

The Transformed Life, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 9:1–9

Code: 1728

INTRODUCTION

One of the great days in the history of the church was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. The importance of this conversion is indicated by the fact that it is mentioned three times in the book of Acts chapters 9, 22, and 26. Paul also alludes to it many times in his Epistles. The conversion of this particular man became the pivot on which his life and the history of the church turned. In tremendous measure we are indebted to this man for what we know about God and salvation because his Epistles detail this information.

A. The Best of Saul's Personality

It is fitting that Saul's conversion was very unique because he was such a unique person by birth, a Jew; by citizenship, a Roman; by education, a Greek; and by grace, a Christian. He was missionary, theologian, evangelist, pastor, organizer, leader, thinker, statesman, fighter for truth, and at the same time, lover of souls. He was everything that a Christian could and should be short of being like Jesus Christ. As far as I'm concerned, there never was another man like him.

This is the story of the conversion of this man. It is great evidence of the fact that God can take the worst of the worst and make them the best. Nobody is ever too low to be unredeemable. I think there are times that we wonder whether the grace of God can ever be extended in certain cases, and that often becomes the exact time when the grace of God does its greatest and most glorious work.

B. The Basis of Saul's Conversion

Prior to the occasion of his conversion, the one great, dramatic event that must have plagued Saul was the execution of Stephen. The first time we meet Saul in the Bible is as he stands at the place where Stephen is being stoned (Ac. 7:58). Apparently Saul was leading the stoning because those men who stoned Stephen laid their cloaks at his feet when they picked up the stones. Sometimes a rather inconsequential or apparently trivial event can plant within the mind of a man an idea "time bomb" that does not detonate for a long time. Stephen may have been such a time bomb in the mind of Saul, detonating on the Damascus road as Saul fell flat on his face when Jesus revealed Himself. Saul's confrontation with Stephen may have included some kind of argument or disputation, which Saul lost because nobody could withstand Stephen (Ac. 6:10). It was very likely that this confrontation planted in Saul's mind the whole problem of Christianity...which he saw as heresy. From the time of his confrontation with Stephen, he began to persecute Christians. But I believe that the bleeding Stephen's words and demeanor eventually had a part in the end of the promising career of a young, firebreathing Pharisee. And I also believe that it had a great part in the beginning of the ministry of one of history's most capable and colorful men the Apostle Paul.

C. The Background of Saul's Life

1. His Home

Saul's home was in a town called Tarsus. Tarsus was located at the corner where Asia Minor met Syria north of Israel. It was a city distinguished for its cosmopolitan interests many people gathered there. The wharves on the Cydnus river were crowded with commerce. It was also a city famous for its university. Along with the universities in Athens and Alexandria, the one in Tarsus ranked in the top three. Those three great universities were the Harvard, Yale, and Princeton of their day.

2. His Father

Saul's father was a Roman citizen. And Saul inherited from him that right of Roman citizenship which helped him in later years. His father was also a Jew and a Pharisee, so Saul could zealously match his credentials with any Jew.

3. His Trade

In keeping with Jewish tradition, every boy had to learn a trade. One of the very large industries in the city of Tarsus was tent making. The young Saul learned this trade. He was able to weave cloth from the black hair of goats into strips, and then tie the strips together to make tents.

4. His Teacher

At the age of approximately thirteen, Saul was packed off to Jerusalem. His Jewish heritage was motivation enough for him to have good Jewish training. In Jerusalem he sat under a great teacher by the name of Gamaliel. Gamaliel was called "the beauty of the law" because of his marvelous ability to teach. Gamaliel was so revered that when he died, the people said that reverence for the law died with him. So Saul studied under this brilliant man.

The course of his study would involve memorization of great portions of the entire Old Testament. He became quite scholarly in terms of his knowledge of the Old Testament. He also would sit in question and answer sessions with his tutor. So he was very familiar with Jewish history and theology.

5. His Confrontation

Since it is never mentioned in the Bible that Saul met Jesus, it is likely that after having studied in Jerusalem he went back to Tarsus, and perhaps became the master teacher in the synagogue there. But later on he did return to Jerusalem. Jesus had already disappeared from the scene when he confronted Stephen. Now, Stephen was dynamic, bold, dramatic, and powerful, and Saul couldn't handle him. The only thing he could do was get rid of him, so Stephen was killed. But I think the death of Stephen planted a time bomb in the mind of Saul that finally exploded on the Damascus road in conjunction with God's invasion of his life.

6. His Persecution

From the time of Stephen's death, Saul became the leader of a persecution movement. Years later, in Acts 26:9-11, he acknowledged this: "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem; I not only shut up many of the

saints in prison, by authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme; and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities" (RSV). Jerusalem wasn't enough; he chased them all over the land. According to Acts 8:3, "...he made havoc of the church." He laid waste to the church. The Greek word describes a wild boar rampaging through a garden or an army devastating a city.

a. The Results of the Persecution

Meanwhile, Philip and the Hellenistic Christians who have been scattered by a ravaging Saul, have gone everywhere preaching Christ (Ac. 8:45). Saul's persecution led to preaching which led to salvation for many.

b. The Relentlessness of the Persecution

Meanwhile, back at Jerusalem Saul is still furiously pursuing Christians to incarcerate and kill. Eventually he accomplished something of what he set out to do in the city of Jerusalem because he is now intent on leaving to seek out little pockets of Christians. He is really zealous; it is not just a lark or a game with him. In his mind Christianity is heresy; the defamation of the character of God and the traditions of Judaism; so he seeks out Christians with a certain amount of personal honesty. Apparently he hears that there is a group of Christians in Damascus, so he decides to go there and take care of that group. It is here that we pick up our first point:

I. FAITH IN THE SAVIOR (vv. 19)

A. The Sin Of Saul's Campaign (vv. 12)

1. His Destruction of Christians (v. 1)

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest"

a. Consuming Every Passion

The phrase "breathing out" is literally "breathing in" in the Greek. The idea is not that he's expelling air, but that he's inhaling; the lives in an aura of threat and slaughter, breathing the very air of slaughter. He is totally encompassed; his whole lifestyle and life's breath is threat and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. It is all that occupied him; he is consumed in it. The consuming passion of his very existence was to exterminate every Christian he could find. His sin was like Haman's, the Agagite, in the book of Esther. Haman wanted to exterminate every Jew, especially Mordecai (3:46). His ending wasn't as promising as Saul's; he wound up hanging from his own gallows (Est. 7:10). Fortunately, Saul eventually comes to a knowledge of Jesus Christ.

b. Chasing Every Disciple

The word "disciples" does not just refer to the Twelve. It is the Greek word *mathetes*, which means "a learner." Anyone who comes to Jesus Christ is a disciple. Anyone who follows Christ in order to sit at His feet and learn from Him is a disciple. So Saul was after every disciple, not just in Jerusalem, but wherever they were.

There were probably a minimum of a hundred and fifty thousand people in Damascus, and at least twenty thousand were Jews. We know this because it wasn't too long after this time that Damascus was sacked and about twenty thousand Jews were massacred. So, there had to be at least that many members in the Jewish community.

Beginning in the Synagogue

Christianity, in its original context, stayed within the framework of the synagogue. When the Jews were coming to salvation in Jerusalem, they didn't immediately leave the synagogue. When Paul went to see the Christians in the various towns on his missionary journeys he usually went to the synagogues. In many cases the Christians had not yet separated themselves from the synagogue. Christianity began in the synagogues with groups of Jews who understood the New Covenant and moved away from the old system, but didn't necessarily move out of the synagogues. This was one of the problems on which the book of Hebrews is based. Jews who had come to Christ maintained their involvement in all of the rigmarole of the Jewish synagogue. So the book of Hebrews was written in order to detach the Jewish Christians from the traditions that were so much a part of their former lives.

Those Christians in Damascus were apparently still operating within the framework of the synagogue. Saul wanted to obtain the rights and privileges from the high priest to go through the synagogues in Damascus and root out all the Christians. And there must have been many synagogues to serve that many Jews.

2. His Desire for Approval (v. 2a)

"And desired of him letters..."

Saul wanted permits to go to Damascus and get the Christians. He had to have these permits because he couldn't operate on his own. The entire country was under Roman rule, and the Romans recognized the rights of the high priest within the Jewish state. So Saul had letters from the high priest to perform this as a religious function in the framework of Judaism. He couldn't perform this function apart from the high priest's authority under the Roman jurisdiction.

3. His Designs for Damascus (v. 2b)

"...to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

So it was Saul's design to go to Damascus. He wanted to bring the Christians back to Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders were apparently attempting some legal procedures which would establish the Christians as ecclesiastical offenders before the Sanhedrin. Saul probably had a large entourage of people traveling with him in order to bring these prisoners back.

In order to travel the 160 miles north to Damascus, he had to pass right through Samaria. And if Saul was already irritated, you can imagine how irritated he was by the time he passed through Samaria, because Philip, who was immediately followed by Peter and John, had preached the gospel all over Samaria. People were turning to Jesus Christ by the thousands. A revival was taking place in Samaria. That must have really irritated him. But he didn't stop at any point he made his way through, no doubt infuriated at what he saw but intent on getting to Damascus, perhaps figuring that he would mop up this area later. It normally took a caravan six days to travel from Jerusalem to Damascus, and it was likely that on the sixth day as they neared Damascus that something fantastic happened to Saul.

B. The Steps Of Saul's Conversion (vv. 39)

Verse 3 begins the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. There are five simple, key words to help you follow his conversion: The Contact, The Conviction, The Conversion, The Consecration, and The Communion. First, let's look at...

1. The Contact (vv. 3, 7)

Here is Saul living in an atmosphere of slaughter and threat, marching with this gang to Damascus in order to root out every Christian. But as he moves toward this plan, God stops him in his tracks.

Invading the Privacy of Sin

Does God do this very often to people? I can't actually say that God lets people see some kind of heavenly vision, slams them to the ground, and brings them to salvation like this, but God always initiates the contact in salvation. God initiates the contact because the natural man does not understand God, does not know God, does not sense God, and does not see God. God must invade the privacy of his sin. God is sovereign in salvation. Paul says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God..." (1 Cor. 2:14a). He doesn't even pursue God he pursues happiness, health, wealth, and peace, and finds that none of them are lasting. So, there is a direct act of God's sovereignty and will to bring about salvation.

Now, some people God gently calls. Some people hear the still, small voice of God, but there are other people who are making so much noise that God has to make a lot of racket just to get through. In my own life I spent my youth growing up in a Christian home and went to church for many years. I knew all of the things there were to know and God continually spoke to my heart, but I continued to rebel in my own heart about really committing my life to Him. Finally, as I was traveling seventyfive miles an hour in a car, it flipped and threw me out onto the pavement, sending me sliding for a hundred yards. After it was all over, God could communicate to me. I said, "I can only go so far, Lord. I can't fight this." God had to get dramatic in my life. Very often God has done something tremendously dramatic to lay His hands on somebody's life, while other times He doesn't need to be so dramatic. Don't disparage the fact that your salvation wasn't dramatic; just praise God that it happened. I think that the greatest miracle may be when God takes the person who is very good and allows him to recognize that he is a sinner who needs Jesus Christ.

a. The Light of Heaven (v. 3)

"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shone round about him a light from heaven."

Saul was absolutely oblivious to anything God was doing. He didn't even believe that Christianity was anything. Then God says, "Stop!" He stopped him dead in his tracks. The light shone and the whole entourage hit the ground (Ac. 26:14). They were face to face with Jesus Christ and they fell over. The soldiers did the same thing in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus walked out to meet them (Jn. 18:6). In putting the narratives of Acts 9, 22, and 26 together, apparently some of the soldiers picked themselves up off the ground and were dumb with amazement.

b. The Blindness of Man (v. 7)

"And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man."

1) Glory Concealed

The light was absolutely blinding. Acts 22:9 says, "...*they heard not the voice of Him that spoke to me.*" Some people have assumed a contradiction between these two verses. It means that they heard a noise, but they just didn't know what it was saying. In John 12:29 when God spoke, many of the people heard thunder. So all those people hit the ground when the light shone.

2) Glory Revealed

Everybody stood up except Saul. He remained flat on the ground and saw Jesus in glory. Jesus Christ is the glory of God in a body. He revealed His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration to James, John, and Peter (Mt. 17:12). Here He reveals His glory to Saul the sinner and killer of Christians. He stops him dead in his tracks and reveals Himself.

a) The Testimony of Scripture

You say, "It doesn't say that he saw Jesus." I know it doesn't, but he still saw Jesus. You say, "Well, where's the evidence?" It is found in several other places in the New Testament.

(1) 1 Corinthians 15:8 "And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

(2) 1 Corinthians 9:1 "Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord?..." Sure he saw Him. He saw Him right there on the road to Damascus.

(3) Acts 9:17 "And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way...." Ananias acknowledges the fact that Jesus appeared to Saul and that he saw Him.

(4) Acts 9:27 "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way...."

(5) Acts 22:14 "And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth."

So we know that Saul actually saw Jesus Christ in glory. He saw the glorified Christ. He had believed that Jesus was dead and that Christianity was a big joke. And then, all of a sudden, he saw Jesus.

b) The Testimony of Stephen

The last man to see the resurrected Christ before Saul was Stephen. He said, "*Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God*" (Ac. 7:56). Everyone heard what he said. And that infuriated the Jews all the more. But the man standing there who was responsible for the stoning of Stephen, in the grace of God was the next one to see His glory. And that is how grace operates. Stephen prayed, "...*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge...*" (Ac. 7:60b). God answered him and God was gracious to Saul. The heavens opened one more time and the killer Saul gazed into the glory and person of Him whom he persecuted.

So, salvation begins with a divine, sovereign contact. That is the doctrine of election the sovereignty of God in motion toward the sinner. After the contact, let's look at...

2. The Conviction (v. 4)

"And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

Whenever there is to be salvation, there has to be conviction of sin because sin separates men from God. So sin has to be exposed. At this point the conviction is potent. Saul is in the right position for conversion flat.

a. The Warning of Saul's Sin

When Jesus says, "Saul, Saul," it is emphatic because He says his name twice. And in Luke's writings, the repetition of a name by Jesus refers to a rebuke or a warning whether it is "Martha, Martha," "Simon, Simon," or "Jerusalem, Jerusalem" (Lk. 10:41; 22:31; 13:34).

b. The Warfare of Saul's Soul

1) The Indictment of Guilt

Jesus says to Saul, "...why persecutest thou Me?" One thing that must have absolutely tore at Saul was the guilt he was living with. God has built into every man a sense of right and wrong (Rom. 1:182:16). Saul had been living with a horrible conflict believing he was doing right in persecuting Christians and yet, because it was wrong, he knew there was tremendous guilt in his life. In Acts 9:5 Jesus says, "...it is hard for thee to kick against the goads." In other words, "It hasn't been easy doing this, has it Saul? You have been fighting God, and it doesn't come easily." As a result, he had been living with unbelievable guilt, and his conscience must have been as heavy as lead. It must have been an unbelievable thing to try to exist in the air of threat and slaughter. And when he heard Jesus say, "Why are you persecuting Me?" you can imagine the anguish that ripped through his soul when he was confronted with the horrors he feared might be true, and found to be true. His guilt was full guilt. Jesus said, "Why are you persecuting Me? What did I do to you?" In John 15:25 Jesus says, "...They hated Me without a cause." Who could ever hate Jesus Christ?

2) The Inseparability of Christ and His Disciples

Jesus says, "...why persecutest thou Me?" You say, "Well, he's not persecuting Jesus, he's persecuting the Christians." When you persecute the Christian, you persecute Jesus. We are inseparably tied together. Paul says, "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). You can't persecute me without persecuting Him. Every time you touch me you touch Him. No blow struck on earth goes unfelt in heaven. Jesus is a sympathetic High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15). He bears our griefs and carries our sorrow (Is. 53:4). This is Saul's first exposure to the inseparability of the life of a Christian and Jesus Christ his Lord. Paul later elucidates this relationship in Ephesians 1:2223 concerning the doctrine of the body and its Head. We are one. What a thrilling thing it is to know that Jesus is bound together with all the members of His body so that whatever hits us hits Him. Saul was actually dealing blows to Jesus Himself.

3) The Issue of Rejection

a) Saul's Central Problem

The real issue in every man's life is what he does with Jesus Christ. God didn't say, "Saul, you've been a naughty fellow. You have hate in your heart. You're going around murdering." That is all superficial. He says, "Saul, your problem is that you are persecuting Jesus." This is the conviction: Any man who lives in this world apart from Jesus Christ is as guilty as Saul because he has rejected Jesus Christ.

You say, "A Christian can do what he wants, I don't care." To reject Jesus Christ at any level damns a man. The degree of it is consequential, but all the degrees of punishment in hell are bad. So, the real issue of conviction is what a man does with Christ. That is the cardinal issue you want to emphasize when you are sharing Christ with someone.

b) Saul's Changed Perspective

Saul learned his lesson well. To read the wonderful things he wrote later on in his life, it is easy to forget what he was before. In 1 Corinthians 16:22 he says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema [accursed]...." What a joy it must have been for him to be able to say that.

So the issue is what a man does with Jesus. If you don't love Jesus, you are anathema. That is the issue of convictionunbelief and rebellion toward Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God, through all the preparation of Saul's life, has brought him to a crisis. Christ Himself confronts him with his problem. According to John 16:9, the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict "*of sin, because they believe not on Me.*" That's the issue.

So, we have seen the contact, and immediately after that the conviction. Whenever you bring someone to Christ you must talk about their rebellion against Him. It is not right for anybody to exist

who doesn't give Him glory. Now third, we will see...

3. The Conversion (v. 5)

"And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the goads."

This is where I believe Saul is converted because in verse 6 he is so obviously a different man.

a. Saul's Rebellion

Jesus recognized the terrible guilt that plagued Saul's conscience and says, "It hurts to know that, doesn't it?" A goad was a long stick with great long nails at the end. It was used to pierce and perforate the hide of an ox so it could be driven. When the ox would hesitate, the nails would perforate its hide and the ox would then continue forward. Now a dumb ox might resist and kick against the goad, which wouldn't hurt the goad but would certainly hurt the ox. And there would be pain in the resistance.

Saul had been rebelling against God. You know who was getting hurt? Not God. Ever since Saul started his persecution the gospel was spread all over Samaria and Judea. The only person getting hurt was Saul, and his conscience was ripping him apart. And Jesus said, "It's a tough thing to be fighting."

b. Saul's Repentance

1) His Recognition of God

Saul asks, "Who are you, Lord?" Notice that he has the right idea in terms of where he belongs in relation to the Lord—he is flat on his face. The Lord says, "I am Jesus." I think Saul knew that God was talking, but I'm not sure that he yet understood it was Jesus.

2) His Recognition of Jesus as God

When Jesus said, "...I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest...", I think the light dawned in the life of this man. He believed that Jesus was dead, but here He is alive. Saul knew well the Christian message—he debated it with Stephen, and he chased enough Christians to hear what they had to say. I believe that when he heard Jesus, he said to himself, "Okay, I accept. I can't fight at this level." And I believe that it is right here that you see the conversion of this man. He acknowledged Him as Messiah and Savior. And this horrible truth flashed on his mind: Jesus, who went about doing good and healing all those oppressed of the devil, who was crucified, who was rejected by the nation; Jesus, whom the dying Stephen beheld and into whose hand he committed his spirit; that Jesus, whom Saul so hated and whose followers he so mercilessly and cruelly persecuted, is alive and the Messiah He claimed to be. I believe at that point, bowed as he was in body, he became bowed in spirit and acknowledged Jesus Christ. All of the bloodshed drowned Paul in the sorrow of his sin—he was shattered, he was penitent, he was lying beneath the mercy of God, and his heart was broken by repentance. But I believe in that moment it was healed by faith.

Some Ridiculous Opinions

Saul's conversion was a glorious conversion, but many people want to explain it away. There are at least half a dozen opinions about what happened to him. Renan, the Frenchman, says that it was an uneasy conscience with unstrung nerves, fatigue of the journey, eyes inflamed by the hot sun, and a sudden stroke of fever that produced a hallucination. Others say that a thunderstorm just happened to hit at that very moment, and as a result of being so overwrought by the guilt of his own conscience, he imagined that God spoke to him. Perhaps the most popular view that has been espoused by many, including Jewish scholars, is that he had epilepsy. Dr. Klausner holds this view, saying how obvious it was that Paul was epileptic. However, some medical sources indicate that

certain epileptics cannot remember anything that occurred during a fit or seizure. It's amazing, then, how well Paul detailed what happened.

Ironside, quoting Spurgeon, said, "O blessed epilepsy, if it effects a conversion like this!" We know what happened. God invaded his life. It takes more credulity to believe the junk that people use to explain away the Bible than to just put your faith in God. I don't see how they do these illogical mental gymnastics to come up with wrong answers.

I love the fact that Jesus said, "I am Jesus," because that identified Him. It is the name at which every knee will bow (Phil. 2:10). Jesus said to him, "It has been rough on you kicking against Me--against the goad." And a goad was not a little prickly instrument. Shamgar in Judges 3:31 slew six hundred men with one. It was painful for Saul, and he was the only one getting hurt. If you kick against God, you will get hurt. If you throw yourself against God, you will get broken--He won't.

c. Saul's Rest

I think that peace began to enter Saul's soul at this point. He rested from the battle. And when he rested, so did everyone else. Acts 9:31 says, "Then had the churches rest...." As long as he was hassling everyone, the plans of the church were up in the air. Even if he had been converted and died right away, the church still would have seen it as a great day.

So we have seen the contact, then the conviction (Christ convicts him of the real issue--faith in Him and acknowledging Him as Savior and Lord), and then the conversion.

Obtaining Mercy

It is important to compare Saul with the Pharisees, because the Pharisees heard and saw Jesus, they saw His miracles, and their response was not faith. Saul responded in faith. They responded in apostasy; Saul responded with an open heart. He expressed the view of his conversion in 1 Timothy 1:12: "And I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who hath enabled me, in that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." In other words, he had faith, he believed, and God saw that he was faithful, counted that faithfulness for righteousness, and placed him in the ministry. In verse 13 he says, "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious [a wanton aggressor]; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." In other words, "Don't hold me to apostasy. What I did I did because I didn't know the truth fully." Those Jews will spend eternity in hell because they knew it and rejected it. Paul continues: "And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Nevertheless, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe..." (1 Tim. 1:14-16).

Saul's entire soul had been wrapped up in the annihilation of the church. Had his plan succeeded, the church would have been smothered in its own birth, drowned in its own blood, and God's eternal decree would have been annulled and Satan would have triumphed. So great was his sin that if he had not done it in ignorance, he would have been damned forever; but since he did it not really knowing the truth, God's mercy was available.

Now, we will see...

4. The Consecration (vv. 6-8)

Very often people come to Jesus Christ but never really commit everything to Christ until later...if ever. This man was saved and consecrated his life to full-time service at the same moment, and that is the only way God ever intended it to be.

a. The Verbal Consecration (v. 6a)

"And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?..."

This part of verse 6 does not really appear in the manuscripts. You say, "What is it doing here?" This question of Paul's does appear in Acts 22:10, and some scribe felt that it fit here just as well. So it is biblical, but it just belongs in Acts 22:10, which is a recount by Paul of this same narrative. The oldest manuscripts don't contain this part of the verse at all. But since it is true, we will discuss it as part of the narrative.

1) Abandonment to the Lordship of Christ

Saul said, "...Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?..." Now that is consecration. He was saying, "Lord, here's my life. What do you want out of me? I'll give You everything I have." Saul had a career that could not continue. Since he had to start from nothing, he gave everything to the Lord.

2) Acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ

I love the fact that he said, "...Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?..." He acknowledged the lordship of Christ. I hear people say, "Well, I know that He's my Savior, but I haven't received Him as Lord." That is not accurate. You don't receive Him as Lord or not receive Him as Lord. He is Lord! When you receive Him, He comes as who He is, not divided into the sections that you want. Don't say, "Well, I received Him as Savior ten years ago but today I made Him Lord." No, you didn't make Him Lord--He is Lord. If you don't do anything, He is still Lord. In John 13:13 Jesus says, "Ye call Me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am."

3) Acquiescence to the Lordship of Christ

The question in the Christian life is not, "Is He Lord of your life?" The question is, "Are you obeying Him?" From the beginning Saul said, "I know You are Lord, and I'm going to obey You." The Christian life is a battle between the will of the Lord and the will of the Christian. Christian maturity occurs when both wills always agree. That is the process of maturity. Your will is at one level and His will is at another. You grow to the point that you become a mature Christian, and then your will and God's will are the same. Then you will find that the will of God isn't such a big problem when you are conformed to the image of Christ.

There are many verses which say that He is Lord (Ac. 10:36; Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:5; Phil. 2:11). Saul recognized it and said, "I'm going to be whatever you want me to be." Some people become saved but don't want to give everything to Him. Saul knew that the one needful thing in his life was obedience.

The question "...what wilt Thou have me to do?..." is the only question a Christian need ever ask the Lord every day of his life. It is the standard for every Christian--ceasing to do what I want, what I desire, what my ambition dictates, and doing what He wants me to do. And that is maturity. You say, "Well, anybody can say, 'Lord, what will Thou have me to do?' I've heard people say that a lot, but do they always do it?" No. People often consecrate themselves to the Lord at camps, but the first time God gives them the test of obedience, they fail. We all make these kind of verbal consecrations, but Saul made a verbal consecration that was for real. And the Lord tested him just as quickly.

b. The Actual Consecration (vv. 6b-8)

"...And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And

Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man; but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus."

Saul did exactly what Jesus told him to do. His consecration wasn't just verbal, it was actual. His whole life was a testimony. He kept saying, "The love of Christ constrains me. I go there because Jesus drags me there. The Lord sent me here. The Lord's pushing me over here. The Lord drew me here." His whole life was like that. He sought nothing other than what God wanted him to do. We promise so much, but do so little. Saul promised a simple thing, and he did it. Don't make all kinds of gigantic promises to God, just make Him one, "Lord, I'll do what You want," and then do it. It is that simple.

Saul's entry into Damascus wasn't quite what he had anticipated. Instead of going in as the great conquering hero, he went in as a blind lamb, being led by the hand. God had crushed him into submission. And sometimes God has to do that. But it's like crushing a rose--it releases the fragrance. When it was all over, what came out of Saul was fantastic. And if that's what it takes, God, crush me if crushing me means I can be something like Paul.

So, we have seen the consecration, and last, we see...

5. The Communion (v. 9)

"And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."

a. Fathoming the Depths of Salvation

Saul's conversion had happened so fast and without any prior warning, that he needed to catch up with what was going on. We know he believed, but have you ever had an experience where you had to say, "Wait a minute, I've got to think this through. This is a little too fast."? Even in your wildest imagination you could not fathom the extremes which this man had gone through in one midday afternoon under the hot sun. He had been transformed in a most unbelievable fashion, and he needed time for his brain to catch up with what had happened in his soul. So God put him in a place all alone in order to allow him three days to catch up with what had happened. Salvation happens in an instant, but it takes a long time to plumb the depths of what it really is. Perhaps this is a statement you could make concerning your own salvation, "Well, I was saved at this time in my life, but the reality never really began to dawn on me until a certain time afterwards." That's what was happening with Saul.

b. Fathoming the Vision of Jesus

What was the last thing Saul ever saw? Jesus. Have you ever looked at the sun, and then everywhere else you looked all you could see was the sun? Or perhaps you have had someone take your picture and everywhere you looked you saw the flash. It is said that if you look at the sun long enough you will become blind. An astronomer tried it, and it happened. Saul's blindness was not the blindness of darkness, it was the blindness of light. For three days all he ever saw was the Son--he couldn't get rid of the vision of Jesus. So he spent three days getting acquainted with Jesus. I think that is when all the old things died, and they died hard. He didn't yet understand forgiveness, and he would still have guilt. But I think that was when faith, love, joy, and peace were born in him. What a conversion it was! Praise God for this man. One of the greatest scenes in history has just passed before our eyes. Learn from it what the Spirit will teach you.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why was Paul such a unique person?

2. Explain the influence that Saul's confrontation with Stephen had on both Saul's persecution and his eventual conversion.

3. Where was Saul's home? What made this city distinguishable in that day?
4. What credentials did Saul inherit from his father?
5. What trade did Saul learn as a boy?
6. Who was Saul's teacher in Jerusalem? What did his training consist of?
7. What is a good way to describe Saul's persecution of the church? What was the result of his persecution? Support your answers.
8. Why did Saul decide to carry his persecution of Christians to Damascus?
9. What was characteristic of Saul's life-style during his persecution of Christians?
10. When the Jews turned to Christ, what part of their former religion did they maintain? Why was the book of Hebrews written?
11. Why did Saul need permits from the high priest in order to continue his persecution in Damascus?
12. Who always initiates the contact in salvation? Why?
13. Give the evidence that supports the fact that Saul saw Jesus on the Damascus road.
14. Why does there need to be conviction of sin before salvation can take place in a person's life?
15. Why did Jesus say Saul's name twice?
16. What was the horrible conflict that Saul had been living with? What effect did Jesus' question in Acts 9:4 have on Saul?
17. Whom was Saul really persecuting when he was persecuting Christians? Why?
18. What is the real issue in any man's life?
19. What was a goad used for? What did Jesus mean when He said to Saul, "...it is hard for thee to kick against the goads"? (Ac. 9:5)
20. At what point in this narrative is it most likely that Saul was converted? Why?
21. Why was God's mercy available to Saul? Why was Saul's initial rejection of Christ not considered apostasy? Why could the Pharisees be considered apostates? (1 Tim. 1:13)

22. What question of Saul's indicates the fact of his immediate consecration to Jesus? (Ac. 22:10)
23. When does maturity occur in a Christian's life? What is the one question that every Christian needs to ask every day of his life? Why?
24. How did Saul prove that his verbal consecration was for real?

Pondering the Principles

1. Take this time to meditate on the circumstances that surrounded your salvation. Did you hear the still, small voice of God, or did He have to do something dramatic in your life? How did God initiate the contact in your life? What did He do in order to cause you to recognize your sin? Compare your life before your salvation to your life now. What changes do you perceive? What was the goal of your life before? What is the goal of your life now? Spend the rest of this time in prayer, thanking God for what He has accomplished in your life.
2. Have you had doubts about your ability to handle your responsibility in a ministry in which God has placed you? Perhaps you have had doubts about your performance in a ministry because of your past sin. Imagine the doubts Paul could have had. Memorize what he said in 1 Timothy 1:12, 15-16: "And I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who hath enabled me, in that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry....This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Nevertheless, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."
3. On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate the progress of your maturity in Christ? Do you find it that you are more in agreement with God's will than you used to be? If not, what areas are you struggling in? Why do you do that which you want and not what God wants? If you want to be obedient to God, then you must make the commitment to do what He wants. Do you want to make that commitment? If so, write down your commitment. Now make it your goal to keep this commitment by acting upon it. If you are sincere, God will help you to keep it.

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