

COVENANT — THE FIRST CHURCH

Paul's New-Birth Experience

LESSON 04

JUNE 28, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Acts 9:1–20

FOCUS VERSES

Acts 9:17–18

¹⁷And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

¹⁸And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God can radically transform His enemies into His covenant people.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

We will welcome everyone as a brother or sister whom God transforms.

COVENANT CONTEXT

In Acts 8, God invited the Samaritans into covenant with Him. Although the Samaritans were partly Gentile, they were also partly Jewish. However, here in Acts 9, God recruited a zealous Pharisee named Saul to preach the gospel to Gentiles, setting up the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 to bless all nations through the Jews.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: Where would you visit if you could visit any country in the world?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to God extending His covenant to everyone in the world, including the Gentiles.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. SAUL ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS (I)

A. Saul's Plan to Persecute Christians

DISCUSS: *Why do you think Saul thought he was doing a good thing by persecuting Christians?*

B. God's Plan to Recruit Saul

C. I will allow the Lord to redirect my steps.

***DISCUSS:** How was your conversion experience similar or dissimilar to Saul's?*

II. FROM THE OLD COVENANT TO THE NEW

A. Saul's Transformation

***DISCUSS:** What are some aspects of your old life that you were proud of but are now ashamed—that you now consider “rubbish” but once held in high regard?*

B. I will fully embrace my new life in Christ.

III. PAUL: THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

A. From Enemies and Outcasts to Covenant People Together (**V**)

***DISCUSS:** What relationships do you have that were once marked by hostility or division but have been transformed by the power of Christ?*

B. The Transforming Power of Jesus

C. I will welcome all people as brothers or sisters God transforms.

***DISCUSS:** How can you purpose to be radically inclusive in your evangelistic efforts and ensure you spread the gospel to everyone, not writing off anyone as being unworthy of your witness?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to restore broken relationships within the body of Christ
- For God to help us see everyone, regardless of how different someone may be, as a potential brother or sister in Christ

LESSON CONNECTION

Harold was raised in a rural town in the northeastern United States. In his tiny town of 1,500 people, his exposure to other languages, ethnicities, and cultures had been extremely limited. Everyone in his town had the same skin tone, verbal tics, and cultural quirks. He had never even considered other ways of thinking and living until he found himself surrounded by a small sampling of the world's diversity packed into a crowded cafeteria at Bible school.

Harold sat at a round table with several students and one of the professors. Lively conversation ebbed and flowed across the room, mostly going unnoticed by Harold and his fellow students. Suddenly, the professor interjected into the conversation, “Do you hear that?” The students looked confused as the professor smiled with his trademark cheeky grin, declaring, “It sounds like Heaven. Revelation 7:9 says every nation and every language will be present before God's throne. This student body looks like a good start.”

Prompted by the teacher's words, Harold began listening more intently to nearby conversations he had previously disregarded as background noise. At the table nearest to Harold sat four students attempting to communicate in French—none of the four spoke the same dialect of French. One student hailed from France, another from the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec, another from Louisiana Cajun country, and the fourth from the

French-speaking African country of Cameroon. The four students laughed and joked as they compared pronunciations and cultural differences.

Beyond these, Harold identified distinct Russian, Chinese, Australian, and Jamaican accents. He saw students who had come from every corner of the United States. Harold then considered the sole online class he was taking that semester because of a course scheduling conflict. In that class he was studying alongside distance learners in Fiji, the Dominican Republic, and rural Saskatchewan in central Canada. The professor had noted he previously had taught online students from several countries representing every continent except Antarctica.

Harold and his tablemates began to excitedly verbalize this diversity to one another and to the professor. With a smile, knowing he had seized upon a teachable moment, the professor asked the table of eager students, “Why do you suppose everyone here at this school gets along so well? There are some in this room whose countries are at war with each other. There are some in this room whose ancestors enslaved the ancestors of others in this room. By the world’s standard, they should hate each other, don’t you think?”

The students were silent. They had not considered such a perspective, yet at the same time, the answer to the professor’s question felt obvious to these students who were intensely engaged in the study of God’s Word. Harold piped up, “Only Jesus could do such a thing. The world will always have division and disunity, which is why the end times will be full of wars and violence. Only Christ will be able to unify what the world is trying to tear apart.”

BIBLE LESSON

I. SAUL ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

(I) One of the most iconic conversion stories in the Bible is the apostle Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. At that time, the Bible still refers to him as *Saul*. In fact, it is a common misunderstanding that Saul’s name was changed on the road to Damascus (when in actuality the two names are Roman and Hebrew variations of the same word). He spent three years with Jesus in Arabia, and then he returned to Damascus, later went to Jerusalem, and then traveled to Tarsus by way of Caesarea. (See Galatians 1:17; Acts 9:26–30.) Saul eventually ended up in Antioch, where he was a faithful part of a ministerial team for many years, possibly over a decade, before he was commissioned as a missionary during a prayer service (Acts 13:1–3).

During this entire time, it would appear he was still known as Saul. He was not referred to as Paul until he began his missionary travels. (See Acts 13:9.) While he is most widely known for his missionary journeys and letters he wrote to various churches, many years passed between his conversion and his travels and letters. Before he was a missionary, before he wrote a single epistle, and before he became one of the most influential Christian ministers in the New Testament church, he was simply Saul, a zealous Pharisee en route to Damascus to persecute Christians. During this trip to Damascus, Saul had an unexpected and life-changing encounter.

A. Saul’s Plan to Persecute Christians

By his own description, Saul was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:5–6, NKJV). He

was extremely knowledgeable of Hebrew law and prophecy. He sincerely believed he was doing God's good work as he zealously persecuted Christians. Saul had already consented to Stephen's brutal execution and had broken into houses all around Jerusalem looking for Christians to persecute and imprison (Acts 8:3). However, his murderous intent could not be contained in Jerusalem. He received intel and permission from the high priest to travel to Damascus to find even more Christians to imprison.

***DISCUSS:** Why do you think Saul thought he was doing a good thing by persecuting Christians?*

B. God's Plan to Recruit Saul

While Saul had a plan to persecute Christians, God had a plan of His own. God knew that someone as zealous as Saul would make an excellent warrior for His cause. God also knew that someone as educated and thoughtful as Saul would require an experience he would never be able to deny. God blinded Saul with a bright light and spoke to him with a booming voice from Heaven. Saul knew such an experience could only happen by the power of the God he knew as Jehovah. When the voice identified Himself as Jesus, Saul finally realized that Jehovah and Jesus were one and the same—Jesus was Jehovah who came in flesh.

C. I will allow the Lord to redirect my steps.

Saul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus is an inspiring example of God's great mercy. Just as Saul was willing to be transformed when he had an undeniable experience with Jesus Christ, so we must allow the Lord to redirect our steps when we are going down a wrong path. While hopefully we will not be errantly jailing and murdering Christians like Saul was, any path that leads us away from God is a wrong path. We must be willing to allow God to guide our path in every juncture of our lives.

***DISCUSS:** How was your conversion experience similar or dissimilar to Saul's?*

II. FROM THE OLD COVENANT TO THE NEW

Saul was a Pharisee trained "at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law" (Acts 22:3, NKJV). Consequently, few in Saul's day were more qualified to articulate and argue the intricacies of Jewish law. Yet, when confronted with the reality of Jesus' identity, Saul's outlook completely changed. He so completely embraced Jesus Christ that he would later describe the old covenant of the Law as "the ministry of death" and considered himself to be one of the "ministers of the new covenant" (II Corinthians 3:6–7, NKJV).

A. Saul's Transformation

Saul transitioned away from understanding his relationship with God in terms of legalistic obedience to the Old Testament law. Such a mindset only led to death, but the new covenant—which emphasizes a personal relationship with God through the indwelling Holy Spirit—brought life. Such a shift in mindset meant Saul would not be able to rely on his own personal accolades and accomplishments anymore. Under the old covenant, his training and pedigree were points of pride. Indeed, Saul was later able to easily recite his heritage, education, and personal qualifications in Philippians 3:5–6. However, under the new covenant, Saul would count these credentials as "rubbish" (Philippians 3:8, NKJV). A personal relationship with Jesus Christ was of more value and a greater

qualification than anything he could attain by his own power or merit.

***DISCUSS:** What are some aspects of your old life that you were proud of but are now ashamed—that you now consider “rubbish” but once held in high regard?*

B. I will fully embrace my new life in Christ.

Saul’s mindset completely changed when he embraced his new life in Jesus Christ. Similarly, we must choose to abandon our former prideful, sinful way of thinking and allow ourselves to be transformed through the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of us. Maybe none of us will experience a blinding light and booming voice like Saul did, but all of us have an opportunity like Saul to embrace Jesus Christ when we hear the gospel. Saul could have chosen to reject the gospel and continue in blindness, both physically and spiritually. We, too, can choose to reject the gospel of Christ, or better yet, we could join with Paul and allow the truth of God’s Word and His Holy Spirit to change our hearts and minds.

III. PAUL: THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

Multiple theories exist surrounding the reason for Saul going by Paul, but it is worth noting that Saul is a Hebrew name and Paul is a Greek name. Since Paul would later be known as an “apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13) and Greek was the common language of the Roman world, the name change was likely pragmatic. His missionary efforts would be readily accepted by non-Jews if he used a Greek and Roman name rather than a distinctly Hebrew name.

This theory is further supported by the context in which Saul’s name change is recorded (Acts 13:4–12). While witnessing in Cyprus, Saul and Barnabas had an opportunity to witness to the Roman proconsul of the region, Sergius Paulus, a Gentile. During this evangelistic effort, a Jewish false prophet opposed Saul and Barnabas, hoping to dissuade Sergius Paulus from converting to Christianity. This false prophet was called *Bar-jesus* in Hebrew and *Elymas* in Arabic, which literally meant “sorcerer or magician.” Saul, filled with the Holy Ghost, rebuked Elymas, who was immediately struck with blindness. This miracle so profoundly impacted Sergius Paulus that he was converted.

In the middle of this story of Saul opposing a Jewish false prophet while witnessing to a Gentile, Luke recorded that Saul was also known as Paul (Acts 13:9). By listing Paul’s name change here and subsequently never using the name Saul again, Luke signaled to the reader that Paul’s role was moving forward in the Book of Acts. Paul’s ministry did include Jews, but Paul was primarily an apostle to Gentiles.

A. From Enemies and Outcasts to Covenant People Together

The hostility between Jews and Gentiles is well-documented throughout the entire Bible. Paul was knowledgeable not only of Jewish doctrine but also Jewish history and would have been keenly aware of this deep-seated hatred. However, Paul recognized God’s desire was to bring both Jews and Gentiles into covenant relationship with Him.

(V) Paul described this new relationship in his epistle to the church at Ephesus. He recorded that Jews and Gentiles had previously been separated by the old covenant of circumcision. Under the old covenant, Gentiles were regarded

as “aliens,” “strangers,” and “foreigners,” without any hope of salvation (Ephesians 2:12, 19). However, under the new covenant, Jews and Gentiles are now “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). The old covenant of circumcision no longer divided humanity, and the new covenant of Jesus Christ now unified humanity.

***DISCUSS:** What relationships do you have that were once marked by hostility or division but have been transformed by the power of Christ?*

B. The Transforming Power of Jesus

Paul understood unequivocally that Jesus was the solitary force of transformation that allowed this new covenant relationship to exist. Paul wrote that Jesus was the one who made those who were separated to be reunited, broke down walls of division, abolished the former covenant of the Law, and reconciled all of humanity to Himself (Ephesians 2:13–16).

Now, instead of circumcision, Jesus had implemented a new covenant signified by the indwelling Holy Spirit, which would only be accessible through Jesus. It was a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy that the new covenant would be one written on the heart, rather than on tables of stone. Elsewhere, Paul summed up this new covenant relationship in this manner: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:13).

C. I will welcome all people as brothers or sisters God transforms.

Paul’s commitment to radical evangelistic inclusion provides the template for present-day Christians to follow. Paul refused to be deterred by any human dividing line. Throughout his ministry he witnessed to everyone, regardless of skin color, ethnicity, language, or nationality because there is no more inclusive message than the gospel.

Perhaps Paul’s time as a minister at Antioch (where he was still known as Saul) helped guide his radical inclusion. As recorded in Acts 13:1, Saul the converted Pharisee, ministered alongside a rather diverse group of ministers. This group included Barnabas, a Levitical Jew from Cyprus; Simeon, a man whose skin was so dark it was part of his nickname; Lucius, an African from Cyrene, which is in present-day Libya; and Manaen, described by his relationship with Herod the tetrarch, likely indicating Manaen had been a wealthy, upper-class Gentile.

If Paul welcomed all believers as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, present-day believers are without excuse. Every person, regardless of how different each one may seem from us, is still a child of God, made in His image, whom God is wanting to transform by the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit. He is just waiting on us to tell them all about Him.

***DISCUSS:** How can you purpose to be radically inclusive in your evangelistic efforts and ensure you spread the gospel to everyone, not writing off anyone as being unworthy of your witness?*

***Teacher Option:** Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how God wants to use us to reach people much different from us. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone*

story.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

As Harold left the school cafeteria that day, he reflected on his own upbringing in the small town where he grew up. He cringed as he remembered his unsaved family members who commonly made degrading jokes about other races, skin tones, and nationalities. Harold cringed again as he remembered how he used to laugh at these jokes without having ever met someone from the group of people being mocked.

While it might have been easy to dismiss these jokes as harmless banter, now that he attended Bible school with many of the groups he once joked about, he saw how hurtful these jokes could be. If he would not have dared to say the joke in front of someone from this group, why would he say it when they were not around? Embarrassed and ashamed by this part of his past, he got alone in his dorm room and bowed his head to repent and ask forgiveness of the Lord.

Studying his Bible, Harold resolved to endeavor to daily live out Paul's charge to the Ephesians: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). Harold also resolved to live out the prayer of the psalmist: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psalms 19:14).

Harold had recently learned a quote from the late Bishop T. F. Tenney: "I do not ever want to have fewer brothers and sisters than God has sons and daughters." If Jesus loved the world so much that He died for each of them to adopt them into His family, Harold felt he could do no less than accept every believer as his brother or sister in Christ.

If God is no respecter of persons and shows no partiality, Harold decided he could not make blanket judgments about entire groups of people whom He had never met. If God offered salvation to every person, regardless of race, class, or gender, Harold wanted to witness to everyone, no matter how different each one was from him. He was grateful from that day forward for his professor who took an otherwise normal lunch period to engage his students in an unforgettable teachable moment.

The next time he was in the cafeteria, he stopped to listen. And he smiled: It really did sound like Heaven.