

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH: WHAT A CHURCH SHOULD BE

ACTS 09:31

Introduction

This single verse is a summary statement showing the state of the church. It is a picture of just what a church should be.

- I. Condition 1: at peace (v. 31).
- II. Condition 2: edified — strengthened (v. 31).
- III. Condition 3: living — walking (v. 31).
 - a. In fearful trust.
 - b. In the Spirit's comfort.
- IV. Condition 4: growing (v. 31).

I. *Acts 09:31 A Church at Peace*

The church was at peace. The word *peace* (*eirenen*) in the Greek tense is active: the church was in a continuous state of peace or rest. It had been going through a most troublesome time, but now the trouble had been handled and peace reigned. Calm and rest settled in and took control. The idea is that the believers were now rejoicing in the peace and deliverance God had given from their great trial. The problem had been severe persecution (see notes, Acts 8:1-4; 9:1-2). But now the storm had settled: peace and calm, quiet and rest prevailed.

God Himself stopped the persecution. He did so by doing two things.

1. God converted the arch-persecutor himself, Saul of Tarsus (see notes, Acts 9:1-9. Rather humorously and rejoicing in the grace of God, that is one way to stop the persecution: convert the persecutor!)
2. God overruled the evil of men, worked it out for good. He used a world event to distract the Jewish rulers from the church. The Roman emperor Caligula was attempting to set up a statue or an image of himself in the temple at Jerusalem. He was set on forcing the Jews to worship his image. This, of course, was anathema, accursed to the Jews. In their minds, it was a much greater threat than the small movement of Christianity. Therefore, they turned from persecuting the church to dealing with the threat of the Roman emperor.

Thought 1. The church is to joy and rejoice when peace and rest reign about the church.

- 1) The church should joy in God who worked things out for good and brought such a state of peace to the church. The believer shall suffer persecution (see Ph. 1:28; 2 Tim. 3:12). There is no escape. Therefore, when peace reigns there is cause for rejoicing.
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James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

1 Pet 4:12-13 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

2) The church should make use of the calm and peace, bearing a stronger testimony than ever before. Times of peace and quiet, rest and comfort are too often used for revelling in the *blessings* of fellowship, and the church becomes complacent and lethargic. This should not be the case. Calm and peace mean the gospel is *now unhindered and unopposed*. Therefore, opportunity for proclaiming the gospel *freely* should be grasped to the fullest.

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

John 9:4 “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (see Lk. 19:10)

Col 4:5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

Psa 90:12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

II. Acts 09:31 A Strengthened Church

The church was *edified* or *strengthened* (oikudomoumene). The word means to build up, to grow spiritually, to promote spiritual growth, to establish, to confirm in the faith. The tense is continuous action. The believers were continuing to grow spiritually...

- becoming stronger in their faith in the Lord Jesus.
- learning more of the Word of God, of Jesus’ teachings and doctrines.
- gaining a greater knowledge of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power.
- learning how and becoming more effective witnesses for the Lord.
- gaining more and more boldness both for living and witnessing.

Rom 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Rom 15:2 Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.

1 Cor 14:3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

Eph 4:12 To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Eph 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

III. Acts 09:31 A Church Living in the Fear of the Lord

The church was living or walking in the Lord just as the Holy Spirit exhorts in Scripture.

Col 2:6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.

1 John 2:6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

1 Pet 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Note they were *living* in two things in particular.

1. They lived in the “fear of the Lord” (see *Fear*, Acts 9:31). Very simply, this means to live in “the fear of the Lord”; to live before Him in trust, reverence, awe, worship and obedience. It means to live a life that witnesses to the glory of His love and grace, holiness and righteousness.

Mat 10:28 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Luke 1:50 “His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.”

Acts 10:35 But accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

1 Pet 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

Deu 10:12 And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Josh 24:14 “Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.”

Psa 25:12 Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.

Psa 31:19 How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.

Psa 147:11 The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.

Prov 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

Eccl 12:13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Isa 8:13 *The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.*

2. They lived and walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The word *encouraged* (parakleseis) means *paraclete*, the very title by which Christ called the Holy Spirit. It means comforter, advisor, helper, exhorter. The picture is that of One who is called to stand by the believer's side (just as Jesus did). That is the reason Jesus made the great promise: "[God] will give you *another Counsellor* [Comforter]." (See note, Jn. 14:26.) The Holy Spirit was flooding their hearts with a great sense...
- of the Lord's presence: comforting, advising, helping, counselling, encouraging and exhorting them.
 - of joy and rejoicing over the great salvation that had saved them to the utmost and given them an eternal inheritance in the presence of God Himself.

John 14:16 *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever."*

John 14:26 *"But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."*

Col 1:12 *Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*

1 Pet 1:4 *And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you.*

ACTS 09:31 FEAR (PHOBO)

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. Acts 09:31

Fear means to stand in awe and reverence before God. It does not mean to fear God's presence, to shrink and withdraw from Him. To the contrary, it means that a person reverences and stands in awe of Him, wanting to approach and know Him because He is the majestic and sovereign Being of the universe. It means that a person does not fear...

- to trust and believe Him
- to approach and worship Him
- to do His will
- to serve Him ☐

IV. *Acts 09:31 A Growing Church*

The church was growing and multiplying by leaps and bounds. But note why the church was growing at such a rapid pace. The believers...

- were at rest and peace
- were edifying, strengthening and building each other up
- were living and walking in the fear of the Lord
- were living and walking under the control of the Spirit

These are the essentials for church growth, for reaching people with the gospel of the Lord Jesus. ■