

Paul's Calling and Mission

A 50-minute teaching script for Acts 9:19-31, Acts 13:1-12, and Romans 15:14-33

BIG IDEA The risen Christ called Paul, and the Holy Spirit sent him through the church to carry the gospel to the Gentiles and build up Christ's people.

BEFORE CLASS Write on the board: Who sends the church into mission—and how does the whole church participate?

0:00-3:00 | Welcome and opening prayer

Good morning. Today we are moving from Saul's conversion to Paul's calling and mission. We will watch that calling begin in Damascus, see the Holy Spirit send him through the church at Antioch, and then listen to Paul explain his mission in his own words.

Let's pray. Father, send your Holy Spirit to guide us and teach us. Help us hear your Word, recognize that the mission belongs to Jesus Christ, and understand how you call the whole church to participate. In Jesus' name, amen.

3:00-6:00 | Recap Lesson 2

Last week we met Saul as a zealous Pharisee who believed he was defending God while opposing Christ and attacking Christ's church. Stephen, filled with the Spirit, saw clearly. The council was religiously certain but refused to hear. As Stephen died, he prayed that the Lord would not hold the sin against his killers. That prayer included Saul, although Scripture does not say Stephen's prayer caused Saul's conversion.

The risen Jesus confronted Saul, humbled him, and identified himself with the suffering church: 'Why do you persecute me?' Then Jesus sent Ananias to the man who had come to arrest Christians. Ananias obeyed and called him 'Brother Saul.'

Galatians showed us that God took the initiative: God set Paul apart, called him by grace, revealed his Son, and commissioned him. Philippians showed us that Christ changed what Saul counted as gain.

TRANSITION Grace did not extinguish Saul's zeal. Grace gave his zeal a new Lord, a new message, a new people, and a new purpose.

6:00-9:00 | Read Acts 9:19-31

Ask one reader to read Acts 9:19-31. Before the reading, ask everyone to notice Saul's new community, where he first proclaims Jesus, how people respond, and how the church helps him.

9:00-17:00 | Saul's calling becomes action

The first thing Luke tells us about Saul's new life is that he spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. These were the people he had intended to destroy. When Christ claimed Saul, Saul discovered that he belonged to Christ's people.

It is reasonable to believe these disciples taught Saul about Jesus' earthly ministry and helped him understand the life of this new community. But Luke does not tell us what instruction they gave him. Galatians says Paul's gospel and apostolic commission did not originate with human teachers. That does not mean he never learned Christian tradition or listened to other believers.

Verse 20 says, 'At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.' Spending time with the disciples and preaching at once most naturally happened in parallel. Saul did not yet know everything, but he knew the decisive truth: the crucified Jesus was alive, was God's Son, and was Israel's Messiah.

Acts 9:20 is the only place in Acts where Jesus is directly given the exact title 'Son of God,' apart from the related quotation 'You are my Son' in Acts 13. The title speaks of Jesus' unique relationship with the Father, places him in David's royal line, and

identifies him as Israel's promised Messiah. Verse 22 reinforces that message: Saul was proving from Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah.

Notice where he begins: in the synagogues. Saul had carried letters authorizing him to search those synagogues for followers of Jesus. Now he enters them proclaiming the Jesus he had come to oppose. This becomes his regular pattern. His calling to the Gentiles does not erase his concern for his Jewish kinsmen. The synagogue provides shared Scriptures and an audience of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles prepared to hear about the Messiah.

The response changes from amazement to violence. The man who made Christians suffer is now suffering for Christ. Saul entered Damascus carrying official letters and expecting to lead Christians out as prisoners. He leaves hidden in a basket, dependent upon Christians to save his life.

When Saul reaches Jerusalem, the believers are understandably afraid. Then come two wonderful words: 'But Barnabas.' Barnabas listens to Saul, brings him to the apostles, recounts his encounter with the Lord, and puts his own credibility behind this changed man.

Was Barnabas unafraid because he was filled with the Spirit? Luke later describes him as full of the Holy Spirit and faith, but Acts 9 does not say Barnabas felt no fear. Courage is not the absence of fear. Barnabas did not practice naïve acceptance; he considered Saul's testimony and changed life, then helped the church receive someone Christ had received.

TEACHING LINE Saul's former allies regarded him as a traitor, while his former victims struggled to believe he had become their brother.

Saul then moves about freely among the Jerusalem believers. He also debates Hellenistic Jews and meets the same kind of violent resistance Stephen encountered. Acts does not identify the exact synagogue or say Saul had participated in Stephen's earlier debate. The safe and powerful connection is that the man who approved Stephen's death is now continuing Stephen's witness—and facing similar hostility.

17:00-20:00 | Bridge from Jerusalem to Antioch

The believers send Saul to Tarsus for protection. Later, in Acts 11, Barnabas travels to Tarsus, finds Saul, and brings him to Antioch. They teach the church together for a full year. Barnabas does not merely open a door for Saul; he helps Saul find a place to serve.

That brings us to Acts 13. In Acts 9, the church receives, protects, and advocates for Saul. In Acts 13, the Spirit leads the church to commission and send him.

20:00-23:00 | Read Acts 13:1-12

Ask one reader to read Acts 13:1-12. Ask everyone to notice who calls, who sends, where Barnabas and Saul begin, what opposition they encounter, and what finally amazes Sergius Paulus.

23:00-32:00 | The Spirit calls and the church sends

The Antioch church has a geographically and socially diverse leadership team. Barnabas came from Cyprus. Lucius came from Cyrene in North Africa. Saul came from Tarsus. Manaen had been raised with Herod Antipas. Simeon carried the Latin nickname Niger, meaning 'black,' although Luke does not tell us his birthplace or ethnicity.

Luke calls them prophets and teachers, but he does not tell us which title belonged to which person. What matters here is what they are doing: worshiping the Lord and fasting. Mission grows out of a worshiping, listening church.

The Holy Spirit says, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' The message may have come through one of the prophets, but Luke does not tell us. We should distinguish what Scripture states from what we infer.

After more fasting and prayer, the church lays hands upon Barnabas and Saul and sends them. Verse 3 says the church sent them; verse 4 says they were sent by the Holy Spirit. Luke sees no conflict. The Spirit calls, and the church discerns, commissions, and participates.

ASK What might be missing if someone claims an individual calling but refuses the discernment, support, or accountability of Christ's church?

They sail to Cyprus, Barnabas's home island, with John Mark as their helper. At Salamis they follow the pattern we saw in Damascus: they begin in the Jewish synagogues.

At Paphos they meet a Jewish false prophet and magician known as Bar-Jesus and Elymas. Bar-Jesus means 'son of Jesus' or 'son of Joshua.' Elymas may have been a professional name connected with being learned or a magician, although its exact origin is uncertain. Luke's sharper irony comes in Paul's rebuke: the man called 'son of Jesus' is acting as a 'child of the devil' by trying to turn someone away from the Lord.

We may infer that Elymas feared losing his influence with the proconsul, but Luke does not state his motive. Luke tells us that he deliberately opposed the missionaries and tried to turn Sergius Paulus away from the faith.

This is also where Luke writes, 'Saul, who was also called Paul.' God did not rename Saul at his conversion. Saul was his Jewish name and Paul his Roman name. Luke's switch fits the movement of the story more deeply into the Gentile world.

Paul's words to Elymas are severe: 'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right!' But Luke says Paul is filled with the Holy Spirit. He is not insulting an honest seeker; he is confronting a false teacher who is actively preventing someone else from hearing the truth.

ASK Are harsh words ever appropriate in Christian witness?

Christian witness normally requires patience, gentleness, and respect. But gentleness does not mean passivity when someone deliberately deceives others or blocks them from hearing the gospel. There are times when protecting others requires clear and forceful opposition. At the same time, we must not baptize our impatience as Spirit-filled boldness.

Elymas is struck blind for a time. The parallel with Saul is difficult to miss: an opponent of Christ cannot see and must be led by the hand. Luke does not tell us whether Elymas later repented.

Sergius Paulus sees what happened and believes, but do not miss Luke's final words: he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. The sign authenticated the message; the message remained central.

32:00-35:00 | Read Romans 15:15-21, 23-24, 30-32

Say: Acts has shown us Paul's mission happening. Romans now lets Paul explain, in his own words, what he believed Christ was doing through him and how churches participated.

Ask one reader to read Romans 15:15-21, then verses 23-24 and 30-32. Briefly summarize the Jerusalem collection in verses 25-29.

35:00-41:00 | Paul explains his mission

First, Paul describes his calling as 'the grace God gave me.' Grace did not merely forgive Paul. Grace entrusted him with service. His ministry to the Gentiles was a gift and responsibility, not a personal achievement.

Second, Paul says he will speak only of 'what Christ has accomplished through me.' This lesson is not the story of an unusually driven man conquering the Roman world. Paul speaks and acts, but Christ accomplishes the work through him by the power of the Spirit.

Third, Paul has a settled ambition: to preach where Christ is not known. Acts 13 shows that frontier pattern beginning; Romans 15 shows that it shaped his ministry over decades.

Fourth, Paul expects the Roman church to assist him toward Spain. Mission is not a lone hero story. Churches send, give, host, encourage, and participate. The collection for Jerusalem also joins Gentile churches materially to Jewish believers.

Finally, Paul asks the Roman believers to join his struggle by praying. They may not travel with him, but their prayers make them genuine partners in the mission.

SYNTHESIS Acts tells us what Paul did. Romans tells us what Paul believed Christ was doing through him—and how the churches participated.

41:00-47:00 | The Gospel Then and Now

Return to the board question: Who sends the church into mission—and how does the whole church participate?

The mission belongs to Christ. The Holy Spirit calls and empowers. The church worships, listens, discerns, commissions, protects, supports, and prays. Some believers go; others give, welcome, teach, encourage, and send.

Our temptation is to become inward-looking or to outsource mission to pastors and professional missionaries. Acts 13 and Romans 15 will not allow that. Not everyone is Paul, but the whole church participates in Christ's mission.

DISCUSS If not every Christian is called to be Paul, how does every congregation participate in Christ's mission?

If time allows, ask: What would it look like for our congregation to worship, listen, send, support, and pray more intentionally?

47:00-50:00 | Summary, homework, and prayer

Today we saw Saul's redirected zeal become witness and suffering. Christ called him. The church received and protected him. Barnabas advocated for him. The Spirit sent Barnabas and Saul through the worshiping church at Antioch. Opposition could not stop the gospel, and Paul later described the whole mission as what Christ accomplished through him by the Spirit and through the partnership of churches.

FINAL LINE Christ called Paul. The church received him. The Spirit sent him. Christ worked through him. Churches partnered with him.

Before next week, read Galatians 1-6 in one sitting and Acts 15. Mark the church problem, Paul's gospel answer, and the response he calls for.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you that the mission belongs to you. Thank you for calling servants, forming a church, and sending your people by the Holy Spirit. Keep us from becoming inward-looking. Show each of us how to go, give, welcome, encourage, protect, and pray so that those who do not know Christ may hear the gospel. In your name, amen.

Optional material if discussion moves quickly

Chronology: Galatians 1:17 says Paul went into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Luke summarizes this period with 'after many days.' We cannot reconstruct every movement with certainty.

Naturalistic explanations of Saul's conversion—thunderstorm, seizure, psychological blindness, repressed guilt, or despair over legal righteousness—are speculation. Luke and Paul consistently present the event as an appearance and commission of the risen Christ.

Paul's basket escape appears again in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33, where Paul places it within his account of weakness. His first escape as a Christian missionary was not glamorous; he left the city like cargo.