

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism!

It has become one of *the* defining words of our day. Since the events of September 11th, 2001, the word *terrorism* has been constantly on our minds. It has become a household word. Virtually every newscast has some kind of report on this menacing evil. As a result, consciously or subconsciously, the reality of terrorism hangs over America like a dark threatening cloud that could unleash its destructive and disruptive fury upon us at any time.

America's ongoing War on Terrorism seems to headline almost every newscast, talk show or political interview. In addition, there is the ominous concern over *bioterrorism* with killer bacteria and toxins like Anthrax, Ricin, E-coli, Salmonella and Smallpox – just to mention a few – which are so lethal that a small vile could poison entire city water systems.

Then there is the very real danger of dirty bombs. Since these deadly atomic devices are only briefcase- or suitcase-sized, they could easily be smuggled into any city by a terrorist and exploded – im-

mediately annihilating thousands of people and spreading nuclear contamination that would either kill or permanently injure hundreds of thousands of our citizens.

Whenever the news is not specifically focused on the military aspects of the War on Terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq or the Middle East, it is grappling with the issues of our national security in the face of the continuing threat of terrorist attacks here in America. Entirely new governmental departments have been created to fight terrorism under a Homeland Security Czar. As a frequent airline traveler, I have to constantly contend with long security lines, multiple x-ray scans and body searches with handheld wands on every trip I take, especially international ones.

In most airports today as you go through the security check points, you have to take off your coat, your hat, your glasses, your belt, and your shoes. Laptop computers and video cameras have to be taken out for special inspection. After all of this, if you do not pass muster, you are taken behind a curtain and put through the indignity of a body pat-down! Sadly, these frequent security checks have become a time consuming fact of life for every traveler – all compliments of Osama bin Laden!

There is also the new and ever-growing threat of cyberterrorism. This is a completely new dimension of war for the electronic age. In this twenty first century, the United States is learning that our enemies are astute and sophisticated at utilizing cyberspace and the internet for recruiting, propaganda and sabotage. In addition to the devastation and death caused by their suicide bombers, these technological terrorists are increasingly able to crack our intelligence codes and hack their way into our military security systems. If young computer geeks in America and abroad can increasingly penetrate many of our top secret security codes just for the fun and challenge of it, it doesn't take a lot of imagination to realize how terrorists could do the same for their disruptive and destructive purposes. By just injecting the right kind of computer viruses and worms into our internet and online banking systems, they could cripple our economy with total confusion in nano-seconds!

When the national and international military ramifications of terrorism are not being focused on in the media, the news often deals with the overall financial impact of terrorism on the American economy. It is only to be expected that the ever present possibility of another terrorist attack causes insecurity

and uncertainty on Wall Street. Investors and traders have an underlying sense of nervousness that negatively affects their financial activities.

Put together then, these aspects of terrorism continue to cost the American taxpayer tens of billions of dollars each year, dollars that could better be spent on education, job creation, transportation, infrastructural upgrades, environmental issues and other things that would boost our economy and enhance our democratic way of life.

September 11th, therefore, has become the paradigm that has caused a radical shift in our politics, our economy, our thinking, our behavior, our travel, our shopping, our recreation – our entire lives.

In America today, our previous sense of security has imploded on itself and crumbled like the Twin Towers in New York did on 9/11. Our high-flying economic bubble of the Nineties popped before it could loftily float into the New Millennium. Now in the twenty-first century, America struggles to maintain her position as the economic superpower of the world. A foreboding sense of *fear* and insecurity overshadows life for most Americans. Deep down we all know that life will never be the same again. We have crossed over a bridge that used to isolate

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us from these kinds of foreign dangers. As a result, we live in a new world order dominated by the ever-present reality of *terrorism*.

Unquestionably then, the American way of life has changed – FOREVER!

I believe that Jesus prophesied the advent of these fearful times in His Olivet Discourse about End Time events recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 24; Mark 13, Luke 21). He said that one of the signs of the “last days” would be that “Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world” (Luke 21:26). In this apocalyptic teaching, Jesus specifically spoke about the many fearful events that would increasingly take place in the spiritual, political, racial, medical, environmental, and cosmic realms – all preluding His Second Coming. He said that all of these traumas were but the “beginning of birth pains” leading up to the advent of His Kingdom here on earth (Matthew 24:8).

At the time of my writing of this book, everything seems to hinge on the fate of the illusive terrorist leader, Osama bin Laden. He has become the very personification of terrorism to the world! To many people, he is like the beast and false prophet of Revelation who are the puppets of Satan – the real

mastermind of worldwide terrorism (Revelation 13 - 20). As a result, bin Laden is Public Enemy #1 for the Free World. He is also on top of the FBI's *10 Most Wanted Criminals* with a multimillion dollar bounty on his head: Dead or Alive! He has made it clear that he will never be taken alive.

One way or another, bin Laden has vowed to die as a Muslim martyr in this worldwide jihad he is leading. He will either die as a martyr through coalition bullets or bombs that are seeking him out or he will die by the hand of one of his bodyguards who have been strictly instructed to shoot him rather than let him be captured or killed by the "infidels." Either way, bin Laden would then live larger than life in infamy! His legacy would then continue to inspire thousands of other young Muslims to take the jihadist road to radical Islam.

But bin Laden is not alone in this worldwide net of terrorism. He is just the current leader who has galvanized the other lesser terrorists of the world behind his fanatical plot to destroy everything American, Western and Judeo-Christian. Because of his bigger-than-life terrorist persona, supported by his personal and family wealth, he has been able to finance terrorist activities around the world in a way others could not.

Then there are bin Laden's chief lieutenants of destruction, Ayman Al-Zawahiri from Egypt, and Jordanian-born Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. These terrorist masterminds are surrounded by an unending group of fellow Muslim fundamentalists who are willing and eager to be the self-destructive pawns of terrorism by becoming "suicide bombers." Each one intoxicated by promises of direct entry into the Islamic Paradise were thousand of beautiful virgins await each of them!

In addition, there are an untold number of terrorist sleeper cells around the world. Like the hijackers on 9/11, these radically committed men and women are just awaiting the word from their leaders to strike again. So it is not a matter of *if* there will be other acts of terrorism; it is a matter of *when* and *where*.

In the minds of the terrorist, this is an ideological and political struggle unto death. For them, there can be no retreat or compromise. It is a religious and cultural war in which there can only be one winner. It is an all-or-nothing jihad, or holy war, in which there can only be one winner at the end of this all-out struggle for world domination. Since America is perceived as the Great Satan, the pri-

mary global threat to the Islamic way of life, she must be either *converted* or *annihilated*!

So this war will either result in the triumph of democracy and freedom – or in the imposition of an Islamic Caliphate of fundamentalism, radicalism and legalism!

Many Americans have the naïve belief that if these key radical religious fundamentalist leaders can be killed, then terrorism will be stopped. If we can “cut off the head of the serpent,” then its body will quickly die! As a result of this mindset, America and all of her coalition partners have focused their ideological warfare and military might on the eradication of radical groups like the Taliban, Hamas, Fatah, Mujehideen, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, Martyrs of al-Aqsa, and the worldwide network of al-Qaeda. From our military perspective, it is an all-out war that is seeking to wipe the scourge of terrorism from the face of the earth – for good!

Tragically, there is a dangerous naiveté in this idealism and triumphantism that reveals a very superficial understanding of the Muslim religion, in general, and Islamic Fundamentalism in particular. Make no mistake about it, this is a war like no other that America has ever faced in her short history as

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a nation. It very well could become the war that we lose – costing us, our children and grandchildren, our religious freedom and democratic way of life.

However, as America continues to wage its military campaign against terrorism, I want to remind my Christian readers that we must also intensify our spiritual campaign against terrorism. There is an obvious parallel here between this ideological War on Terrorism, and our spiritual War on Terrorism. But I fear that most American and Western Christians do not see the obvious! They do not connect the ideological and spiritual dots in this cosmic battle. They do not discern the spiritual warfare taking place behind the physical warfare that continues to escalate.

As I have already stated, I believe this is a very deadly spiritual blindness and moral malaise that could cause us to lose the War on Terrorism! While most American Christians see this war in terms of a political and ideological conflict, the terrorists clearly see it as a *jihad*. They are absolutely clear in their minds that this is nothing short of a “holy war” unto death between their way of life and ours – with a winner-take-all consummation.

So my friend, we must never forget that we too are in a life and death battle against evil forces that are out to completely destroy us. These sinister spiritual terrorists are fully committed to the goal of wiping out every vestige of Christianity and Judaism from the face of the earth! They take no hostages or prisoners. Death and annihilation is their ultimate goal for every person created in the image of God and especially all those who bear the image of Christ through the new birth. Therefore, our battle is not a physical one. That's why Paul sought to jar us into spiritual alertness with these sobering words:

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the *spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” (Ephesians 6:12).

Even though that verse is well known by almost every Christian, most still live their lives as though it has little or no relevance to them. As a result, they live their Christian lives as though they were called by Jesus to attend one long perpetual church picnic! By watching them you would conclude that the Christian life is just one unending spiritual vacation lived in the lap of luxury!

This is just the kind of naïve spiritual illusion that the evil one wants Christians to live in. As they go through their lives with this “spiritual picnic mentality” rather than with a life-and-death spiritual warfare mentality, they are little or no threat to the master terrorist’s continued domination of the world in general – and their world in particular.

Tragically, as these carnal believers live AWOL from active duty, they lose the cutting edge of their spiritual convictions and become lukewarm Christians who have been cooled-down by the world around them (Revelation 3:15-16). They have laid aside their spiritual armor and dressed themselves in the latest designer clothes. Desiring popularity with man more than integrity before God, they are increasingly conformed to the social decorum of the day. Let me say it again, Christians who have been conformed to the “spirit of the age” (Ephesians 2:2) pose little threat to the demonic hoards in the heavenly realms that Paul exhorted us to be ever vigilant against.

In America’s War on Terrorism, our soldiers are learning a very painful lesson. After many months of intensive bombing, strafing, missile attacks and door-to-door street-fighting, they are experiencing

what the former Soviet Union painfully learned after ten years of warfare in Afghanistan. They too are finding out that it is exceedingly difficult to locate and destroy these Islamic holy warriors in their endless mountain caves, tunnels and strongholds. In like manner, the only power that can ultimately bring down the spiritual strongholds of terrorism is the omnipotent power of God which knows no barriers or boundaries. Only God's power is equally effective at penetrating mountain strongholds or the greater strongholds of the human heart! That's why Paul reminds us:

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have *divine power to demolish strongholds*” (I Corinthians 10:3-4).

So I share this small book about the *Transformation of a Terrorist* to encourage Christians to intensify their spiritual warfare against the demonic forces that rule and reign in the world today. It is the “god of this age” who has “blinded the minds of the unbelievers” (II Corinthians 4:4). It is against Satan and his diabolical minions of terrorism that we must continue to “fight the good fight of faith” (I Timothy

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1:18; 6:12). As we do so, we need to remind ourselves that the true and living God is still in the business of transforming terrorist! If His Spirit could accost and convert an arch-terrorist in the First Century, He can do the same in the twenty first century!

Therefore, let's begin this study by reading a brief autobiographical reflection of the former days of a terrorist who led a jihad against Christianity around AD 35. Like the name of Osama bin Laden, this man's very name struck panic in the heart of those whom he sought to eliminate. His name was Saul of Tarsus. Here are his own words describing his former days as the terrorist of the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jewish people of that day.

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that He considered me faithful, appointing me to His service. Even though I was once a *blasphemer* and a *persecutor* and a *violent man*, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.* But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, *the worst of sinners,* Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an *example* for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (I Timothy 1:12-17).

With those words of reflection, let’s walk through the major steps of the making and breaking of this terrorist by the name of Saul of Tarsus. Just like the Arab television Al-Jazeera is giving us an ongoing “inside account” of the terrorist exploits of Osama bin Laden, the Bible gives us the same perspective of Saul of Tarsus. We find several detailed accounts of this former terrorist activities recorded by his personal biographer, Doctor Luke. Interestingly, Osama’s right hand man is Al-Zawahiri, who is also a medical doctor from Egypt! In Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26, we get the “inside scoop” on this man who terrorized the Holy Land in the first century. When we put these several accounts together, we find an incredibly relevant case

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study on the *formation* and *transformation of a Terrorist*.

But first we must remember that *terrorists are never created in a vacuum*. They do not spontaneously arise. They do not suddenly step on the stage of history from a place of ideological neutrality or religious tepidness. There are always defining events that become the catalysts to ignite their passions and explode them onto the world scene in such a way that they cannot be ignored. So let's begin our study of Saul the Terrorist, when he was a young man. Like bin Laden, Saul's early life was characterized by *religious zeal* and *ideological fervor*.



THE PREPARATION OF SAUL

Saul was uniquely prepared by God to be His chosen instrument by first being a *religious fundamentalist*. It is not stretching the facts to say that he was a *religious fanatic!*

Listen to his personal credentials taken from his own mouth and pen. After one of his many arrests in Jerusalem for perceived hostile activities, he sought to defend himself. In order to better persuade his hearers, he made his defense in Aramaic, the *lingua franca* or street language of the common people.

“I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel, *I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers,*” (Acts 19:39 - 22:3).

He would later write a similar list of his racial and religious pedigrees to the Philippians, some of whom were wrongly boasting in their racial pedigrees and prestigious socioeconomic status:

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“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless” (Philippians 3:4-6).

Saul of Tarsus then, was a Jewish Fundamentalist, just like bin Laden is an Islamic Fundamentalist. He was a *legalistic fanatic* about the Law of Moses, just like bin Laden is a fanatic about the Shari'a law of the Koran. Just like Bin Laden wants to forcefully impose *Shari'a law* upon the entire world of the twenty-first century, Saul wanted to impose his brand of religious legalism throughout the Judaism of the first century. From his legalistic perspective, Jesus of Nazareth had been a serious law breaker – and He had encouraged His disciples to do the same.

Both Saul and Osama then, are guilty of the same legalistic religious zeal. They both preached “law without love,” which is always one of the hallmarks of every form of religious fundamentalism, whether it is Islamic, Jewish, Christian, Hindu or Buddhist. So it was his legalistic orientation as a Pharisee

that was an essential part of Saul's preparation as a religious terrorist.

History has proven over and over again that terrorism motivated by religion can be far more harsh and repressive than any secular form of political terrorism. That's because *political* terrorism is primarily directed against entrenched political and social structures, while *religious* terrorism is directed against the internal commitments of the heart. While *political* terrorism seeks to change the world from the *outside in* – *spiritual* terrorism seeks to change things from the inside out. Those who cannot be converted must be eliminated! Fundamentalism has no room for tolerance and toleration. Exceptions to the rule are not allowed.

History has repeatedly shown through many protracted bloody religious wars, that a terrorism fueled by religious fundamentalism is to be feared most of all! *It is the most passionate form of terrorism because it is done in the name of god.* People will *fight* for political causes, but they will *die* for religious causes in untold numbers as the suicide bombers prove! Even worse, they will slaughter untold thousands – even millions – in the process of imposing their religious and racial radicalism.

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The matter of *religious zeal* brings us to our next point in this study of Saul the Terrorist...



THE PASSION OF SAUL

We get our first glimpse of the *passion of Saul* at Stephen's martyrdom. As you may recall, Stephen was the first Christian in history to be killed for his faith in Jesus Christ. Stephen's execution is Saul's first appearance in the New Testament. In Acts we read this introductory account of the carefully orchestrated mob scene that carried out the execution of Stephen – right after his bold witness for Jesus Christ and His resurrection:

“They began to stone him [Stephen].
Meanwhile, *the witnesses laid their clothes
at the feet of a young man named Saul*”
(Acts 7:58).

No doubt Saul had carefully listened to the defense that Stephen had made at his religious trial before the Sanhedrin – one of the longest sermons recorded in the New Testament. If what Stephen preached about Jesus and the Law was true, then Saul's whole belief system would be proven wrong. Both could not be right! Either Stephen was correct and the Sanhedrin was wrong; or the Sanhedrin was right and Stephen was wrong. Their spiritual

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positions were mutually exclusive. If the Sanhedrin were wrong, then Saul, as one of its most scholarly and ardent defenders, was wrong with them!

So, to silence the doubts in his own heart, Saul gladly consented to the execution of Stephen. In his mind, the death sentence was totally justified against this Jewish infidel who believed that Jesus was indeed God's Messiah! Just like Bin Laden is accusing Christians, Jews and nominal Muslims of *blasphemy* against Allah, Stephen was accused of "...*blasphemy* against Moses and against God" (Acts 6:11). That accusation brought a swift and decisive death sentence by stoning!

However, Stephen's execution was only the first fruit of the passionate persecution of the church spear-headed by Saul. Although terrorism starts with an individual, it never stops there. The first life is always the hardest to take. The first execution is the most difficult to convince people of the rightness of. But once the first blood is shed, it becomes necessary and easier to take more lives. That's why terrorism never stays focused on one person or a few individuals. It quickly becomes dif-fused and wider in scope. Religious and racial prejudice is quickly generalized from one victim to the masses. It begins as one person becomes the

personification of the perceived heresy. Then it is generalized to anyone and everyone who holds that perceived heretical belief, regardless of their sex or age. That's why tribalism and genocide is so prevalent in the world. The hatred spreads from the individual to the group, the family, the clan, the tribe, essentially the whole race! After that generalization is made, anyone and everyone is fair game whether they are young or old, men or women, babies or children. Every death is seen as the superior triumphing the inferior, the good over the bad, the clean over the unclean, the chosen over the cursed, the righteous over the infidel!

So after Stephen's stoning, Saul quickly widened the scope of his hostilities to include the entire Church in Jerusalem. Notice this brief account of how this religious persecution spread from Stephen to the other members of the early Church in Jerusalem regardless of their sex.

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:1-3).

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It is very important to note that the church was the object of Saul's terrorism. It was not against Roman rule or Greek Philosophy, which he also hated and opposed. It was not even against his Jewish religious rivals, the Sadducees, whom he also disdained as theological liberals. No, the focal point of his terrorism was against the church. Since this is the one organism and institution the Lord Jesus came to establish on earth, it has always been the single greatest object of Satanic spiritual terrorism! Everything that Satan inspires through political, religious, educational, economic and entertainment systems is designed to do one thing: *destroy the church!*

It is also instructive to note here the word that is used for "...*destroy* the church." It is a very graphic and descriptive word. It is the Greek word, *ely-maineto*. Interestingly, this is the only time it is used in the entire New Testament. It is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in Psalm 80:13. There it describes a wild boar "ravaging a vineyard." When a boar ravages something, he does so by uprooting it. So just like an enraged wild boar ravages and ruins a vineyard or garden by uprooting everything in it, Saul was ravaging the Church. In his religious rage he was seeking to uproot every vestige of the fledgling

young church in Jerusalem and Judea before it could deeply take root in the Jewish culture.

After the martyrdom of Stephen, which followed the terrorism against the Jerusalem Church, we next see Saul's ongoing passion recorded in Acts 9. There we can see the scope of his terrorism spill over from Jerusalem to Damascus. As a result of the intense persecution in Jerusalem, "all except the apostles were *scattered throughout Judea and Samaria*" (Acts 8:1). Then we read Saul's widening web of terrorism against the church:

"Meanwhile, Saul was *still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples*. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who *belonged to the Way*, whether *men or women*, he might take them as *prisoners* to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2).

We must never forget that the source of Saul's passion against every man or woman who was a follower of "...the Way," was his *religious fundamentalism*. Because of his Pharisaical and legalistic perspective, he had a fanatical dedication to the *literal interpretation* and *strict application* of the Law

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of Moses to every area of life. He would later explain this religious zeal to the Galatians this way:

“...you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely *I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it*. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was *extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers*” (Galatians 1:13-14).

Later in his own life he faced a “mob scene” of hostile Jews in Jerusalem who were trying to kill him – just as they had Stephen years earlier. He defended himself by reminding them of his racial purity and religious zeal:

“I am a Jew. I was thoroughly trained in the *law of our fathers* and was just as *zealous for God* as any of you are today” (Acts 22:3-4).

Saul was not only dedicated to the Law of Moses, he was “...extremely zealous for the *traditions* of his fathers.” As a Pharisee, he was just as committed to the authority of the *oral tradition* of the Jewish elders, as he was to the *written Law* given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai. So it was the classical reli-

gious tension between *truth* and *tradition*. It was the fundamentalist conflict between the *truth of God* and the *traditions of man* – the battle between the *letter of the Law* and the *spirit of the Law*.

We can also see through the life and actions of Saul the Jewish Terrorist that the “letter of the law kills” (II Corinthians 3:6). That’s because from their legalistic perspective everything was clearly either black or white. In their worldview, there were absolutely no gray areas in life, no exceptions to the rule, no room for compromise. There was legalistic rigidity with little or no flexibility. There was no tolerance at any level. You were either a *believer* or a *blasphemer!*

Therefore, when it comes to the law, there were no majors and minors. Everything becomes a *major offense* against the law, and is met with the severest punishment. Not to defend unto death every single letter of the law puts the whole religious house of cards into jeopardy. In Paul’s religious mindset, grace did not exist. In fundamentalism, love is never allowed to intervene. Every infraction of the law is seen as total rebellion against the entire legal system and must be dealt with through decisive and deadly force!

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As you will recall, this was the very same fundamental religious conflict that ultimately cost Jesus His life. He was accused by the religious leaders of allowing, even encouraging, His disciples to "...break the *tradition* of the elders." But Jesus told them: "...you break the *command of God* for the sake of your *tradition*" (Matthew 15:1-3). So Jesus was ultimately a fatality of religious fundamentalism and blind legalism!

PRINCIPLE

Zeal without knowledge = fanaticism & fundamentalism
Knowledge without zeal = ritualism & traditionalism
Knowledge ignited by zeal = authentic Christianity!

Later Paul described this misguided zeal in reference to his Jewish brethren:

"I can testify of them that they are *zealous for God*, but *their zeal is not based on knowledge*" (Romans 10:2).

As you ponder those words about religious zeal, let me share a spiritual principle with you:

Therefore, a person who has *passion* and *zeal* before converting usually becomes a *passionate* and

zealous Christian after converting. That's why Paul wrote:

“Never be lacking in *zeal*, but keep your *spiritual fervor*, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11).

Let me share with you an example of this by telling you about my dear friend and partner from Nepal, Pastor Naurman Chepang. As his name would indicate, he came from the Chepang tribe, a poor, suppressed and marginalized tribal group from the lower caste people of Nepal. Because of their lowly status in society, they were generally discriminated against by the higher castes. As a result, they primarily lived in the more remote mountainous areas of Central Nepal. But they were still strict observers of their folk Hindu religion and tribal cultural traditions.

Naurman was a natural leader among his people. He often rose to the top and got his way by the sheer power of his personality and explosive anger. To cross him could easily prove fatal to one's health! So he usually got his way among his fellow Chepangs.

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However, through the witness of some new Christians from a neighboring tribe, a few of the Chepangs began to turn to Christ. These conversions to the “foreign god of the white men” enraged Naurman! These conversions threatened his entire religious and social system. So it must be stopped!

With the help of the local police, he sought out the one who first brought the Christian faith to his area. He had him beaten and arrested. After being abused in jail for a period of time, this new Christian was threatened not to share his beliefs any more, and was released.

He had heard that Naurman’s father had recently died, and that his mother was currently gravely ill. Even worse, Naurman’s firstborn son was also sick and not expected to live. So just as soon as this person was released from jail, he found his way to Naurman’s house. When Naurman saw him, he thought he had come to get revenge for having him beaten and arrested. Contrary to anything Naurman could have imagined, this person greeted Naurman with the words: “I forgive you and hold no anger against you.” He went on to say: “I understand that both your mother and son are gravely ill, I and I would like to pray for them.”

Naurman was crippled with shock. His clinched fist began to relax. His face that had been red with anger began to grow ashen. While he did not want to let this man into his house, his love for his mother and hopeless desperation over his son's worsening condition overcame his anger. Naurman slowly walked into his small house, followed by the Christian. The man found his way to the side of the aged and ailing mother, and laid his hands on her in simple faith. He asked God to heal her and raise her up to health again. Then he went to the boy who was feverish and unconscious from some unknown disease or demon. The Christian laid hands on him and rebuked the fever in the Name of Christ. To Naurman's utter amazement, both his mother and son were almost instantaneously healed by the power of God's Holy Spirit! Naurman was broken before the living Lord. He fell on his face and confessed his sins to God and was wondrously saved!

Overnight, Naurman the persecutor became Naurman the preacher! The same zeal he had used against Christians, he now used to spread the message of Jesus. He sent out to win all of his local Chepang villagers to Jesus Christ – and soon did so! Then he set out to the next Chepang village, and the next, and the next. In village after

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village, Naurman won converts and planted new house churches among these young Chepang believers. Within a matter of several years, he literally won almost all of the Chepangs to Christ in his area of Nepal. In the process he also raised up and mentored other young Chepang pastors. In village after village, Naurman planted new churches among these young Chepang believers.

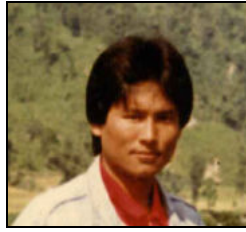
It has been my privilege in the last dozen years to trek into scores of these Chepang villages, help baptize new Believers and dedicate the small church buildings NDI partners have funded. Some of the most exciting experiences of my life have been to partner in evangelism and church planting with this Chepang radical, the man who became a radical for Jesus Christ!

If time and space permitted, I could tell you several other similar stories of radicals around the world whom I have personally known who have become “radical for Jesus.” But suffice it to say at this point, *God has always loved radicals*. He seems to take special sovereign delight in *transforming terrorist into disciples!*

So you see, my friend, often the people who become the most passionate for the faith, are the very

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ones who were once the most passionate against the faith! That's why a radical antagonist often makes the most radical apostle for Jesus Christ! The church in America desperately needs some more "radicals for Jesus" in her ranks!



**Naurman
(before)**



**Pastor Naurman
(after)**



THE PERSECUTION OF SAUL

It was because of his religious passion that Saul was a persecutor of the church. Passion by nature is never passive. It must be expressed in some way, positively or negatively. Passion will never be dormant and reactive. Any emotion that can be described as passive is not passion! The very emotional nature of the DNA of passion forces it to be active and proactive. In Saul's case, his *passion* was manifest by *persecution*. That's why it is not stretching the comparison to say that we could accurately describe him as a religious fundamentalist who was on a "Jewish Jihad!" Listen to his own words as he described his passionate persecution against the Christians:

- "I was a *persecutor* and a violent man," (I Timothy 1:13);
- "I *persecuted the church of God*, and tried to destroy it," (Galatians 1:13);
- "I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, be-

cause *I persecuted the church of God*" (I Corinthians 15:9);

- "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests *I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.* Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them *punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme.* In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them" (Acts 26:9-11).

It is also instructive to note here that in his *obsession* against them, Saul was seeking to force the Christians to "blaspheme." Without that offense, they could not seek the death penalty according to Jewish Law, which says: "anyone who *blasphemes* the name of God must be put to death" (Leviticus 24:16). This is exactly why Jesus was accused and condemned to death by the religious leaders (Matthew 26:65). So Saul would seek to provoke Christians to blaspheme the name of God by affirming that Jesus was indeed God incarnate. Once they did this, they could be executed by stoning.

Little did Saul realize at the time that in seeking to get them to blaspheme, he was also guilty of blasphemy. That's why he said later that he was a blasphemer (I Timothy 1:13). However, Jesus had taught that there was still forgiveness for anyone who blasphemed Him, but not so for anyone who "blasphemed the Holy Spirit":

"I tell you, every sin and *blasphemy* will be forgiven men, but the *blasphemy against the Spirit* will not be forgiven. Anyone who *speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven*, but anyone who *speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven*, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:31- 32).

So in his terrorist days, Saul blasphemed Christ many times! As he crusaded against Christ and the church, he "spoke many words against the Son of Man." But he was fully forgiven both in this age and in the age to come! What forgiveness! What mercy! What "Amazing Grace!"

So Saul was not only a *persecutor of Christians*, he was also a *blasphemer of Christ*. One could not be separated from the other. To persecute Christians

was to blaspheme Christ! He was doing it all under the banner of serving God. In his misguided zeal, he was persecuting Christians and blaspheming Christ from a religious motivation.

However, on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians and blaspheme Christ, Saul came face-to-face with a life-changing principle: There is a spiritual organic union between Christ and His Church. To touch one was to touch the other. To

PRINCIPLE

There is a spiritual organic union between Christ and His Church.
To touch one is to touch the other. To persecute the Body of Christ on earth, is to blaspheme the exalted Head of the Church in heaven, Jesus Christ.

persecute one was to persecute the other. To blaspheme one was to blaspheme the other.

Therefore, in order to make Saul see straight, God had to make him blind! In sovereign love, God made Saul *physically* blind so that he could *spiritually* see. He had to take away his physical sight in order to give him spiritual insight! That's because Saul thought he could see perfectly, when in reality he was perfectly blind! He had what Jesus had called "bad eyes":

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:22-23).

Like all religious fundamentalists, the light within Saul was really spiritual darkness. So he viewed all of life through dead eyes that were darkened by sin and blinded by legalism!

On the Damascus Road we see some of the great healing paradoxes of God! We see how God opened Saul's eyes by closing them! God made him see by blinding him! God blinded him with light in order to lead him out of darkness! He flooded him with physical light from heaven in order to give him spiritual revelation! He focused the spotlight of heaven on this religious zealot and illuminated his soul to the degree that it dispelled all darkness!

With this one blinding burst of light, God got Saul's undivided attention! Then the resurrected and ascended Christ said to him: “Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute Me?” (Acts 9:4) In a blazing flash of insight, Paul knew that Jesus was the resurrected

and reigning Lord! “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.” With four brief words, Saul asked and answered his own question! But Christ confirmed Saul’s revelation with the words: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5).

Suddenly Saul realized that what he thought he was doing *for* God – was really *against* God! Saul suddenly realized,

- When he persecuted Christians, he persecuted Christ!
- When he blasphemed Christians, he blasphemed Christ!
- When he touched Christians, he touched Christ!!
- When he touched the Body of Christ, he touched the Head of the church!
- When he touched Christians on earth, he touched Christ in heaven!

He suddenly realized that he was working against God, bucking the tide of God’s Spirit, swimming upstream against the currents of God, going against the prevailing winds of spiritual history, rubbing against the moral grain of the universe! So God said to him: “It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 26:14).

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Saul found out on the Damascus Road what every anti-Christian tyrant has learned throughout history: "The harder you kick against God, the deeper you drive His spiritual goads into your heart! The greater the external persecution, the greater the internal pain!" They must either repent and change their direction as Saul did or drive a fatal goad into their soul! Saul was smart enough to reverse thrust, pull back, change course, and go in a 'new direction!'



THE PRAYER OF SAUL

Like all observant Pharisees, Saul had recited prayers all of his life. It was a daily part of his Jewish *religious ritual*. At a very minimum, he would have recited prayers two times a day – at the morning and evening sacrifice. Since the Pharisees were known for their religious zeal, he would have probably prayed at least three times a day (Exodus 29:39; Numbers 28:4,8; Psalm 55:17; 141:2; Daniel 6:10, Acts 3:1, etc).

But there is a BIG difference between *reading or reciting prayers* and really *praying*. It matters not whether you recite your prayers three times a day like a Jewish Fundamentalist or five times a day like an Islamic Fundamentalist. The question is this: “Are you really praying prayers from the heart? Are you really personally communing with God?” Or are you just reciting prayers from rote memory? Are you just going through the motions of liturgical prayers or are you having a personal conversation with the true and living God through Jesus Christ?

So while Saul had recited prayers all of his life as an observant Jew, he now was really praying from

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the heart for the first time in his life! His prayer life suddenly became intently personal. Face down on the ground, Saul moved from religion to relationship, from ritual to revelation, from isolation to intimacy.

As a result of his prayers, God supernaturally gave a vision and revelation to Saul. He did the same to Ananias, a Christian disciple living in Damascus. He told both Saul and Ananias that if they would obey this vision, it would result in Saul's physical and spiritual healing:

“For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’

‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered.

The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is *praying*. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight’” (Acts 9:9-12).

Notice how specific both visions were. There was nothing vague, mystical or ethereal about this heavenly vision. Also note how *scary* the vision was for Ananias! Saul's reputation as a *terrorist* had preceded him to Damascus. His notoriety as a persecutor was already well known in Christian circles. The Believers had come to know from painful experience that Saul was the "point of the spear" for the Sanhedrin in their crusade to eradicate Christianity! So for Ananias to obey God's instructions would be very risky. It could easily be fatal. With understandable fear, he reminded God of Saul's growing reputation as a *terrorist against Christians*, just in case He had missed the local news reports out of Jerusalem and Damascus!

"'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the *harm* he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name'" (Acts 9:13-14).

But God was in the process of transforming this vessel of wrath into a vessel of mercy (Romans 9:22-23). So He gave Ananias these words of assurance:

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“Go! This man is My *chosen vessel* to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much He must suffer for My name” (Acts 9:15-16).

God was asking Ananias to make a LARGE step of faith and obedience! He was asking Ananias to put it all on the line for Him. As a result, he would have to bet his life on the trustworthiness of this vision from the Lord! The moment he knocked on the door of the house of Judas on Straight Street, he was committed! There was no turning back! In spite of his natural human fears, Ananias “went to the house and entered it.” Then we read about a brief loving encounter that *transformed the terrorist!*

“Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘*Brother Saul*, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’

Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and *he could see again*. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength” (Acts 9:17-19).

Without the risky faith and bold love of Ananias, we would never have had the Apostle Paul! Oh, I am sure that God would still have sovereignly accosted Saul at some other point in his terrorist activities. But in the meantime, more Christians would have been persecuted and more time would have been wasted by Saul fighting the wrong battle. Ananias would have missed the joy of being God's instrument to bless and baptize Saul. He would have forfeited the joy of laying his hands on the greatest terrorist of his day and seeing him spiritually and physically healed! He would have missed the privilege of being the first Christian to call him Brother Saul, and welcome him into the Family of God!

I often wonder how many similar covenant relationships and Kingdom-advancing blessings I have missed by not being bolder and more assertive in my faith! What about you?

May God give more of us that kind of bold forceful faith and risky love to reach out to the terrorists of our day, whether they are bigoted politicians, biased educators, hostile ACLU lawyers, cynical talk show hosts or perverse entertainers! They are all fair game to Christ's love and sitting ducks before

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the power of the Holy Spirit! God still delights in transforming terrorists!



THE PURPOSE OF PAUL

Even though Saul did not know it at the time, God had been sovereignly orchestrating the events of his life so that he would fulfill the purposes for which he was created, purposes that literally blew his mind!

Like the prophet Jeremiah, Saul was also ordained to be an instrument of God before he was even born. Compare what God said to the prophet Jeremiah with what He revealed to Saul:

- “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, *before you were born I set you apart*, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).
- “...God, *set me apart from birth* and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me,” (Galatians 1:15).

That’s why he would later look back on this Damascus Road experience and write: “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Philippians 1:12).

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Paul would further remind us that when God's grace lays hold of us, it is always for a foreordained divine purpose. After extolling God's saving grace through faith, he wrote:

“For we are *God's workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus to do good works *which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10).

So before God prepared the world, He also planned and prepared “good works for us to do.” How awesome and exhilarating! What a great way to live! There is no greater joy for any individual than to live out those foreordained purposes God prepared for us before the foundations of the world! Those are the unique purposes He indelibly inscribed in our DNA as the spiritual radar to direct us to His perfect will for our lives. Only as we live out that divine flight plan will we be truly challenged, happy and fulfilled as a person. Only then will we one day hear Him say at the conclusion of our lives: “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21)

What then, were the purposes for which Christ laid hold of Saul the Terrorist on the Damascus Road? What were the good works for which God had predestined and prepared Saul? He was to be a

preacher of the very Gospel that he had once tried to silence! He was to proclaim this message before Gentiles, kings, and Jews. Since he had caused great suffering to Christ's Church, he would also have to suffer often for the name of Christ. But because he had made others suffer for their faith, he was willing to endure any hardship for the sake of the Gospel. Thoughtfully ponder the following passages where he recounts some of the things he endured for the sake of Christ.

- "For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, We are weak, we are dishonored. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world" (I Corinthians 4:9-13).

- “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are *hard pressed on every side*, but not crushed; *perplexed* but not in despair; *persecuted*, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our bodies the death of the Lord Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. Therefore, we do not lose heart, for our light momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that outweighs them all” (II Corinthians 4:7-17).
- “We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of

God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report, genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown, dying, and yet we live on; beaten and yet not killed, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich, having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (II Corinthians 6:3-10).

- "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides eve-

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rything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Therefore I will boast, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That's why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak then I am strong" (II Corinthians 11:23-28; 12:9-10).

Take a moment to look at this list of hardships and persecutions that Paul endured for the sake of Christ. Review them slowly and thoughtfully as you reflect upon the level of your own zeal for the Lord Jesus.

"Condemned to die, made a spectacle, fools for Christ, weak, dishonored, hungry, thirsty, in rags, brutally treated, homeless, cursed, persecuted, slandered, scum of the earth, refuse of the world, hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, always being given over to death, troubles, hardships, distress, beatings, flogged severely, imprisoned, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, dishonor, bad report, regarded as imposters, unknown, dying, beaten, sorrowful, poor, having nothing, 40 lashes minus

one, beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked 3 times, spent a night and a day in the sea, constantly on the move, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own countrymen, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the country, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, labored, toiled, often gone without sleep, often gone without food, cold, naked, weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties, the daily pressure on me of the churches.”

Post that list on your bathroom mirror or fridge to refer to from time to time when you think you are having a bad day! As you read that list from Paul's own autobiographical account, it makes so much of our American Christianity and “church-ianity” seems sterile, powerless, bland and mediocre by comparison! But that's just the kinds of things that transformed terrorists are willing to go through for their newfound faith in Jesus Christ! That's because they already understand the reality of suffering and sacrifice for a cause.

What was Paul's response to the incredible sufferings, persecutions, misunderstandings and disappointments that constantly faced him in his life and

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ministry? Was it anger, bitterness, resentment, depression and despair? Did he pout and whine and have a personal pity party? No! Listen to his unimaginable responses to such constant physical, emotional and spiritual buffeting:

“We bless...endure...answer kindly...we do not lose heart...we worked with our own hands...in great endurance...in purity... understanding ...patience...kindness... sincere love...truthful speech...in the power of God...always rejoicing...possessing everything.”

That is either the psychotic response of a sick masochist who loves pain and suffering or it is the irrefutable testimony of a life that has been totally transformed and motivated by Agape love! In addition, the consistent witness of Paul’s radically transformed life following his Damascus Road experience is one of the great irrefutable evidences of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nothing short of a miracle than the magnitude of a man coming back from the grave could begin to explain that kind of a transformation of a terrorist!

Finally, let’s look at what became the primary motivation of Saul’s life.

THE PREACHING OF SAUL

Almost immediately after his conversion, Saul began to *witness* and *preach* about his faith in Jesus Christ. He did so without being ordained or going to Bible School or Seminary for training! Note this succinct account of his bold compulsion to preach:

“Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to *preach* in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, ‘Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who called on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?’ Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 9:19-2).

Later, Saul – now known as Paul – testified before King Agrippa about his call from God on the Damascus Road to the ministry of preaching and proc-

lamation. He tells Agrippa what God called and commissioned him to do:

“I have appeared to you to appoint you as a *servant* and as a *witness* of what you have seen of Me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.

So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I *preached* that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God’s help to this very day, and so *I stand here and testify to small and great alike*. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would pro-

claim light to His own people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:16-23).

Here we can see a wonderful summary of what the Gospel does for people:

- “Opens their eyes,” (Isaiah 35:5; Acts 16:14);
- Turns them “from darkness to light,” (John 3:19; 12:36; II Corinthians 4:4, 6; Ephesians 4:18; 5:8; Colossians 1:13; I Thessalonians 5:5);
- “Turns them from the power of Satan to God,” (John 8:44; Hebrews 2:14);
- “that they would receive forgiveness of sins,” (Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14);
- “that they would be, sanctified by faith,” (Romans 8:17; I Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 1:12; Hebrews 10:10; 13:12);
- That they would “prove their repentance by their deeds” (Acts 26:)

Only the living God can sovereignly bring about those spiritual realities for a person, whether in the first or twenty-first century. As amazing as it is, He has chosen to do it through what Paul called “the foolishness of what we preach” (I Corinthians 1:21).

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That's why *preaching* the Gospel was Paul's life-long passion after his dramatic conversion on the Road to Damascus. Note the following verses that highlight the primacy of preaching in his life:

- “It has always been my ambition to *preach* the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation” (Romans 15:20).
- “Our hope is that, our area of activity among you will greatly expand so that we can *preach* the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory” (II Corinthians 10:15-16).
- “...at His appointed season He brought His word to light through the *preaching* entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,” (Titus 1:3).
- “God, who set me apart from birth, called me by his grace, to reveal His Son in me so that I might *preach Him* among the Gentiles” (Galatians 1:15-16; 2:7).

- “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to *preach* the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (I Corinthians 1:17).
- “My message and my *preaching* were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” (I Corinthians 2:4).
- “Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to *preach* to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8).
- “When I *preach* the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to *preach*. Woe to me if I do not *preach* the gospel!” (I Corinthians 9:16).

The fact that Saul the Terrorist had become a preacher of the Gospel was inconceivable to the early church! Because of his reputation as the arch-persecutor of the church, it is fully understandable that they were reluctant to believe the reports of his conversion. Paul later wrote about how these young Christians “only heard the report: ‘The man who formerly persecuted us is not

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preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” But in their doubtful faith about the reality of his conversion, Paul said that “they praised God because of me” (Galatians 1:23).

Through these verses we can clearly see the priority of preaching in Paul’s life. But he also was equally clear about the focal point of his preaching. His message was no longer about the rules, regulations and traditions of Judaism, but about Jesus Christ:

- “For we do not *preach* ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (II Corinthians 4:5).
- “We *preach* Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (I Corinthians 1:23).
- “But even if we or an angel from heaven should *preach* a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Galatians 1:8).
- “As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is *preaching* to you a gos-

pel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:23).

In one of the very earliest of the New Testament writings, Paul clearly sets forth the *sine qua non*, or irreducible minimum, of the Christian gospel that he received and preached:

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I *preached* to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By his gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I *preached* to you. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture, that he was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, to the Twelve, to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time...to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am least of the apostles because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect, this is what we *preach*, and this is what you believed" (I Corinthians 15:1-11).

So it was because of his passion for the propagation of the message of Christ that he could write to the Christians in Rome: “I am eager to *preach* the gospel also to you who are at Rome” (Romans 1:15).

Paul not only had a passion for *preaching*, he also had a priority of raising up others who would also go out and preach the gospel – and be supported by their local churches:

“Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved. How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone *preaching* to them? And how can they *preach* unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Romans 10:13-15).

Because Paul clearly understood that God had chosen the foolishness of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21) as His primary means of bringing people to faith in Christ, he exhorted the young churches to support their preachers financially:

“The Lord has commanded that those who *preach* the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (I Corinthians 9:14).

Paul, then, could summarize his whole life by saying that it was “God, whom I serve with my whole heart in *preaching* the Gospel of His Son” (Romans 1:9).

After reviewing these verses from Paul about the priority of preaching, is it any wonder that his final written exhortations to a young pastor named Timothy, resounded with the commission to “preach the Gospel?”

- “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to *preaching* and to teaching” (I Timothy 4:13).
- “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is *preaching* and teaching” (I Timothy 5:17).
- “*Preach the Word*; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and en-

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courage – with great patience and careful instruction” (II Timothy 4:2).

Paul later reminded the Galatians, a group of early Christians struggling with legalism, about his call to preach the Gospel of God’s grace:

“God, who *set me apart from birth* and called me by His grace, was pleased to *reveal His Son in me* so that I might *preach Him* among the Gentiles. I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into *Arabia* and later returned to *Damascus*” (Galatians 1:15-17).

So after His conversion, God gave Saul his first theological education in the very places that would later become the *centers of Islam!*

- Arabia is the Holy Land for Muslims because it is where their two most holy sites of Mecca and Medina are located.
- *Damascus* was the very first capital of Islam – from which it began its march to sweep the world with the sword and crescent.

Just as Saul was persecuted in Damascus, so Christians are still discriminated against and persecuted there to this very day under the hostile and repressive Syrian regime of Islamic Fundamentalism. Indeed, the more things change, the more they remain the same! How very prophetic and relevant is Paul's life for our own day in our struggles against Fundamentalist Islam.

I believe that Paul's spiritual experience was a foreshadow of the centuries of conflict that would go on to this very day between Christians and Muslims, between followers of Jehovah God and Allah, between disciples of Christ and disciples of Mohammed, between believers in the Bible and believers in the Koran, between those who carry the cross and those who carry the sword!

But both religions have one thing in common: both Christianity and Islam primarily propagate their beliefs through *preaching*. The mullahs of Islam and the missionaries of Christianity traverse the world preaching their messages – one about “Mohammed, the prophet of Allah” (Koran 3:144), and the other about “Jesus, the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33; 16:16; 27:54; John 1:34; 11:4; Romans 1:4; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 4:14; I John 5:5).

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It is startling to realize that the majority of humanity in the twenty-first century will have to choose between those two opposing messages! In the face of the worldwide advance of both religions, neutrality will increasingly not be an option. That's because both Islam and Christianity have an *exclusive message*, and both are commanded by their founders to evangelize the world. If they are true to their faith, neither can be passive in front of unbelievers. Each must seek to evangelize the other. Both Christians and Muslims are compelled by the Bible and Koran to seek the conversion of the other. Both are commanded to disciple their converts in their respective traditions and cultures that impact every aspect of life.

It is also interesting to note that *materialism, prosperity, nominalism* and *lukewarmness* are the greatest danger to both religions! The insatiable appetite for prosperity and possessions tend to detract both Christians and Muslims from their primary calling to propagate their faiths. Both the followers of the message of Jesus Christ and revelations of Mohammed have to contend with the seduction of materialism that is pervasive in our world today. Fundamentalism in both Christianity and Islam is one of the ways both religions are seeking to com-

bat their “war with the world” of materialism and hedonism.

Therefore, as a result of the spiritual momentum of Christianity and Islam around the world, everyone will have to either bow before the *crescent* or the *cross*. The essence of Islam is *total submission to Allah*, just like the essence of Christianity is *total surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord*. Increasingly, the multiplied millions of the world must choose between the two. Neither Islam nor Christianity will allow the untold masses to remain neutral and passive in the face of their theological beliefs and ideological worldviews. Each must march forth across the globe and press every living human being to choose their God!

It is obvious, then, to any thinking person that both Christianity and Islam cannot both be true. Contrary to much popular rhetoric in America by political and religious liberals – to say nothing of the spiritual pontifications of naïve media moguls and talk show hosts – *both Christianity and Islam are not just different roads to the same God*. Both are not just separate, but equal, paths to the same spiritual enlightenment. Both religious roads do not lead to the top of the same theological mountain. One is the right Way to life and the other a deadly

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detour. One is *eternally right* and the other is *eternally wrong*. One ultimately leads to heaven and the other to hell! One is a false religious counterfeit from the devil and the other a true revelation from God. Therefore, one ultimately leads to *salvation* and the other leads to *damnation!*

Unfortunately, we live in an age of hazy theology characterized by *humanism, pluralism, relativism* and *universalism*. We have been taught to worship “God as we conceive him – or her – to be.” We are told to seek enlightenment in the temple of toleration as we worship at the altar of equality. The American masses are being brainwashed by the idea that *all religions are equally valid*. The idea states that all roads do indeed lead to the top of the spiritual mountain of enlightenment and salvation – whether it is the Christian road, Jewish road, Islamic road, Hindu road, Buddhist road, New Age road, humanistic road, or spiritualistic road.

PRINCIPLE

Contradictory beliefs cannot simultaneously be true.
Beliefs that are not equal to the same thing are not equal to each other.

Nothing could be further from the truth! One of the basic laws of logic teaches that contradictory be-

liefs cannot *both be true*. Simply put, beliefs that are not equal to the same thing are not equal to each other. To say that “fire is hot” and “ice is hot” is not equally true. One is hot and the other is not. Black is not white and white is not black. Evil is not good and good is never evil. When it comes to human sexual relationships, heterosexuality, homosexuality, bestiality and pedophilia are not equally valid expressions of one’s sexuality! One is truth, while the others are sick and psychotic perversions of God’s marvelous gift of sexuality.

Webster defines truth as “ultimate reality,” or “facts that correspond to reality.” Truth, then, is not anything I want it to be or perceive it to be. Truth is objective, not subjective. Truth is what it is – reality. Jesus said: “I am truth” (John 14:6). In making that claim, Jesus was either a liar, lunatic or Lord! Those are the only logical choices. Either He knowingly lied about who He was, was self-deceived about who He was, or knew and rightly proclaimed the truth about who He was. It’s your choice. But your eternal destiny rides on your conclusions about Him. You literally bet your life on your answer about who Jesus is! Your answer not only determines how you live this life, it also determines where you will spend eternity! So my friend, choose well! This one life is the only shot you have at getting the right answer! For each of us, death is our final exam.

Therefore, just as Saul found out that his beliefs about God apart from Jesus Christ were false and incomplete, so people today must learn that what Mohammed taught about Allah and what Jesus taught about God are not equally true. They are not the same. Both revelations are not equally true. Neither do both give equally true representations of God. At the same time, Mohammed cannot be embraced as the last and truest prophet of God, and Jesus believed in as the final and full revelation of God the Father to a lost and dying world. While Mohammed professed to give revelation about god, Jesus professed to be the very Incarnation of God. Both claims are not equally true. Both beliefs cannot be held simultaneously. One must totally exclude the other. Either Mohammed or Jesus was a false prophet. One was *deceived* while the other was *divine!*¹



¹ For a further study and comparison between Christianity and Islam, you may either order my book on this subject or download my teaching outlines from our NDI web site under www.biblicalprinciplesforliving.com.

CONCLUSIONS

On the Damascus Road, God transformed a terrorist! He changed Saul of Tarsus into Paul the Apostle. His transformation was so radical that his *name* was changed because his *nature* was changed! That's as radical a change as has ever happened in human history! It was carefully documented in writing for us by Doctor Luke, a first century physician who became a close lifelong traveling companion and biographer of this converted terrorist. To any rational person, this radical transformation of Saul to Paul is explicable only as a direct divine intervention of the true and living God. Nothing short of a personal post-resurrection appearance of the risen Christ could produce such a total transformation in this man. As a result of his radical conversion,

- The *Blasphemer* became The *Believer*;
- The *Persecutor* became The *Preacher*;
- The *Accuser* became The *Apologist*;
- The *Terrorist* became The *Teacher*;
- The *Antagonist* became The *Apostle*;
- The *Murderer* became The *Missionary*!

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Let me say it again: That level of spiritual, emotional, physical, psychological and theological transformation is only explicable in terms of the sovereign intervention of God's grace! No other explanation will satisfactorily deal with the historic facts.

Therefore, if God can convert a Jewish Radical, He can just as easily convert an Islamic Radical, a Hindu Radical, a Buddhist Radical or a Maoist Radical! If He can transform a Jewish Fundamentalist into a Christian Apologist, He can do the same for the Islamic Fundamentalists of our day, which he is doing in many Muslim countries around the world. Today some of the most bold and fearless preachers of the Gospel in Islamic countries are converted mullahs and Koranic scholars whom Jesus supernaturally appeared to in dream or vision just like He did to Paul on the Damascus Road!

If God can make a *Christian preacher* out of a *Jewish persecutor*, He can do the same for the most ardent *Islamic Fundamentalists*, *Hindu Fundamentalist*, *Buddhist Fundamentalist* or *Maoist Fundamentalist*! God's nature has not changed – and their nature cannot change without His sovereign saving grace. That's why the true and living God

has never gone out of the business of *transforming terrorists!*

We must pray then, that God will continue to supernaturally give visions to radical Muslims and other religious fundamentalists in our day just like He did to Saul on the Damascus Road. He has never stopped loving *religious radicals* and “fighting fundamentalists!” He has never ceased to spiritually sabotage their lives with his “goads of grace” on their radical journeys and religious pilgrimages!

Therefore, regardless of the road they are traveling on in their religious zeal, God can still sovereignly reveal Himself to them and call them into His Kingdom, and commission them into ministry. So whether these Islamic fundamentalists are traveling on the Pakistani Road, Afghan Road, Saudi Road, Lebanon Road, Jordan Road, Libyan Road, Tunisian Road, Syrian Road, or Egyptian Road, God is still just as able to transform terrorist in the twenty-first century as in the first century!

But we must also pray that God will raise up more bold Christian disciples like Ananias who will put it all on the line in *forceful faith* and *radical love* to reach out to the terrorist in our world. It matters not whether they are *Jewish Radicals, Islamic Radicals, Hindu*

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Radicals, Buddhist Radicals, White Supremist Radicals, Black Radicals, Secular Radicals, Homosexual Radicals, Feminist Radicals, or Radical Street Gangs” – God still loves them and extends His grace to them. Jesus’ atoning death on the cross was just as much for them as it was for us good sinners. His Holy Spirit can transform them from being *radical antagonists* to *radical Apostles!*

In God’s sight, a radical is a radical! For Him, one is no harder to convert than the other. His Spirit and Word can just as easily transform one as it can transform the other. As believers, we need to pray and work for this because *radical enemies make radical friends!* Converted terrorists make *radical Christians!* That’s because they already understand “radical commitment.” They already have vision and passion – though misguided. They are already zealous. They are already turned on and on fire. They already understand what it means to be sold out for a cause. They understand the cost of discipleship. When necessary, they are prepared to be persecuted for their faith and even die a martyr’s death for their faith.

Also, from their former lives as radicals and terrorists, they fully understand the concept of *spiritual warfare*, a foreign concept to most American Christians. So

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when these religious jihadists are liberated from the enemy's camp, they become fearless "soldiers of Jesus Christ" (II Timothy 2:3). Oh how the American church needs the infusion of enthusiasm and zeal that some converted radicals would bring! Their presence and passion would help restore American Christianity to first century Christianity, which was radical to the core!

So may God motivate and empower each of us to be radical Christians for the Kingdom of God! Only then will we see God transform terrorists by the power of the Spirit and the Word. Only then will His Holy Spirit turn the church back into a *radical transformational fellowship of Christian revolutionaries who will again turn our world upside down for God's glory!*

In His radical sovereign love and grace,

J.L. Williams

