

### EPC Discussion Guide for Acts 9:19b-25

EPC Discussion Guides provide context and teaching to discuss a passage of Scripture. Many of these guides are usually companions to sermons, but the discussion guide will provide enough material for those who did not hear the sermon to discuss the passage. Group leaders are encouraged to order questions and emphases according to the needs of their particular group. This particular study includes more extended sections of teaching which might be best considered by having various members take turns reading the content out loud.

Read Acts 9:19b-25

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.<sup>20</sup> And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”<sup>21</sup> And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?”<sup>22</sup> But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

#### Saul Escapes from Damascus

<sup>23</sup> When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him,<sup>24</sup> but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him,<sup>25</sup> but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

1. The text emphasizes that immediacy with which Paul began to fulfill his divine calling as an evangelist. A narrative text like this doesn't tell us what Paul was thinking; it tells us what Paul did. But, elsewhere we gain insight into what motivated Paul when it came to proclaiming the good news about Jesus. Consider 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:14—“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;<sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” And, Romans 9:1-3—“I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.<sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” Paul’s experience of Christ’s love, his love for Christ, and his love for his brothers moved him to speak of Christ. *How is this love dynamic present or lacking in your own life? Is there anything we can do to increase our experience of Christ’s love?*
2. We need to remember that God the Father perfectly loves Jesus, His son. He was perfectly pleased with him before he even began his ministry. Jesus never displeased his Father in heaven. This is powerfully expressed in Jesus’ baptism: “Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’” (Luke 3:21-22). Jesus perfect love for His Father means that he did not have to deal with his own sins against God. He was, therefore,

qualified to deal with our sin against God. The Father's willingness to give his Son for us and the Son's willingness to die for us ought to stir us to love them both when we contemplate it.

3. Luke summarizes the content of Paul's proclamation of Jesus as, "He is the Son of God." There is much that could be said about what it means that Jesus is the Son of God. But, when you look in Scripture you see that one of the ways that Jesus' relationship to his Father is powerfully expressed is in terms of the work that Jesus does for his Father and for those that the Father has entrusted to him. "For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me" (John 5:36). Jesus' crucifixion is the culmination of the work that his Father has given him to do so that he may give eternal life to his church (John 10:27). His resurrection proved that his works as a Son were perfectly accepted by His Father. *What difference could it (or should it) make in our lives to remember the perfect and finished works of Christ?*
4. It is true of human relationships: it helps our appreciation of a gift when we understand the type of sacrifice and effort that went into purchasing it. Similarly, it warms our hearts to consider how intentional God the Father and Jesus the Son were with regard to our salvation. When we think in detail of what Jesus did for us, we can see that he really did do *everything* required to save us. Consider these words by J.I. Packer:

"Humility in Scripture means, not pretending to be worthless and refusing positions of responsibility, but knowing and keeping the place God has appointed for one. Being humble is a matter of holding on to God's arrangement, whether it means the high exposure of leadership (Moses was humble as a leader, Num. 12:3) or the obscurity of subservience. When Jesus stated matter-of-factly that he was "humble in heart" (Matt. 11:29), he meant that he was conscientiously following the Father's plan for his earthly life.

In this he was keeping his place as the second Person of the Godhead. The three Persons of the Holy Trinity are eternal and self-existent, partaking equally of all aspects and attributes of deity, and always acting together in cooperative solidarity. But the unchanging cooperative pattern is that the second and third Persons identify with the purpose of the first, so that the Son becomes the Father's executive and the Spirit acts as the agent of both. It is the Son's nature and joy to do his Father's will (John 4:34).

Regarding redemption, the Father's will for the Son is sometimes called the covenant of redemption, since it has the form of an agreement between two parties on a program and a promise. The Westminster Confession summarizes the agreement (the Father's purpose, accepted by the Son) as follows:

It pleased God in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of his Church, the heir of all things, and

Judge of the world: unto whom he did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. (For the ideas and phraseology of this statement, see Eph. 3:11; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:5; Acts 3:22; Heb. 5:5-6; Luke 1:33; Eph. 5:23; Heb. 1:2; Acts 17:31; Isa. 53:10; John 17:6; 1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 8:29-30.)

This purpose of the Father for the Son had two stages. The first stage was humiliation. The eternal Son let go of his glory and through incarnation became a poor man and a religious outsider. Finally, by means of a show trial and unscrupulous manipulation of Pilate's moral weakness, he became a condemned criminal dying a dreadful death as mankind's sin-bearer (Phil. 2:6-8; 2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 3:13; 4:4-5).

The second stage was exaltation. Christ rose, ascended, and now by his Father's appointment reigns as king over the world and the church (Phil. 2:9-11), sending the Holy Spirit (John 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:33) and thereby applying to us the redemption that by dying he won for us. Drawing those given him to himself (John 12:32), interceding for them (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; John 17), guarding, guiding, and caring for them as a shepherd cares for his sheep (John 10:27-30), he is currently bringing many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10) according to the Father's plan, and he will continue to do so until all God's elect have come to repentance and new life (2 Pet. 3:9).

In all of this the Son is obeying the Father in true humility, living out a natural, voluntary, and joyful subordination. Meanwhile, the Father's aim of having the Son worshiped and glorified equally with himself is steadily being fulfilled (John 5:19-23).<sup>1</sup>"

5. Paul labored to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. *Why would it have been so hard to accept that the Christ of God's people was crucified? Why do you think it remains hard for many to believe this?*
6. Paul was an effective evangelist and yet, in the end, the Jews in Damascus sought to kill him. In a major twist in the narrative of Acts, we see Paul being cared for by the church that he once sought to persecute. One of the lessons we derive from this narrative is that faithful ministry will, at times, result in opposition. Consider Peter 1 Peter 2:19-21 "For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.<sup>20</sup> For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.<sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps," and also 1 Peter 4:12-19 "<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.<sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.<sup>14</sup> If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.<sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a

---

<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, <http://www.monergism.com/threshold/articles/onsite/packer/obedience.html> (September 23, 2014)

meddler.<sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.<sup>17</sup> For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?<sup>18</sup> And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"<sup>19</sup> Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." *What role can the Christian community play in fostering faithful Christian ministry and in caring for those who suffer because of it?*

*Spend time as a group praying for Christ to renew your love for him. Pray for renewed confidence in His sovereign care of all things. Developing relationships with others and sharing Christ may be a bit awkward and scary but it need not be devoid of joy and love. Though it may be met with opposition, it may also be met with saving faith. Because Jesus is sovereign King and the gospel is God's power to save, we should not feel as though we are "running exhausted up hill." Because of who Christ is and what He has done, sharing the good news about Jesus is, in fact, "running exhilarated downhill" and in step with the Spirit.*