

Acts 9: Strength and Peace in the Church

Acts 9 is famous for the story of Saul becoming Paul. It's one of the most incredible stories of transformation and conversion in the entire Bible. However, my reflections are meant to help us look deeper into the less popular points of the chapter. Every time I sit down to study God's word, I always ask, "God what do *you* want me to read or learn through my reading."

What really jumped out of my reading in Acts 9 was a very simple, but profound verse:

Acts 9:31 (NKJV) ³¹ *Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*

This verse is actually the second of six or so summary statements made by the author Luke. Just FYI: There's a debate on how many summary statements Luke actually makes, but the most common is six. These summary statements are important because they serve as guide posts to determine where we are in the journey of the early church.

This particular summary statement indicates there's a time of peace in the churches found in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria... Wait! What? Samaria!? This statement made by Luke is the equivalent of saying, "We have 75 churches in the Chicagoland Area and they're all relationally healthy." Folks let me tell you, the only way that's possible is through the Power of the Holy Spirit.

The areas that Luke mentioned were all separated not only by geography, but philosophy and culture as well. But that was before the Gospel was preached! You see, when the Gospel is preached, and you hear Jesus' story of grace, there's no other choice but to offer grace and forgiveness to others; regardless of their color or nationality. In my opinion, social, cultural, and racial unity, should be the greatest evidence of fruit in the church today.

How Did the Church Experience Peace and Edification?

For me as a pastor I tend to lean on passages that can help me better serve and understand the church. I often desire for there to be peace and unity in the church *SO THAT* we can truly be effective at helping others grow deeper in their relationship with Christ. Churches never grow during times of disunity and turmoil. People walking in the doors of an unsettled and tumultuous church won't stay, and God won't entrust people to that church either.

Luke uses the word *edify* as a compound for both, "house," and "built up." Meaning, we're not just talking about God's church (physical structure), but also the Body of Christ (spiritual church) being built up. But there was something that led to this peace. There was something that the church needed to do in order to experience a time of peace and "strengthening."

Simply put, the church walked in the fear of the Lord, and was comforted by the Holy Spirit. The church during the time of peace was focused on growing deeper in their relationship with God and being led by the Holy Spirit. They didn't spend a lot of time strategizing on how to break their next growth barrier, or planning on how to spend their marketing money to attract people to the church. Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with being mindful of strategy and spending, but it should never be at the cost of listening and obeying what the Holy Spirit wants to do and communicate. Instead, they were still before the Lord. They were in "awe" or fear of the Lord and allowed the Holy Spirit to minister to their Spirit. They were doing what Jesus did and went up to the mountain to get their instruction for the "next steps."

And the result, they were multiplied! Now that's a growth strategy!

Let me ask you: Is your church in a time of peace or turmoil? Are you helping foster a time of peace or egging on a spirit of turmoil? If three really different areas and people groups can experience peace, what's our excuse?