**A Period of Peace and Progress**

*Acts 9:31*

**Introduction**

1. The church was established on the Pentecost following the Lord’s resurrection, and experienced exponential growth.
2. However, the growth was not through easy circumstances, but great opposition.
3. After the death of Stephen, Saul sought more to persecute the church, but was converted after he saw the Lord on the way to Damascus.
4. After this, the church continued to experience progress, but also were blessed with a time of peace – **Acts 9:31**
5. How the church carried itself in service to God before the peace, and during it tells us much about how we are to be.
6. The Church was Unified – ***“the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria” (NASB)***
7. The unifying power of the gospel:
   1. Judea – south (Jews)
   2. Galilee – north (Jews)
      1. ***“Galilee of the Gentiles” (Isaiah 9:1)***.
      2. **Judges 1:30, 33** – failed to drive out inhabitants.
      3. “Ever since the times of the judges, all these lands had been exposed, on account of the countries that joined them, to corruption from Gentile influence and subjugation by heathen foes.” (Keil and Delitzsch, Isaiah 9:1)
      4. “a district occupied by a mixed population of Jews and heathen… Their mixed origin explains the differences in speech which distinguished them from their brethren in the South, who regarded Galilee and the Galileans with a certain proud contempt (**John 1:46; 7:52**).” (ISBE, “Galilee”)
   3. Samaria – ***“For the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9)***
      1. Surprise of Samaritan woman at Jesus’ forwardness (**cf. John 4**).
      2. Unlikely aid of the good Samaritan (**cf. Luke 10:25-37** – when not even the priest nor Levite helped their countryman).
   4. ***“the church” (ASV, ESV, NASB)*** – manuscript evidence better supports the singular.
      1. “Notice that he uses the word church in the singular to indicate the unity of the body of Christ. Jewish Christians from the south (Judea) and the north (Galilee) lived in perfect harmony with Samaritan Christians.” (Hendriksen-Kistemaker, Acts 9:31)
   5. **Isaiah 2:2-4** – unity and peace in the mount of the Lord.
   6. **Ephesians 2:14-18** – peace and unity through the cross – one access to the Father, the Spirit.
      1. ***“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).***
8. ***“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1)***
9. The Church was at Peace – ***“the church…enjoyed peace” (NASB)***
10. Peace follows Perseverance
    1. Peter and John – arrested and threatened (**Acts 4:18, 21**); prayed for strength (**Acts 4:23-31**); beaten and commanded to be silent (**Acts 5:40**); **continued to preach** (**Acts 4:41-42**).
    2. Stephen – falsely accused and brought to the Sanhedrin (**Acts 6:11-12**); **preached the truth** (**Acts 7:51-53**); stoned to death (**Acts 7:57-58**)
    3. Disciples – persecuted by Saul (**Acts 8:3**); **went on to preach everywhere** (**Acts 8:4**)
    4. At every stage of persecution, the disciples continued to trust in God and persevered in faith, living and spreading His gospel.
    5. Great perseverance of faith displayed:
       1. When Ananias obeyed the Lord – **Acts 9:13-17**
       2. When Barnabas vouched for Saul – **Acts 9:26-27**
       3. When the Jerusalem church received Saul, and aided him – **Acts 9:28-30**
       4. Perseverance is impartial concerning circumstances but acts by faith through everything.
    6. Such perseverance resulted in peace – **Acts 9:31**
       1. **Isaiah 40:31** – wait on the Lord, and results will come.
       2. Hope strengthened – **Romans 5:3-5**
       3. Patience strengthened – **James 1:2-4**
       4. Persecutor converted – **Galatians 1:22-24** – GOD’S WILL ALWAYS IS THE BEST COURSE TO PURSUE.
11. Our only way to peace through conflict is perseverance of faith:
    1. Outer conflict – persecution – continue to live and preach the gospel. (**cf. Acts 14:2**)
    2. Inner conflict:
       1. Sin – purge it – **1 Corinthians 5:6-7**
       2. Error – refute it – **Titus 1:9-11**
       3. Personal conflict – resolve it – **Philippians 4:2-3**
       4. Divisiveness – stifle it/avoid it – **Romans 16:17**
    3. Various conflicts will come, but we must not yield to the urge to pursue peace through willful ignorance, or false comfort.
       1. Many seek peace by ignoring conflict.
       2. This does not make the conflict any less real, but only exacerbates it.
       3. We must face our problems/conflicts as a church if we wish to see peace.
    4. Peace comes when we pursue faithfulness – **Philippians 4:9**
12. The Church was Edified – ***“and [was] edified”***
13. ***“being built up” (ESV, NASB)***
14. “It might have been imagined by some that, as the church had spung into existence amid strife and persecution, it would languish when opposition was withdrawn; but its present prosperity proved that it was not the obstinacy of human passion, but the legitimate working of unchangeable truth, which had brought it into existence.” (McGarvey, J.W., Acts 9:31)
    1. Eternal divine truth does not waste away into nothingness but will persist and solidify in the hearts of honest men.
       1. Nothing will vanquish it – not the heat of opposition, nor the coldness of indifference.
    2. Gamaliel’s prediction was true – **Acts 5:35-39** – ***“let them alone”*** – when the church was left alone (for a time), the peace led to even greater building up of faith!
15. The time of peace should not be squandered, but used as a time for strengthening the ranks to endure future conflict – **Ephesians 4:11-16**
    1. Negligence foments conflict – **Judges 2:7-11** – served the Lord but did not edify following generations.
    2. Complacency will destroy – **Zephaniah 1:12**
16. The Church was Faithful – ***“walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit”***
17. **The unscriptural/worldly depiction of peace and progress in the church is one of tolerance, lewd grace, and subjective assurances.**
18. The HS depicts the church having peace and making progress by a combination of two seemingly dissociated things – fear and comfort.
    1. NOTE: “walking” denotes a way of life, a continual activity.
19. Fear and Comfort
    1. Walking in the fear of the Lord:
       1. **Acts 5:11** – after Ananias and Sapphira were killed for lying to the Holy Spirit.
          1. Such did not repel but attracted – **Acts 5:13-14** – esteemed highly, multiplied.
          2. After the Divine discipline the faith of the disciples only grew – **cf. Acts 5:29** – ought to obey God.
       2. **Proverbs 1:7** – fear of Lord beginning of knowledge.
          1. When God is feared, we pursue His will to be pleasing to Him – **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**
       3. Fear of God keeps us in His love:
          1. ***“To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ” (Jude 1, NASB)***.
          2. **Jude 3-4** – contend for the faith, not follow lewd grace.
             1. “pervert favor into licentiousness (i.e. they interpret divine goodness as an opportunity to ignore God and do what they please) Jd 4” (BDAG)
          3. **Jude 5** – reminders to strike fear, and incite faith.
          4. **Jude 20-21** – fear produces diligence which keeps us in God’s love.
       4. Fearing God brings blessings – **Proverbs 1:7-9; 9:10-11**
          1. Thus, walking in the fear of the Lord and comfort of the Holy Spirit go hand in hand.
    2. Walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit:
       1. Comfort – *paraklēsis* – “consolation, exhortation”
          1. **Acts 4:36** – Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement.
          2. **Acts 11:22-26** – encouraged to continue with Lord, full of HS and faith, taught.
          3. “includes also the ideas of counsel and exhortation” (Reese, Gareth L., Acts 9:31)
       2. Holy Spirit, the Helper/Comforter (*paraklētos*) – **John 14:26-27; 16:13, 33** – revealed truth resulting in peace and cheer/comfort.
       3. We receive comfort when we walk according to the Spirit’s teaching, and trust in His promises – **2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 4:13-15**
          1. Confidence we have fellowship through the Spirit – **1 John 3:24**
          2. Comfort in such confidence – **1 John 5:13, 18-21** – knowing we have eternal life.
20. The Church was Multiplied – ***“they were multiplied”***
21. ***“multiplied”*** – i.e. numerically. (contrast with, ***“edified”***)
22. The verse suggests that the reason for their being multiplied was their walking in the fear of the Lord and comfort of the Holy Spirit – **Acts 9:31**
23. We will not truly increase our number of faithful children of God through gimmicks – **cf. John 6:26-27, 44-45**
    1. “Bread and fish” attract the natural mind, but the word of God attracts the spiritual mind – **1 Corinthians 2:14-15**
24. Disciples make disciples – **Matthew 28:18-20** – those who are not truly following the Lord’s will are not going to attract any who truly wish to follow Jesus.
25. When we follow God faithfully, we open opportunities to convert people – **1 Peter 3:15; Acts 8:4** (people who truly have hope stand strong in their convictions, they don’t waver in hypocrisy and inconsistency)

**Conclusion**

1. Conflict is to be expected when we are seeking to follow the Lord.
2. However, if we persevere in faith we will see the effects of God’s word, especially times of peace, if not without, certainly within.
3. We need to be unified, seek edification, be faithful, and seek to multiply.