

“A Faithful Witness (Part 1)”—Acts 9:19-31

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Acts 9...

They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and that is truly how I feel whenever I am unable to gather with you in church. When we all are kept from gathering, in this case because of a wintery mix, it makes me appreciate what we have here even more. I hope you can relate. In any case, it is good to see you this morning.

We are picking things up after the conversion of Saul, who you may know as the Apostle Paul. He was heading to the city of Damascus to round up any Christians he could find so that he could deliver them to the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, where they would face sentencing for their faith in Jesus. Yet, on the way, Saul has a blinding encounter with the risen Jesus Himself. His mind is forever changed about Jesus, and he enters the fellowship of the church in Damascus. So let's pick things up at this point.

If you are able, let me invite you to stand to your feet in recognition of the authority of God's Word. I'll read our passage for this week and next, beginning in the second half of verse 19. Follow along as I read. This is God's Word...

“For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’ ²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc 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?’ ²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

²³ When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, ²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶ And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 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.

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.” (Acts 9:19b-31)

You may be seated...

What we just read involves two scenes and a summary. The first scene involves Saul's time in Damascus and the second his time in Jerusalem. Each of these scenes follows a similar pattern: Paul arrives at a place, seeks to associate with the church in that place, boldly preaches the Gospel in that place, and is driven from that place by those who seek to take his life.¹ Nevertheless, the Gospel is still advancing, which is the point of the summary statements at the end.

In all of this, Saul shows himself to be a faithful witness of Christ Jesus. And herein I think there are lessons to be learned. While we don't have exactly the same calling as Saul, we are each called, as Christians, to faithfully bear witness to Christ and His saving work. Here I think the example of Saul is instructive. It teaches us several characteristics of those who are faithful witnesses in this world, and that is what I would like to spend the remainder of our time unpacking with you. To that end, let's first notice that...

Faithful Witnesses Are... *Christ-Centered*

What, according to verse 20, was Saul proclaiming about Jesus? "*He is the Son of God.*" And what, according to verse 22, was Saul proving to the Jews about Jesus? That "*Jesus was the Christ.*" So the content of his witness was that Jesus is the Son of God and the long-awaited Christ. His was a Christ-centered witness. But let's unpack this more.

Verse 19 tells us that Saul spent "*some days*" with "*the disciples at Damascus.*" These are not the famous disciples that Jesus appointed as Apostles. They are mentioned later in the text. No, "*the disciples*" mentioned in verse 19 are those men and women who made up the church at Damascus, including Ananias, who figured prominently in the previous verses. These are the people who Saul had intended to arrest and extradite to Jerusalem to pay for their crime of faith in Jesus. But all that changed on the road to Damascus. What once Saul viewed as blasphemy of the highest order, he now knows as the truth. Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Christ. And Saul cannot keep silent about these truths.

"*Immediately,*" we're told, Saul starts entering the Jewish synagogues of Damascus to declare that Jesus is "*the Son of God*" (9:20). Did you notice that the last words we have heard from the mouth of Saul in Acts was the question he asked Jesus, "*Who are you, Lord?*" (9:6). Now the first words out of his mouth since his conversion are, "*He is the Son of God*" (9:20). "Surely Luke wants us to see that this is foundational to being a Christian and foundational to the rest of Paul's life as the greatest missionary who ever lives."² It all turns on this revelation—Jesus is the Son of God.

Yet, interestingly, this is the only place in the book of Acts where Jesus is called "*the Son of God,*" though we do see this language in Luke's Gospel (1:32, 35; 3:22; 4:41). We also know that Luke was a companion of Paul—or Saul, as he's called in here—and frequently in Paul's writings we see him referring to Jesus as God's Son (e.g., Rom 1:1-4; 1 Thess 1:10; Gal 2:20; Eph 4:13). Luke was well-acquainted with the content of Saul's preaching; he himself had heard Saul preach Jesus as "*the Son of God*" many times.

There is actually some debate though as to what is meant by "*Son of God*" here. It's common for people today to contrast the fact that Jesus is the "*Son of God*" with the fact that He is also called the "Son of Man." Some claim that "*Son of God*" is meant to call to mind His divine nature, and "Son of Man" His human nature. While I appreciate the insistence that Jesus now exists as one person with two natures (cf. hypostatic union), many would be surprised to learn that from a first-century Jewish perspective—like that possessed by those to whom Saul preached in the synagogues—the title "Son of Man" had more of a heavenly connotation and "*Son of God*" could have a variety of connotations. As R. C. Sproul explains,

"It is true that when Jesus is called the 'Son of Man,' it has something to do with His human nature, but the chief significance of that title is that it refers to an Old Testament personage, a heavenly being who dwelt in the presence of the Ancient of Days and was sent from heaven to descend to the earth for a mission. In a sense, therefore, the title 'Son of Man' describes more of Jesus' divine nature than it does His human nature. Likewise, when we come to the title 'Son of God,' we assume that its primary reference is to His deity, but again we would trip over ourselves if we drew that inference without great care."³

What he means in that last sentence is that the title, “*Son of God*,” is used in a variety of ways in the Old Testament. In the singular, it sometimes referred to the nation of Israel as a whole, which God sometimes referred to as His son, adopted by way of redemption. Additionally, Israel’s king is sometimes referred to as God’s son, as, for instance, in the Psalms (e.g., Ps 2:7; 89:26-27; cf. 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 28:6). And since some of these texts are associated with the coming Messiah, the Messiah, over time, also became associated with this title. This is why, you might remember, during the trial of Jesus, the high priest asked Jesus, “*Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*” (Mark 14:61).

Every single one of these associations with the title “son of God” is fulfilled in Jesus. He is the embodiment of the true Israel, in which we ourselves are included by virtue of our union with Him (Gal 6:16). He is the King of kings, the one to whom all of Israel’s kings and the promises of the Davidic covenant are fulfilled. And, of course, He is the Messiah—which literally means “anointed one” in Hebrew and is translated “Christ” in Greek—who the Old Testament anticipated would come to deliver and reign over God’s people. He fulfills it all. He is *the* Son of God in the truest sense. As the Father announced, “*This is my beloved Son; listen to him*” (Mark 9:7; cf. Matt 17:5).⁴

However, it would be incorrect to conclude that the title “*Son of God*” has nothing to do with Jesus’ divine nature. Instead, what we find in the New Testament, as Sproul points out, is that the authors understood this sonship language, when applied to Jesus, to also imply “the transcendent aspect of Christ’s unique relationship to the Father,”⁵ which is to say, His deity. This unique relationship to the Father is a particular point of emphasis in Paul’s writings (e.g., Rom 1:3-4; 8:29, 32; Gal 4:4; Col 1:13-20; 1 Thess 1:10).⁶ Paul is one who had seen, by his own admission, “*the glory of the Lord...for God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). As Sproul explains, after surveying some of the biblical and historical evidence,⁷

“He is very God of very God. There never was a time when the Son was not. God was, is, and always will be triune. That was the radical message immediately proclaimed by the Apostle Paul. He had seen Jesus as an enemy to the purity of the Jewish monotheistic religion, but upon his conversion he realized that the Messiah of Israel was nothing less than God incarnate.”⁸

It should not be lost on us how radical a shift this was for Saul. It was not lost on the Jews who heard him proclaim that Jesus as “*the Son of God*” in their synagogue. “When [Saul] preached in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God, he was using that title in the fullest measure.”⁹ And the people were astonished by this claim coming in particular from the lips of someone like Saul. Verse 21 tells us, “*All who heard him were amazed and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc 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?’*” They were correct. This is the very same Saul.

And yet, in another sense, it is not. He’s a new man now. He left the city of Jerusalem with murderous intent, commissioned by the city’s high priest, to do harm to those professing faith in Jesus. But before he arrived in Damascus, he met *the* High Priest, Heaven’s own High Priest, the only High Priest to never relinquish his office, the exalted and resurrected Jesus Himself. And everything changed for Saul. This High Priest—the true One—gave Saul a new commission, a charge to proclaim good news and invite people to faith in Jesus. And that’s what he sets about doing as soon, it would seem, as he regains his sight.¹⁰

Why is this first thing that Saul goes about proclaiming? Because it is vital for us to receive as truth. Let me illustrate that with a handful of Scriptures related to the fact, significance, and implications of Jesus being the Son of God.¹¹

“*And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*” (1 John 5:11-12)

“No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.” (1 John 2:23)

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Romans 5:10).

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

It is difficult to read the New Testament and not come away with the impression that “Jesus is the Son of God” ought to be at the center of our worldview and the lives that result. Through the life and death of the Son, we have received the gift of adoption. To confess the Son is to have the Father, and to have both the Son and the Father is to have eternal life—now as well as in the age to come. Even in the present, the Son of God works on our behalf, so that our lives as Christians are lived by faith in Him. That is what these verses communicate. No wonder, this message is placed at the very start of Saul’s missionary work: “Jesus is the Son of God.” And it needs to be at the heart of our Christian lives as well.

Indeed, this truth must be accepted at our conversion. And it is only accepted by God’s grace. Why do I say that? Well, think about this. Who are the two most prominent Christian figures in Acts? Peter and Saul/Paul, right? Think about how the knowledge of Jesus as the Son of God intersected their lives. For Peter there was that famous scene where Jesus asks him, “*Who do you say that I am?*” And Peter responds, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matt 16:15-16).

What’s interesting about that reply is that this perfectly coincides with Saul’s witness in the text. He is declaring to the Jews that Jesus is the “*Son of God*” (Acts 9:20), but also, according to verse 22, that He is “*the Christ*.” We read that he “*confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ*.” That’s what he labored to show. “Jesus was, in other words, the Messiah for whose coming and saving work the Old Testament had been preparing God’s people.”¹² Saul was “*proving*” this to the Jews he bore witness to. This is the language of rationality. He was demonstrating that Jesus was the Christ, no doubt, from the Scriptures (cf. 13:16-47). He was making the case. He was reasoning with them. Saul was a rational man, which his preaching in Acts and letters in the New Testament will bear out. And here he applies the full scope of his rationality to making the case that Jesus was the long-awaited Christ.

This “*confounded the Jews*” who sought to oppose Saul. They couldn’t counter his claims. The same thing happened with Stephen earlier Acts 6, where we read that the Jews “*could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which [Stephen] was speaking*” (6:10). Saul has picked up the mantle of Stephen.¹³ How ironic. Previously Saul had supervised the execution of Stephen for his claims about Jesus. Now he was making the same claim. He has, in a sense, replaced Stephen.

But he didn’t replace Stephen’s message. It’s the same message. The same as Peter’s confession: Jesus is “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*.” Yet if we keep reading, Jesus’ response to Peter’s confession is important. Do you remember how Jesus responded? He said, “*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven*” (Matt 16:17). You see, earlier in Matthew, Jesus said “*No one knows the Son except the Father*” (11:27). If that’s true, then how does anyone come to know the Son? That what Jesus explains to Peter. We don’t come to know Him as the Son of God unless the Father reveals Him to us. It takes a supernatural work of God’s grace. And the same is true of knowing the Father. Jesus also said that “*no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him*” (11:27). Such a

saving knowledge and faith doesn't just happen. It requires the Lord's grace operating on a person. No one will believe apart from this grace. Jesus taught Peter this.

And how does Paul (Saul) later speak of his coming to know Jesus as the Son of God? He says that the One *“who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal [same word used to describe Peter's confession] his Son to me”* (Gal 1:15-16). Just like Jesus said to Peter, flesh and blood did not reveal it to Him. It was revealed to Him by the Father.

So how does a person today come to know Jesus as the Son of God and to have fellowship and life with the Son? The exact same way. As John Piper explains,

“There does have to be intelligible preaching or teaching or witnessing about the biblical story of Jesus. Our text says (Acts 9:22) that Saul ‘confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. An intelligible, valid presentation of Jesus is essential. But persuasive words alone do not open the eyes of the heart. They tried to kill Paul in Damascus. ‘Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, Simon, but my Father who is in heaven.’ ‘The God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 4:6). How then do you come to know and to have and to fellowship with the Son of God? You listen to his Word, his story (Luke 9:35). And you pray for the revelation of the Father—the eyes to see the glory (Mark 9:24). And by grace you believe and triumph. ‘Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?’ (1 John 5:5).”¹⁴

It is a privilege to know this truth. It is a greater privilege still to bear witness to it in this world. And that is the mission we share in as God's people. Saul is a good example of this. But he is meant to be the rule, not the exception. Christians today, in other words, are to be no-less Christ-centered in their witness. We may not all be the gifted evangelist that Saul was. We may not all know the Scriptures as well as Saul did on the day of his conversion. But every Christian in this place has a testimony to share. A testimony of how Jesus has changed your life. An understanding that He died on the cross for your sins, taking your place in judgment, receiving what you deserved, so that you could be spared. You understand that on the third day, He was raised to life, assuring us that the Father was satisfied with His Son's atoning sacrifice for us. You understand that you have been saved by grace alone—as an undeserved gift of God freely given through Christ—and through faith alone—apart from anything you did or could ever do to earn it. And you have a story—a testimony—of how you first heard this good news—this Gospel—and believed and were forever changed. This is yours to share. That's what it means, in part, to be a faithful witness to Christ.

But, and this is important, your “testimony is not a synonym for autobiography.” I so appreciate the way Stott frames this point. He writes, “Testimony is not a synonym for autobiography. To witness is to speak of Christ. Our own experience may illustrate, but must not dominate, our testimony.”¹⁵ Amen! Faithful witnesses are Christ-centered. Our witness must always be about Christ ultimately. It's for Him and His glory, not to make much of us.

But even sharing the story of how Christ saved us can be an intimidating thing for many of us. We can get nervous. We can shy away from the opportunities we have. We can feel inadequate to the task. That's normal. But it doesn't have to be this way. Which leads us to the next point, namely, that...

Faithful Witnesses Are... *Spirit-Supplied*

The Spirit of God provides what is needed to be a faithful witness to Jesus. We don't go at it alone. He works in us to bear witness, and He supplies all that we need to do it effectively. As we've seen in Acts, that is part of the

reason the Spirit is imparted to us in the first place. Remember Acts 1:8? Jesus' final words to His followers before His ascension were:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

The Spirit was given for the sake of making us witnesses. We could say more about the purpose of His indwelling, but we must never say less. And we will say more about this point, but not today, for I want to save it for next week. There are at least three things that the Spirit of God supplies Paul within these verses, but expand upon them next week.

What I want to close our time with today is a different reminder, a third reality that accompanies being a faithful witness...

Faithful Witnesses Are... *Regularly Resisted*

He was resisted by the leader in Arabia (as we will consider next time). He was resisted by the Jews in Damascus. He was resisted by the Jews in Jerusalem.¹⁶ In each case, they sought his life. They rejected him for his newfound commitment to Jesus and His Gospel. He became a fugitive for the faith.

We may not face that kind of resistance as faithful witnesses today, but as Paul will write later, *“all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* (2 Tim 3:12). And this should come as no surprise to Saul even at this stage of his life. Remember back in verse 16, Ananias (Saul's first Christian friend) was told that Christ was about to *“show [Saul] how much he must suffer for the sake of [Christ's] name.”* Surely, Ananias shared this with Saul, in which case none of this resistance should have been too surprising.

But it may come as a surprise to many Christians today who are *not* regularly asked to count the cost of following Jesus on the front end of their exposure to the Gospel. But this was not the case in the early Church. “Jesus' basic call to discipleship was to a cross (e.g., Matt 10:38; 16:24).”¹⁷ Did Saul suffer more than most for his obedience to Christ? Absolutely. But this doesn't change the fact that suffering for the sake of Christ is normal fare for Christians. Indeed when Saul would later go on to plant many churches among the nations, we are told, in particular, that he appoints elders (plural) in every one of these churches and that he explained to these congregations that it is *“through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:21-23). He knew this from experience, even in his earliest days as a Christian. And, in the end, he is shuttled out of town again, this time *“down to Caesarea”* and then *“off to Tarsus,”* his homeland. Saul would remain there until Barnabas retrieves him almost a decade later to come and serve with him in the city of Antioch.

What do we learn from this? Well, we are reminded that living for Jesus is not going to be easy. Being a faithful witness comes with adversity. But here's some good news—our witness will not be thwarted. It's going to accomplish God's good purposes. And that's why verse 31 is so important. It reminds us that *“the world's opposition did not impede the spread of the gospel or the growth of the church.”*¹⁸

In verse 31, Luke pauses to summarize the growth of the Church, as he has done throughout his narrative (6:7; 9:31). We read,

*“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” (Acts 9:31)*¹⁹

By *“peace,”* Luke doesn't mean that the Church was no longer opposed. “Rather, Luke means the peace of God in Christ that every believer enjoys regardless of his [or her] outward circumstances (cf. Phil. 4:4-7).”²⁰ They

were, by and large, “*being built up*” in spiritual maturity. The verb is passive there, suggesting that it is God who is “building” them up. And what is characteristic of this maturity? Probably at least what is described in the second half of the verses, as Guy Waters explains:

“First, there is ‘the fear of the Lord’, a right reverence and regard for the majesty and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, there is ‘the comfort,’ or as it may also be translated, ‘exhortation’, ‘of the Holy Spirit,’ denoting guidance and consolation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers. It is as the church is so maturing that she is able to weather the storms of providence about her, and that she is blessed of the Lord with numerical growth.”²¹

And brothers and sisters, the same can be true for us today. Why? Because Jesus has promised to build His Church. And that’s what He is doing. That’s why we are here. That’s why we take our witness so seriously. And as we do that together, we too will know the peace of the Lord, as walk in the fear of the Lord, and receive the comfort that only the Spirit can provide. That is our lot. So it may not always be easy. But it will most assuredly be worth it. And all God’s people said? Amen.

God help us. Let’s pray...

¹ Guy Prentiss Waters, *Acts*, EPSC (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2015), 233.

² John Piper, “Jesus Is the Christ, the Son of God,” accessed online at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/jesus-is-the-christ-the-son-of-god>.

³ R. C. Sproul, *Acts*, SAEC (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 168-169.

⁴ Sproul writes, “In the New Testament, the idea of sonship is inseparably related to obedience. This truth lay at the root of the controversies Jesus had with the Pharisees over their relationship with Abraham. The Pharisees said, ‘Abraham is our father,’ and Jesus said, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this ... before Abraham was, I am ... You are of your father the devil’ (John 8:39–40, 58, 44). There is quite a contrast between being called ‘children of Abraham’ and ‘children of Satan.’ Why did Jesus say that His opponents were children of the Devil? He answers that question for us: ‘You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do’ (John 8:44). The same idea is used to describe sonship with respect to Jesus. Jesus is uniquely the Son of God in the sense that He, of all people in history, was completely and absolutely obedient to the Father. In His humanity, He was the Son of God. In His humanity, because of His sinlessness and perfect obedience, He warranted the title ‘Son of God.’” Ibid., 169.

⁵ Ibid. Derek Thomas notes that “especially in John’s Gospel, the title ‘Son of God’ points to a relationship of deepest intimacy with God. On nine occasions Jesus refers to ‘my heavenly Father’ or ‘my Father in heaven,’ adding on occasion an explanation as to what this means: ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’ (Matt. 11:25–27). At this point in his life, Paul may have been unaware of these sayings of Jesus, but the Old Testament messianic significance of this term was something he had begun to see fulfilled in Jesus.” Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 260-261.

⁶ See Piper, “Jesus Is the Christ, the Son of God.”

⁷ For example: “In John’s Gospel Jesus is described as the *monogenes*, the only begotten of the Father. The term ‘only begotten’ does not mean ‘first begotten’; the prefix *mono*-means ‘only,’ rendering the ‘only begotten one.’ It is the language of *begottenness* that provoked one of the most serious controversies in all of church history, which led to the fourth-century Council of Nicaea, out of which came the Nicene Creed. In the fourth century a dispute arose when Arius denied the deity of Jesus. Arius said that Jesus was a human being who, while uniquely adopted by the Father for His mission, was not divine. Arius said that Jesus was not eternal; He was not of the same substance or essence as God; He was merely a creature. However, we know that Jesus was divine because the Bible says He was begotten, and the Greek verb ‘to beget,’ *ginomai*, means ‘to be,’ ‘to become,’ or ‘to happen.’ It refers to those incidents and events that indicate the beginning of something in time and space. Arius argued from the text that Jesus was begotten, which means that He had a beginning, and if He had a beginning, He is not eternal; and if He is not eternal, He is not God. So, Arius concluded, we ought not to attribute deity to Christ. That was what the Council at Nicaea was all about. The Nicene Creed declared that Christ was *homoousios*—of the same substance as the Father and therefore co-substantial and co-eternal with the Father. The creed uses the language of begottenness: ‘Christ was begotten, not made.’ The church acknowledges that the Bible speaks of the begottenness of Jesus, but the begottenness here refers to an eternal relationship, an eternal begottenness set apart from any other kind of begottenness by the term *monogenes*. Christ is the only one ever uniquely begotten eternally of the Father”. Sproul, 169-170.

⁸ Ibid., 170.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “The ‘at once’ [or ‘immediately’] emphasizes Saul’s immediate and unhesitating obedience to the Lord’s commission.”

David E. Garland, *Acts*, TTCS (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 96.

¹¹ Piper reflects on the same passages in the aforementioned sermon.

¹² Waters, 234.

¹³ Patrick Schreiner, *Acts*, CSC (Holman Reference, 2021), 307. For more on how Stephen likely influenced Saul, see Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Worthy: Living in Light of the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 77-97.

¹⁴ Piper, “Jesus Is the Christ, the Son of God.”

¹⁵ Stott, 178.

¹⁶ For a reflection on how these “Hellenists” that Saul disputed in Jerusalem were likely former friends and acquaintances of Saul, see Ferguson, 83-85.

¹⁷ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 304.

¹⁸ Stott, 179.

¹⁹ “Luke includes all believers in the singular ‘church.’ The singular is used in the NT for house churches but also for the collective body of believers. The KJV has ‘churches,’ but earlier and better NT manuscripts have the singular, and those are followed in the ESV, NIV, NLT, and NASB. Here the term refers to what we call the ‘church universal,’ that is, all believers worldwide.” Brian J. Vickers, “Acts” in *John-Acts* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 423.

²⁰ Waters, 239.

²¹ Ibid., 239-240. He goes on to point out that in Acts 9:31 we see “that the church has a public or corporate witness. In whatever situation she finds herself, the church must commit to maturity, to walking in the fear of the Lord, and to living in the fellowship of the Spirit. This pattern of life does not come from within. It comes from the Spirit of Christ, working by and with the Word in believers’ lives. It is the maturing church, Luke tells us, that God was pleased to bless with conversion growth. It is tempting in the church to pit outreach and discipleship against one another. They are, Scripture reminds us, the very best of friends. It is by committing ourselves to this path that we may experience the very ‘peace’ in Christ that the early church did.” Ibid., 241.