

Saul's Conversion

Lesson Scope: Acts 9:1-31

References in brackets refer to Acts 9 unless otherwise specified

Lesson Focus

Our first glimpses of Saul are interspersed with the concluding details of Stephen's martyrdom. He consented to Stephen's death and received the witnesses' garments. Passive as those statements may seem, Saul was not passive in his persecution of the church. Our lesson text opens with Saul "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." Later Paul testified to King Agrippa that he had been "exceedingly mad against" the believers. But God knew how to reach him. He knew that, once converted, Saul would preach Christ with the same zeal with which he had previously opposed Him.

Unregenerate man is at enmity with God and His people. But when a man yields to Jesus Christ, he becomes a useful vessel in God's hands.

Conversion, as used in the Bible, means "a turning around." Although the term is not found in this passage, it certainly describes Saul in this lesson. He was heading in one direction (persecuting the Christians), he turned around and headed in the opposite direction, he became a Christian himself.

There is both God's part and man's part in the conversion process. Turning around requires the work of God in one's life. But that does not mean man has no part to fill. By the grace of God, man can make a complete U-turn in his life. If one is found still heading in the same direction as before, one cannot claim that God has done His part, because God will not do His part alone. The question may arise, At exactly what point in this story was Saul converted? Do not make too large an issue out of answering this.

Turning Saul's life around was in some ways a process: answering Jesus' voice from heaven, fasting for three days, and receiving spiritual sight. All of these were essential parts of Saul's conversion. Regardless, the main point of the lesson is not when Saul was converted, but rather how he was converted.

Lesson Aim: To identify characteristics of a genuine conversion.

Theme Verse: **John 3:3** Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Lesson Text

Stopped

Acts 9:1-9

¹ (KJV) And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, ² And desired of him letters 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. ³ And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: ⁴ And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 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 pricks. ⁶ And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. ⁷ And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. ⁸ 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. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

Strengthened

Acts 9:10-19

¹⁰ (KJV) And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I *am here*, Lord. ¹¹ And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, ¹² And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting *his* hand on him, that he might receive his sight. ¹³ Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: ¹⁴ And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. ¹⁵ But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for

he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: ¹⁶ For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. 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 as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. ¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. ¹⁹ And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

Supported

Acts 9:26-31

²⁶ (KJV) And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. ²⁹ And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. ³⁰ Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. ³¹ Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Questions for Study

Stopped

1. What was Saul's response to the bright light and the voice?
2. Explain the importance of Saul praying and fasting for three days.

Strengthened

3. What work did God have planned for Saul?
4. What evidences in this passage show Saul was open to the help of others?
5. Why do submission to others and conversion go hand in hand?

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6. What important role did Barnabas fill after Saul's conversion?

7. What blessings can the church experience because of converted members?

Analysing the Passage

“This way” (9:2) designates the Christian faith, and similar expressions are common in the Book of Acts. The word pricks (9:5) refers to a goad, meaning the Lord had been attempting to prod Saul in the proper direction. Assayed (9:26) means “attempted.”

Saul was a man of action. He may not have been the most polished with words (2 Corinthians 11:6), but he knew how to get things done. His persecution of the church was brutal and relentless, reaching as far as Damascus. God knew He could use a man with zeal to accomplish the work at hand.

The light from heaven was “above the brightness of the sun” (26:13), but it did not strike Saul down. Rather, “he fell to the earth” (9:4). We see in 26:14 that both he and the men with him fell to the earth. However, 22:9 mentions that Saul’s comrades did not hear the voice that spoke although they indeed saw the light.

Saul’s conversion had an immediate impact on the church. It seems that he was the main force behind the persecution, because the churches experienced rest in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

Principles and Applications

Stopped

1. A genuine conversion begins with an acknowledgment of the lordship of Jesus Christ (9:1-6). Without Christ, there is no salvation. Furthermore, acknowledging Christ as Lord is just as important as acknowledging Christ as Saviour. Christ will not save those who are not willing to follow Him.
2. Submission is a mark of the converted (9:6). One who desires salvation must submit himself both to God and to others. Rebellion is a part of the past life that must be left behind. Conversion means one is willing to give up his own way.
3. Genuine conversion requires a time of soul-searching (9:8-9). Saul prayed and fasted for three days. Conversion is not a spur-of-the-moment event, and should only be entered into with serious consideration and commitment.

Too many “conversions” among nominal Christians have been made in the emotion of the moment. The crowd of people, the hell-fire sermons, and the emotional outbursts leave little time for serious reflection. After the emotion dies down, the “converted” person too often returns to his former ways of living.

Strengthened

4. Sincere, repentant prayer is both essential to and evidence of a genuine conversion (9:11). Prayer is communication with God. Through this avenue one makes his desire of salvation known to God. Prayer is needed not only for conversion but also throughout the Christian life.

5. Genuine conversion prepares one for service on God’s terms (9:15). God had a special work for Saul to do. He was a chosen vessel to bear God’s name to the Gentiles. Not everyone is called to the same work, but God has work for all to do. A converted person is ready to fill his place in God’s plan.

6. The truly converted desire to be baptized into the body of Christ (9:18). In the Scriptures, conversion and baptism go hand in hand. In turn baptism goes hand in hand with becoming part of the church. This means that the converted will relate to a body of believers if at all possible. How else can one find the encouragement needed to remain faithful? How else can one receive the warning and admonition needed to stay on the right path? How else can one practice the Bible commands for Communion, feet washing, and the holy kiss? Where there are others of like faith, to worship only at home on a family level is not according to New Testament teaching.

7. Genuine conversion produces spiritual vision and strength (9:18-19). One can now exercise spiritual eyesight through the discernment of God’s Spirit within. Strength for victory is available through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. God imparts all that is needed for the Christian life to those who sincerely desire conversion.

Supported

8. The truly converted are one with the disciples of Christ in fellowship and testimony (9:19, 26, 28). A person who refuses to be one with the brotherhood is exhibiting the carnal traits of pride, rebellion, and self-will. These traits belong to the old man. Abundant blessing is found in mutual sharing of life’s burdens and joys with a Scriptural brotherhood and there is joy in submission.

9. The true church, a body of converted members, experiences peace, spiritual growth, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost (9:31). Blessings abound. Loving care is shown between brethren. Each one receives exhortation to grow in his Christian life. God's Spirit is able to move among His people. As a result, the church can continue to grow and multiply.

Important Teachings

1. A genuine conversion begins with an acknowledgment of the lordship of Jesus Christ (9:1-6).
2. Submission is a mark of the converted (9:6).
3. Genuine conversion requires a time of soul-searching (9:8-9).
4. Sincere, repentant prayer is both essential to and evidence of a genuine conversion (9:11).
5. Genuine conversion prepares one for service on God's terms (9:15).
6. The truly converted desire to be baptized into the body of Christ (9:18).
7. Genuine conversion produces spiritual vision and strength (9:18-19).
8. The truly converted are one with the disciples of Christ in fellowship and testimony (9:19, 26, 28).
9. The true church, a body of converted members, experiences peace, spiritual growth, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost (9:31).
10. The truly converted are willing to bear reproach and suffering for Christ's sake (9:15-16).

Answers to Questions

1. What was Saul's response to the bright light and the voice?
Saul fell to the ground. He asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" and "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He was done kicking against the pricks.
2. Explain the importance of Saul praying and fasting for three days.
Saul needed time to seek God's face. True conversion takes a serious commitment. Conversion should not be hasty. Time is required for serious contemplation.
3. What work did God have planned for Saul?
God wanted Saul to bear His name to the Gentiles.
4. What evidences in this passage show Saul was open to the help of others?

Saul was led by the hand into the city. He allowed Ananias to lay his hands on him and help him. He wanted to be baptized. He received food from others. He stayed for a while with the disciples at Damascus. He was willing to let Barnabas introduce him to the disciples at Jerusalem.

5. Why do submission to others and conversion go hand in hand?

A converted person is no longer self-willed. He is humble enough to accept help. He does not rebel against authority.

6. What important role did Barnabas fill after Saul's conversion?

Barnabas helped the brethren at Jerusalem to trust Saul. He brought Saul to them and told them the story of Saul's conversion.

7. What blessings can the church experience because of converted members?

There can be peace in the church. Love is shown between brethren. Encouragement and exhortation can be freely shared and received. God's Spirit can work among the brotherhood. The church is able to grow.

Summarizing the Lesson

Conversion is life changing. One must completely give up self and yield to the lordship of Jesus Christ, willing to follow the Lord's bidding. Only when one is willing to go the whole way with Christ can conversion be genuine.

Research Guide

1. Study other passages where Saul's conversion is retold: Acts 22:41-16 and Acts 26:10-20.
2. For a study of Paul's past life, see Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:4-7; and 1 Timothy 1:11-16.