

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XXI. God's Restraint Of Saul To Prepare Him For Ministry

(Acts 9:20-31)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 351.
- B. Accordingly, we can learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the Early Church era as it is presented in the book of Acts.
- C. Acts 9:20-31 demonstrates how God sovereignly restrained a newly converted Saul from ministering until he had matured into being an effective servant of God, so we view the passage for our insight and application:

II. God's Restraint Of Saul To Prepare Him For Ministry, Acts 9:20-31.

- A. Saul's conversion to Christ "is believed by some to be the most important event in the church since Pentecost. Luke certainly considered Saul's conversion significant for he recorded it three times in Acts (chaps. 9, 22, 26)." (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 375) After all, Saul, who was later called "Paul," became the most ardent apostle of Christ, writing roughly half of the New Testament!
 1. However, though he was eminently qualified to minister as an apostle in knowing the Hebrew culture and language, though raised in Tarsus where he learned Greek culture and its philosophies, though he had the rights and privileges of a Roman citizen, though he was educated in Hebrew theology, though he was trained in a trade to support himself and though God had given him zeal, leadership qualities and theological insight (Ibid.), Saul was still a "youth, young man" (*neanias*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 536; Acts 7:58)
 2. That youthfulness coupled with his zeal and abilities proved to be so inflammatory with the opponents to the Christian faith that the Christian community itself could not bear to have Saul present, Acts 9:20-30:
 - a. The Christian community could not handle Saul's prolonged presence in Damascus, Acts 9:20-25:
 - i. Right after his conversion, Saul began to testify in the synagogues of Damascus that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, Acts 9:20. This is the only verse in Acts that uses the phrase "Son of God," a Hebrew term referring to Christ's deity, so Saul was strongly rubbing against the theological views of the acceptable Judaism of his era. (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 377)
 - ii. Everyone who heard him were "beside themselves; they were struck out of their senses" (*existanto*, Ibid.), for Saul's past record of making havoc of the Jerusalem Church contrasted sharply with his current activity of saying that Jesus was co-equal with God the Father! (Acts 9:21 with John 5:18)
 - iii. Saul increased in strength, baffling the Jews, proving that Jesus was the Messiah, Acts 9:22 ESV.
 - iv. In time, the Jews plotted to kill Saul, and they watched the city gates day and night in order to capture and kill him, Acts 9:23-24. Accordingly, Saul's followers took him by night and let him down through an opening in the city wall in a large basket, Acts 9:25.
 - b. The Christian community could not handle Saul's prolonged presence in Jerusalem, Acts 9:26-30:
 - i. Saul's sojourn into Arabia mentioned in Galatians 1:17 likely occurred between Acts 9:22 and 23 (Ibid., p. 378). Thus, after returning to Damascus from Arabia and being sent from there by fellow believers, Saul went south to Jerusalem where he tried to associate with its Christians, Acts 9:26.
 - ii. The Jerusalem believers feared Saul, so Barnabas brought him to the apostles and testified of his conversion, giving Saul the credibility he needed to fellowship with Jerusalem saints, Acts 9:27-28.
 - iii. However, when Saul spoke boldly in Christ's name, debating with the Grecian Hebrews in continuing the slain Stephen's ministry, the Grecian Hebrews tried to kill him, Acts 9:29; 6:8-14.
 - iv. The believers in Jerusalem then brought Saul down to the seaport town of Caesarea and sent him by ship back to his hometown of Tarsus to the far north of Israel. (Acts 9:30 with Acts 9:11)
 3. With Saul in Tarsus, the churches in Judaea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed rest from persecution, they were edified, walking in the reverence of God and comfort of the Holy Spirit, continuing to multiply, Acts 9:31.

Lesson: Though gifted and motivated to serve Christ, Saul's lack of wisdom as a new believer made life too hard for the rest of the Church, so God "parked" him back in his hometown until he matured into being more edifying.

Application: If we are motivated and gifted to serve God in some way, but He seems to be blocking us from serving Him, we best focus on maturing in the Lord that He might effectively use us when we are actually fit to serve Him.