

## The Three C's in Christianity

4-14-2013

Acts 9:1-20

*1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." 13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." 17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-- Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Being a retired shop teacher, I have to admit, spelling is not one of my fortes. Praise be for spell check. All you have to do is look at the title of today's sermon and know I have trouble spelling. Well, duh, Guerry, that's obvious, Christianity only has one "C". Hopefully before today's sermon is over, each of you will agree with me, there are three "C's" in Christianity.

Before we get into today's spelling lesson, I want to spend a few minutes talking with you about something I have started calling the "Accident of Birth." Now don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about an oops. I have a totally different meaning. I'll even explain by talking about myself. I was planned by my mother and father. I'm the middle child of three. Most of you know Nancy. A few of you may have met our younger brother Jimmy. No doubt, growing up, there were times when Nancy and Jimmy probably wished I hadn't been planned, but such is life, here I am. That's neither here or there. Here is what I mean; by the accident of birth, I was born in North Carolina, not South Carolina or Virginia. I wasn't born in Germany or England, or Japan or Iraq, I was born in North Carolina, and I had absolutely nothing to do with that. I was born a male. We know scientifically all about X's and Y's and all that stuff, but I had absolutely nothing to do with the fact I was born a male. I was born white. I could have been born black, or Hispanic, or American Indian, or Asian, or any of a host of other ethnicities. But, I was born white, something I had absolutely nothing to do with. I was born the middle child. Why wasn't I born the first or why wasn't I born the youngest. Here again, something I had absolutely no control over. Are you beginning to see what I mean by the accident of birth? Oh, yeah, least I forget, I was born into a Christian family. I cannot remember a time when my family didn't go to church.

Church was a very integral part of my life. And not just church, Christianity type church. Momma and Daddy weren't Jewish, they didn't go to Synagogue. They weren't Muslim, they didn't go to the Mosque. We were Christians; we went to church. We worshipped God. We believed Jesus Christ was the son of God; that he was crucified, died and was buried. That on the third day he rose from the dead and that through belief in Him, we may each have eternal life with God. We celebrated Christmas and Easter. As a result, by the accident of birth, my core values were instilled in me because of where and to whom I was born. Because of my core values, I can't imagine worshipping anyone other than Jesus Christ. This may sound a bit like heresy, but because of the accident of birth, I am a Christian. I may even go as far as saying, because of the accident of birth, each of you are Christians. How many of you were born to Jewish families, or Hindu families, or Buddhist families or Muslim families. How many of you were born into Christian families?

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying the only reason you are a Christian is because of your birth. No, no, not at all. Each of you are adults and each of you have the ability to make up your own minds, to study the various religions of the world, and see where you think you fit in and decide exactly what you believe in. It's called free will and each of you have it. However, most, not all mind you, but most people, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jew, etc. maintain the religion of their youth. There are however, exceptions.

Our scripture this morning is the perfect example of what I'm calling the accident of birth, and of our free will to chose our religion. We all know the story of Saul. Saul of Tarsus was born a Jew. He was also a Roman citizen because of his father. Saul's father was a Roman citizen, therefore, when Saul was born, he was automatically considered a Roman citizen. Saul's family was probably pretty well off. He was well educated, studying classic Greek, philosophy, ethics, and the Jewish scriptures. Unless you were a family of some means, you really didn't get the chance to be educated back then. Yet, Saul was an educated man. He was a Pharisee. As this new sect, or religion began to form, converting persons from Judaism to Christianity, Saul took a personal affront to it. How dare people leave Judaism? How dare they start to worship this messiah? The real messiah had not come yet. The first time Saul actually shows up in the Bible is during the stoning of Stephen. Listen to Acts 7: 57-58, **At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,<sup>58</sup> dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.** Saul is in the crowd; Saul is watching; Saul sees how the "good Jews" react to Stephen and the words he is preaching. And in chapter eight verse one we read **And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.** Yes, Saul approved of Stephen's death. Listen to the first few verses of chapter eight: **And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.<sup>2</sup> Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.<sup>3</sup> But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.** That became Saul's mission in life; destroy Christianity. We heard the scripture lesson this morning. It's a story we are all familiar with. Saul had persecuted the majority of the Christians he could find in Jerusalem. He had heard there were some Christians in Damascus. So he was on the way to Damascus to find more Christians. He even had permission, he had papers from the High Priests, the keepers of the law, papers allowing him to arrest these Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem. And we all know what happened. While on the way to Damascus, Saul encountered our Risen Lord and was blinded. He was led the rest of the way to Damascus, where he stayed in a house on Straight Street. Here Saul fasted and prayed for three days until a man named Ananias, who was sent by God, came and healed him and baptized him. We pretty much know the rest of the story. Saul became Paul and spent the rest of his life converting people to Christianity. Paul is often considered one of the two most important people in the history of Christianity. Christ obviously is the most important. And Paul was the other. He is credited as one of the greatest religious leaders of all time and over a third of the books of the New Testament were supposedly written by Paul.

And now, we begin our spelling lesson. There are three “C’s” in Christianity. Guerry I can count and I only see one “C”. Let’s look a little deeper. The first “C” is Change. In today’s scripture lesson we read about the change Jesus Christ affected in the life of Saul. We listened as Saul became Paul. We heard the change that Christ made in the life of a man who had done, who was doing everything in his power to destroy the church. We saw a changed man. We saw Paul become one of the greatest religious leaders of all time. God had a plan for Saul. Saul changed from a devout Jew who persecuted Christians, to an even more devout Christian. God has a plan for you too. God wants you to change. I’m not comparing you to Paul. I’m not saying you are a bad person. I’m not saying you are trying to destroy the church. What I am asking though, are you the best Christian you can be? Is there room for change in your life. Is there something you could do to be a better person, to be a more devout follower of Jesus Christ? If so, then God is asking you to make that change. Don’t wait for Him to strike you blind as you go down Greenville Boulevard. Open your heart to Jesus Christ today, right now. Last Sunday I had the privilege to witness twenty-four women testify to the change Christ had made in their lives. It was an extremely moving experience. Jesus Christ can and does change lives. Give him your life today.

The second “C” in Christianity is courage. Do you have the courage to be a Christian? How muchn courage did it take for Paul to completely change his way of life. He had to leave behind his friends and his family. He had the courage to stand up against the Romans and the Jews he once represented. Do you have the courage to stand up in the face of today’s society and profess your belief in Jesus Christ? Do you have the courage to make the necessary changes in your life to live a Christian existence? Professing Christianity is easy. Anyone can stand up and proclaim “I am a Christian!” Anyone can talk the talk. Now comes the hard part, do you have the courage to “walk the walk”. Do you have the courage to do what it takes in today’s modern society to go and “make disciples”. Do you have the courage to go into greater Greenville and make disciples? I’m not asking you to go to China or North Korea, or Mexico. Do you have the courage to stay right here in Greenville and perform mission work? Do you have the courage to step outside of your comfort zone and welcome someone unlike us into the brotherhood of Jesus Christ? Courage comes with a price; are you willing to pay the price?

And our third “C” is commitment. If you are willing to make the change, if you have the courage to confess your Christianity to the world, then what is required of you is a commitment to your Lord and Savior. Without the commitment, the change and the courage just seem to go away. We all know people who are quick to stand and say I gave my life to the Lord when I was “X” years old. You put an age in there, it doesn’t make any difference whether it was eight or eighty, we’ve all heard it. We have also watched those same people do everything a Christian wouldn’t do. Not because they are bad, not because they didn’t profess the lord at that age, but because they lack the commitment. They lack the commitment to keep their Christianity, their devotion to Jesus Christ alive and in the front of their lives. The chorus of the video we watched says it so much better than I can:

I got off track, I made mistakes, Back slid my way into that place, where souls get lost, lines get crossed and the pain won't go away;

That is what happens when we don’t have the commitment to Jesus Christ; without commitment, souls get lost, lines get crossed and the pain won’t go away. Don’t let that happen to you. Commit your life to Jesus Christ.

The three C’s of Christianity; change, courage, and commitment. Each of those words represents a lot. Each of those words alone can help you with your own personal walk with Jesus Christ. You can change. It takes work, but you can change. It takes courage to change. It takes courage to live the life of a Christian in today’s society. It takes a commitment to put Jesus Christ first in your life. That is where He expects to be, first in your life. He put you first in His when He gave his life for you. Do you have the commitment to put Him first in yours. My prayer for each of you this morning is that you will take these three C’s with you as you leave today. Alone each represents a portion of your life; together these three letters can help you finish the chorus of the song:

I got off track, I made mistakes, Back slid my way into that place, where souls get lost, lines get crossed and the pain won't go away. I hit my knees, now here I stand, There I was, now here I am. Changed. With the help of Jesus Christ, I am changed.

Allow Jesus Christ to change your life just as He changed the life of the Apostle Paul. Amen!