

LIFE OF PAUL SERIES

THE CONVERSION AND COMMISSION

OF PAUL

Paul had achieved many things in his life. He was an educated man, successful, a Pharisee of Pharisees but yet of all those things, it was only when he came to know God's love that he was transformed. No matter how much money or status and fame you have, there is nothing compared to encountering God and knowing His love. Today we are going to consider the conversion of the apostle Paul. The love of God can transform your heart and mind like He transformed Paul's life. There is nothing like the love of God that can come upon your life. As we consider the life of Paul we want to see what kind of man that he became after going through all the various backgrounds that we considered last week; the background and the history of apostle Paul's life before he knew Jesus. We are going to learn that Paul had reached a certain level and there are at least six areas that he had reached that we want to consider.

Lets look at Acts 26:4 *My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They know me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.* By that time he was about to be converted, Paul had become one of the top Pharisees in the whole of Israel. I believe he would possibly have no equal compared to him. He was highly successful and in case you don't realize what position that was, in those days of the Bible, the highest position that you could reach - the apex of natural and spiritual authority as well as political power - would be to be among the Pharisees. They controlled not only the religious power but they controlled also the national rule in Israel although

they were under the Roman law. So firstly Paul was, as we consider here, highly successful.

Secondly we learn in Acts 9 that he was highly organized. When he did something he planned well and did it successfully. Acts 9: 1 *Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.* Now there were other people persecuting the Christians but none was like Paul before he became an apostle, so organized was he that he even looked into getting letters from the Sanhedrin council. In cross reference of that, let's look at Acts 22:5 *As also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren.* Now you notice the difference in Acts 22:5 and Acts 9:1. In Acts 22:5 it looks as if Paul was so prominent among the Sanhedrin Council and they said, "Paul we want to appoint you to wipe out the sect of the Nazarene" and Paul was given the authorization letter. But Acts 9:1-2 tells us a different story; it was Paul who asked for the letters. So Paul was the one who got the idea of getting letters and organizing systematic persecutions in every city against the Christians. He was not satisfied with just creating trouble; he wanted 'organized trouble'. He was highly organized and successful in achieving his goals and that's the kind of person he was, a high achiever. We need to understand the background he came from before we see his conversion.

Thirdly we learn that Paul was an extremely cruel person. If you don't see the cruelty side of him you wouldn't be amazed at his conversion and that is why I want you to see how cruel he was. You would have thought what a lovely letter 1Cor.13 is! 'Love is kind, love is pure, and love is long-suffering'. You can't imagine the one who wrote it was once the cruelest person that ever existed. We read some of his letters; they are so beautiful, so soft, and so nice, that we forget that it came from someone who was tremendously cruel. Let me give an example in Acts 26:10 *This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.* He was one of those who cried, "Death to the Christians!" That was how cruel he was. I mean in prison you see all these people suffering, that were not enough to Paul, he will be among those who initiated death. That was how cruel he was. Look at other descriptions of him in Acts 22:4 *I*

persecuted this Way to the death. Paul didn't just want to see people suffering; he wanted all of them dead. Paul was so cruel and he was only satisfied when there is total annihilation. "I persecuted onto death" he said. *Binding and delivering into prison both men and women.* He didn't have a tender heart before he was born again. He was merciless. In Acts 9:2 *And ask letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, bring them bound to Jerusalem.* He wanted to bring people all the way to Jerusalem. Look at Acts 8:3 *As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.* He even went house-to-house for arrests; dragging them from the house and whatever they were doing, writing, or eating, he will take them straight to prison. Don't you think that was a very cruel man? Acts 26:10 *When they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.* Verse 11 *And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme.* He would have been perfect for the Nazi or the Gestapo. He caused people to blaspheme by torturing them and making them deny Jesus. Here he said, "I caused them to blaspheme". What a cruel man! If this is not enough look at the ending of verse 11 *being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.* He won't let them go and pursued them even to foreign cities. That was the old Paul before he was born-again. 1Tim 1:13 *Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; insolent means 'someone who is rudely contemptuous, someone who looks down on another person, rough and rude with them in his pride'.* So Paul was someone who would speak all the bad languages you know against the Christians. When you begin to see the background he had, if you were among those persecuted Christians, you must be wondering when the Lord is going to destroy him or when God is going to slaughter him or send fire to destroy him. Apparently with all these evil and wicked things, it seems as if Paul will never be converted. Some of you thought that you are been persecuted; wait till you met Saul! You thought you had a hard time, not until you have met Saul! This was the type of person he was.

Acts 26:10 tells you several things here. 'He could cast a vote' - that tells you he was a member of the Sanhedrin council and therefore Paul's age would have to be at least in his thirties. So we know that Paul's age was about thirty years plus, maybe he was forty, I don't know. To qualify as a member of the Sanhedrin council you need to be elderly; usually at least thirty and above for it was one of the Jewish customs and rules from the time when the priesthood was established. They marked the priests from thirty years old onwards. 'Thirty' was a spiritual

significance in that they believe a person would reach into maturity. So Paul was about thirty plus and a powerful member of the Sanhedrin council and one with voting power.

Having understood the backdrop of the apostle Paul and the stages that he reached, how he was a blasphemer, an insolent man, a persecutor and all his wicked deeds, the question we ask is, "Why was Paul touched, saved and commissioned?" How could someone so cruel ever become an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ? Truly the amazing grace of God! Therefore, don't you ever write off anybody! If God can do it for Saul, He can do it for anyone, inclusive of you!

Some of you wives are praying for your husbands; thinking they are monsters. Keep praying more without giving up on anyone because prayers prevail. But some people pray the halfway prayer. What is the halfway prayer? God change him but don't call him. Jerry Seville was a mechanic and he knew all the things of the world. His wife, Caroline, prayed continuously for him and one day God transformed him. He was born-again, baptized with the Holy Spirit and called by God to serve Him, something that Caroline would never expect. So some wives are praying for their husbands to be born again but when they are born again and their businesses are successful, they pray, "Lord please don't call him into the ministry," and in their hearts they fret, "lest I lose my comfortable lifestyle and all those wealth."

There are three reasons we can find as to why God touched the apostle Paul in spite of his cruelty. In 1 Tim.1:13 *I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.* You put that verse together with Acts 22:3 *and was zealous toward God as you all are today.* You put those verses together and you have a picture of what was going on in Paul's mind – zealous but ignorant! Paul thought that he was serving God. He was sincere but sincerely wrong. He believed the Jewish religion was the truth and anything outside of that was not of God and being firmly convinced mentally he went about destroying Christians, thinking that they were against God. When he was killing and persecuting the Christians he thought that he was doing God a favor. He thought that was what God wanted him to do. So his mind was totally wrong, his methods were cruel, his traditions were incorrect but his heart was right. He was sincere but sincerely wrong.

Surprisingly his heart was right and when God looks down, He sees right into the heart of Saul where nobody else could see because all these cruel things covered up Saul. When people see the natural they cannot see the inside, yet deep on the inside in his heart of heart Paul loves God. He wanted to serve God for he was called from the womb and he thought that was the way to serve God.

We see the same ignorance in the history of the Church, for example, the period of the Inquisition. You know what the inquisitors did? John Calvin was famous for his book on "Pre-destination and Theology" but if you read his true biography, you wouldn't want to get near that guy. Although he became a Protestant, he had his own watchers or "watch dogs" and the inquisitors in those early days of Christianity will go about and be like spies, 'spiritual K.G.B.' of the church. They would spy around to see anyone not walking with God or didn't do what the church officially permitted. And if anything were not officially sanctioned by the church, they would seize that person and put him on trial and asked, "What do you believe? Do you believe this or do you believe that?" And if you mentioned anything doctrinally erroneous, off with your head; you were punished. And every of those inquisitors thought they are serving God. It was the same with John Calvin when you read his life story. Because it was a reformed church, he sent people to check if anyone contradicted the doctrine. They don't have liberty of religion and as a result of that there was a lot of cruelty done in the name of God.

History tells us about the crusades. The crusades were a mistake. God did not sanction them at all, yet people had fought in the name of God for causes that are not scriptural. If such things had happened in history, don't be surprised that apostle Paul was like that. Yet deep in his spirit, in his heart of hearts firstly, he really loved God. Do you know that if you love God there is a certain amount of mercy He will show you? He won't permit you to continue that way because it is wrong and may destroy your own self but there is a certain mercy that can come into your life because your heart is right. Your heart can be right but your head wrong and your hands are wrong but God will still be able to reach to you but you need the other two points to help.

We see the second point in Acts 7:60 *Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.* Note in Acts 8:1, Saul was consenting to Stephen's death, meaning Saul was responsible for his death for he was the one who planned it against Stephen. Saul was the one who instigated the Jews to stone Stephen and they were making all kind of accusations against him in Acts 7: 54 *When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.* And as Stephen was dying after been stoned, he prayed the famous prayer "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." Meaning "God please forgive them for what they are doing to me". That's the second important thing. The Bible has much to speak about forgiveness.

The Lord's Prayer in Matt.6 states 'as you forgive others their trespasses against you the Lord forgives you'. We also understand from Matt. 6 and Mk. 11: 25 that if we don't forgive people, if we have unforgiveness in our heart and when we try to pray to God, He will not hear us. Therefore, unforgiveness hinders our prayer.

But there is another truth that is important, 'Unforgiveness will prevent people from reaching out to God', meaning your unforgiveness against another person will prevent God's Spirit from reaching out to touch the other person. For example, in a family relationship, the wife do not forgive her husband and because of her unforgiveness, not only their prayers are withheld but also the prayers of other saints for the husband are blocked. They are blocked by the unforgiveness of the wife because her unforgiveness becomes like a cement coating on the husband and no amount of prayer can get through. She could continue in that kind of attitude for years and wonder why God never hears.

Now that can apply to any other situation. We must know the other truth about forgiveness. Every time you do not forgive somebody, your unforgiveness becomes a hindrance for God working in their life and in your life too. So we like to look at Jn.20:23 and examine a special scripture there. If you don't read it carefully you may misunderstood but it is the other aspect of forgiveness that is important. *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.* It is different from Matt. 6. In this case Jesus is saying somebody has done something against you. You are right and they are

wrong and of course you have a right to demand justice. Normally people will reap what they sow anyway but here you could have a bad feeling against somebody who has done something against you. You want that person to change and yet that person cannot change because you don't forgive them. You say, "I don't have any unforgiveness in my heart against him". We are not talking about you against him only; we are talking about removing the thick covering of unforgiveness that you have laid. In other words, you are a still judgmental person and you want them to change yet they cannot change for the effect of intercessions are not getting through into their life because your unforgiveness has become a cement coating over the people you do not forgive.

If Stephen had not said, "I forgive Saul", we may never ever hear of Paul. When Jesus was on cross of Calvary and as He was dying and looking at all those people who were mocking at Him and says "Father forgive them for they do not know what they have done", what Jesus did was to keep an open heaven so that after He died and He rose again, when His disciples came and ministered to the very same people who crucified Him, mercy was released to them so that they could be saved. If Jesus did not release forgiveness to them, they are condemned to judgment.

There is no value in judgment. The value of judgment is only to satisfy your own evil. Think very carefully what value do judgment has. For God we understand because He has to rule this universe by His law but what value has judgment for us? Someone harm you, someone did things to you and you are angry with them. In the end you wrote a message that you forgive them but you still wish judgment fall on them. Lets say everything went your way. Judgment comes on them and in the end they died early. What do you gain? You only gain a fat ego. You were right that they were wrong but think very carefully for judgment has no value for anybody, not even for the one who was wronged. Then when you go to heaven and your life story is replayed and you see how that person being judged and crying in hell fire, when you see that you realize what value did your judgment get? Nothing, only a fat ego! But if you have said "I don't want them to be judged. I don't want the wrath of God to fall on them. I don't want them to reap what they are sowing". And you say "God have mercy. God forgive them". And God began to take our forgiveness over their life to show mercy.

Did you notice something? The afflicted has a right to call for vengeance from God. The blood of all the prophets and everything are going to come upon the earth in the book of Revelation because every innocent person who was harmed there is a judgment that needs to be paid. But there is only one solution, if those who are wronged cry for mercy the judgment can be diverted. Cry for mercy, not for ourselves, we don't need mercy for we got Lord's protection but for those who did wrong for they need mercy. So your forgiveness or unforgiveness prevents God from working in their lives.

In the expanded translation it brings this out very clearly. In Jn.20:23 *If the sins of any individuals you forgive they have been previously forgiven them if the present result that they are in the state of forgiveness. If the sins of any certain individuals you retain in not forgiving them they have been previously retained and thus have not been forgiven.* It is not talking about you but is talking about them. We know Matt. 6 applies to us. If we can't forgive we ourselves will not be forgiven but Jn.20:22 say 'if you don't forgive they cannot be forgiven'. What a marvelous truth that works both sides! They cannot be forgiven with the present result that they retain and they are retained and in a state of not being forgiven and they will remain in that judgment state, ready for judgment to come upon them. We don't want that to happen because that's not what Jesus tells us to do, to react with the call on judgment on people. That's what happened when Stephen cried out and said "Father lay not this charge against them". If Stephen had not said that, the charge will be laid against them all the rest of their lives and they will begin to reap what they have sowed in the wrong thing.

The second reason for Paul's conversion is because the people he harmed had forgiven him. If his victims did not forgive him, there would have been no chance for Paul too. Remember it is not only you who need to exercise forgiveness for your own sins and your relationship with God, but also those whom you don't forgive need it more than you because your forgiveness means a difference between their conversion or not. Perhaps there is somebody you have been praying for but they cannot come to know God because your unforgiveness is hindering them from coming to God. They will know nothing about truth and forgiveness or unforgiveness because they are unbelievers and you don't expect

unbelievers to live like believers. The surprising truth is that if we don't forgive them who had done us wrongs, God will hold it against them until we plead on their behalf, saying "God have mercy on them". When you begin to show mercy, the person instead of reaping what they sow and going to the gates of hell, will come to know the Lord. When you get to heaven and you replay your story, that person will come to you in heaven and say, "Thank you". Stephen said "Welcome Paul. Do you remember me?" Paul will say, "Of course, Stephen, thank you for not laying the charge against me". That's the second reason why he was converted.

The third reason for such a cruel man to be converted is not clear in the New Testament but it will be very obvious that intercessions were made for him. You could be sure the church of Jesus Christ prayed and interceded for those who persecute them and for God to touch their lives. Instead of repaying "an eye for an eye," they repaid "an eye" with prayers and it does many wonderful things. It will surprise many of us how much authority we have. You don't realize how much authority you have. Do you know that whom you forgive God forgives too? Whom every person you lay a charge against that is right and just, God lays a charge against them. We don't realize what authority we have.

Moses said "No God, don't do it" when God told Moses that He is going to destroy the Israelites. One man stood between Israel's destruction and Israel's resurrection. We don't realize how much authority we have. We have more authority than Moses. I can assure you if anything is done against an innocent lamb or sheep and they cried out for justice, woe to those who caused one of the little ones to suffer. It is dangerous because some Christians don't know how much authority they have and they are pronouncing judgment on people without realizing how much better if they have pronounced mercy.

One illustration that we can have is in Exodus 32. Although this is the Old Testament but the principle remains the same. When Moses was delayed up in the mountain receiving God's commandments and revelations in Ex.32:1 *Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of*

Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said "This is your god."

When Moses came down and saw that golden calf, three thousand people died when he came down. He asked Aaron how did this golden calf come about. Verse 23 Aaron said *For they said to me, "Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. And I said to them. "Whoever has any gold, let them break it off." So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."* Fat story! He said, "I just took all the gold, throw it in and out come this calf". Three thousand people died because of that. Don't you think Aaron should have died? In fact God wanted to punish him because he was the one who started it.

Turn to Deut. 9:20 *And the Lord was very angry with Aaron and would have destroyed him; so I prayed for Aaron also at the same time.* In other words Moses had to specially pray for Aaron. It's amazing that when God forgives He really forgives because that same Aaron in Leviticus 9 when he offered to God an offering, God accepted it. God didn't say, "I know you Aaron since that time you did it, I never like you". And Aaron was offering this offering and God said, "I don't want to show my glory, let another priest come". Never! When God forgives, it's as if it has never been done. So in Leviticus 9:6 *Then Moses said, "This is the thing which the Lord commanded you to do, and the glory of the Lord will appear to you."* God really did forgive Aaron all because one man prayed and interceded. Intercession can turn judgment into mercy, it can turn judgment into revival. Therefore forsake not intercession.

In Acts 9:1 *Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.* Saul was literally breathing fire out from his nostrils but because of these three principles, on his way to Damascus the Lord appeared to Saul. The

Lord said *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"* He didn't say, *"Why are you persecuting the Christians?"* but rather, *"Why are you persecuting Me?"* In Acts 9:3 you see Saul was not looking for the Lord, he was looking for Christians to put them to death. He was not like some of us seeking for God and thought you found Him but actually God was looking for you. Some of us say, *"I found God"*. When was God lost? You were the one who were lost but there is a desire in our heart and some of us have been seeking high and low for the truth and we have come to know the truth about God and God has changed our hearts. But Saul was not seeking God; he was not sitting on a donkey going to a prayer meeting. He was going directly against God and because of the three points that we have mentioned, God did a work in Saul's life.

I could imagine Stephen when he went up to heaven and when he was at the throne of God and there were still many Christians dying because of Saul. And Stephen would be up there reminding and saying, *"Father God remember Saul. I have forgiven him"*. His life was taken but Saul's life will continue and end up in ministry. In Acts 9:3 *As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"*

Lets look at the detail of the story in the background. There were other people who travelled with him, what happened to the others? Acts 22:6 *Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. And I fell to the ground. Then in verse 9 And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.* So he said the people who were around him also saw the light coming down from heaven. Acts 26:13 *At midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground. All of them were possibly on donkey backs and suddenly came this light from heaven and all fell. Some of us think that only Saul fell down but the light shone on all of them and all of them were lying on the ground and God only spoke to one.*

Then there is another interesting thing that happen in Acts 9 *And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless.* Then there is another interesting thing that

happened here in Acts 9. It says in verse 7 *And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.* They heard a voice but they saw nobody. Acts 22:9 *And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.*

Did you notice something here; it says they did not hear the voice that spoke to Saul. In Acts 9:7, *"indeed hearing a voice but seeing no man."* Then in Acts 22:9 it says, *"they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me."* Isn't that a contradiction when you put both verses together?

The key to the interpretation is the Greek word for "hear" or "*akouo*." The word "hear" or "*akouo*" may be used in two ways. The first as in becoming aware of sound, etc with the ears, as in "I heard someone laughing." The second as in being told or informed, like "Have you heard the news?" Thus, Acts 9:7 indicates a "hearing" of the sound whereas Acts 22:9 indicates hearing the meaning or message of the voice (which they did not hear.) The former denotes the auditory perception whereas the latter the mental perception.

So the one here in Acts 9 that says they heard a sound but they didn't hear the sentences. It was not intelligible to them. It was not a voice that they heard but rather they just heard a sound whereas in Acts 22 it says here that they didn't hear the voice, meaning they did not hear the message of the voice. Summarizing the two verses, we could say that Paul's companions heard the *sound* of the voice but did not hear the *message* of the voice. Paul's companions could have heard the voice sounding "*boom, boom,*" but Paul heard the voice saying, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" Here is where a small thing like that when you look deeper it makes a lot of difference. Now we have the whole background.

By that time all the men have fallen to the ground, some of them heard a sound but they were speechless when they heard that sound and they could not understand that sound. Only Paul heard the voice whereas the rest heard the sound.

That's an important spiritual truth here. It is interesting to know that the same spiritual manifestation can be received differently. I am sure you read about the gospel of John when Jesus Christ was giving thanks to God and says "Father I thank You for hearing Me and that you hear Me always" and suddenly it thundered when God spoke 'This is My beloved Son'. Then the other responses of the people were interesting, some of the people claimed it thundered and some of the people thought an angel spoke to Him.

Look at Jn.12:27 *Now My soul is troubled and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.*" Then a voice came from heaven saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." Jesus had one of the most remarkable answers from heaven. Imagine one day as you are praying to God, "O gracious heavenly Father. We pray for Your grace and Your mercy to be established", then from heaven the reply came "I have established it". By that time usually nobody is around the prayer meeting but here God manifests and God says "I have glorified it and will glorify it again".

What I want you to notice is the response of the people, in verse 29 *Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him."* Those who said it thundered they only heard it as a thunder because when the voice said "I have glorified it and will glory it again", you need spiritual ears to hear spiritual manifestation, you need spiritual eyes to see spiritual manifestation and you need a spiritual mind to understand spiritual manifestation.

Then the others who were there, who also possibly heard some word here and there, said an angel had spoken. It is not unscriptural for anyone of you expecting any audible voice. Verse 30 *Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake."* See Jesus doesn't need voices; He doesn't need all these things because He is with God and He knew the voice of God. These are what I call the audible voice of God manifested but the strange thing is that in that precise moment when the voice came, three different groups heard

different things. One group heard it as a thunder and another group heard it as a clear crystal voice. For spiritual matters, how you perceive is dependent on your spiritual level for the same manifestation can be perceived differently according to your spiritual level.

I remember the first vision that I had of Jesus Christ was in an evangelistic campaign in Penang. I was sitting way at the back and this evangelist was calling for all the people to go forward for prayer. As all the people were coming forth and I was looking down from the top row, observing all those things happening at the stage, suddenly I saw this huge big figure standing over the people and it looked exactly like Jesus Christ, huge and big, like floating above the people. Everything was perfect but there is only one part of the vision that troubled me for the color of the vision was green. So I saw a green Jesus standing over the people blessing them. You know what an open vision is like; you don't realize whether this is an image or a side effect. The vision was there for sometime before He just disappeared. I was quite troubled and enquired, "Lord never in my Bible did I hear of a green vision. His robe was green, His beard was green, His face was green everything was green". Then I went back to pray and said God "What's wrong? It's that a right vision or a false vision?" Then the Lord said, "It's because you are still green". Then the Lord began to show me that I perceived Him through my 'young' spiritual level for at that time I was young in the things of the Lord. Then I began to realize that we perceive spiritual perception according to our spiritual level.

The same manifestation can be different to different people. If you have zero spiritual level even if someone comes from the dead and manifests you still may not take it and believe; neither can you even see or hear. Even if Jesus were to appear in a cloud for all to see, some people will just say it's a special reflection of light. They wouldn't believe because they perceive at their level. So here were all these other people lying down with Paul hearing the sound but not understanding because of their spiritual level.

What was Paul's spiritual level? Lets look at Acts 9 you could see that he was actually ready for the harvest because the moment he was thrown down God spoke to him. When the Lord presented the case against him and said "Saul, Saul,

why are you persecuting Me?" - the first thing that Paul said is, "Who are You Lord? Who are you? What are You?" The Lord answered and said in verse 5 *I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*. It tells you Paul would be frightened by that time for he never noticed Jesus is alive. Can you imagine persecuting somebody's followers and suddenly that Master Himself come asking "Why are you persecuting Me?" Can you imagine the fear that went to Paul when the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting". If he could run he would have run but he couldn't for he was stuck to the ground. See God has a sense of humor.

There are three proofs that we can show here that Saul was born again that instant. Firstly when the Lord said "I am Jesus", he was trembling. Acts 9:6 *So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord what do You want me to do?"* Now that he is stuck to the ground and said "Lord what do You want me to do. I am willing to do anything You want me to do". I give you three proofs that he was converted. Firstly he acknowledged Jesus as Lord. Secondly when he met Ananias in Acts 9:17 *And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and said brother Saul*. In other words, Ananias recognized he was born again. The third proof of his conversion is in Acts 26:16 where Jesus said, *Arise and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for the purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you*. Thirdly Jesus commissioned Paul to the ministry. I am sure Jesus will not commission someone who is not born again. So Jesus immediately commissioned Paul because Paul acknowledged Him as Lord and he was born again when he fell off the donkey. So there are three proofs of his conversion.

Paul has come to know the Lord through a tremendous experience. Now in his commission at his conversion time there are three other important things for us to take note of. We noted that Paul was born again and he was called to the ministry of God. It all started when somebody said "Lord, lay not this charge on them". O the marvelous grace of God.

There are three things that we need to know after Paul was converted and commissioned. Firstly is the verse you have read in Acts 26:16 Jesus said, *for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you minister and a witness both of*

the thing which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. That's the first point in the commission. You can only bear witness of the things you seen and the things you hear. Your main goal and task is to go tell what the Lord had shown you and what you have heard from Him. Tell of those things you personally have seen and those things that you personally have heard. That's your obligation and duty and call as a witness of Jesus Christ. We are to be His witness and not a reporter. You are not to tell another person's story. You are not to tell what somebody else had seen, what somebody else had heard. You are to tell what you have personally see, heard and experience of the Lord. The only thing that will keep you in the ministry and in your conversion, in spite of the lack of understanding of theology, the one thing that will keep you in the way of God, is forsake not your experience. Remember from where you have come from and when you are put on trial it is your experiences that carry you through. They could line up arguments against arguments, sentence against sentence, logic against logic, but no man can take from you your experience of God and that's what Christianity is about. We don't have a theology of Jesus only in history, we don't have just a creed to believe in, we don't have just a religion in that we could follow, we have a living God called Jesus Christ whom we can personally encounter with and He is alive and he wants you to experience Him in a personally way. You'll realize that you know nothing until you know how it is like to know that God is real. Now this is something that is consistent through the Bible.

If you look over at Acts 2 as apostle Peter was preaching, he says to all these people who were enquiring regarding what the Holy Spirit out pouring was like, in verse 33 *Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.* We don't base our ministry on experiences but we base our ministry on the Word but the strength of your Word depends on your level of experience. In other words you must have that experience first before you understand the Word fully. You don't base it on your experience but your experience will help you understand the Word and then basing it on the Word you could base your ministry there.

Let me illustrate this point here. For example faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Before you can believe in something, you must hear about

it. In Acts 19 Paul said to the Ephesians, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" The Ephesians replied him and said, "We have not even heard about the Holy Spirit". How can they receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit when they haven't even heard about Him? So you need information first. You need to hear about and acquire the information, but the information alone is not going to be enough. The information helps you to move into that experience. That's the illustration on the operation on faith. Now here we are talking about experience in relationship to the Word. You will never be able to understand this Bible until you experience God and the more you experience God the more you find things in the Bible. You cannot just read the Bible and get a concordance alone without prayer or get an analytical mind trained in Algebra or develop the most logical mind and analyze these words line upon line and still you will never get the truth of God that way. The truths of God are received first through experience and then with your experience you look into the Word and you understand where its place is. When you understand it that's when you can base it on the Word and go forth. So when we are teaching people, we say 'Don't base your ministry on experience' we are not saying don't have experiences, rather we are saying when you have experience don't run out yet. Build upon your experience and gain understanding based on the Word. But that doesn't mean that is telling you therefore don't have experience, just have the Word. You can never understand the Word without experience.

You will notice this if you have not been praying much in the Lord and your worship life is low and you are so busy about your life, about your job, doing all the routine things that this life has and all the burdens and affairs of this life, I would guarantee you if you were to read this Bible you don't get much. You could read it and it looks like a dull book because you lack experience. But when you begin to worship God and praise God and experience the reality of God, o how good it is to know He is in your heart and you are with Him and you experience this joy that is unspeakable. This peace that is beyond understanding, this love that goes beyond the widest dimension, thing that you cannot express but it's in your experience. Then when you turn to the Bible you will literally devour it. You will say 'Yes I find Him here'. Ten chapters will be nothing to you; twenty chapters will be nothing to you because your heart has experienced God. O how important experiential knowledge is! You can only tell and speak of what you see and what you heard and one day when you began to be persecuted, you began to be challenged in your faith, that encounter with God will make you

unshakable.

Do you know every argument has a counter argument? Which is why in my book of philosophy that I am working on you can never really prove whether God exists or God doesn't exist because even if you give people the proof they can explain it in another way. You tell people your experience they can explain it another way and such is the mind of man. In the end, believing in God is a matter of faith. If you believe in God you experience Him. If you don't believe in God you are in a different world. Which is why when atheists challenge you, "Prove to me that God exists" and you try to prove the existence of God by finding every proof you can, they can easily turn your proofs around to explain their position too. In the long run you can only ask them back a question, "You prove that God doesn't exist" and they will also be stunned because they cannot prove that God doesn't exist either. If they say, "I don't see Him therefore He doesn't exist". You haven't seen your brain does your brain exist? You haven't seen an electromagnetic wave does it exist? Yes of course. So you really can't prove that God doesn't exist. In the long conclusion it is faith in God and to choose not to believe in God is also a step of faith in the opposite side. They have to believe that God doesn't exist. So in a sense when it comes to your testimony it is what you have experienced in God that sustain you.

Only recently I was sitting together with a person who was called to the ministry. I asked him several questions. I said "How do you know that God called you?" After I heard his replies I told him it is not strong enough. He says "What do you mean it is not strong enough?" Because you said, "This person prophesied over me" and I sensed it and say that is not strong. I have been in the ministry that long and this is an important thing. In the end you must know and you must be fully assured of His call and that is what will sustain you in the ministry. Because you know you are called, not whether you succeed, not whether for you it is easy, not whether you are financially viable or not but it's whether you are called to that kind of work that He wants you to do. That will keep you on track because along the road there will be difficulties, hardship what ever. You will be challenged. That's the first major area.

Notice that when the apostles were challenged about their faith, in Acts 4: 20 *For*

we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. Nobody can challenge what you have experienced. They can only analyze what you have experienced and accept it or reject it but they cannot challenge it because it was your experience. And when Paul the apostle was being challenged regarding the doctrine of Jesus and His ministry in Acts 26 he told king Agrippa "O king I have not been disobedient to the heavenly vision". And you must understand that Paul was about seventeen years in ministry and twenty-seven years in the Lord. While he was born again in Acts 9, Paul was launched into the missionary journey and the ministry of the apostle in Acts 13, which was A.D. 45 and Acts 26 was after three missionary journeys and some time during his imprisonment and it was A.D. 62, a period of at least seventeen years in the ministry and ten years of conversion. After a total of twenty-seven years after Paul was born again, he still says "I am what I am by the grace of God." I believe all these things because I have seen and I have heard and no man can take that from me because His voice and His Bible are having the same authority. If I know that I have heard God and God told me to do something and anything or any person stand in the way is going to get blasted down because I fear God more than anything. I know that if I don't obey His written Word I will suffer. But I also know that if I don't obey His voice that I hear, I will pay the price. And if you hear the voice of God and you don't obey, you pay the price as much as disobedience to the written Word. Faith obeys His Word whether His Word is the written Word or the spoken Word you hear in your spirit. And we are accountable to that.

The second area of Paul's commission in Acts 26:17 *I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you.* Notice in Acts 26 that God told Paul what he was commissioned to do, 'I will send you to the Gentiles'. Look at Acts 9:5 and you see his first question, "Who are You?" His second question is verse 6 "What shall I do?" And that's the second point in the commission. If God commissioned you He will tell you what to do. But before you can deal with the what, you must deal with the 'who'. The 'who' means you experienced Jesus of Nazareth. You experienced Him in all His fullness. You begin to know who He is: the revelation of Jesus in your life. Then the next question is what to do. You don't have what to do before the 'who'. A lot of people want to do what without experiencing the 'who' but when you get past the 'who' it deals with the 'what'.

This is exactly what I was talking to that brother who was not from this country. We were talking about his call to the ministry. I said you know what God asked you to do. I am not talking about whether you are apostle, prophet, pastor evangelist or teacher or specific things, but at least if He called you He will tell you about certain things. I am not expecting some details that will come later in the ministry but He will tell you what you are to do. And if the answer is "I don't know", I will tell the person that he or she has not spent enough time with God to hear Him. I know God well enough when He tells you something, He will also tell you what to do. If you cannot hear the 'what', you have not been spending enough time with God. Waiting to hear Him speak the details. So when Paul said, "What shall I do?" the Lord says, "I will show you what you must do now and I will show you what you must do later". There are two "'what's."

See in Acts 9 he says in verse 6 *Lord, what do You want me to do?* And over in Acts 22:10 Jesus said *Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.* In other words, God is going to show you the 'what' step by step but if you hear something from God or commission or call of God and you cannot even tell the first step of the 'what', I will say there is something wrong. You have not spent enough time with God to hear the first step of the 'what'. There are many steps of 'what' and God will show you what you must do now. So God said, "Now Paul I want you to go to Damascus. When you are there I will tell you what you must do some more. And after I will tell you what you must do along the way". It's a gradual leading by the Spirit and therefore the 'what' must come when God commissioned you.

The third area in Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to him, "Go for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.* Look at the word 'he must suffer', not 'he shall suffer', not he will but he must. I am sure you heard about the Salvation Army. They always put on their logo, the two 'S' and it means 'saved to serve'. William Booth started the Salvation Army and in case you didn't read the history of William Booth, he didn't live his life fully in God. After he died he went to heaven and Jesus said, "I will give you one more chance". And he came back to earth and was so desperate to do things for God and that's how the Salvation Army started with 'Saved to Serve' but there is one more in between, one more 'S'; 'Saved to suffer and serve'. I can prove to you from this

Bible that before God allow you to serve, God wants you to bear suffering for His name. You will never serve before you are tested and you will be fried, burned, purified. God is not going to send a vessel out that is half-baked. He wants to bake you up first and the baking process is allowing testing and trials in your life. Every time when the apostle Paul talks about ministry, he talks about suffering. Now suffering can come in different forms, not necessarily in sicknesses or in debt because those are the redemption from the curse, but suffering is of persecution, hardship, and sacrifices and unless you are prepared to suffer; you are not prepared to serve. God doesn't divide suffering from serving for they are one and the same thing, two sides of the same coin.

Paul said, "We die that others may live". 1 Peter 5 talks about when we suffer for His sake, then the Spirit of glory comes on our lives. I want to testify to you on this fact that the greater He wants you to serve the greater you must suffer and be tested. So if you are not prepared to take the testing, to be like a sheep led to the slaughter, then you are not ready for His service.

I know what is like for God to prove you. When we started this church I remember people were challenging whether I was really called by God as a minister and there were statements made that I was not called to be a pastor. The only thing that kept me on was not only friends but it was because inside me I know that I know that He has called me to the ministry. Now after all these years people don't doubt that you are called. That is why anyone who is called must really know that he or she have heard from Him. You can be called and be trained, no problem, but the sustenance comes from your knowledge and experience of Him.

I remember what it was like when we have no one to turn to when persecution abound from the north to the south to the east to the west. I know what it is like to cry a billion tears and to know that there is no one to defend you at all. I know what it is like to cry for the whole night because you feel God "You have called me and what are these things happening?" Today when you begin to reap the fruit of the labor, people don't realize that before you can serve you must suffer and there will continue to be purification but after sometime you become like the apostle Paul, you understand God's pattern and Paul said, "I rejoice, I take

pleasure in infirmities and persecution” because he understood that was God’s pattern of working.

Many times when I look at new ministers coming out in the ministry and I see them struggling as they begin to face persecution and difficulties, my heart goes out to them and said, “If you only know that is the way God is purifying you for His ministry. If only you stop struggling against what God is permitting to come into your life so that you would be so molded, broken, so pressed, until you know that you are nothing in Him and only Jesus lives in you”. Then you’re ready for that which God has for your life and there is no short cut. You are saved to suffer.

Let us accept the Lord Jesus not just a Savior, not just a healer, and just a baptizer in the Holy Spirit but let us also accept the Lord Jesus Christ as a suffering Messiah and take upon us the suffering that you must bear for His Name’s sake. If you know Him as shepherd, healer, El Shaddai, Jehovah Jirah, you must know Him as a lamb led to the slaughter, then will your faith be perfected in Him. He has suffered many things for us and it is the only way in which you can come forth in the ministry of God.