

Acts

Part 25 – “The fear of the Lord and the building of the church”

Acts 9:19b-31

The story of Acts so far has been one of ordinary men and women, through the work of the Holy Spirit, proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ amidst great opposition. And despite the opposition, the church has grown. And although there are many “heroes” in Acts, the primary agent of change and growth has been the Holy Spirit. This was true then and this is true now.

God gathers His people and grows His church through the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

1. Fear of the Lord (v. 31)

- a. Fearing God does not primarily mean that we are afraid of God. The main connotation of this phrase in both the OT and NT is a reverence and trust in God that leads to obedience.
- b. Proverbs speaks to this.
 - i. The fear of the Lord
 1. is the beginning of knowledge. (Proverbs 1:7)
 2. is the beginning of wisdom. (Proverbs 9:10)
 3. is a fountain of life. (Proverbs 14:27)
 4. is to hate evil. (Proverbs 8:13)
 5. prolongs life. (Proverbs 10:27)
 6. gives strong confidence. (Proverbs 14:26)
 7. keeps people from sin. (Proverbs 16:6)
 8. leads to life. (Proverbs 19:23)
- c. In conversion, anger and hostility toward God turns to fear/reverence of Him.
 - i. Romans 3 – In our sin of unbelief we are enemies of God. We have no fear of God.
 - ii. Once we do believe, this fear is not a terrifying, immobilizing fear of a vicious dictator but rather a reverent fear that gives confidence, courage, and life amidst a broken world.

2. Comfort of the Holy Spirit (v. 31)

- a. Christ is present with us through His Spirit. (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)
- b. For the early church this was vital for their survival and their courage to move forward in the midst of great opposition and risk.
 - i. It provided courage for Ananias as he goes to Saul. (9:13-17)
 - ii. It allows Saul to preach boldly as the Spirit speaks through him. (9:20, 22, 28)
 - iii. It gives hope for conversions.
 1. The early church could take great comfort in the fact that Jesus was present with them through His Spirit and that He would change hearts as they faithfully proclaimed His Word.
 - iv. It provided great comfort in the fact that even though their circumstances might be difficult, they had Christ's Spirit in them as a guarantee of a life to come.
 1. “In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.” (Eph. 1:13-14)

God gathers His people and grows His church through proclamation, accountability, and realignment.

1. Proclamation of Jesus as the Christ
 - a. After his conversion, Saul immediately proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues. (v. 20)
 - b. He presented a well-thought-out argument proving that Jesus was the Christ. (v. 22)
 - i. He confounded the Jews with his message. (v. 22)
 - ii. He confused them because of his former life. (v. 21)
 - c. His message led to anger in those that didn't believe. (vv. 23-24, 29)
 - i. He was equating Jesus with the "Son of God," claiming an intimate relationship between Jesus and God that is central to our understanding of the person and work of Christ.
 - ii. They sought to kill him both in Damascus and Jerusalem.
 - iii. His fleeing Damascus through the hole in the city wall was not because of his fear of man. He was on a mission to proclaim Christ. (Phil. 1:21-26)
 - d. The gospel was advancing just as Jesus had promised.
 - i. From Jerusalem it had advanced throughout Judea and into Samaria (Acts 1:8; Acts 9:3). Shortly after this the gospel will ignite throughout the gentile world.
2. Community of accountability (vv.26-28)
 - a. Saul is brought before the apostles to have his profession of faith and ministry verified.
 - a. It was for the protection of the people and the message.
 - b. The leaders had a responsibility to protect the purity and peace of the people and the message.
 - c. Barnabas vouched for the authenticity of Saul's profession.
 - d. Saul needed to be placed within the accountability structures of the church as he continued his ministry.
 - b. John Stott – "True conversion always issues in church membership. It is not only that converts must join the Christian community, but that the Christian community must welcome converts..."
3. Realignment of everything
 - a. Saul's allegiances change.
 - a. Prior to conversion: traditions of his fathers (Gal. 1), the chief priest, the religious law, his misguided view of God
 - b. After conversion: Christ and the church
 - b. Saul's priorities change
 - a. Prior to conversion: persecuting the church/Christ
 - b. After conversion: proclaiming Christ and protecting the church
 - c. Saul's path changes
 - a. Prior to conversion: Pharisee of Pharisees, rising in stature among those persecuting The Way
 - b. After: evangelist, encourager to the churches, eventual author of NT books, and martyr