

WALKING IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD  
Acts 9:31

Intro: A wonderful verse, one I have not been able to get away from. I spoke briefly about it in our prayer meeting recently. It speaks of one of those times God graciously gives His people even here on earth.

The word "then" relates this to what Luke had been writing about, and we can see that it had to do with the salvation of Saul of Tarsus who had been causing such havoc among the people of God.

It seems that the best reading for "churches" here is actually in the singular, so it is a statement which applied to the Church, the whole body of Christ, in that day.

The word translated "rest" is the word peace. "Rest" is a good translation. They were enjoying a respite from the troubles that had plagued them--believers being imprisoned, and even put to death. God was having special mercy upon them.

However, sometimes it is not good for the Church to be free from external trouble. We are inclined to get careless about our relationship with the Lord and about the purity of our lives. But that was not the case with the Church at this time. It would seem that throughout the Empire, not just in one or two places, the people were growing spiritually and the Church was growing numerically. It was one of those special times in the life of the Church when the blessing of the Lord was very apparent.

But, from the standpoint of the Church, there was a reason.

It does not always follow that if the things that were said about the Church in that day can be said about the Church in any time in history that there will be numerical growth, but rarely, if ever, do you find the blessing of God without these two statements that we have in v. 31:

- 1) "Walking in the fear of the Lord,
  - 2) "And in the comfort of the Holy Spirit,
- "were multiplied."

Let us look at these two expressions.

I. WHAT IS THE FEAR OF THE LORD?

We find this expression as far back as the book of Genesis, and it extends all of the way into the book of the Revelation.

It is used in the OT to describe one who knows the Lord.

But it was used because there was a reason for using it. A person who feared the Lord was characterized by at least three things:

- 1) He lived in awe before the Lord. He had great reverence in his heart for the Lord. He looked upon the Lord as holy, upon himself as being unworthy to have any relationship with the Lord. This is seen in Rev. 15:4.
- 2) The person who feared the Lord did not live in fear of the Lord (that never brings peace), but he feared doing anything that would displease the Lord.
- 3) He was a person who loved the Lord, who trusted the Lord, who was continually demonstrating his faith in the Lord.

Now our text tells us that those early Christians were "walking in the fear of the Lord." There was not just an occasional evidence of this, but it was the way they lived. And probably the chief emphasis in this statement in this particular verse is that they sought always to do the things that would please and glorify the Lord. Pleasing Him came first in their lives.

But let us consider the other expression:

## II. WHAT IS THE COMFORT OF THE HOLY GHOST, OR, OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Perhaps you will remember from our study of 2 Corinthians that the word "comfort" always carries with it the idea of encouragement.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit was very real to those early Christians. And they knew what it meant to have the continual help of the Spirit of God. He strengthened them. He restrained them in their hearts when they were tempted to do the wrong thing. He gave them great joy when they did what was pleasing to the Lord.

So, taking these two expressions, as the people sought to please the Lord, the Holy Spirit was continually encouraging them in what they did, and so they were able to please the Lord more and more.

I am sure that most of you will remember Prov. 9:10:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:  
and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

Solomon, who was known throughout the world of his day for his wisdom, and who probably has never been surpassed, said that the fear of the Lord is where you start. The man who ignores God, and who has no desire to please God, is the most foolish man that you can find--and there are millions of

them in the world.

But now I want you to observe two relationships in this verse:

### III. TWO IMPORTANT CONNECTIONS.

- A. The connection between being edified and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Notice this relationship in the verse.

If you and I are not primarily concerned in our lives about pleasing the Lord, it is probably due to the fact that we are not growing in the Lord. A growing Christian wants to please the Lord. This is a good way for us to check on our own growth.

You know, it is possible for us to be very regular in church, to be very faithful in reading our Bibles, and even in prayer, without growing. Growth comes when the Word of God becomes the pattern for our lives.

But notice the other connection:

- B. The connection between the walk of those in the early Church, and the way in which they were growing numerically.

There is something very unusual, very interesting, and, may I say attractive, about the person who lives in the fear of the Lord, who lives to please the Lord. It is such a rare thing, even among the people of God. And this is one thing that attracts people to the Lord; the Spirit of God uses it this way, and that is one reason that He encourages the people of God to live in this way.

So this verse becomes very instructive for us if we really want to see the blessing of the Lord today.

Now Luke does not say this, but it certainly seems to be implied by what he did write, and I want to say it tonight. I believe that this verse describes how the people of the Church were living even before the Lord gave them this time of peace, this time of rest from all of the persecution they had been experiencing. So, whether things are peaceful outwardly, or all in turmoil for any reason, this is the way we should live--with the highest reverence for the Lord, wanting to please Him, trusting Him to help us and to use us as it pleases Him.

Cf. Paul's words in 2 Cor. 5:9--one of the greatest verses

But let me make now some practical applications.

#### IV. WHERE DO WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT PLEASING THE LORD?

It would take the whole Bible to give a complete answer to that question, but let me give some that apply to us in this day in which we live, facing the circumstances we face.

- A. We need to be careful about pleasing the Lord in our worship.

If your heart is truly instructed in the sovereignty, the majesty, the glory, of God, it is going to be evident in your worship, privately and publicly.

- B. We need to be careful about pleasing the Lord in our handling of the Word of God.

Think of this in two ways:

1. In the interpretation of Scripture.
2. In the application of Scripture to our lives--our walking.

Our chief concern is not to please men, but to please the Lord.

The third thing is a matter that was very much upon the heart of our Lord when He was here on earth: the oneness of His people.

- C. We need to be careful about pleasing the Lord in our relationship with our fellow-believers.

Not all Christians have been led to understand the doctrines of grace. I wish they had, but they haven't. And yet they really know the Lord.

Perhaps we could divide the Lord's people into the following groups:

- 1) Those who agree with us.
- 2) Those who disagree with us.
- 3) Those who disagree with us and oppose us. Sometimes the opposition is undercover. And this is hard to take. Things are often said that are not true. They turn people against us. And the inclination in our hearts is to strike back.

But what do we need to be thinking about?

Illus: Dr. J. B. Rowell of Victoria, B.C.--the Central

Baptist Church--at our breakfast table quoted, "In the sweet fear of Jesus . . ." It is on the wall in our dining room, and I often quote it as my prayer when I meet with the Lord in the morning.

God has opened our eyes to some very wonderful truth. How grateful we ought to be! But it is right at this point that we are going to have our greatest tests.

And this leads me to the last point that I want to make.

D. We need to be careful about personal pride.

Has the Lord taught us these truths, and do we love them so much--the truths of His sovereignty in salvation--that we would gladly lay down our lives for them? Then remember: This should humble us. This should make us cry out to God daily that God would open the eyes of those who oppose us.

Those who know the grace of God should be the most gracious people on the face of the earth. Think of what the Lord said in Matt. 11:28, 29, and what Paul said in Acts 24:16.

Concl: We want to see blessing, but there is a path which leads to blessing. It means that we must be a people who walk, who live, in the fear of the Lord, who want to please the Lord more than anything else in everything that has to do with our lives, and who enjoy the encouragement of the Holy Spirit as He ministers to us and as He guides us ever deeper in our understanding of the Word.