, as the disciples of Christ or of the church. For we do not read of Paul as having yet made disciples but only of having confounded the Jews who were living in Damascus.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 110.

³² Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 300: “Arabia was ruled by the Nabateans at the time, and Damascus may have been either part of it or bordering it... both the Jews and the Arabs were now after him! Perhaps this governor wanted to arrest him since he had done something in Arabia that he did not like—such as preaching!”

³³ Keener, *IVPBCNT*, Ac 9:25: “Houses were sometimes built into city walls; Saul’s escape method has biblical precedent (Josh 2:15; 1 Sam 19:12).”

³⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 366: “The term for “basket” ($\sigma\pi\upsilon\tau\iota\varsigma$, *spyris*) describes a container often used to collect excess food, such as at the feeding of the multitudes (Matt. 15:37; 16:10; Mark 8:8, 20; Acts 9:24–25). It is like a hamper basket.”

³⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 241–2: “Paul also referred to this event in 2 Cor 11:32–33. Although there are differences between the two accounts, the correspondences are remarkable: the setting in Damascus, the plot against Paul, the watching of the gates, the window in the wall, the lowering in a basket. The most significant difference is that in 2 Corinthians the Nabatean *ethnarch* (‘governor’) is described as watching the gates for Paul, while in Acts it was the Jews who did so... The Nabateans perhaps held some jurisdiction over Damascus at this time, in which case the Jews would have enlisted the authorities in their attempt to apprehend Paul.”

³⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 364: “The overlap of distinct details gives us some chronological pegs for Paul’s ministry. Since Aretas died in AD 39, the beginning of Paul’s ministry falls before this date. In addition, Aretas came to full power in the region after Tiberius died, sometime in AD 37, but he may well have had some significant influence before then. So an AD 36–39 time frame fits for 9:1–26.”

crucify Jesus.³⁷ But in this case, under the rubric of God's sovereignty, Saul escaped. And he escaped somewhat embarrassingly in a basket.³⁸

By the way, this wasn't like a little easter egg basket that your kids used to collect easter eggs. This was a large basket that was used to contain bread or other foodstuffs. And I hope the irony of this isn't lost on you. Saul came with an entourage from Jerusalem to conquer and destroy the church in Damascus. But instead he was led into the city by others because he was struck blind and dumbfounded by Jesus. And now he's leaving Damascus humiliatingly in a basket because people are trying to kill him.

Let me just reiterate what I said earlier. Jesus's followers will experience opposition. It might not be as extreme as Saul in Acts 9, but it'll be noticeable.³⁹ Jesus promised as much. If you preach Christ boldly... if you proselytize... you will encounter opposition. Even in countries like our own where proselytizing is legal, you will face opposition if you say "Jesus Christ is the Son of God. There is no way to be saved apart from him. Repent! Repent and believe in Christ and your sins will be forgiven."

Here's some encouragement for us in that. Yes, as Christians, we experience opposition. But the good news in that is this...

3) Jesus's followers are never **alone** (9:26–30)

Yes, friends become foes. But also foes become friends.⁴⁰ Saul the hunter becomes Saul the hunted. But he's not a lone wolf. Jesus has given us this thing called the church that helps us in the midst of opposition. And we're never alone, because obviously God gives us his Spirit. Jesus himself said, "I am with you always to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). And God promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb 13:5; see also Deut 31:6). So, that's a comfort to us. But in addition to that, Jesus gives us his church. **And the church is a gift to those who follow Christ and forsake the world.**

Now here's the thing. Saul built a rapport with the Christians in Damascus. But the Christians in Jerusalem aren't aware of the transformation that he's experienced. And so, part of the suffering that Saul experienced early in his ministry was the skepticism of his fellow brothers in Jerusalem.

I'm sure Saul didn't expect a warm welcome from the Jews in Jerusalem when he returned. But he probably wasn't expecting a coldshoulder from his "brothers" in the church.⁴¹ Here's what I mean. Look at verse 26.⁴²

²⁶ And when [Saul] had come to Jerusalem

Remember now, this is three years later according to Galatians 1:18. Three years after Saul's conversion, he returns to Jerusalem. But he's not returning with chained Christians in tow ready to be thrown into prison. No, Saul is a Christian himself who has led people to Christ. He's a persecuted member of the church now, not the persecutor.⁴³

³⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 454: "The apostle's comment in 2 Cor 11:32 suggests that the Jews of Damascus evidently had the support of the ethnarch of the Nabatean King Aretas, whose agents were supposed to make the arrest."

³⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 242: "Paul saw the incident as particularly humiliating, listing it as the crowning event of his trials as an apostle (2 Cor 11:23–33)."

³⁹ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 304: "While Saul encountered more sufferings than many other obedient Christians, we must remember that suffering for Christ is a normal part of Christianity and it should come into standard introductions to Christianity for new believers."

⁴⁰ MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 274: "His hated enemies became his friends, while his former friends instantly became his enemies."

⁴¹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 16, Kindle: "This was perfectly understandable, but it must have been crushing for Saul. A glorious conversion and three years of preparation, then ministerial frustration, and now, even worse, rejection by the mother church."

⁴² Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 301: "It must have been an emotionally stirring time for Saul as he returned to the city he loved, where he had grown up, and where he had been such an eminent success. He could assume his former associates would shun him. But how difficult it must have been for him to find that when he tried to join the disciples, "they were all afraid of him" (v. 26)."

⁴³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 455: "Three years after Saul had left Jerusalem and traveled to Damascus to arrest the followers of Jesus (cf. v. 19; Gal 1:18), he returns—not only a believer in Jesus himself but as a witness who has encountered Jesus and who has been commissioned to proclaim the good news of Jesus among Jews and Gentiles."

²⁶ And when [Saul] had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join⁴⁴ the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

“Yeah, I remember you, Saul. You’re that guy who put Christians in prison! Both men and women! You’re that guy who stood by approvingly as they crushed Stephen’s skull with rocks. You’re that guy who was breathing out threats against us. I remember you. And I’m not so sure that you’re not trying to infiltrate our ranks from the inside, by pretending to be a Christian yourself.”⁴⁵ Actually, wouldn’t that be the best way to infiltrate this movement?⁴⁶ Through espionage?⁴⁷ Maybe Saul’s a spy!⁴⁸

Now before you get too judgy against these disciples in Jerusalem, just consider for a moment how you would react. What if Saul was personally responsible for putting your family in prison? What if you were good friends with Stephen, and Saul was one of the people that was responsible for his death?⁴⁹ Wouldn’t you be a little skeptical? Wouldn’t you be a little dubious of this guy’s credentials as a Christian?⁵⁰

What about if someone from your past came to this church and got saved? What if it was someone who did you harm? What if it was your ex-wife or ex-husband? What if it was a coworker or boss who had wronged you in the past? What if it was a prominent atheist who all of a sudden had his own Damascus-road experience? How would you respond to that?

Yes, maybe there are reasons, at times, to test the genuineness of a person’s conversion.⁵¹ But there is also a danger of us being unwilling to embrace the power of God to transform even the worst of sinners. Jesus’s parables teach us about the danger of excessive skepticism when it comes to radical life-change. Let’s not be like the older brother in Jesus’s parable of the prodigal son.

Well, watch this. While the rest of the disciples in Jerusalem were skeptical of Saul, one man had his back. One man, who has already displayed great Christian character and generosity, is going to take Saul under his wing and vouch for him.

Look at **verse 27**.

²⁷ But Barnabas

Do you remember Barnabas from **Acts 4**? His Hebrew name was Joseph but the apostles called him “Barnabas” which means “son of encouragement.” Barnabas sold one of his fields and gave the proceeds to the church. He was an example of great, godly generosity.

⁴⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 456n2148: “The verb κολλάω denotes ‘to be closely associated, cling to, attach to,’ here specifically ‘join oneself to, join, associate with’ (BDAG, s.v. κολλάω 2b); the passive voice of the verb is mostly used in an active sense.”

⁴⁵ MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 277: “Saul must have seemed to them to be the quintessential wolf in sheep’s clothing, now trying to destroy from within what he had previously tried to destroy from without.”

⁴⁶ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 307: “Was Saul a spy? His fiery enthusiasm and outspoken boldness would have provoked negative reactions in some of the more sober elders. Who is this young upstart, who goes to extremes in everything he does? He must be an unbalanced individual, for once he was violently opposing Christianity and now he is vigorously defending it. Yet Barnabas stuck his neck out to support Saul.”

⁴⁷ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT, 193: “The role of *agent provocateur* was as familiar in antiquity as in more recent times.”

⁴⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 369: “In Jerusalem, Saul’s conversion meets with skepticism when he tries to join the disciples. It is not clear whether the report about Saul has not made it back to Jerusalem or whether once the report is received it is viewed with skepticism, especially if this Jerusalem visit is delayed by several years. Should not the real, converted Saul be expected to have come back immediately? Thus the delay, instead of being a problem historically, may well have created an uncertain climate in an already tense atmosphere of persecution.”

⁴⁹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 219: “Some had lost relatives because of Saul. They had heard of his conversion, but they had a hard time believing that he was a true disciple. Perhaps they thought Saul was really “a plant” by the Sanhedrin.”

⁵⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 456: “Since presumably many of the Jerusalem believers had been personally arrested, imprisoned, and interrogated by Saul in the dangerous persecution in which Saul was actively involved (8:1, 3), their suspicions are understandable.”

⁵¹ See the example of “Big Jim Harrington” in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 16. Harrington was a celebrity Christian preacher, who had previously been part of the Bonnie and Clyde gang. Harrington turned out to be a total fraud.

But not only was he generous with his money, he was also generous with compassion towards this guy Saul. When other people were fearfully repudiating Saul, Barnabas took Saul under his wing. He was like, **“No he’s with us. He’s a brother in Christ.”**⁵²

²⁷ But Barnabas took [Saul]

The Greek word “took” here means “to take hold of” or “to grasp” or “to catch.” It’s as if Barnabas took hold of Saul and said, **“No, no, no! He’s with me. He’s one of us.” “Whatever reputation I have as a disciple of Jesus Christ... as a respected member of this church... I am willing to risk it on this guy.”**

Isn’t that fantastic? My prayer for this church is **“God, give us more Barnabases in our church!”**

²⁷ But Barnabas [caught Saul] and brought him to the apostles⁵³ and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly⁵⁴ in the name of Jesus.

Barnabas becomes Saul’s advocate, even before the apostles. **“You can trust this guy,”** Barnabas says.⁵⁵ **“This guy met with our Lord. This guy has been preaching lights-out in Damascus for three years. Let’s welcome him as a brother, as a fellow disciple of Jesus Christ.”**⁵⁶

One of the things that I’d really like to cultivate here at VBVF is a “son of encouragement” mentality. I think we have a fair amount of that already. So this isn’t a rebuke or anything like that. I just want to reinforce a cultural value that we have here. I don’t want anyone who ever steps into this service on Sunday morning to feel unwanted or unwelcomed in our fellowship. Even if they are tattooed from head to toe. Even if they have more body piercings than you have buttons on your nicely ironed Sunday shirt. Even if they reek of alcohol and cigarettes. I can only imagine how intimidating it must be to step into a worship service like this for the first time.

And for a visitor who isn’t accustomed to singing praise songs like we do... or who isn’t used to opening up a Bible and studying a passage... or who has never taken communion in a church... the last thing that I want them to sense from us is an attitude of disapproval or judgy-ness. Everyone with me?

I know I’m preaching to the choir, here. Some in this room have shown so much hospitality and brotherly kindness to visitors. You are the epitome of a “son of encouragement” or a “daughter of encouragement.” Keep that up.

And for the rest of us, let me just say, “Let’s go be a Barnabas for someone else in this fellowship.” Go welcome a new visitor. Go get to know someone new in our fellowship. Don’t run to the people in your small group after the service. Don’t just gather around your best friends and your own demographical cohort. You can catch up with them later. Go be a Barnabas to someone else in our fellowship.

Not only was Saul affirmed by Barnabas and his testimony, he was also affirmed by his actions. They knew Saul wasn’t a spy when he started preaching boldly in the name of Jesus.

Look at **verse 28**.

⁵² RUDOLF GWALTHER: “Barnabas is to be examined, who because of his generosity relieved the needy of the whole church and therefore was called ‘the son of encouragement,’ so now by his testimony he maintains Paul’s good name while he is in danger and is not ashamed of him who he knew everybody suspected. This deed of charity is singular and very necessary, because there is scarcely anything among people more common than sinister and wrong suspicion.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 127.

⁵³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 456: “The definite article in the formulation ‘to the apostles’ (πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους) should not be pressed to mean that all twelve apostles were present in Jerusalem at this time and met Saul in a meeting arranged by Barnabas. According to Gal 1:18–19, Saul saw only Peter and James during this period; the other ten apostles were evidently involved in missionary work elsewhere during Saul’s brief stay in the city.”

⁵⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 370: “The verb used for Saul’s preaching is *παρρησιάζομαι* (*parrēsiazomai*, speak freely, openly, or fearlessly... Acts uses this verb often (18:26; 19:8; 13:46; 26:26; 14:3).”

⁵⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 243n45: “The Greek is ambiguous. The subject of ‘he told’ [ESV: ‘declared’] is unclear and could be Paul rather than Barnabas. The name ‘Saul’ (NIV) does not occur in the reference to the testimony. The Greek has simply ‘how he on his journey had seen’ and so could be Paul’s own testimony.” Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 369: “There is debate about the subject of the verb here, but that Barnabas speaks up for Saul is the most natural way to read the passage.”

⁵⁶ Barnabas was admirable in so many ways in the NT. But as always with NT Christians, he had feet of clay. Paul makes this clear in Galatians 2:13, “And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with [Peter], so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.”

²⁸ So [Saul] went in and out among them at Jerusalem,⁵⁷ preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.⁵⁸

It's like Damascus all over again. **"Saul, what's wrong with you? You almost got killed in Damascus doing that stuff."** He doesn't care. He's got to tell people about Jesus.

²⁹ And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists.

By the way, Hellenist doesn't mean hellion. We're not talking about people who were sent from the gates of hell to do the devil's bidding. A Hellenist was a Greek-speaking person. The ancient Greek word for "Greece" was *Hellas* (Ἑλλάς). And in the ancient world they would often speak of Hellenizing, which meant the assimilation of Greek culture and society throughout the world.

A Hellenist, in this context, refers to a Greek-speaking Jew. There were a lot of those in Jerusalem, as we've seen already. And that's why they appointed Stephen and Philip to pass out benevolence to the Greek-speaking widows within the church.

And if you remember, Stephen was preaching the gospel to a group of Hellenist Jews when they stirred up the Sanhedrin to execute him. Saul was part of that group. And now—talk about transformation—Saul is the one preaching and disputing with them. This was his former posse. These were his former accomplices in the stoning of Stephen. And now Saul is preaching Stephen's message.

And what do you think is going to happen to Saul? Well, the same thing that happened to Stephen if the Hellenists get their way. Look at **verse 29**.

²⁹ And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.³⁰ And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.⁵⁹

Notice that Saul has now managed to ingratiate himself into the church in Jerusalem. Barnabas was strategic for that. The apostles, I'm sure, were strategic too. They vouched for him. And now the "brothers" (9:30) are the ones that help rescue Saul. And once again, he is whisked away and escapes death.⁶⁰

Saul cheats death again. **Saul jukes and sidesteps the grim reaper. And he does it with the help of the church. And he does it in fulfillment of Jesus's statement,** "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:15–16b).

Saul goes off to Caesarea which is about 55 miles northwest of Jerusalem. And then Saul takes a boat and travels another 300 miles north of Caesarea to Tarsus, his hometown.⁶¹ And that's where we find Saul a few years later when Luke returns to him in **Acts 11**.⁶²

⁵⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 243: "The Greek text says literally that he was 'going in and out among them' in Jerusalem. The expression is familiar from Acts 1:21, where it refers to the circle of apostles. That meaning may well be intended here. Paul was fully accepted into the apostolic circle. He too was a 'witness' for Christ."

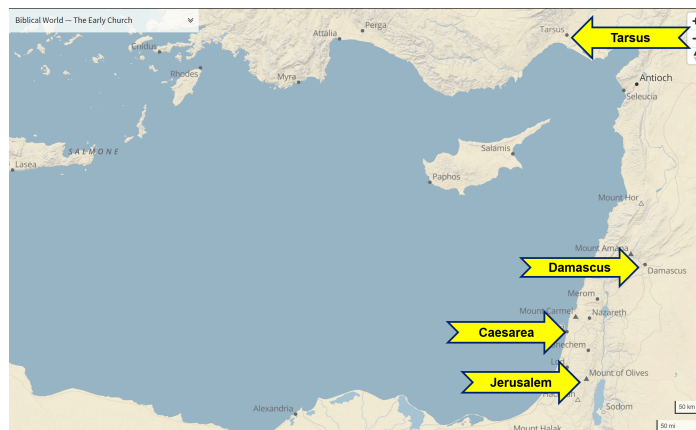
⁵⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 457: "He was 'preaching boldly' (παρρησιαζόμενος) as he had done in Damascus (cf. v. 27). Saul's bold preaching in v. 28c can be linked (a) with a teaching ministry among the believers in Jerusalem, and (b) with the evangelistic ministry that the apostles were perhaps able to carry out again in public (in Solomon's Portico in the temple complex?) after the persecution following Stephen's execution (8:1–3) had subsided. Paul's statement in Gal 1:22 that he was 'personally unknown to the churches of Judea' suggests that he limited his activities during this visit to Jerusalem, with the result that the followers of Jesus who lived in other towns of Judea did not meet him at this time."

⁵⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 458: "The city of Tarsus was a natural choice for Saul's next phase of missionary work. First, Tarsus was his home town where he could interact with relatives, friends, and other Jews in the local synagogues. This made Tarsus an ideal base for reaching other towns in the region. Second, his Tarsian citizenship would have given protection, a perhaps desirable situation after the narrow escapes in Damascus and in Jerusalem. Third, Tarsus was one of the most important cities in Asia Minor."

⁶⁰ Saul/Paul talks about this period of his life later in Acts 22: "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles'" (Acts 22:17–21).

⁶¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 370: "Why does he go to Tarsus? We do not know, but, given Paul's later travels and the possible locale of Tarsus in Jewish understanding, Tarsus being his former home may not be the only reason. Apparently there is a safe community there to care for him."

⁶² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 244: "The time span between Paul's sailing to Tarsus and Barnabas's bringing him to Antioch covered some ten years or so. Since neither the Pauline Epistles nor Acts covers his activity during this period in Syria-Cilicia, these are often referred to as Paul's "silent years."



Tarsus, Damascus, and Jerusalem⁶³

Paul tells us in the book of **Galatians** that he only spent fifteen days in Jerusalem with Peter. He was probably in Jerusalem longer than that, but not much longer.⁶⁴ Paul was received by the church in Jerusalem (through Barnabas's help). He preached the gospel to the Hellenistic Jews. And then he fled for his life from those who were trying to kill him. Saul's time in Jerusalem was fast and action-packed!

Paul also tells us in **Galatians** that he doesn't return to Jerusalem again until fourteen years later. So just to recap, Saul goes to Damascus to persecute Christians. He gets radically saved. He spends three years in Damascus (and Arabia) preaching the gospel before fleeing for his life. He spends fifteen days in Jerusalem. He's welcomed as a brother by the apostles. He preaches the gospel and then flees for his life again to Tarsus. And then fourteen years later he returns to Jerusalem as a bona-fide apostle of Jesus Christ who has travelled extensively and spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. That's the first fourteen to seventeen years of Saul's ministry in a nutshell.

But before we leave this passage, notice the summary statement in **verse 31**. This is not a throw away statement. This is important.

³¹ So the church⁶⁵ throughout all Judea and Galilee⁶⁶ and Samaria had peace⁶⁷ and was being built up.⁶⁸ And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, [the church] multiplied.⁶⁹

⁶³ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), May 31, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

⁶⁴ MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 278 suggests that Saul's entire stay in Jerusalem was just fifteen days.

⁶⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 244: "The 'church' was at peace. Luke's use of the singular 'church' could be taken in the 'universal sense' as the whole body of Christians in all their local assemblies. That meaning does seem to be found in Paul's speech at Miletus (Acts 20:28), but everywhere else in Acts 'church' refers to a local body of believers." So also Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 372: "The term ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*, church) carries its technical, theological meaning of the community of believers, but with a new twist (earlier 5:11; 8:1, 3). The term here is singular; it is one community in three regions that is in view. This sense of the church in many locales appears only here and in 20:28. Usually the word refers to a specific local gathering (13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3; 16:5; 18:22; 19:32, 39, 40; 20:17)."

⁶⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 244: "This is the only mention of Galilean Christians in Acts. Galilee is probably to be included within the reference to 'all Judea' in Acts 1:8. Here Luke mentioned it separately to emphasize how the commission to 'all Judea' was being fulfilled. Already the witness had reached Galilee."

⁶⁷ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 301–2: "The church now enjoyed a time of relative calm, which is true of most evangelistic communities that face persecution: There are periods of respite from serious opposition."

⁶⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 373: "The result is edification or strengthening (οικοδομουμένη, *oikodomoumenē*, being built). This participle almost has the force of a result, so that peace leads to strength ('experienced peace and thus was strengthened' in NET; note our translation). This strength is rooted in the support of the Spirit and an attitude that fears the Lord."

⁶⁹ JOHN CALVIN: "Let us realize that the peace, which, Luke says, existed in the churches, was not in fact perpetual but simply that the Lord granted some relief to his servants for a short time. For he makes allowance for our weakness in this way when he quiets or lessens the whirlwinds and tempests of persecutions, so that by their persistent pressure they may not push us beyond our limits." Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 128.

Write this down as a final point for this message.

4) Jesus's followers are encouraged and built up in the **Spirit** (9:31)

Verse 31 is a pretty amazing statement that shows us how much of a menace Saul was to the church. The fact that the church had peace after he was removed from the equation is quite an indictment of how destructive Saul was for the church. No wonder he was so remorseful about it later in life.

For those of you who are chess players, this is like removing your opponent's queen from the board. Saul was that important to the anti-Christian cause. Actually it's more dramatic than that. It'd be like turning your opponent's queen into a queen for your own side. Not only did Saul's conversion remove Public Enemy #1 from the church, but it also turned the persecutor of the church into a preacher of the gospel. And the church experienced peace and was built up because of it.

And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, [the church] multiplied.

Notice that "the fear of the Lord" is not just an OT concept. You might say, **"That's OT language. That's Proverbs."** Yes, but it's NT language too.⁷⁰ The early church feared God and they worshipped God. And the church multiplied. Saul's transformation strengthened the church.

Sometimes the church grows through persecution. But also sometimes the church grows through peace.⁷¹ We have evidence of both of those in the book of **Acts**.⁷²

Now here's a tough question for you, church. Let me close with this. I'm not going to be judgy as we close this message; but I am going to be preachy. So brace yourselves.

We're talking this morning about transformation. And we're comparing Saul's experience with our own experiences. I want you to ask yourself this question right now. "Has the church been strengthened by my conversion and my participation in the body of Christ?" Let me ask it this way: "Have you been an asset to the church of Jesus Christ after conversion?"

Let me expand on that a little bit. **1) Saul's conversion ignited immediate gospel witness. Has your conversion ignited gospel witness? Has your conversion, whether six weeks ago or six years ago or six decades ago ignited gospel witness in your life? Or are you perpetually sheepish about the Lord Jesus whom you supposedly serve?**

2) Saul's conversion awakened rapid spiritual growth in his life. Has your conversion awakened spiritual growth? Paul's life radically changed and accelerated quickly. Has your conversion done that? Has your conversion accelerated spiritual vitality and vibrancy in your life? Or are you stuck in a state of spiritual stagnancy and apathy?

The longer I follow Christ—and it's been almost 40 years now for me—the more I realize how apathy is the great enemy of Christianity in our country today. I used to think it was pride or lust or legalism. I still think those things are a problem, but not as much as apathy.

3) Saul's conversion incited opposition. Are you being opposed? Satan knew that Saul posed a serious threat to his kingdom and so he mobilized his forces to neutralize him post-haste. "We've got to take this guy out." If Saul had just sat around after his conversion and done nothing, Satan wouldn't feel threatened at all. There would be no need for opposition. But because Saul was aggressively preaching the gospel, because he was actively trying to take ground away from the kingdom of darkness, because he was a threat, Satan tried to take him out! Here's my question for you: "Are you a threat to Satan's kingdom?" "Does your faith in Christ incite opposition?" It should.

⁷⁰ Marshall, "Acts," in *CNTUOT*, 576: "'The fear of the Lord' is a characteristic OT expression for the Jewish religion (e.g., Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; cf. Rom. 3:18), but this is the only instance in the NT describing the practice of the Christian religion. By this usage Luke indicates that the Christian religion is in continuity with OT religion; however, it may well be that the ambiguous 'Lord' here refers to Jesus (cf. Acts 10:35)." Although see 2 Corinthians 5:11 and Ephesians 6:4.

⁷¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 220: "The peace for the church was only temporary, for a new persecution would arise in chapter 12."

⁷² JOHN CALVIN: "For as we are accustomed in peacetime to abandon ourselves to a riot of luxury, the churches are for the most part more blessed in the midst of the tumults of war than if they are enjoying the quietest and most pleasant time they could desire." Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 128.

There's an old aphorism often attributed to Winston Churchill (although he probably didn't say it) that goes like this, "You have enemies in this world? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life." If you call yourself a follower of Jesus Christ and you have zero opposition in your life, you might want to check that paradigm against Scripture, because that's not what Christ said we should expect in this world.

4) Finally, Saul's conversion blessed the church. Are you blessing the church? Saul's conversion strengthened the church. Has your conversion strengthened the church?

Look, none of us are as effective or talented as the Apostle Paul. Please don't think I'm holding you to that standard. Most of us are just Ananias and Barnabases in the church of Jesus Christ. But we're all called in one way or another to edify the church with the use of our gifts. We're all called to build up and strengthen the church. Is that something that you are doing right now? Conversion means transformation. How have you been transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?