

Acts 22

Paul's story

(What can we learn from the way Paul tells us his spiritual story.)

1. Paul has been misunderstood and faced death at the hands of those who hated him but he demands an audience with them demonstrating his grace and kingdom perspective.
2. See apttoteach .com (theology files #702, #705, #707, #713)
3. The historical critical story of Christian origins has three key elements.
 - a. A historical Jesus of whom we know very little.
 - b. A creative PR figure (Paul) who invents a gospel story about Jesus to explain Paul's personal spiritual longings and experiences.
 - c. A powerful political machine (Constantine) who makes the story official by excluding all other explanations.
4. How well does Paul's testimony fit this critical story?
 - a. Is Paul a good candidate for starting Christianity?
 1. Does his pre-conversion experience show signs of what would come later as a theology of Jesus' divinity, Salvation by grace through faith, and Freedom from the Law Covenant.
 2. Does his conversion experience suggest a gradual (natural) evolution of new theological ideas?
 3. Does his post-conversion experience indicate that there was something for Paul to gain by adopting this new theology?
 - b. Is it realistic to expect the "resurrection myth" to become accepted by the time of Paul's writing?
 - c. Do the gospels fit the story line of the historical critical theory?

Paul wins a hearing among the Jews.

"¹ Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now {offer} to you." ² And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said,

- Paul identifies with the Jews by showing respect for Jewish culture
- He addresses them as "brethren and fathers."
- He speaks in Hebrew. Many Jews did were not able to speak Hebrew in that Greek and Latin were the more common languages of the empire. To know the Hebrew tongue was a sign of serious devotion to Jewish culture.

Paul's testimony of conversion.

Paul's zeal for God did not lead him to Christ.

3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are today. 4 "And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

Paul's persecution of Jesus did not stop Christ's grace.

6 And it came about that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, 7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 8 And I answered, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' 9 And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. 10 And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go on into Damascus; and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.' 11 But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

Paul's conversion was not only to the Messiah but to a mission.

12 And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, {and} well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 13 came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. 14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. 15 For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.

Paul's baptism marked his new identity.

16 And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

Paul's mission was to the Gentile world.

17 And it came about when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, 18 and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' 19 And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee. 20 And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.' 21 And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'

- When a person becomes a follower of Christ do they cease being a Jew? This is a debated point even to this day. Judaism is a culture that is closely connected to a religion. Paul was not afraid to identify himself as a Jew while being a follower of Jesus as Messiah.
- Paul's Damascus Road experience did not come as a result of his seeking God but quite the contrary. This is an important part of his defense before the Jews in that it underscores his zeal for the Jewish culture.
- There are a number of questions that come up as we read Paul's testimony. For example –

- When was he born again of the Spirit? It was probably not on the Damascus Road but rather at his baptism.
- Were his sins washed away at the point of his water baptism or when he “called on the name of the Lord”? It was probably not through the water baptism per say but when he called on the name of the Lord. This may seem like a fine point but it is a big issue with the Church of Christ sect. See **apptoteach .com** (theology #812)
- In what sense was Paul persecuting Jesus? Jesus was so closely identified with his followers that to persecute them was to persecute Him. Matt.25:40, 45 “Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’”
- We can note a number of things in Paul’s story.
 1. He was called from resistance. He was the most unlikely candidate for conversion to Christ even though he had a zeal for God. **God is not impressed with misplaced religious zeal.**
 2. Jesus so identifies with His church that their pain becomes His pain. **Jesus’ empathy for His followers is complete.**
 3. He was called through revelation. He was made aware of what he was doing and its significance. It is interesting that when he was made blind, he then saw and understood. Paul’s dramatic religious experience did not dictate his understanding of what was normative for others who would come to follow Christ. **Paul’s experience is not the norm.**
 4. He was called to service. We may not have a dramatic or clear word of direction but we should assume that we are appointed to service in some capacity. We are not called to live lives as though we had no affiliation with Christ. **Conversion to the Christian faith is a conversion to a Messiah and His mission.**
 5. Faith and repentance are not mentioned but powerfully illustrated. Paul changes direction not just his confession. **The clearest indication of true conversion is seen in one’s life direction.**
 6. **Grace does not require a worthy recipient.** Paul was hostile to Jesus and yet God loved him and reached him. This does not mean that Paul did not have to make some choices. But it illustrates the heart of God in Jesus.

The hostility of the Jews at the mention of Gentiles.

22 And they listened to him up to this statement, and {then} they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!" 23 And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.

- It is not Jesus that is the offense to these Jews but rather the grace of God which is extended to the Gentiles.

- Jesus protects Paul by encouraging him to flee. This is a window into how much freedom God gives to His creation. He could change Paul's circumstances but He does not.

Paul's appeal to Roman citizenship.

²⁵ And when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"
²⁶ And when the centurion heard {this,} he went to the commander and told him, saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman."
²⁷ And the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes."
²⁸ And the commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "But I was actually born {a citizen.}"
²⁹ Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.

- Paul had no problem identifying himself as a Jew and as a Roman. Paul's ties to his culture were clear and embraced without contradiction to his Christian faith. This may have some interesting implications for our own day. We need not shed all ties with our ethnic and national roots to follow Christ.

³⁰ But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them."