

The Conversion of Saul

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Saul of Tarsus was 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' most ardent advocate as Paul, the apostle of Jesus, is one of the remarkable narratives of history. Saul's conversion holds significant implications:

- Those who have lived, are living, and will live in the Christian Age cannot be saved from the eternal consequences of sin by their physical ancestry. Saul was born as a member 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 to be saved – as must all others (Mark 16:15–16; Rom. 1:16–17; 2 The. 1:7–9).
- Saul's piety, sincerity, and zeal couldn't save him (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 religious bodies, doctrines, and practices.
- To mistreat Jesus' church is to mistreat Him. Saul persecuted the **church**, but when Jesus appeared to him near Damascus, He asked him, "Why persecutest thou **me**?" (Acts 8:1; 9:4). When men neglect, pervert, despise, or persecute the Lord's church, they do the same to the Lord. Likewise, we express our love for Jesus, first by obeying His plan of salvation and thereafter by serving Him faithfully in His church (John 14:15; Eph. 3:21).
- One cannot be saved by faith alone. After confessing his faith in the Christ, still on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–5), Saul then asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" (22:10). Jesus didn't say, "Nothing, Saul: you were saved the moment you believed." No, Jesus told him in Damascus he would be told "what thou **must** do" (9:6, emp. DM). If Saul was saved when he believed in Jesus, neither Saul nor Jesus knew it. The Lord doesn't have different plans of salvation for different people; He has never saved anyone by faith alone, as essential as faith is.
- Baptism is the culminating act in Jesus' plan of salvation. God doesn't forgive/save the penitent sinner at the point of faith, but in the act of baptism (Acts 2:38). Note carefully: Saul believed in the Lord and fasted and prayed three days (Acts 9:9–11, obvious evidence of repentance), but, he still was not forgiven of his sins/saved. Ananias, the Lord's messenger, told Saul: "be **baptized**, and **wash away thy sins**" (22:16, emp. DM), **thereby** calling on the Lord for salvation. That which Ananias commanded Saul to do is what Jesus stated: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark. 16:16).

Only by following Saul's pattern of conversion – involving faith that results in baptism for the remission of sins and a life of faithful service to Christ – can we say with Saul/Paul at last, "I have kept the faith:...henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness..." (2 Tim. 4:7–8).

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