

New Testament Conversions – No. 5

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

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A man named Saul is introduced to us as a co-conspirator in the murder of Stephen and a hater of Christ and Christians (Acts 7:58; 8:3). His zeal was so great in persecuting the saints that he asked for authority to travel 13.5 miles north to Damascus to arrest and persecute Christians there (Acts 9:1-2). As he and his companions approached that ancient city, he was startled by a light out of Heaven, brighter than the noonday sun which was shining (Acts 26:13). A voice asked, "Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me?" Saul did not know who was speaking to him, so he asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" Jesus identified himself to Saul and told him to go into Damascus where he would be told what he **must** do (Acts 9:6). Saul, blinded by the light, was led into the city by his companions and was three days without sight, during which he would neither eat nor drink doubtless due to his distress over his persecution of the Son of God, in whom he now believed (Acts 9:8-9).

In a vision, the Lord instructed Ananias, a Christian in Damascus, to go to Saul, restore his sight, and tell him the plans Jesus had for him to be a great evangelist (Acts 9:10-15). Ananias, reluctant at first because of Saul's fierce reputation, sought out Saul, restored his sight, delivered the message concerning Saul's future work and told him he must be baptized to be cleansed of his sins (Acts 22:16), which command he obeyed (Acts 9:19-22). He later became the legendary apostle, Paul.

Please observe the following truths in Saul's case:

- (1) As in the case of the Ethiopian and Philip (Acts 8:26-40), miracles brought these men together, but Ananias, not the Lord directly, told Saul how to be saved (Acts 22:16). With the completion of the New Testament at the close of the first century, such miraculous activity was no longer necessary and no longer occurs (1 Cor. 13:8-13).
- (2) What did Saul do to be saved? It is evident that he **believed** in Jesus as God's Son when the Lord identified Himself to him, else he would not have obeyed Jesus' command to go into the city and await further instructions.
- (3) It is also obvious that Saul was very **penitent**. This explains why he refused to eat or drink for three days – he was so distressed over his terrible sins he had no appetite.
- (4) Ananias first restored Saul's sight, then told him of the work the Lord had planned for him and what he had yet to do to be saved – "...arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins..." (Acts 22:16). Notice that Saul was not saved when he **believed** on the Lord, unless one can be saved without his sins being forgiven. He **believed** when the Lord identified

Himself, but still he needed his sins washed away three days later. Saul was not saved at the point of **repentance**, for he had demonstrated his penitence for three days when Ananias told him he needed his sins washed away

- (5) The Lord told Saul he would be told what he **must do** when he entered the city (Acts 9:6). The only command Ananias gave Saul was, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16). Those who vainly argue that baptism is not necessary to salvation, and is merely an optional act could wish that this verse did not appear in the Gospel. It plainly teaches that baptism is a “**must**” and that one’s sins are still upon him **until he is baptized**, or it doesn’t teach anything.
- (6) The argument that such a position equals a doctrine of “water salvation” is utterly baseless. If it does, then the Holy Spirit is guilty of the doctrine, because He is the author of it. Neither this verse nor any other teaches that water washes away sins. Only the precious blood of Jesus does that (Rev. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:18-19, etc.). However, this verse teaches us **when** our sins are washed away in the blood of Jesus – unmistakably, when we are scripturally baptized.

This is a matter we dare not be mistaken about. Please study this issue carefully.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for, and it was published in the “Bible Thoughts” Column for the *Hood County News*, Granbury, Texas, September 17, 1978.]

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