

Introduction

Conversation with Stacy regarding our different paths after starting college

1. A life changed by Jesus Christ is a powerful thing:
  - a. On the one hand, it has the power to draw the unsaved to Christ as it did me when I saw the change it made in Bob Keagle's life
  - b. On the other hand, it has the power to offend as it did in the case of Stacy
2. Today we come to one of the more famous passages in Acts, the conversion of Saul and we're going to see the impact his conversion—his changed life—had on those around him:
  - a. The POWER that comes from a changed life
  - b. The PROBLEM that comes from a changed life
  - c. The PARTNERSHIP that comes from a changed life
  - d. The PROLIFERATION that comes from changed lives

A. The POWER that comes from a changed life (READ 9:19a-22)

1. Almost immediately after his conversion Paul began preaching the Gospel:
  - a. He is still in Damascus and fellowshiping with the disciples there
  - b. It has only been "**several days**" but "**immediately he began to proclaim Jesus**"
  - c. He began where he was familiar...in the synagogues preaching to his fellow Jews
  - d. The heart of his message was that "**He [Jesus] was the Son of God**"
2. This both amazed and confounded the Jews (21-22):
  - a. They were amazed because this was the last man they expected to be preaching about Jesus:
    - 1) He was the one who previously had been destroying Christians (21a): "**Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name**"
    - 2) He was the one who had come to Damascus for the very purpose of arresting Christians and dragging them back to Jerusalem to be tried and put to death by the Sanhedrin (21b): "**and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?**"
    - 3) It was shocking to them that the great protector of Judaism and persecutor of Christians was NOW ONE OF THEM!
  - b. They were not only amazed but confounded as well (22):
    - 1) The Greek word translated as confounded is used in different ways in the NT:
      - a) It can refer simply to being confused or bewildered—the NIV translates this verse as the Jews being "**baffled**"
      - b) It can also refer to having feelings of anxiety or dismay—the NET translates this as "**causing consternation among the Jews**"
      - c) Both of these seem appropriate here based on the context—the Jews were baffled and confused to the point of causing them anxiety; they didn't know what to make of Saul and didn't know what to do

- 2) Luke tells us that the reason for their confusion and anxiety was that Saul “**kept increasing in strength**” and was “**proving that Jesus is the Christ**” (22):
  - a) In other words, as the NET renders it, Saul was becoming “**more and more capable**” in his preaching
  - b) He was getting better and better and proving to the Jews that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah
3. Takeaway:
  - a. What we see here is the power of a life radically changed by Jesus Christ
  - b. One of the things that made Saul’s preaching about Jesus so amazing and confusing to his fellow Jews was his radical conversion from persecutor of Jesus to follower of Jesus
  - c. Paul actually used this as part of his testimony and defense on at least two occasions:
    - 1) The first was when he addressed the Jews who had him arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-10)
    - 2) The second was before King Herod Agrippa before being sent to Rome (Acts 26:8-20)
  - d. A life changed by Jesus Christ is a powerful witnessing tool—and one of our greatest assets!

**B. The PROBLEM that comes with a changed life (9:23-25)**

Meeting with Kathy’s husband and him saying he was leaving because she became a Christian and he didn’t “sign up” for that

1. We see something similar with Saul here (READ 9:23-25):
  - a. Luke simply refers to these events taking place “**when many days had elapsed**” which is rather unspecific
  - b. However, according to Paul in Galatians 1:18-19 these events take place three years after his conversion (with some intermediate time in Arabia before returning to Damascus)
  - c. The length of time is also supported by the fact that Paul had preached in Damascus long enough to have accumulated some disciples (v. 25)
2. Luke ties the Jews’ desire to kill Saul to not just his preaching about Jesus but partly to their anxiety and consternation over his conversion (established in vs. 21-22)
  - a. There’s no evidence in the book of Acts up to this point that disciples were persecuted outside of Jerusalem...except by Saul
  - b. There’s no indication that the Jews in this passage plotted to kill the believers in Damascus
  - c. In fact, v. 31 suggests that things were pretty peaceful
  - d. But, the Jews in Damascus nonetheless sought to kill Saul (someone they most likely respected or thought highly of prior to his conversion because of his position and notoriety)
  - e. In fact, it was so bad Saul’s disciples had to institute a rescue plan (RE-READ 24-25)
3. For some, the only thing more offensive than a Christian is when one of your own converts to Christ:
  - a. One of your own people (common in many Muslim countries where being Christian is permitted unless you were born Muslim and convert to Christ)
  - b. One of your own family—as in the case of Kathy above

- c. One of your friends—as in my case with Stacy
  - d. For Paul, it was some of his own Jewish brethren
4. Takeaway: the problem with a life that’s been changed by Jesus Christ is that just as it can be a powerful witnessing tool to lead some to Christ, it can also be just as offensive to others:
- a. For those of us who came to Christ in our teens or later in life, we may have had friends who didn’t like the “new us” and started to distance themselves or abandoned us altogether
  - b. For those who weren’t raised in a Christian home, we may have family members who now find us offensive (e.g. cousin Steve)
  - c. We may have neighbors or co-workers who can’t stand us simply because of what (or Who) we stand for
  - d. But, we have to keep in mind that what some will find offensive, others will be drawn to for salvation (2 Corinthians 2:14-16): **“14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. 15 For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?”**

C. The PARTNERSHIP that comes from a changed life (9:26-30)
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1. After being forced out of Damascus, Saul made his way back to Jerusalem:
  - a. According to Galatians 1:18, he went to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter
  - b. However, when he arrived none of the Christians would dare associated with him (READ 9:26):
    - 1) They were afraid—can you blame them?
    - 2) They didn’t believe that he was now a disciple of Jesus
2. This may have remained the case had it not been for one man, Barnabas (READ 9:27):
  - a. We first learned about Barnabas back in Acts 4 when he sold a tract of land and gave the money to the apostles
  - b. His name means “Son of Encouragement” so his actions here shouldn’t surprise us
  - c. While the others refused to associate with Paul out of fear, Luke tells us that Barnabas must have mustered up his courage because he talked with Saul and learned all about his conversion and preaching in Damascus
  - d. It was apparently through Barnabas that Saul finally got his introduction to Peter:
    - 1) Luke says he took Saul to **“the Apostles”** (27)
    - 2) However, in Galatians 1:18-19 Paul reveals that of the actual Apostles he only saw Peter (whom he actually lived with for 15 days)
    - 3) The only other leader he saw was James, the brother of Jesus, but Paul does refer to him also as an Apostle (apparently, just as Luke does here)
  - e. Barnabas and Saul were apparently quite persuasive because Saul was soon **“with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord”**, arguing with the Jews in the synagogues, and having his life threatened (29)
3. Takeaway:
  - a. I think one of the takeaways comes from two words that Luke uses in v. 28—Saul was **“with them”**

- b. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:14, **“Do not be bound together with unbelievers, for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?”**
- c. Prior to his conversion and his changed life, Paul was an unbeliever and an outsider—he had no partnership with righteousness or fellowship with God’s people (those in the light)
- d. But, because of his faith in Christ he was now bound together with believers, a part of the body of Christ; he was **“with them”**
- e. In fact, he was now partners with the Apostles and disciples of Jesus, working along side them as a witness to the resurrection of Jesus and the Gospel—and this is in spite of his murderous past
- f. This is seen clearly in vs. 29-30 (REREAD): Saul, who was once persecuting believers is now being delivered by those he sought to arrest, try and kill!
- g. The same is true of every one of us who has placed their trust in Jesus—our lives have been changed by Jesus and we now have at least one thing in common: we are now partners in the body of Christ regardless of our past

D. The PROLIFERATION that comes from changed lives (9:31)

- 1. When our passage began, the church in Judea and Samaria was under assault
- 2. Saul was on a rampage, extending his campaign to wipe out the Church from Jerusalem to the cities and towns outside Jerusalem
- 3. God’s solution? Take the greatest threat to the Church and turn him into his own chosen instrument to build up the Church!
- 4. Just as Stephen’s murder served as a catalyst for increased persecution, Saul’s conversion led to the proliferation (rapid growth and expansion) of the Church:
  - a. It did so immediately because it temporarily halted Saul’s attack against the Church (READ 9:31)
  - b. It did so in the long term because Paul had probably the greatest impact on the Church that any single man has ever had aside from Jesus Christ
- 5. Takeaway:
  - a. The Lord has always used changed lives to grow His Church—from the likes of Peter, James, John, and the other Apostles, to the 120 who gathered in the Upper Room after His ascension, to the thousands who were saved at Pentecost, to Stephen, Phillip, Saul, and the millions just like you and me over the past 2000 years
  - b. In fact, the Church is made up of a bunch of sinners whose lives have been radically changed by Jesus