

Sunday, May 4, 2025  
Third Sunday of Easter  
Acts 9:1-20 "I Am Jesus, Whom You are Persecuting"

Saul was following his understanding of what God wanted.  
Monotheism. Complete obedience to God.  
Put God first before human commitments.

He didn't want to turn to the right or the left but to obey only God. It may be that when we are most sure we are right, we are not understanding God's ways.

We believe that it was truly God who flashed the light from heaven and stopped him. We believe that God sent His Son Jesus to the world as a man, that worship of Jesus is not polytheism. For the people of the time, trained in the Torah, it was shocking to have a person claiming to speak not just as a prophet, but as one with the Father. It seemed blasphemous.

The canon is closed, according to the church councils in the centuries following Christ. There will be no new revelation about God's character beyond the Person of Jesus, who is the full expression of God.

So does that mean that we already know everything about obedience to God?

Is it possible that although we are committed to obeying God in 2025, we are going against what God wants? Churches seek certainty in study programs like "The Purpose-driven Life" and in detailed statements of faith about God and the Bible.

Paul was chosen to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, kings, and Israel. The list is an unusual formulation, as usually Israel comes first, with the extension to the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit is showing how the Church will develop in the Book of Acts.

The Church developed in history. From the life and teachings of Christ the Church unfolded as mediated by Paul, who was chosen in our story this morning.

Do you remember in the OT book of Samuel how God wanted Israel to be led directly by God, not kings? In the same way, Christ did not establish a human institution to carry on his work, but trained his disciples. The Church has become a number of mighty institution!

Can you imagine a Church without hierarchy or earthly authority? Can you envision spiritual life without any institutions?

Without question, history and our own experience teaches us that if a group tries to function cooperatively, without dominating leaders, someone with ambition will step in. People like to follow strong leaders rather than take responsibility for choosing a good way. We are unable to choose good without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

"Reformed and always reforming" means continually measuring ourselves against the guidelines of Scripture and trying to become ever more aligned with what God wants. (GPS with fixed destination.)

Is this stabilizing or destabilizing?  
Is this negative or positive?  
Arrogant or humble?

Am I persecuting Jesus in any way? Yes, we surely are, especially where we are absolutely sure that we are defending God against those who are opposing him.

Standing with God's purposes is a difficult and courageous way of life. Defending God is surely a foolish endeavor in which we find ourselves persecuting Christ instead. First, God's ways are so far beyond ours that we follow at a distance. Second, God is Almighty and takes responsibility to defend himself.

We will always be living in God's faithfulness and mercy, courageously speaking and acting as we believe is right not justifying ourselves.  
We will always be living in God's faithfulness and mercy, repenting but not apologizing for ourselves.

Let's live confidently, because we receive all that we comprehend of God's voice to us, without shame or backtracking. and provisionally. Let's live provisionally and humbly, because even with the best of intentions, we can persecute the Lord Jesus unawares.

### **Note**

I am interested in your thoughts and prayers as you read the Scripture text or my sermon. Please let me know if you would like to have a conversation on these matters or another matter of interest to you.

—Mary 267.239.1295 (Text first or leave a voice mail)

Or leave a message with Linda E at the Church, 610.259.2696, asking me to call you.