

# Paul: Before & After His Trip to Damascus

## *Paul & His Travels - Lesson #2*

Scripture Text:

Acts 9:1-9 22:3-10 (Jerusalem) Acts 26:12 (King Agrippa)

I. Saul the Persecutor: "breathing out murderous threats"

Q What pictures do you think of or what comes to mind here? (Ps. 18:15)

*The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of breath from your nostrils.*

Contributing background of Paul that may have contributed to his rampage against the Church?

A. Ethnic Heritage Phil. 3:4b-6

*"If anyone thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."*

A citizen of Tarsus

1. The tribe of Benjamin (few could trace lineage to Benjamin).

Early Christian writers loved to trace Paul's activities as a persecutor of the Infant church as the fulfillment of Jacob's blessing of his 12 sons: Gen. 49:27

*... of Benjamin he says "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder." V.28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and*

*this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him."*

2. "A Hebrew of Hebrews" - a reference that both parents are Hebrew

#### B. Religious Heritage - Paul felt he must defend Judaism

1. A Pharisee ("separated ones" the religious leaders in Judaism, highly esteems religious purity, pursuers of the law legalistically)
2. devoted to the study of the law (Talmud)
3. A student of Gamaliel Acts 22:3 (the most noted Rabbi scholar of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century). Studied in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel.

#### C. Troubled in his conscience - In bondage to the works of the law (Talmud)

1. the Jerusalem counsel - he says to those early Judaizers who tried to put the gentiles under Jewish law

*Acts 15:10 "Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?"*

2. Rom. 7:10

*I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.*

### 3. Stephen's death

Speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem, giving his testimony about when he was in the Temple in a trance speaking to God . . . Acts. 22:19;-20

*"Lord," I replied, "these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.*

#### D. Threat of changing - old ways for new.

Jesus said "you can't put new wine in old wine skins."

People react violently to change - wanting to preserve the old ways and traditions.

Change = loss. Loss is painful.

*Phil. 3:7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing "Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish...."*

#### E. The "Scandal of the Cross"

*Gal. 5:11 Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense (scandalon) of the cross has been abolished.*

*Q Why would a Jew consider the Cross a scandal? (also 1 Cor. 1:23)*

That the Jewish Messiah should have been put to death by crucifixion on a Roman cross, was unthinkable. This was blasphemy. It was scandalous and this new Jewish sect was propagating a scandal.

For Deut. 21:23 plainly declares that God's curse resides on "anyone who is hung on a tree." This symbolized divine judgment and retribution to the crime and the criminal. God had condemned murder, and then hanging the criminal on a tree symbolized divine judgment and rejection.

*Gal. 3:13 He became a curse for us.*

For the Greek, deity and suffering were mutually exclusive. To Paul before his conversion and all Jews, a Messiah that dies and hangs on a tree (cross) is offensive and scandalous.

## II. Paul's Conversion Acts 9:3-9 (22:6-11; 26:12-18)

A. What does conversion mean? "to be changed" or "to turn". When a man is converted, it means his heart is changed. Jesus said "you must be converted to enter the Kingdom of Heaven".

### B. Five new things that happened in Paul's life

1. Got a new sight. Saw things differently. Jesus said to Nicodimus that

*"no one can see the Kingdom of Heaven unless he is born again."*

*In Him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it...*

You can have the words down, but the heart you cannot fake.

Paul Before: Didn't See

Persecuting the Lord  
Jesus was Messiah  
His ignorance & pride  
He rejected God  
Works Can't Save  
God's grace to sinners  
He was in darkness  
At enmity w/God  
The power of Cross  
God as merciful/loving

Paul After: Could now See

Christ on the cross  
Justified by grace not works  
Reconciled to God  
The Kingdom of God  
At peace with God  
Adopted as child of God  
Sanctified by Cross  
The unspeakable gift  
Imputed righteousness

2. A new submission.

Before Paul was rebellious/enmity/against and persecuting the Lord. In v. 4 He says "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me". He didn't say "the Church". He is united with His elect. You mistreat one of His children you do it to Him. He said, "If you do it to the least of these my brothers, you've done it unto to Me." We need to be careful how we treat one another. Compare to your own children.

After: The first thing Paul asked after his conversion is, *Acts 22:10* "Lord, what should I do?" There's a new hunger to please God and do what He says. Before he was rebellious, now willing to serve Christ and the Church. That's what a converted heart does, it says "yes" to the Lord.

3. A new sensibility.

Before: Paul was self-righteous. Paul thought he was blameless before the law and therefore not in need of forgiveness.

After: He understood he was not right before a holy God.  
[e.g., two men in Temple]

A converted heart has a new sensibility to sin in his life.

A recent pole reveals that in the U.S. 75% of people who claim they will go to Heaven when they die will get there on the basis of their good works.

When Paul went before the high priest in Acts 23:1, Paul looked at the Sanhedrin and said,

*"My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day."*

The high priest ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Paul said, *"God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You judge me according to the law yet you violate the law."* Those who were standing near Paul said, *"You dare to insult God's high priest?"* Paul replied, *"Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'" (Paul quotes Scripture against himself-admitted wrong).*

We should have this new sensibility toward others - our spouses, family members, all people and God, to be able to say when necessary, *"I was wrong, I have sinned, forgive me."*

4. A new security.

Before: Phil. 3:4b-6  
Position  
Worldly accomplishments  
His Pedigree  
Works of the law

After: Phil. 3:7  
*"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ"*

His position, his worldly accomplishments, his pedigree, religion, status, is but refuse. He now has rock bed assurance in Christ alone.

That's what conversion does. Now I'm not saying we don't from time-to-time question or have doubts, but there's an assurance in our heart that can't be shaken.

Some assume that they were converted when, "I prayed the prayer". A prayer doesn't change a person's heart. It's not because of a prayer, or raising your hand or going forward in a revival meeting. It's having your heart changed by the Lord Jesus Christ when He shines the light of the Gospel for you to see and know that you have been changed by the cross.

Did you change? You can't go back.

5. A new service.

Before:  
Biggest enemy of Cross  
Self-serving own ambition  
Persecuted believers

After:  
Biggest Soldier of Cross  
Apostle to Gentiles  
Wrote 13 of 27 NT Books  
Loved believers/church

Paul made the most of life before his conversion, and he did so after.

When you're converted, you want to be involved in the service of God, you want to be around the people of God, to participate in church, serve Him in the church. Is the service not there because the heart is not there?

I don't understand those who say they're Christians but have no need to attend church or serve there.

6. Conclusion. Only God can change the heart. With a changed heart, we can endure trials and hardships. When things aren't going well on the job, in our relationships, in every way.

III Paul reminds us of our conversion. Eph. 2:1-10. Remember what the Lord has done to change your heart.