*“Who you are speaks so loudly I can’t hear what you are saying.”* Ralph Waldo Emerson

*“Generations of believers have held that some human lives are in such harmony with the ideals of God that they should be singled out.”* Jon Meacham, “His Truth is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope.”

 Have you ever thought about you build the reputation you have? And what it means to those who know you? You can have a reputation personally, professionally and spiritually. How do you build and maintain that reputation?

The Apostle Paul is someone for whom reputation was shifting, difficult to build, and important to maintain. Let’s start at the beginning.

The first part of Acts 9 describes the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (later known as the Apostle Paul), a story with which most people are familiar. He begins the chapter *“breathing threats and murders against the disciples”* who believed in Jesus (v. 1). A few verses later – and a conversion on the road to Damascus in between (vv. 3-18) – Paul finds himself preaching about Jesus in the Synagogue in Damascus. His message was simple. “*Jesus is the son of God.”* (v. 21). Understandably, the people were confused that it was Saul who was delivering this message. They remembered that Saul had “wreaked havoc” on the disciples and had violently disputed Jesus’ divinity (v. 21).

 Paul then had to escape Damascus because the Jews “plotted to kill him.” (v. 23). So, he goes to Jerusalem and tries to “join the disciples.” (v. 26). But Saul’s reputation preceded him. *“And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.”* (v. 26). Barnabas stepping and vouched for Paul, his conversion, and the good work he had done in the name of Christ – going so far to say that Saul had preached “boldly in the name of Jesus” and that he had “disputed against the Hellenists.” (vv. 28-29).

 This is a lesson about the power and impact of reputation. The verse for consideration is Titus 2:7-8:

*Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.”*

Perhaps not surprisingly, it is Saul (now Paul) who wrote this letter to the young man Titus (1:1). If anyone could understand the power and impact of reputation, it was Paul. To frame our discussion, think about the following questions:

1. Who is someone you deeply admire spiritually? And why?

2. Jesus instructed us to do “our alms” (works) in private (Matthew 6:2-4). He was using the example of giving money, but the principle applies to doing works for well. In light of this, how can you be a “model of good works?”

3. What are characteristics of a person who is a “model of good works?”

4. In Titus 2:7, Paul puts the onus on the teacher, rather than the student. “In your teaching” we are to show three things: integrity, dignity and sound speech.” What do each of those three things say about content and approach when you are teaching someone? How do you think Paul demonstrated those characteristics as he had to teach people?

5. In today’s highly divided society, is it possible that we won’t be condemned for what we teach, that our opponents will be “put to shame,” and that others won’t have evil to say against it? Is that possible when speaking about controversial topics today?

I look forward to our conversation.