“Fear and Boldness in Jerusalem” Acts 9:26-31

Context:
The Spirit’s work at Pentecost opened the eyes of new believers that they might transcend spiritual ignorance and live lives in keeping with Christ-like virtue and power. That work continued through Stephen and Philip, whose spiritual gifting to work signs and wonders created sacred spaces which showed Christ’s resurrection power. Those sacred spaces intruded into religious and political power structures. It resulted in persecution and dispersion (the diaspora) of a large number of believers into Judea, Samaria, and the regions beyond. Saul of Tarsus was a radical example of a persecutor of Christ’s disciples pursuing them wherever they fled. His narrative now unfolds, revealing how spiritual regeneration transforms Christ-haters into God-lovers. The narrative of Saul also reveals a fulfillment of the prophecy of Christ that brings the Gospel to the ends of the world.

Life Principle: Boldness is not a lack of fear; it is the result of fear rightly placed (Acts 9:31).

Luke reveals that Paul is a man of bold action and strong words. He’s already been threatened with death for his preaching in Damascus (9:23) and has now come to Jerusalem, continuing to preach the gospel bravely. Three times were reminded of Paul’s confidence: Barnabas recounts his bold preaching in Damascus (9:27); he then preaches boldly in Jerusalem (9:28); and then is described as ‘disputing’ with the Hellenist Jews (9:29).

The underlying theme, however, is that Paul’s boldness is always empowered by the comfort and assistance of others. The church in Damascus cares for him and rescues him (9:25); Barnabas speaks on his behalf to encourage him and others (9:27); the church in Jerusalem rescues him from certain death (9:20).
In contrast to Paul’s boldness is the undertone of fear. The passage depicts the church as at first fearful of Paul (9:26) and leaves the reader to imagine how fear of people must be overcome in order to speak out for Christ as confidently as Paul does.

3. Acts 9:31
Finally, the text leads us to understand that fear is ultimately the cause of comfort and boldness. Fear will always exist in the heart of humans, the issue at stake is what (or whom) we make the object of our fear; and conversely, from what (or whom) we draw comfort and encouragement.

For Further Study:

- Acts 9:31 says that the church walked in the “comfort of the Holy Spirit.” Gravepoint’s doctrinal statement on the Holy Spirit says, “We believe that He moves in the hearts of all believers to strengthen them for the indwelling and working of Jesus Christ unto the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:14-21). Take a look at some verses which describe the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (i.e. Jn. 15:26-27; 16:4-15; Eph. 3:14-21; Rom 8:16-26). What does it mean to walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit? What role does the Holy Spirit play in comforting believers? What are some other things these verses say that the Holy Spirit does in the life of the believer? How have you seen the Holy Spirit comfort, teach, encourage, and lead you in practical ways in your life?

- One of the concepts brought up here is “the fear of the Lord.” This is a phrase which occurs regularly throughout the book of Proverbs, occasionally throughout the OT, and sparsely throughout the NT. The theme, however, is consistent throughout the entire Bible. As a Bible Study Method, use a concordance and look up all of the instances of the phrase: “fear of the Lord” throughout the Bible. Try to come up with your own explanation of what it means to walk in “the fear of the Lord.” How would an understanding of the fear of the Lord impact your interpretation of other passages like: 1 Jn. 4:18 and Phil. 2:12?

Transformational Exercise:
Spend several minutes each day this week contemplating what it means to fear the Lord in such a way that it causes comfort and emboldens you to speak up about Christ.