

Acts 9:1-19

In the early church, no event is of greater significance than the conversion of Saul. It stayed, for a time at least, the persecution he had inflicted against her, allowing her to "catch her breath" before another wave of persecution arose again by the hand of Herod (Acts 12:1f). It allowed her to resume with great fervor the evangelism she had been busy in to which was added Saul's labors whose conversion changed him from being the greatest persecutor of the church to one of the greatest promoters of the gospel of Christ.

Our historian introduced Saul into the text at the death of Stephen and briefly told of his "laying waste" the Jerusalem church (Acts 8:6). Then he leaves the activities of Saul to chronicle the labors of Philip.

Then he turned his attention again to Saul whose determination to stamp out the religion of Christ knew no restraints. Saul was "exceedingly mad against them" (Acts 26:11). Although he was later greatly ashamed of his deeds at this period in his life, and in humility called himself "the chief of sinners," he had acted in good conscience in his madness against the disciples of Christ (1 Timothy 1:15, Acts 23:1).

Saul's efforts to destroy the church had miserably failed. The church had suffered but the Faith was still very much intact and alive. This only served to further agitate Saul. He went to the high priest and asked of him letters to the synagogues of Damascus that should he find any there who were of the "way," he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. With this grim purpose in mind, he made his way to Damascus. It was about noon and suddenly a great light shone round about him from heaven and a strange voice said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul fell to the earth and said, "Who art thou, Lord?" (Acts 9:4f). Saul's called Jesus "Lord," but that does not mean he was confessing faith in Christ. The words "who art thou?" tell us he was ignorant of Him to whom the voice belonged. He used the word "Lord" because, while he did not know who was speaking to him, he knew he was superior to him. Jesus responded immediately, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9:5). What a moment of both revelation and accusation! Stephen was right after all! Saul had wrongfully consented to his death. He had wrongfully intensified his persecution against Christ's disciples, thereby Christ. Little wonder that Saul said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 22:10). The response was, "Go into the city and there it will be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6). Blinded by the light, he was led into the

city where for three days and nights he fasted and prayed. Men with him saw the light and heard a sound but did not understand the voice because Jesus had spoken in the Hebrew tongue (Acts 26:14). Saul was told that a man named Ananais would come, lay hands upon him to restore his sight, and also tell him the things he "must do."

Ananais receive the Lord's message with negative reaction. He said, "Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to thy saints at Jerusalem and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name" (Acts 9:13f). Ananais did not know what the Lord knew. "Go thy way," He said, "For he is a chosen vessel unto me" (Acts 9:15f).

His objections removed, Ananais followed the Lord's bidding and went to the designated place. He told Saul that the Lord had sent him that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). He then commanded, "and now, why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). This raises a significant question. Was Saul saved on the Damascus road? Present day preachers think so. They assert Saul was saved as soon as he saw the light. Of course that could not be, for at that point he was not a believer. But was he saved after Jesus revealed Himself to Saul and he came to believe in Him? Consider three things. If Saul was saved on the Damascus road, SAUL DIDN'T KNOW IT. For three days he neither ate nor drank, but continued constantly in prayer, evidencing an agitated, troubled spirit. If he was saved, he was the most miserable "saved man" there ever was. Saul regarded his salvation as occurring when he was baptized. He wrote Romans, "Are ye ignorant that all WE who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? WE were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so WE also might walk in newness of life" (6:3-5). If Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, THE LORD DIDN'T KNOW IT! He told Saul that in the city he would be told what he MUST DO (Acts 9:6). Then He sent Ananais to tell him, "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins..." (22:16). If Saul was saved on the Damascus road, Ananais DIDN'T KNOW IT! He charged Saul to arise and be baptized THAT HE MIGHT WASH AWAY HIS SINS.

All the disciplines and manuals in the world, coupled with the wisdom of highly educated men, articulate in eloquent speech and human reason, cannot set aside the fact that Jesus, who died to make salvation possible, said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...." (Mk. 16:6). Should not Jesus know what He requires of men in order for them to be

saved? He sent out His apostles to preach the gospel and to give all men His conditions for salvation, and when Peter preached on Pentecost to conscience smitten sinners who implored, "Brethren what shall we do?" Peter's response was, "Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins" (Acts 2:36-38). Did Peter not understand what Jesus required of a man who wished to be saved? Satan always adds to the word of God. God told Adam and Eve, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Satan said, "thou shalt NOT surely die." To Paul's words, "Seeing we are justified by faith", Satan, through his preachers, adds the word "only"-- "Seeing we are justified by faith ONLY" (Rom. 5:1). Man IS justified by faith, but not by faith only. The two are not the same. Baptism is essential to salvation!

Saul complied with the Lord's instructions. God had warned he would suffer many things for His name's sake which things included tribulation, hunger, thirst, nakedness, stripes, prison, stoning and finally martyrdom. Saul never flinched, wavered, nor looked back. In his words he "counted all things but loss" for Christ (Phil. 3:8f). With Saul's conversion, a new day dawned for the Lord's Church and the greatest portion of the remainder of Acts tells of Saul's majestic and sacrificial contribution to the Cause of Christ.

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