

A TESTIMONY TO FREE AND SOVEREIGN GRACE

ACTS 26:16 • TV129B

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Acts 26:16

“But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.”

I want you to open your Bible today to the book of **Acts, the 26th chapter**. I would like very much for you to turn to that portion of God’s Word. I’m going to read **verse 16** and use that as my text. I would like for you to read the verses which precede **verse 16** and those which follow **verse 16**.

The subject today is: **“A TESTIMONY TO FREE AND SOVEREIGN GRACE.”**

In this **16th verse of Acts 26** the apostle Paul is telling King Agrippa what the Lord said to him when he met him on the road to Damascus.

The Lord said: *“Rise and stand upon thy feet for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose: to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen and of those things in which I will appear unto thee.”*

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Did you follow that? Most of us know the story of Saul of Tarsus. I don't think that there are many people listening to this program who are not familiar with Saul of Tarsus.

First of all: You know that he was born in a very religious home.

He said: *"My mother was a Hebrew and my father was a Hebrew. I was born of the tribe of Benjamin."*

Secondly: Not only was he born in a religious home but he was raised in a religious atmosphere.

He was raised in the religion of his fathers. He was raised in deep religious tradition.

Thirdly: Not only that; he was educated in a seminary, in a preacher's training school, not a Gospel preacher but a Pharisee training school. He was raised and educated to be a religious leader, a religious teacher.

This man was a legalist; he said: *"Concerning the law I was blameless. Concerning zeal, I was very zealous."* He had an education and intellect; he exceeded many his equals in his nation. He was a legalist, he was an orthodox person, and he was a traditionalist.

He was a teacher of works and he was a very religious person and he hated the Gospel of God's free grace. He hated the Gospel of substitution. He hated the message of redemption through Christ. He hated it so much that he put in prison everybody who believed it.

He even stood and held the coats of the people who stoned Stephen to death. That's how much he despised the Gospel of God's grace. He was very religious, he was very orthodox and he was very moral and he was a traditionalist to the extent of the Word.

But on his journey to Damascus to persecute men and women of the faith of Christ Jesus, the Lord met him and the Lord arrested him and the Lord opened his eyes and the Lord opened his ears.

The Lord turned him to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in other words; on that road to Damascus, the miracle of regeneration, the miracle of justification, the miracle of sanctification, the miracle of awakening, took place in the life of this man Saul, who was later called the Apostle Paul.

God revealed Christ to his heart and the Lord smote him down. He fell off his horse down to the ground and was blinded and (if you remember) he looked up and saw the great light and he said: *"who art thou Lord?"* The Lord said: *"I am Jesus of Nazareth to whom thou persecutest."*

And Saul said: *"Lord; what will you have me do?"* He said: *"Rise and stand up on your feet for I have appeared unto you for this purpose to make you a minister, to make you a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen and of those things into which I will appear unto you (or I will reveal to you at a later time)."*

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Now, in many ways my story is much like that of the apostle Paul. I'm not an apostle Paul; I can't touch the hem of his garment or lace his shoes or carry his Bible. I know that and I know you know that. But, I think as I tell this story today I will tell your story, many of you, as I tell my story and compare it to that of the apostle Paul.

I was raised in a religious home as most of you are. Most of your parents were very religious people, steeped in religion, very orthodox and fundamental. I was taught in the traditions of my father.

I was trained in fundamentalism. I grew up in orthodoxy. I grew up understanding the Bible to be the Word of God. Saul of Tarsus believed that too. I grew up believing in certain things in regards to religion.

I attended a preacher's school and I pastored a church and I served as an assistant pastor of another church. I was in the business of religion. I was in the business of evangelism and I was in the business of soul-winning as most of you have been and many some of you are. I was in the business of religion.

One day, one day about 30 years ago the Lord God was pleased to meet me like He met Saul of Tarsus, not in that same way, not with a great light and the voice from heaven, but God met me through His Word and He was pleased to reveal to me the Gospel.

And though I was religious, I did not know the Gospel. And though I was religious and orthodox and fundamental and moral; I did not know the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace.

Do you remember that God said to Paul: *"Rise; stand upon thy feet, I appear to you for this purpose that I might make you a minister and that you might declare the things that you have seen and the things that you are going to see."*

And I saw things that day and I heard things that day that I had never seen or never heard before. Saul was 40 years of age, over 40 years of age; he had been steeped in religion, he had been reared in religion, and he had been educated in religion.

He had been in the main forces of religion. He had been out in the front as a leader of religion all of these years but he had never seen the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Now my friend; you can be religious and lost. You can hold an office in the church like Judas and not know God. You can be zealous and moral and blameless and an intellectual, an orthodox, a traditionalist, and a legalist, like Saul of Tarsus and not know Christ.

This Gospel comes as it did to Paul, by revelation. Listen to Job; in **Job chapter 42**, Job said: *"Lord; I've heard of you by the hearing of the ear."* I've heard of God all my life and some of you have heard of God all your life.

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You've heard preachers, you've heard singing, you've heard choirs, you've heard testimonies and you've heard all of these things. You've heard the Bible read and you've heard Sunday school lessons taught.

Job said: *"I've heard of you, by the hearing of the ear but now mine eyes seeth thee."* That's as the old evangelist use to say: "That's a white horse of another color." Now I see you and things appear in a different perspective. *"I see things that I've never seen before."*

I'm going to give you five or six things:

Thirty years ago when God saved me out of religious fundamentalism, (and that's where some of you are and I know I'm talking to you) I want you to listen to me, in orthodoxy, in morality, in legalism, and in tradition, everybody is religious.

God saves as many of His people out of religion as He does out of the gutter. That's where most of them are found, wrapped in the sins of religion and self-righteousness. That's the greatest sin of all.

But, I saw some things that I had never seen before. Job said that. Job; he was a righteous man. God said he was *"upright and righteous."* He said: "I saw some things that I had never seen before."

Here, Job was an old man. He had already raised 10 children and was one of the wealthiest men in the county and all of these things were destroyed and they were destroyed to teach him some things.

David said: *"It's good for me that I've been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes"* Job said: *"I've heard of you but now I see you."*

First of all: All right; watch this, the first thing that I saw; I saw and I do see God's attributes.

That's a big word but it just means character, or characteristics; it means qualities that belong only to God. The Scripture says: *"Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."*

The Scripture says: *"Our God is holy, almighty, righteous and just."* I saw the attributes of God and I have to tell you this: that was the first thing that God revealed to me, who He was. Before he ever revealed to me who I was and even who Christ was, he revealed to me who He was.

You may take issue with this but I'm going to tell you this: some people may claim to see their sin and their need and then go looking for God. They say they see their sins and their need and then they go looking for God in the Scriptures.

But, the pattern's not so in the Word of God. In the Word of God these men saw God and then they saw themselves. This is right. Let me give you some examples:

In **Isaiah Chapter 6:1**, he said: *“In the year that king Uzziah died; I saw the Lord high and lifted up. His train filled the temple: The seraphims cried: holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty.”*

Then Isaiah said: *“I cried woe is me, woe is me; I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”* What did Isaiah see first, his sins or God’s holiness? He saw God’s holiness. In seeing God’s holiness he saw his sin.

What was the procedure used in Job’s case? Job said: *“I see you, wherefore, I hate myself.”* Which did Job see first? He saw the Lord. He saw the Lord in His power. God appeared to Job out of a whirlwind; read **Chapters 40, 41, and 42 of Job**.

God appeared to him out of a whirlwind. He saw the power of God and the might of God and the holiness of God. When he did he said: *“I have opened my mouth once, yea twice; I’ll never open it again: I’ve seen things too wonderful. I’ve seen the Lord; I hate myself.”*

In Daniel; the Scripture says: *“Daniel saw the Lord”* and what was his first remark? He said: *“My beauty melted into corruption.”*

The apostle Peter one day was on the shore with the other disciples fishing and they hadn’t caught anything and the Lord appeared to them and He said: *“cast the net over the side of the ship”* and they did.

They brought in a whole net full and Peter seeing the power of Christ turned to Him and said: *“Lord; depart from me I’m a sinful man.”* He had never seen that before. He saw Christ’s power first and then he saw his sinfulness.

I can go on: David; what did David say? *“When I consider the heavens, when I consider the stars, the sun and the moon which thou hand hast made; what is man that thou art mindful of him?”*

When God would show Jeremiah what he was and what Israel was, he said: *“go to the potter’s house and see the potter working on the clay; now that is God and you are the clay. Can I not do with my own what I will?”* That pattern goes throughout the Scriptures.

Nebuchadnezzar, he said: *“Look at the great city of Babylon which my hands have built.”* God said: *“Well, we’ll see about that Nebuchadnezzar.”* He sent him out into the field to eat hay like an oxen and to stay out there and seven times he passed over him and God said, *“You are going to stay out there until you learn that the most high God ruleth in the kingdoms of heaven and among the armies of heaven and the kingdoms of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”*

Nebuchadnezzar said: *“When my senses returned to me I had learned that God rules in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.”*

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So, I say that this is the first thing to be settled: who is God, who is God? If God's not sovereign there's nobody for me to be responsible to. If God's not holy, how do I determine my sins? If God's not almighty how do I see my weaknesses, by what do I compare it?

Do you see what I am saying? In what likeness do I compare myself? By whose rule do I compare myself? That's the first thing that we see. That is the issue to be settled. Until that issue is settled we make no progress in any attempt at a saving relationship with God Almighty.

"Holy and reverend is his name." When that's determined in your heart, when that issue is settled: who is God, then you can start out on the trail looking for some kind of solution to see, some kind of solution of this break between you and God, some kind of solution or some kind of settlement about this war between you and God.

You have got to know who you are dealing with. I'm telling you the truth. That's the first thing; that's the thing I hadn't seen. *"Thou thoughtest thou was altogether such as one as thyself,"* God says.

But, you find that out and then you find out you are in trouble. And the depths of my trouble are determined by the holiness of my God. Are you with me? The depths of my trouble and the awfulness of my sin and the inability of my hands to do anything about it are determined by whom I am dealing with.

That's the reason that most preachers have those little old silly, simple, easy-beliefs; they are not dealing with a sovereign, holy, omnipotent God. That's the reason you can walk down some aisles and shake a hand and get salvation because you are dealing with a fellow just like the preacher.

But, when you are dealing with an omnipotent, awful, holy, almighty, eternal, just and righteous, unchangeable, infinite, God; there is a whole lot more than this matter of salvation than just pressing down a church aisle or getting up from a puddle of water or eating a few crackers and drinking some grape juice.

There's a whole lot more to it my friends when you find out who God is. I found out one day who God is and I am awed by it, I'm awed by it. Come my children and I will teach you how to fear God: *"the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God."*

The reason you are not hearing any sermons on the fear of God is because "the god" being preached today is not to be feared. Some say: "Who fears him; he can't do anything anyways, except I let him, so why should I fear him?"

But oh, the God of the Bible is to be feared. I will tell you this; when the Bible describes a man who worships God in the Old Testament, do you know what it says about him? *"He's one that feared the Lord."*

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Jacob feared the Lord. Abraham feared the Lord. David feared the Lord. When it describes this generation in **Romans 3** it says: *“there’s no fear of God before their eyes.”* Find out who God is; that’s where you start.

Second: I not only found out who God was but I saw my ruin in the fall.

I looked back and saw what happened in the Garden of Eden. I didn’t know what happened. I thought man was slightly wounded. I found out that Adam was slain. I thought man was blind in one eye; I found that he is totally blind as the result of his sin.

I thought man was somewhat ill. I found out that he was somewhat dead and **Ephesians** says: *“he’s without hope, without help, and without God.”* **Ephesians 2:1** says: *“He’s dead in trespasses and sin.”*

The Scripture tells us that when God put Adam out of the Garden, he put him plum out of the Garden, away from God, separated from God. *“Your sins have separated you from God.”*

Adam lost the way to God, he lost the truth of God, and he lost the life of God. That’s what’s restored in Christ; that’s what Christ is saying when He says: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”* Everything that Adam lost is restored in Christ Jesus.

But, I found out that my intentions were not just focused on Adam’s fall but the results of Adam’s fall to me and in me and upon me; I found out that sin was not just an action.

I heard all of my life that you weren’t supposed to go to a show, you weren’t supposed to drink, you weren’t supposed to smoke, you weren’t supposed to play cards, and you weren’t supposed to dance.

If you could quit all of them you would be religious, you would be holy, and you would be without sin, that you would be sanctified. Just quit all of these things that the folks have named. I found out that’s a lie. I found out there’s not a word of truth in that.

I found out that sin is not just an action; sin is an attitude. I found out sin wasn’t just a work of the hand; it was a condition of the heart. That’s what I found out. I found out man didn’t have hand trouble, he’s got heart trouble.

I found out that sin is a nature, sin is a principle. Sin is a state, sin is a condition of the will and that was my trouble. I found out that sin is a condition of the will and I found out that’s the starting point in this thing of theology to answer these questions:

How can God be just and justify folks like me and you? *“How can he be clean that’s born of a woman?”* Clean, I mean not just clean hands, but a pure heart. I’m not talking about cleaning the outside of the cup; I’m talking about cleaning the inside.

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Christ looked at those religious people of His day and they didn't do those things either. They didn't go to the Honky-tonk on Saturday night and dance all night. But, I will tell you the truth; they had hell in their hearts and Christ looked at them and he said: *"You are like a whited sepulcher; on the outside you appear beautiful unto men, but on the inside, you are full of dead men's bones. You are a generation of snakes. You are hypocrites."* People make clean the outside but the inside is full of lust, hate, bigotry, prejudice, jealousy, envy, and you despise the God of the Bible.

I will tell you: it takes a miracle of God's grace to justify a sinner. I found that out; I found out how lost we were. I found out how helpless we were. I found out how sinful we were. I found out that men were sinners by nature, not just by deeds, by nature, attitude, and spirit.

I found out that some of the most religious people I knew were some of the wickedest people in the world, in their hearts, because they were trying to establish a righteousness of their own. They were trying to work their way to heaven. They were trying to work their way to God. They were trying by an outward show.

I found out that people making the most noise at the church were people who were the most compromising folks in the world in their spirit and attitude. I found out about sin!

***"It took a miracle to put the stars in space
It took a miracle to hang the world in place,
But when God saved my soul
And cleansed and made me whole
It took a miracle of his love and his grace."***

That's what it takes to save folks like me and you and I'm talking about you and me. I'm pointing the finger of God's Word at every one of us and I'm saying that we've got troubles, we've got deep troubles.

They are not skin troubles they are heart troubles. They are not outward troubles, they are inward troubles. They are not head troubles they are heart troubles.

Only the grace of God and the blood of Christ can reach deep enough to cleanse the blackest sinner. *"He's able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him."*

If God never shows you that you are lost, you will never be found. If God never shows you that you are a sinner, you will never be saved. If God never shows you you're guilty, you will never plead for mercy. God saves sinners.

When our Lord was here on the earth, that bunch of religious folk looked at Him and said: *"He's a friend of publicans; he's the friend of sinners. He goeth to be the guest of a man that's a sinner. Why does he associate with folks like that?"*

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Our Lord looked at them and said: *“The well don’t need a doctor; sick folks need doctors. You go learn what that means. I’ve come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”* Christ came to save sinners. He died for the ungodly.

But, you say: “Everybody is a sinner.” Most folks don’t believe it; you ask them. “A sinner is a sacred thing; the Holy Ghost hath made him so.” A sinner is as scarce as hen’s teeth. They are the hardest things in the world to find.

There’s a bonafied, self-confessed, unadulterated, unadorned sinner, who needs God’s mercy. But, that’s who He came to save.

Third: Then I found out something else. I saw that God had determined from all eternity to save a people out of Adam’s race.

God is going to have a people. I’m as sure of that as the Bible is the Word of God. He’s going to have a people because Christ was *“the lamb slain before the foundation of the world.”*

Christ was no afterthought. God didn’t run around looking for a Saviour after man fell. He already had a Saviour: *“Christ was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”*

There was a covenant of grace before there was ever a covenant of works. There was a Saviour before there ever was a sinner. *“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning. He said: “Whom he foreknew, he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son: whom he predestinated, he called, whom he called, he justified, whom he justified, he glorified.”* In other words, I’m saying that the design of creation was to have a new creation. The design of God’s providence is to have a people like Christ and the design of redemption is to make a population, to make heaven a city populated with holy people.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus according as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children according to the good pleasure of his own will.”

Let me ask you some questions:

First of all: Did you choose God or did he choose you? Now, what’s the answer? You have to say: “He chose me,” because Christ said that to His disciples, he said: *“you didn’t choose me I chose you.”*

Secondly: “When did God choose you?” Well, the Scripture says: *“We were chosen in Christ before the world began.”*

Thirdly: “Why did God choose you?” The Scripture says: *“According to the good pleasure of his own will.”*

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I'm just glad that God determined to save a people. If He had left us to ourselves nobody would be saved. I'm glad God chose us. I'm glad God sought us. I'm glad God loved us. I'm glad that God by Christ bought us. If He hadn't none of us would have been saved, we would have all perished.

Christ said: *"You will not come to me that you might have life."* Election is not the sinner's enemy; it's the sinner's best friend. Listen to Paul in **2 Thessalonians 2:13**, he said: *"I thank God for you brethren."* Election is a doctrine of praise; *"I thank God for you brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."*

Election is the doctrine of praise and it's the doctrine of love, *"beloved of the Lord."* It's a doctrine of eternal grace: *"God hath from the beginning."* It's a doctrine of salvation: *"chosen you to salvation."* It's a doctrine of holiness *"through sanctification of the Spirit."* It's a doctrine of means, *"through belief of the truth."*

Oh, I saw God has a people. He said: *"All that my Father giveth me will come to me. Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."* Isn't that what Christ said? He has a people just like chose Abraham, *"he took not on himself the nature of angels but took on himself the seed of Abraham."*

Just like our Lord Jesus Christ passed by the Amalekites, the Hittites, the Philistines, the Amorites, and all the rest of them and chose Israel. The same way our Lord in this day *"has a remnant according to the election of grace."*

Fourth: I saw something else: I saw that the Gospel is a person, it's not a plan; it's a person; it's not a recipe, it's a person.

Paul said: *"I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ. I'm separated to the gospel of God concerning his Son. The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

There are two words, my friend, that sum up the Gospel and one is substitution. *"He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was laid on him. By his stripes we are healed."*

The second word is satisfaction. *"By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."* Substitution: He took my place. Satisfaction: He paid my bill; He paid my debt.

You see; Christ didn't come to make men savable. He didn't come to help men save themselves. He didn't come to make it possible for men to save; He came to save. That's what the angel said to Joseph, *"Thou shalt call his name Jesus; he shall save his people from their sin; he shall save."* He cannot fail. *"He will see the travail of his soul and be satisfied. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, (not might have, he should have) he hath everlasting life."*

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Fifth: I saw something else; I saw the means that God is pleased to use to call out a people for His name is the preaching of the Gospel!

In **1 Thessalonians chapter 1:4-5**, Paul said: *“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”*

They hear the Word but they hear it in the Holy Spirit; they hear it in power. They hear the Word but they hear it in the power and revelation of the Holy Spirit!