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## The Conversion of Saul

Acts 9:17-20; 22:1-16

By John T. Ferguson

The book of Acts is known to be the "book of conversions." It systematically reviews the humble conversions of the first century citizens, as they were translated into God's glorious kingdom of light (Acts 2:47; Col. 1:13). Certainly the gospel is God's power unto salvation to everyone at the exclusion of none (Rom. 1:16, Titus 2:11). At this particular moment let us examine the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, realizing that the things which were required of him by our Heavenly Father are even so required of us.

### What Is Meant By Conversion?

Many do not hold nor do they understand the conclusive biblical meaning of "conversion." The word itself has no more meaning unto them than the mere acknowledgement of their sins and shortcomings before God.

Because of a lack of understanding, many believe that the acknowledgement of sin and the throwing of oneself at God's mercy warrants them salvation (forgiveness) and security from any condemnation. While the word "conversion" does mean a turning about, or around, the word also implies a turning from and a turning to in humble obedience (Acts 5:13; Psa. 51:13).

Those who proclaim and defend a Pauline conversion on the road to Damascus, claim a conversion (salvation) at the point of faith and sorrow. Certainly the Bible teaches that sorrow must be shown, but sorrow is what leadeth one to repentance, which may lead to salvation if further pursued in other acts (2 Cor. 7:8-10; Acts 2:37, 38). Faith and confession of Christ are also requisite for forgiveness, but the exclusion of these will not allow Christ's blood to flow (Rom. 10:10; Mark 16:16).

### What Is The Biblical Understanding Of Conversion?

After preaching to the crowds that had gathered around Solomon's porch, Peter cried, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:11-19). What did Peter really mean? Did the multitude understand his plea? The Bible is its best commentator; let it explain its meaning. As the apostles were boldly proclaiming the Christ, they were asked an important question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

Paul, before his conversion to Christ, asked Jesus the very same question, "what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Just as the apostles had answered the others' question on Pentecost "arise and be baptized" (Acts 2:38), even so did Ananias to the question of Paul, "arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16).

If one would study these passages honestly, he or she would arrive at the logical conclusion and biblical teaching that the conversion of Saul meant his baptism in order that his sins would be forgiven. NO, Paul's being blinded by the light wasn't his conversion. The encounter with Christ caused Paul to recognize Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and prompted his obedience to the words of Ananias.

### The False Idea That Any Religion Will Do.

Saul's religion was based upon the word of God - the Law of Moses (Acts 22:3; 26:5; Gal. 1:13-17). Even though the Law of Moses was a law of high standards in worship and morality, it was to be

superceded by an even greater Law (James 1:25). The Law served as a tutor (schoolmaster) until the coming of Christ and His Law, made possible by His sacrificial death on the cross (Gal. 3:24; Col. 2:14). After Paul's conversion in baptism, he didn't say that just any law or system of religion will do. Paul had now begun to preach the faith which he had formerly denounced (Acts 26:8-11; Gal. 1:23). If any system of belief will do, how can one ever fall from the grace of God? (Gal. 5:4).

### Will All Sincere And Zealous People Be Saved?

With the sweet, calm wind of ecumenicalism and unity in diversity constantly blowing, many are falling for this sort of falsehood.

Paul was a sincere servant. He said he "Did it all in good conscience" (Acts 23:1). Even though he was serious and sincere, Paul was wrong and lost in his sins. He later stated that he did all things against Christ and the church because of his zeal to serve God, but it was done in ignorance (1 Tim. 1:13; Acts 22:3-5). Israel wasn't lost in sin because of their lack of zeal and sincerity, but because of their lack of knowledge (Rom. 10:1-4). Surely sincerity and zeal are tremendous virtues to be had and all who do should be commended. All the qualities that man can possess can never be equated with their reconciliation to God. What about the sincerity and devotion of Cornelius? Peter came that words would be spoken that he might be saved (Acts 10:6; Acts 10:33-48). Sincerity and zeal alone do not grant one salvation from sins (Mt. 7:21-23).

### Conclusion

The Biblical definition of conversion is "the planting of one into the death of Christ" that sins may be forgiven (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27).

Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but rather obeyed (Acts 26:19).

Have you been converted? You must be if forgiveness is to be granted and the hope of heaven made sure.



**FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS**

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# I Have Finished

## (Part 2)

By Eddy Gilpin

By way of review, go back to the last issue of this periodical and scan the first article in this series. In it, it was shown that Jesus stated he had "FINISHED THE WORK" which God had given him to do here on earth (Jn. 17:4). Either he did or he did not. If he didn't, he has made a false statement. If he did, there remains no more for him to do in some future return to earth. It was clearly shown in the previous installment that Jesus will not return to the earth to establish his kingdom, nor for any other reason. When he does come the second time it will be "in the clouds" (I Thes. 4:16, 17), just as he left (Acts 1:9-11). In this portion of the article it shall be the task of this writer to address the topic of Christ's kingdom in order to show that it is already in existence, and thus not yet awaiting establishment in the future as premillennialists teach.

When Jesus and his disciples had come into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi on one occasion, he asked his disciples "whom say ye that I am" (Mt. 16:15). Peter, the outspoken one, stated "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16). Having pronounced a blessing on him for his statement of truth, Jesus proceeded to say, "Upon this rock I will build MY CHURCH and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of THE KINGDOM of heaven" (Mt. 16:18, 19). Jesus thus revealed the church and the kingdom to be one and the same. Note also that at the time of this statement by Jesus his kingdom was yet in the future.

In Mark 9:1 Jesus stated, "There be some of them THAT STAND HERE, which SHALL NOT TASTE OF DEATH, till they HAVE SEEN THE KINGDOM come with power." Notice again that Christ's kingdom (church) was yet to be established at this time. But, note also that concerning his statement one of four things must be true. Either: 1) Jesus was correct in saying that some of that day standing in his presence would not die physically until the kingdom was established, and so it was; or 2) Jesus was incorrect in his assessment and thus mistaken; or 3) Jesus deliberately misled those around him and was therefore a false teacher; or 4) There are some of those who stood there in that day who are still alive and awaiting the kingdom's

establishment (hence making them some 2,000 years old). Who can rightly and forcefully content for any but the first of these? Jesus knew exactly whereof he spoke. His church (kingdom) was established in the days while many of those who stood with him on that occasion yet lived.

To the apostles Jesus said, "Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49). Recall that in Mark 9:1 Jesus said that the kingdom would come "with power." Here in Luke 24 he promised "power" once again; power from on high to the apostles in Jerusalem. Thus, with the coming of this power would come also the establishment of the kingdom. Has this occurred, or is it yet to happen? If it can be shown where the apostles received this power while in Jerusalem as promised by Jesus, then the establishment of his kingdom can also be pinpointed. If it can be shown that all this has already been fulfilled, then it stands to reason that it is not yet to be fulfilled in the future, and premillennialism falls. (Remember the basis of this inquiry. Jesus said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do").

Acts 1:26 reveals that the eleven apostles along with the newly appointed Matthias are under consideration in the beginning verses of Acts 2. This select group was in the city of Jerusalem (as commanded in Luke 24:49) when there came a sound "from heaven" (the source of the power of Luke 24:49) as of a mighty wind. This sound filled the entire house and then "there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:3). The Bible proceeds to say that they (the apostles) "were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues" (Acts 2:4). These "tongues" were languages that they had not studied nor hitherto spoken (Acts 2:6, 8, 11). This powerful manifestation from heaven attracted a huge number of people (Acts 2:14). But still it might be asked how one can know that this event was the same that Jesus spoke of in Mark 9:1 and Luke 24:49. The answer is simple for those honest enough to consider. The Bible reveals that those who obeyed the gospel on this occasion in Acts 2 were "added unto them" (vs. 41). Also, in the days that followed Luke records that "the Lord ADDED TO THE CHURCH daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). Thus for the first time in the pages of inspiration, the kingdom (church) is spoken of as being in existence, and not yet to be established. Not only that, but every reference concerning the kingdom pro-

mised by Christ after Acts 2 reveals it as being in existence and not yet in the future. Prior to Acts 2 the opposite was true.

Yes, the kingdom of Christ has already been established, just as Jesus promised. Jesus came to "finish" the work of God, and finish it he did. If he did not finish his task and his kingdom is yet to be established at his second advent as pre-millennialism contends, then how could it be said of the Colossians that they were in "the kingdom" (Col. 1:13)? or of John that he was "in the kingdom" (Rev. 1:9)? Such could not have been said had the kingdom not been established.

When the second coming of Christ does occur, it will not be for the purpose of establishing his kingdom. When he comes again the kingdom will have already been delivered up to God (I Cor. 15:24), for he must reign as king over his kingdom until he has put all enemies under his feet (I Cor. 15:25). In stating such, Paul reveals that Christ is now reigning as king over his kingdom and denies that it is yet to be established. When Jesus comes the second time it will not be to establish his kingdom. Rather, he will have shed his robe of redemption and donned his judicial garb to "judge the world in righteousness" (Heb. 9:28; Acts 17:31). When Jesus comes the second time it will not be to build his church. Rather, he will gather all nations before him in judgment (Mt. 25:31-46) in order "that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). Are you ready for that day?

## Salvation and Justification

By T. Pierce Brown

Several times recently I have read statements which say something like this: "Justification and salvation are synonymous terms." While not wanting to be "nit-picking", I feel constrained to point out that this is not so. This may seem like a technicality not worth mentioning, but a Bible student, and especially a Bible teacher, not only needs to know what is the proper definition of Bible terms, but needs to know how to adequately and accurately communicate that knowledge in practical and understandable terms to his hearers or readers.

It is true that the terms "justification" and "salvation" may both refer to the same condition in a person in a given context. That is, when Paul said in Acts 13:38, "that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" and in verse 39, "And by him all that believe are justified from all things", he was talking about the same condition. And such is true in many cases. But that does not mean the terms are synonymous. Let us illustrate that. The words "elder", "presbyter", "pastor", "shepherd", "bishop", "overseer" all may refer in some contexts to the same person. That person is one to whom we usually refer as an "elder" in the Lord's church. But the terms do not mean the same thing. The terms "church", "kingdom", "vineyard", "body", "bride", "sheepfold", etc. are all terms which refer to the same group of saved persons who follow Jesus. But they do not all mean the same thing. They are not synonyms.

Such passages as the following should make it even more abundantly clear: Matthew 11:19, "And wisdom is justified by her works." Luke 7:29 "And all the people when they heard, and all the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John." Surely, it does not take one with the wisdom of Solomon to understand that when they "justified God" they did not save God! When Jesus said in Luke 16:15 "And he said unto them, Ye are they that justify yourselves in the sight of men; but God knoweth your hearts," he did not teach nor imply that when they justified themselves they were therefore saved!

The term "justification" simply means "to make or declare one to be right". If the context is that in which a person is declared to be in a right relationship with God it often involves his being saved from his sins.

The Bible declares that Abraham was justified (declared to be just) when he offered his son on the altar (James 2:21). This shows that "faith without works is dead", and that faith was perfected by obedience (James 2:20). Neither Moses, Paul nor James were talking about Abraham being saved from his past sins and being translated into a different kingdom or relationship as in the case of an alien sinner today. We have heard it discussed in such a way as to make it almost sound as if Abraham got forgiveness of his sins by offering Isaac on the altar! The impression may be left that up to that time Abraham was out of fellowship with God - as an alien sinner - and when he offered his son he was justified -- forgiven, as a man is forgiven at the point of baptism! This is not so! A man was never forgiven either in the Old Testament or New by offering his son on the altar!

The real point is that EACH STEP ALONG THE WAY, Abraham was justified by faith. Note carefully: When all God required Abraham to do was TRUST, then Abraham stood in the right relationship with God (was justified) when he obeyed THAT command. When God required Abraham to ACT on his faith, his faith could not be reckoned unto him for righteousness until he ACTED.

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## The Greatest Event of History?

By Eddy Gilpin

In the minds of many Americans, September 10, 1987 was one of the grandest days in the history of this nation. The preparations for this day involved many security, political, and financial factors. Many individuals, groups, and divisions of government spent many days, decisions, and dollars to insure its success.

The city of San Antonio, Texas reportedly hired some 200 additional security officers for this occurrence in their city. Some of these were brought in from as far away as 200 miles. The city of Phoenix, Arizona reportedly spent some \$1.4 million on security measures for the event in that fair city. They also insured their "investment" with Lloyd's of London in case the scheduled attraction was cancelled. The city of Miami, Florida erected thousands of feet of chain link fence and barrier rope to contain the observant crowd. The city of Los Angeles, California, a sight of many historical events, called this "the greatest event ever in the city." In the city of San Francisco, the southbound lane of the Golden Gate Bridge was closed during the height of "rush hour" to insure safe passage of this procession.

There are many other examples from many other American cities that hosted this event that could be cited here. The red carpet treatment for which monumental events are noted was truly evident. Just what caused such excitement and summoned such security measures? The American arrival of the leader of one of the most prominent apostate religious groups, the Catholic Pope. His arrival was marked by a Presidential welcome, fanfare, and great excitement and anticipation.

(Continued on page 4)

There is another arrival about which one can read that is yet to occur, and that is many, many times greater than the aforementioned. Unlike the Pope's arrival, however, there will be no Presidential welcome at this event. There will be no gala festivities planned by the people of this nation. Not one dime will be spent for security. No city will hail it as the greatest event in its history. No newspaper will headline its occurrence nor relish it in review. No monument will mark where it originated, no chart will be given to map out its procession, and no T-shirt will display its wearer's attendance. And, although this arrival is just as sure to happen as did the world-renowned false teacher's, very few are preparing for it. The vast majority are either apathetic toward, insensitive to, or doubtful of its occurrence. What is it? The second coming of Jesus the Christ.

The Bible says: "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thes. 1:6-8). Realizing that "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise" (2 Pet. 3:9), the assurance of his return is just as much a part of reality as was his birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

Many spend countless hours and huge amounts of money preparing for insignificant events in their lives, yet seldom (if ever) even give a thought to the most significant occurrence of all. Those who crowded to see their "religious leader" spent much time in preparing to greet him. Yet they will spend no time in examining his doctrine or evaluating their system, and will blindly follow his every command to a hopeless eternal existence. Most people are just as concerned about other trivial matters as Catholics were about the arrival of the Pope. Compared to the hours spent in preparing for reunions, parties, outings, and vacations, the time spent in preparation for the Lord's return by many is almost nil. What about your life? Is it being spent in preparing for the unimportant events of time, or the all-important events of eternity? "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (1 Pet. 3:10, 11). Prepare to meet thy God!

## THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

## GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

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