

Paul – A Legal Case Study
Chapter 4
Is Paul Legitimate or a Lunatic?

There have been a number of times where I have been asked to take on cases that at first blush looked good, but on further examination had a fatal flaw – my client was not legitimate.

One time in particular, I was approached to represent a man who claimed that he had been defrauded by a major oil and gas company. I had recently won a similar case, and after reading the headlines in the papers, this new fellow came to my office with his tale of “fraud.” The facts were fairly simple. The client (I will call him “Tommy”) had made a deal with the oil company for the purchase of several oil fields located in Texas. The oil company then backed out of the deal and refused to sell the fields. Now importantly, the price point for the purchase was quite low, so Tommy would be getting a great bargain. Tommy believed that was why the company ultimately backed out of the agreement.

For a transaction on the sale of real estate, including oil and gas properties, to be binding in Texas, the contract must be evidenced in writing and signed by the party you are attempting to hold to the deal. I asked Tommy if he had such a document and he replied he did. He then pulled the contract from his brief case and showed me it was signed by the president of the company.

I was impressed. All other things being equal, this made the case winnable.

I told Tommy we would take the case, signed him to a contract, and began my work. As I indicated in the earlier chapters, my work began with an extensive interview, while I made a TO DO list of needed research and investigation.

In my first full interview, which occurred in the days after we began working on the case, Tommy gave me some information that cautioned me things might not be as smooth as I had hoped. Tommy told me that earlier in his life he had been a hit-man for the CIA. I was stunned! It fit with television shows that the CIA had such folks, but I never was certain, and I never thought I would meet one! I asked him for details.

Of course, he told me he wasn't at liberty to disclose them, but thought I needed to know about his past. My “truth-detection radar” was pinging about this, and I knew at some point I was going to return to it.

There was another time he was in my office for further discussions where he asked me to borrow 100 dollars to get gas in his car for his long drive to his ranch. He said he had left his billfold in his home, and needed gas. It struck me as a bit odd

that this man supposedly had 20 million dollars to buy these properties, but needed me to spot him 100 dollars for gas. My radar was pinging louder.

Any time I spoke with Tommy, if a notable person came up in the conversation, Tommy would explain to me how well he knew that person. Tommy evidently had a great relationship with leaders ranging from the pope to Ronald Reagan. He knew all the military generals, every Texas governor I could name, and even had a desk that belonged to President Johnson from his White House days. This seemed a bit beyond what I thought could be true, but he had this signed contract, and that was my main concern, even if he did exaggerate a bit on whom he knew. Still, my radar pinging was getting too loud for me to ignore.

Finally, I was set to take testimony of the President who had signed the contract. This testimony was in the form of a “deposition.” Lawyers for all sides would be present. It would be under oath, and video cameras would record every second. When we showed up at the deposition, I realized I had left the signed contract back at the office. I needed it to show the president and quiz him over why he signed it when the company wouldn’t follow through.

I expressed frustration over forgetting it and told Tommy not to go into the conference room yet. I said the deposition would have to start 45 minutes late because I had to run back to my office and get the signed contract. Tommy then said something I still remember.

“Mark, don’t worry about that! I have some blank ones in my briefcase, and I can sign his name so perfectly, no one will know it isn’t his. Then you can substitute in the real one when you get it over lunch.”

I was too stunned to react. I just stood there as he pulled out an unsigned copy of the same contract. He also pulled out a public document that had the President’s signature. Then, right before my eyes, he proceeded to forge the president’s name perfectly. Tommy didn’t see my flabbergasted expression; his eyes were flitting back and forth from the document that the president had signed and the document he was signing.

I explained that I couldn’t use that document, and called my office to have someone bring the “original.” I took the deposition where the president denied ever signing the contract. I was not surprised. At this point my “truth-detection radar” could not be ignored. I told Tommy to meet me back at the office. We needed to talk.

Once back I told Tommy that I found him unbelievable, and would not proceed with his case any further. He needed to find a new lawyer. He pressed and said,

“But Mark, I have never lied to you! Everything I’ve ever told you has been the truth.”

I replied that I had already had suspicions, and the forgery incident pushed it over the top. He wanted to know why I had any suspicions. I replied that it started with his claim to be a CIA hit man. With tears in his eyes, he then said,

“But I was Mark. I really was. It still haunts me to this day! I was assigned the task of killing the Egyptian president Omar Sadat! I killed him, Mark! Shot him dead!”

I then told him,

“See, Tommy, even that doesn’t make sense! First of all, the Egyptian President’s name was *ANWAR* Sadat, not Omar Sadat.”

Tommy then said,

“But Mark, they didn’t hire me to know his name, they hired me to kill him!”

I replied,

“Tommy, you said you were a hit man for the CIA in the 1990’s. Sadat was killed in 1981. Additionally, there were a ton of people shot in the terrorist attack that killed Sadat, including American military. There is no way this was your work.”

I was done with Tommy. It wasn’t clear to me if he was a charlatan, or a lunatic, but either way, I wasn’t handling his case. It wasn’t based on truth. I must know that a client is reliable and has a firm grasp of reality. It may not be obvious on the first meeting, but it becomes obvious over time. You can readily tell when someone has indicia of reliability, indicia of living in a fantasy world, or worse.

With Paul, I would need to examine him carefully. After all, this is a man who was persecuting those who followed Jesus as Messiah, and then flipped and joined them. What happened? Why the about-face? Was it real? I would spend serious time and energy answering these questions.

Paul’s about-face on his views wasn’t gradual. Far from it. It was immediate. It happened while he was on a business trip. Paul was headed from Jerusalem to Damascus, a journey of about 180 miles. If Paul could make 15 miles a day, which is a general average used for people travelling in that time, then the journey would have taken almost two weeks. Paul had papers with him, authorizing Paul to arrest any Jews who embraced Jesus as Messiah. Paul was to chain them and haul them to Jerusalem for trial and punishment.

It was on this journey that Paul’s life made a U-turn. Paul had a confrontation that changed who he was and what he believed.

These events deserve careful scrutiny. They are the first step in my analyzing whether Paul was legitimate or a lunatic.

BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

The scriptures that set out events around Paul's changing his mind about Jesus and Christianity are found in Luke's book of Acts and Paul's letter to the Galatians. We read about Paul's life-changing experience in three different places in Acts, which should not pass unnoticed. Luke wrote Acts as an early history of the church. The history unfolds over several decades, and being limited in space, Luke is very careful about what he puts in and what he leaves out. Luke choosing to dedicate the better part of three different chapters towards telling, retelling, and re-retelling Paul's conversion story is significant.

One can see why Luke would include it. It is an important story for the Christian faith. The story is captivating. The story is inspiring. The story provides hope to all sinners. The story gives purpose to those with no meaning; comfort to those despairing. The story gives direction to the lost and validates the believer.

The first account begins in Acts 9. It immediately follows the death of Stephen discussed in the last chapter. Paul is aggressively seeking out Christians to stamp out the renegade sect that Paul considered blasphemous to God and Israel. Word gets to Paul that the church has spread into Damascus, 180 miles north. Almost like a virus spreading in a human population, Paul sees his responsibility to capture the virus, quarantine it, and stop its spreading.

Paul gets permission and letters of authority from the high priest for making such arrests and heads for Damascus. "Companions" (that Luke fails to give us much information about) accompany Paul. Scholars generally concur that these would have been "a body of Levite police that had been granted him by the Sanhedrin in order to haul men and women to prison."¹

About noon, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him and falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul,

Roman Police

The arrest and charging procedure in Paul's time was quite different from that familiar to Western Civilization today. Rome had a military, but not what we typically consider a "police force." Similarly, if one were called to court, even for a crime, Rome didn't have a public prosecutor. The prosecution was carried out by the citizens who were also responsible for getting the defendant to court. Rome also allowed a good bit of freedom for provinces like Israel to police their own citizens and enforce their own laws. There were limits, but within these limits, the freedoms allowed Paul and the Jewish authorities, including the high priest that was appointed within the Roman governing structure, to do as Paul set about to do here.

¹ R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament—Acts* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1988 edition) at 351.

Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:3-4). The light was brighter than the noon-day sun and it was not simply a flash of light, but it shone around Paul for a while (Acts 26:13). The voice spoke to Paul in Aramaic, Paul’s Hebrew dialect, calling Paul by Saul, his Hebrew name (Acts 26:14).

Paul’s first reaction was likely fright, for Paul fell to the ground. Paul responded to the voice asking respectfully, “Who are you Lord?” (“Lord” was a respectful term much like “sir” in certain circles today). The answer was probably the last thing Paul ever expected to hear: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). No doubt, as Paul reflected on this event over the next few days, he was stunned by the realization that all his “godly” attempts to stop the church, to eradicate what he perceived to be a cancer on Judaism, were in fact a persecution of the Lord Jesus, God incarnate. No doubt, Paul pondered on that haunting thought a long time.

We also see here, perhaps, why Paul uniquely called the church “the body of Christ.”² Jesus himself pointed out to Paul that Paul’s persecution of the church was a persecution of Jesus!

Jesus charged Paul to make a U-turn in his life. Paul was never meant to serve God by destroying the church. Paul’s service to God was to be building the church. Jesus said:

For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:16-18).

Then, Paul is instructed to head on into Damascus and wait for God’s deliverance and further instructions. Those with Paul hear the voice, but do not understand what is being said (some see a contradiction in the story recorded in Acts 9 and the story related in Acts 22. More on that later.).

Paul stands, and since he had been blinded by the light, his companions lead him into Damascus. Paul spends the next three days blinded, waiting for the promised instructions from God, and fasting from food and drink. Acts does not tell us, but there can be no doubt, that Paul was replaying not just the Damascus road experience, but his entire life to that point: the stoning of Stephen, the words of Gamaliel that fighting against the Way might ultimately be fighting against God,

² See, for example: 1 Cor. 12:27 (“For you are the body of Christ”); Eph. 4:12 (“so that the body of Christ may be built up”); Col. 1:24 (“for the sake of his body, which is the church”). No other New Testament writer uses the analogy of the body of Christ for the church.

and the request to the high priest for permission to arrest Christians in Damascus. Surely, Paul was working through his memory of scripture, trying to understand how Jesus could be Messiah, how one who is crucified and cursed, how one could be the Blessed One, how God could be one (Deuteronomy. 6:4 “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”), and yet Jesus could be God the Son. Paul must have been questioning when Jesus would send the word for what Paul was “to do,” how Paul would take God’s message to Gentiles, and what that message was!

It is interesting that Paul did not immediately head back to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices to atone for his errors in persecuting the Jews that believed in Christ. Christianity teaches that Christ is the atonement and no other sacrifice merits anything before God. But for Paul, that would have been a brand-new realization. I suspect as he was working through God’s instructions to stay in Damascus and wait, he was understanding anew how the sacrifice of Christ was an atonement that fulfilled all the rites and rituals of Moses.

We are told that while Paul was praying, a Jew named Ananias came to see him. From Luke, we get the background of Ananias’s story.³ Ananias was a devout Jew who was believed Jesus was the long-awaited messiah. Ananias was exactly the kind of person Paul was coming to arrest.

On an ordinary day in Ananias’s life, the Lord comes to him in a vision calling him by name. The Lord tells Ananias to go to Straight Street to the house of a man named Judas.⁴ Ananias would there find “a man of Tarsus named Saul” praying. By that time, Paul would have seen a vision of a man named Ananias coming to lay hands on Paul, healing Paul’s blindness. Ananias was familiar with Paul, knew his history of persecutions, and even knew his purpose of coming to Damascus to arrest believers. Ananias speaks of this in his vision, but God dismisses the concerns saying, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). God adds that Paul the persecutor will soon be suffering himself for the church and the name of Jesus.

Ananias goes as instructed and finds Paul. Ananias approached Paul, and calling him brother, laid his hands on Paul saying, “the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be

³ Luke has already told his readers that he compiled his account after “having followed all things closely for some time” knowing and talking to eyewitnesses and writing an “orderly account” so that his readers might “have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” One suspects then that Luke likely talked to Ananias at some time.

⁴ Even though Judas was a common name, it surely did not escape Paul’s notice...or Luke’s... that there was an irony that Paul the persecutor was spending his waiting time in the home of one who shared the name with the traitorous disciple.

filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17). As Paul provided more details later speaking to the crowd at Jerusalem, Ananias commissioned Paul instructing him:

The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:14-16).

Immediately, “something like scales” fell from Paul’s eyes, and Paul regained his sight. Paul went straight to be baptized and only after that did Paul finally eat.

WAS PAUL “CONVERTED”?

Many people who write of Paul and his experience on the road to Damascus write of Paul’s “conversion” to Christianity. Paul never used that term. I would want to know from Paul, was this a “conversion”? Did Paul leave Judaism for a new and different faith?

I suggest “conversion” is not a fair term to use for Paul. Somewhere in the Christian consciousness of many has crept an idea that Jews who become Christians also become Gentiles. This is not what Paul taught. Jews are Jews; Gentiles are Gentiles (unless they convert to Judaism).

When Paul became a “Christian,” Paul never ceased being a Jew. Paul would write to the Corinthians that, “to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews” (1 Cor. 9:20). Now if the Jews were not to be Jews, as Christians, how could Paul ever win them to Christ by being a Jew? I have previously written how Paul continued to call himself a Pharisee even though a Christian (Acts 23:6). In Acts 21, after three missionary journeys to the Gentiles, Paul returned to Jerusalem and took an oath in the Temple affirming that he lives “in observance of the law” (Acts 21:24) and that the rumors that Paul taught Jews to “forsake Moses” or “not to circumcise their children” were false (Acts 21:21).

Pauline scholar John McRay points out that Paul suffered Jewish punishments that he could have avoided simply by repudiating his Judaism. “If Paul had not wanted to remain a Jew, he certainly would not have endured the five whippings of thirty-nine lashes each given him by the Jews (2 Cor. 11:24) *in the synagogues...*”⁵ Now, one might say, what are a few whippings? But, that person has no idea what Paul actually went through.

⁵ John McRay, *Paul, His Life and Teaching*, (Baker Book House 2003) at 49.

Researching the *Mishnah*, which I used in the previous chapter to understand stoning, I can understand what was involved in these lashes. In the section called *Makkot* 3:12-15, it gives a “how to” for delivering lashes:

- “One ties his two hands on either side of a pillar,
- and the minister of the community grabs his clothing—
- if it is torn, it is torn, and if it is ripped to pieces, it is ripped to pieces—
- until he bares his chest.
- A stone is set down behind him, on which the minister of the community stands.
- And a strap of cowhide is in his hand, doubled and redoubled, with two straps that rise and fall [fastened] to it...
- And he hits him with a third of the stripe in front and two-thirds behind.
- And he does not hit [the victim] while he is either standing or sitting, but bending low...
- And he who hits him hits him with one hand with all his might.”

This section of the Mishnah does add that if “the victim dies under the hand of the one who does the flogging, the latter is exempt from punishment.”

Paul endured these lashes because he was a Jew.⁶

ANALYSIS

As a lawyer, I am generally reserved before I accept supernatural events. There is a lot that can't be naturally explained that happens in this life, some of which has happened to me, but I don't typically go to a supernatural explanation for life events. Even still, I don't dismiss supernatural events. I believe there is a divine God. As has been noted at other places, I am a Christian and believe in the divinity of Jesus, believe he is the promised Messiah, and believe God physically resurrected him from the dead. Hence, I am not troubled by the supernatural events that occurred to

⁶ Thinking about the scars and damage to Paul's chest and back gives special meaning to Paul's notice, “From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (Gal. 6:17).

Paul on his journey. If I am right and there is a God, he can certainly resurrect from the dead, and can just as certainly appear to Paul on the road to Damascus.

Even still, I would definitely want to examine Paul and these events as his lawyer. I would need to know if they pass careful scrutiny. How will they hold up to cross-examination? There are several critical things that I would probe.

First, could Paul have been tricking us? Maybe this was his chance to get attention and notoriety. After all, he is generally credited with being the basis for Christian doctrine and thought that has lasted for several thousand years. Who else, other than Jesus, Muhammed, the Buddha, and Moses, have affected so many lives in *today's* world?

Or maybe Paul wasn't deceiving folks; maybe he was just mistaken. Might this have been one of those events that came from the dreariness of a ten-day journey?

On a related note, I would want to carefully consider each of the three accounts of Paul's coming to faith in Jesus as Messiah. As referenced earlier, there are some differences in those accounts. Maybe they are not to be believed.

Was Paul tricking us?

Interestingly, this was a concern of the earliest church. When Paul was first embracing his faith in Jesus, the other believers thought he was trying to wedge his way into their inner circle. They thought his "new found belief" a ruse. It took a good bit of time and convincing for them to even let Paul in on their meetings! (Acts 9:26ff).

On this, I can observe several reasons I would not be worried about jurors or a judge concluding Paul was masquerading these events for his own fame or fortune. Namely, it is because this produced almost the exact opposite in his day.

Paul was already famous. He was on the fast track for Jewish significance. He had studied under the famous Gamaliel, was on the Jewish Sanhedrin as a relatively young man, was charged as the chief prosecutor for the high priests and ruling authorities, had an amazing pedigree, was part of a larger Jewish family that moved in high Jewish circles as well as high placement in the larger Gentile world, had citizenship in Tarsus, placing him in a strong economic position, had money and wealth, had Roman citizenship, and more. Paul told the Philippian church the following:

More than most, I especially have reason to rely on my own life. If others think they have reasons to rely on their own lives, I have more! I was circumcised on the eighth day [as required by Jewish law], am offspring from Israel [also called Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham], from the tribe of Benjamin [one of Jacob's twelve sons,

meaning Paul's lineage was uncorrupted and could be traced all the way back, a Hebrew of Hebrews [Paul could speak the language, knew the customs, was notable among the Hebrew people, etc.]. According to the law, I am a Pharisee [the most notable and powerful sect of Judaism at the time], and I took my Phariseeism so seriously, that I persecuted the church and lived flawlessly by our Jewish legal code (Phil. 3:4-6).

Paul wasn't living on our side of history where he could know or suspect that he would be "famous" thousands of years later. Paul was living in a time and moment when he already *was* famous. The interesting thing is, Paul sacrificed his fame, his placement in society, his "most likely to succeed" status, and more *because* Paul embraced what he had always thought was a dying belief system.

Instead of Paul's wealth, family, societal placement, and all the creature comforts that went with it, Paul embraced a life on the run, isolated from family, and fame, pursued by the power structure of his heritage, and devoid of what is generally considered to make life easy. Paul took a life where he was as likely to be jeered and scoffed as he was to be admired. Where people sought his ruin, rather than his support. Paul did not cash in on a religious movement that was beneficial to him. He traded the beneficial religious system for one that would ultimately cost him his life.

I find it incredulous to think that Paul was tricking us when I consider some of the travails Paul experienced because of his belief that he truly encountered Jesus. Paul explained a small window of such experiences in a letter he wrote to the church at Corinthians:

I labored day and night for the faith. I have been thrown into jails and prisons for the faith. I have been beaten for the faith, more times than I can count. Some of the beatings were life threatening. Five times the Jews whipped me with thirty-nine lashings [something I noted before that he could have avoided by either denying Jesus was Messiah or by abandoning his Judaism]. Three times I was beaten with rods. I survived one stoning, three shipwrecks, and I was adrift at sea for 24 hours. Often when travelling by land, I lived in peril. My life and safety were on the line when crossing dangerous rivers [something in modern times we don't typically face]. I was in peril from robbers, as well as from Jews and Gentiles. My life was threatened when I was in the cities, in the countryside, and at sea. There were false "believers" in Jesus that put me in danger. I worked hard for the faith, and it wasn't easy. I pulled many all-nighters, often had no food or safe water, had to stay out in the cold with no home,

or hotel, and on top of all of that, I had my daily worries and concerns about the fledgling churches where I worked (2 Cor. 11:25-28).

That wasn't even Paul's whole story. One time when Paul was in Damascus, the ruling governor was trying to arrest Paul, and to escape, Paul was lowered down by ropes in a basket from the city wall (2 Cor. 11:32-33).

To add insult to injury, the whole reason Paul detailed these things in his letter to the church at Corinth is because some in the "movement" was dismissing Paul as irrelevant, inadequate, and not worthy of people's attention.

Finally, I should note that Paul was not writing this up as one on a pity trip. Paul's attitude was that he gratefully gave up his marvelous and comfortable life, considering it garbage, compared to the surpassing greatness of having a relationship with a living Jesus (Phil. 3:7-11).

Was Paul trading in the great life for one like that because he wanted to trick us? I find that supposition absurd. If Paul was indeed spending his one existence on earth for such a purpose, then Paul was a lunatic. As I noted in my introduction to this chapter, I have known lunatics, and Paul wasn't one. Paul was careful, deliberate, caring, compassionate, and logical. He was well-balanced and *never* could have accomplished what he did if he were otherwise.

Was Paul mistaken?

My scrutiny of Paul would go beyond whether or not he was trying to trick people. Maybe Paul was just mistaken. Perhaps Paul thought he saw Jesus, but really had sunstroke!

This I could easily dismiss. Paul was a bright man, who had carefully thought through his reasons that Jesus could *not* be God. Paul wasn't against the Christian faith as some happenstance, or slender reed of disbelief. Paul was so certain, and so thoughtful that he went to extremes to wipe out this faith. If Jesus did not really appear to Paul, then Paul of all people should have seen through it.

Not only would the events themselves not deceive Paul, but over time, a fake appearance would have likely been diluted in its effect. As the difficulties mounted, it only makes sense that Paul would have questioned whether or not it was "real." Yet, Paul doubled down, when anyone else would have doubted. Paul never wavered. All the way to the end of his life, Paul maintained full confidence of the truth of what happened.

Furthermore, as I look at Paul's life after these events, the supernatural did not leave Paul. He was able to heal the sick (e.g., Acts 14:3-6), call down blindness on some (Acts 13:4-12), and even bring a dead man back to life (Acts 20:9), all in the name of Jesus.

There is no indication that Paul was deceived.

What about the differences in the accounts?

As I referenced earlier, there are three different accounts of these events in the book of Acts. Some scholars are perplexed over the three differing accounts in the same book. Some even consider these three different traditions that some later compiler put together into a book claiming “Luke” as its author. Other scholars simply acknowledge these differences as factual flaws found in the Bible. These scholars were never trial lawyers!

As a trial lawyer who over the decades has handled literally thousands of different cases, my perspective is quite different from these scholars. What I have seen repeatedly in the courtrooms of America is that events are understood and explained differently by different people. Furthermore, the same person may tell the facts around an event differently depending upon the audience and the purpose for telling the story. It happens day in and day out, and it doesn’t mean the story is false.

To the contrary, the most suspicious story is the one that is told in the same precise language with the same precise details every time. That is a story that is suspicious for veracity. If someone wants to sell something that is not true, they make sure that every detail is precise and ordered consistently. As one trained to listen to various accounts and put a full story together, I am amazed that any scholar would think that a “compiler” took three different traditions of Paul’s encounter with Jesus and put them into Acts in three different places with clear inconsistencies and then tried to pass it off as an original researched book supposedly written by a companion of Paul. Such a charlatan (even if a well-intentioned charlatan), who nails so many other details down to names, places, and times, would be brighter than that!

When Luke gives us the story in Acts 9, he recounts what occurred, giving emphasis where it suits his purpose. In Acts 22, there is the second account of Paul’s Damascus road encounter, but it is not Luke simply writing it over. Luke is actually recording Paul’s speech before the Jewish crowd. Paul was telling the story of his Damascus road experience and the ramifications in Luke 22 with a specific audience listening. Anyone, especially one with Paul’s training, would sculpt his speech and behavior in such a way as to maintain integrity before God, but also to communicate. As Paul explained on another day, he lived his life so he was a Jew to Jews and a Greek to Greeks *in order to reach people for God* (1 Cor. 9:20 “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews”).

So, the narrative in Acts 22 is Paul’s presentation to a certain audience. Paul emphasized certain points while minimizing or leaving out others. The responsible and appropriate thing to do is to compare the accounts and see the emphasis Paul adds for the Jewish audience in Acts 22. As I do that, I see that Paul added details of time (“about noon”) and identification (“Jesus of Nazareth” rather than simply

“Jesus”). This makes sense. Those in Jerusalem would be familiar with the terrain, the travel, and the timing. Furthermore, “Jesus,” which in Hebrew is our name “Joshua,” was a most common name in Paul’s time for those living in Palestine. It makes sense that Paul would give the added “of Nazareth” to clarify which Jesus/Joshua appeared to him. (In Wikipedia language, this was a “disambiguation.”)

Luke says in Acts 9 that Paul’s companions did not hear the voice, while in Acts 22, Paul says the companions did. One might fairly ask which is true? The answer lies in the Greek writing itself. In Acts 9 Luke writes that Paul’s companions “heard the voice” and Luke uses what is called the “genitive case.” Luke means that they heard the sound, but did not understand it. This is like John 12:27-29 where Jesus hears God speaking to him and the crowd *hears* but does not understand, thinking the noise was thunder. Now in Acts 22, Luke is translating Paul’s speech, which was in Hebrew to the Jewish crowd. Luke writes in Acts 22:9 that Paul told the crowd that his companions did not hear the voice using the Greek “accusative case.” By using this different case ending on the words, Luke conveys that Paul was saying that the companions did not “understand” the voice.

Now, there is a difference between hearing and understanding. Understanding that difference removes any alleged contradiction and clarifies what happened. The English Standard Version translation committee understood the difference and clarifies it by translating Acts 9:7, “The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, *hearing the voice* but seeing no one” and Acts 22:9, “Now those who were with me saw the light but *did not understand the voice* of the one who was speaking to me.”

The same passage has the companions in Acts 9 standing while in Acts 26 (where Paul is giving an account of his acceptance in Jesus as Messiah to King Agrippa), Paul says his companions fell to the ground. So, which was it? Careful scholars point out that Luke’s language about the companions standing was a Greek expression of “standing firm” meaning “they did not run away” as opposed to a reference to one’s posture.⁷ Such may be the answer, but another equally plausible answer is that the men both stood for a time and fell for a time. That of course makes sense of both accounts. I know that my reaction to an unexpected blinding light accompanied by loud sounds would likely leave me either falling quickly or turning and running! The companions of Paul did not flee; they stood their ground choosing instead to fall flat!

⁷ See *histemi* (ἵστημι) in Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d Edition (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979). In this sense, Luke uses the word earlier speaking of a flow of blood standing still or stopping (Lk 8:44). Matthew similarly used the word speaking of a star standing still (Mt 2:9).

Lenski and some other scholars see it differently. Lenski writes:

At the first flash of the super earthly light they, too, fell prostrate (Acts 26:14); upon recovering, they now stand speechless, in utter astonishment because of what is happening especially to Saul who is lying on the ground and talking with someone who is unseen by them.⁸

Before leaving this subject, allow me to tell you one more thing about my client Tommy that I discussed in the opening of this lesson. He never paid me back the hundred dollars I loaned him. Now, since I never told you that aspect of my relationship in the opening of this lesson, does that make the opening story false? Does it make the fact false? Of course not! The point of my opening was to talk of verifying the veracity and sanity of my clients. The repayment was not relevant. Now, I add the repayment here because it is relevant to help me make the point. I do Paul and Luke a disservice if I am not extra careful before I write off seeming inconsistencies without adequate research and thinking.

CONCLUSION

For Paul, his Damascus road experience was not a change from one faith to another. Paul didn't leave the Jewish faith. Christ was for Paul, a fulfillment of his Jewish faith. Christ was the law fulfilled. Paul would no longer have need for the ritual sacrifices of Moses, for Christ was the final sacrifice who gave the old sacrifices meaning. In Christ, God had a new covenant with his people, but it was the same God! God opened up his kingdom to those who believe in Christ, be they Jew or Gentile.

Consider Paul's letters to the Romans and Ephesians. Paul spends time pointing out that in the kingdom of God, the Church, God makes Jews and Gentiles one. Not because they are no longer Jew and Gentile, but because they are one in the body of Christ who died for both. When Paul writes to the Galatians, "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek," Paul does not mean those distinctions do not exist. He means that those distinctions make no difference in one's status as a member of the church. In the same passage, Paul continues by saying, "there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female" (Gal. 3:28). Yet clearly there were male and female, slave and free. Paul does not mean these distinctions did not exist. Paul means in the body of Christ, the difference does not translate into first and second-class Christians.

So, Paul was a Jew. As a Jew, Paul came to understand that Jesus is Lord, crucified, and resurrected. Paul never confused his Judaism as the road to God or the basis

⁸ Lenski at 356.

for his standing with God. Judaism and Paul's obedience to the law were never, after his encounter with the risen Lord, the basis for Paul standing before God. Paul stood before God on the merit of Christ alone. But still, we see that Paul continued a Jew, albeit a Christian Jew.

Paul was baptized and received the Holy Spirit. Paul was also commissioned to take this truth and preach it. The Damascus road experience can be called a conversion, but it more properly might be called a "revelation" with a "call" or "commission." Was Paul "born again?" Certainly! Paul would say to the Romans, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

While we may legitimately use the word "conversion," we need to use it recognizing its limitations in the case of Paul. As Capes, *et al.*, put it, "Paul says that he is a new creation (Cor. 5:17), not that he converted to a new religion."⁹ We also believe it equally proper to speak of Paul's experience as a "call" or "commission." We should look here at how Paul wrote of his experience to the church at Galatia:

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus (Gal. 1:11-17).

Paul uses carefully selected language to speak of his experience on the Damascus road. Paul says that God "set me apart before I was born." This language echoes that of Isaiah ("The Lord called me from the womb" Is. 49:1) and Jeremiah ("Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" Jer. 1:5). That is not to say that Paul was high on an ego trip of being special before God. This is the same Paul who called himself an aborted child before meeting Jesus (see Paul lesson 4).

For Paul, the Damascus road experience was not simply a "come to Jesus" event. It was the necessary direction change, the new birth that enabled Paul to achieve for

⁹ Capes, Reeves and Richards, *Rediscovering Paul, An Introduction to His World, Letters and Theology* (IVP Academic 2007) at 84.

God the very things that God had already prepared for Paul to do. In this, Paul never considered himself something exceptional. Paul was always reminding and teaching the church that the same is true of any Christian. Paul would tell the Ephesians, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, *which God prepared beforehand*, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Whatever gain I had, I counted as a loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ my Lord. For his sake I suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I might gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from law, but that which comes through faith in Christ”* (Phil. 3:7-9).

Paul, the aborted child, dead and lifeless, even as he thought himself God’s most zealous and holy servant, meets the resurrected Jesus, and his world is turned upside down. “U-turn” seems too mild to describe the life change. On the road to Damascus, Paul saw and heard Jesus call him and commission him. The vision and the words were clear. Paul never doubted it. It changed his life for good. Paul lost his position, his power, and his prestige. Paul went from the one overseeing the punishment, to the one receiving the punishment. For Paul, this was not a cause for mourning; this was a cause for joy! All the things he lost were garbage and rubbish when compared to knowing Jesus.

2. *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”* (Rom. 8:28).

Paul was born again into this walk with God and Christ that put his early life to shame, but Paul was not born again simply to be a Christian. Neither are we. God has a purpose for Paul, a calling. God has the same for us. Every child of God is a unique vessel fashioned for unique works in his name. We should pray for God’s will to be done in our lives; and we should live with an eye toward such purpose.

3. *“I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ”* (Phil. 3:8).

Paul saw the greatest value in Jesus. It brings me to my knees, wondering where I place my value.