

The Conversion of Saul

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Saul of Tarsus is a fierce persecutor of Christians when he first appears in the New Testament record (Acts 7:58–8:3). His change from cruel crusader against the church to Jesus' ardent advocate as the apostle Paul is one of the remarkable narratives of history, with significant implications:

- One cannot be saved in the Christian age by physical ancestry. Saul was part of God's chosen race under Moses' Law. However, at Jesus' death, His Will/Law for all men replaced Moses' Law (Col. 2:14; Heb. 10:9–10). Saul had to obey the Gospel – as must all others (Mark 16:15–16).
- Piety, sincerity, and zeal did not save Saul (Acts 22:3–5; 23:1; 26:5; Gal. 1:14). In spite of these, he was lost. So are millions today – religious, sincere, zealous – and lost.
- One may be religious, sincere, and zealous, but still oppose Christ and His church, as did Saul (Acts 26:9–11). Multitudes of sincere, zealous, religious people today oppose Jesus by their unauthorized doctrines and practices.
- To mistreat Jesus' church is to mistreat Him. Saul persecuted the **church**, but Jesus asked him, "Why persecutest thou **me**?" (Acts 8:1; 9:4). When men neglect, despise, or persecute the Lord's church today, they do the same to Him. Likewise, we express our love for Jesus by serving Him faithfully in His church (John 14:15; Eph. 3:21).
- One cannot be saved by faith alone. After confessing faith in the Christ (Acts 9:1–5), Saul then asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" (22:10), Jesus didn't say, "Nothing," but told him to go into Damascus and "it shall be told thee what thou must do" (9:6). If Saul was saved merely because he believed in Christ, neither Saul nor Christ knew it. Unless the Lord has different plans of salvation for different people, He has never saved and never will save anyone by faith alone.
- Baptism is the culminating act in Jesus' plan of salvation. When God forgives the sinner of his sins, baptism marks the point of his salvation. Saul believed in the Lord and fasted and prayed three days (Acts 9:9–11), but still was not forgiven of his sins/saved. Rather, Ananias, the Lord's messenger, told Saul to "be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (22:16), **thereby** calling on the Lord's name for salvation. That which Ananias commanded Saul to do is precisely what Jesus earlier stated: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark. 16:16).

One should faithfully serve the Christ, so that with Paul we may say at last, "I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

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