

## **SANCTIFIED THROUGH A KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH.**

– ACTS 9:1-20. – APRIL 6. –

**"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." – Acts 3:19-21.**

CONVERSION is a proper enough word to use respecting the change of course necessary for Jews to make in becoming Christians. The word is used in a totally different sense, however, today, when we refer to the conversion of the dissolute and unbelieving to faith and obedience as disciples of Christ. Any radical change or revolution of thought or conduct is not improperly called conversion. It is well that this point be clearly enunciated, because the misapprehension is so general. Paul's conversion, for instance, is likened to the conversion of sinners, strangers, aliens and foreigners from God; whereas it more nearly resembled the conversion of a Christian of today from opposition to present truth to its love and service. Such conversions today are quite frequent – many who once burned Millennial Dawn now love it, and are doing all in their power to spread abroad its teachings, its views of the divine character and plan, its presentation of Messiah and his work, past and future. The change, or conversion of such persons is acknowledged to be remarkable – things they once hated now they love – things they once loved now they abominate – old things are become new to them, from the new standpoint, – the new light upon the divine plan which has shined into their hearts.

Saul of Tarsus, the bitter enemy of the Lord Jesus and his followers, was, at the same time, a zealous servant of God; and his persecutions of the truth, as he himself assures us, were undertaken

and prosecuted with zeal, because he thought that thus he did God service. He was a *good* man according to his light – but that light was a dim one. It was because he was at heart honest, sincere, good, loyal to the Lord, that a special miracle was wrought for the opening of the eyes of his understanding – that he might see the truth. His sincerity is amply attested by the promptness of his obedience as soon as his mental eyes were opened. He changed not as respected his zeal for God and his cause, but merely in the direction in which that zeal was exercised, and in the manner of its exercise, after it was subjected to the mind of Christ through the holy spirit received. So today while we have the Scriptural assurance that "None of the wicked shall understand," we have also the assurance that "The wise shall understand." The "wise" are not the "wicked," and we esteem those who have manifested a bitter opposition toward present truth to be not "wicked" at heart, but deceived, blinded.

We confidently expect that many of this class will yet be found amongst the "wise" to whom it shall be granted to understand the glorious things of the divine plan now being revealed through the Scriptures. It will be revealed to them because they are not of the wicked; but are like Saul of Tarsus, true children of God, whose zeal for him has been misdirected, misguided, misused. Some may kick against the pricks of facts, evidence, conscience, etc., longer than others; but eventually the Lord will grant to each of them some experience, or trial, the bitter experience of which will prepare them to see the light, the truth, in the right direction. Thus many of them sing, – "E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me."

Saul's father was a Roman citizen; probably a man of wealth and influence: he was a Jew of the holiness sect called Pharisees – the most exact and rigid in respect to the divine law. His son named after Saul, the first king of Israel, was also given a [R2969 : page 76] Roman name, Paul, because of his father's Roman citizenship. The Apostle's reference to having suffered the loss of all things for Christ's sake, is understood to imply that he had been disinherited by his father because

of his acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. Quite evidently he was poor in the beginning of his ministry, as is evident from his laboring at tent-making while preaching. The fact that subsequently the record represents him as a man of considerable influence, and with one or more servants, is considered by many to justify the inference that at a later date he inherited property, possibly by reason of his father's death. In no other way can his "own hired house" in Rome, and his influence with officials, shipmasters, etc., be accounted for; – little attention and consideration are given to a pauper prisoner.

As to Paul's personal appearance: An iron medal was recently found which purported to give a likeness. There is also a Roman tablet of about the fourth century, which shows Paul seated in a curule chair; both represent him as of fine appearance, somewhat bald, with beard, and a fine open countenance; about medium stature and weight. In the "*Acts of Paul and Thecla*," the first Christian romance, written about A.D. 150, there is a description of Paul which is probably the best, and a true tradition. In this he is described as "small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, well built, with eyebrows meeting; rather long nosed; with motions full of grace, for sometimes he seemed like a man, and sometimes like an angel. His manner was singularly winning." Very evidently his good education and contact with people in the higher walks of life gave him that grace and ease of manner and speech he manifested so conspicuously in the presence of the many high officials with whom he came in contact in various ways, as the representative of the Lord.

Our lesson connects with the narrative of Philip: while the latter was preaching Christ, Saul was breathing out threatenings against all of "this way," and doing all that he could to stamp out Christianity. In-as-much as the persecution had caused the scattering of believers, Saul was pursuing them – going even outside the province of Judea in his zeal to crush out that which he believed to be dangerous heresy. Some may wonder how he could be at heart loyal to the Lord, and yet in mind be so bitter against the Lord's faithful. Let us suggest how the

matter probably appeared to Saul's mind: Doubtless he was full of the Jewish sentiment respecting Messiah, respecting his nation, Israel; he considered it a certain and unquestionable fact that the Pharisees represented God and all the glorious prophecies and [R2969 : page 77] traditions of the nation; and that as Jehovah had favored this nation for now these many centuries, his favor, undoubtedly, must still be with it; so that if he had any further revelations to make they would undoubtedly come through the scribes and pharisees who "sit in Moses' seat" – as representatives of God and of the Law. He expected a Messiah of dignity and wealth and social standing in the nation; – if born in the natural way at all to be of one of the best families. He expected him to establish the dignity of Israel upon a plane similar to, but higher than that of Solomon; – that he would be a great leader and commander to his people, who would successfully carry them through every difficulty and opposition like as did Moses, Joshua, David, – but still greater, still grander, still more successful.

It is surely difficult for us to imagine how absurd would be the claims of Jesus, to a mind filled with such expectations. Jesus had neither wealth nor social standing nor influence amongst his own people; he was despised and rejected by the religious chiefs and elders of the nation Moses represented; he could have no power or influence whatever with the Roman Emperor or others – in the way of establishing Israel as the chief nation of the world, whose laws should ultimately extend to every nation, carrying with them the foretold Messianic blessings. No, from Paul's standpoint Jesus was a fraud, a deceiver, a false Messiah, his disciples were crack-brained dupes, and their doctrines were calculated to bring odium upon the religious rulers, who represented Moses in the nation, – calculated to stir up strife and division amongst the people and to mislead them and turn their minds entirely away from Moses and the Law and the hopes of Israel; and thus to hinder the good cause of God which had been gradually developing for centuries.

It was Paul's zeal for God and his cause that made him a persecutor, and not his love for persecution itself, – nor any brutal desires that gloried in the sufferings of others. His impulse was duty – toward God and toward his nation; for if the false doctrines spread it meant to him a spreading of opposition to both, and temporarily, at least, a frustration of the hopes of Israel – putting further off the glorious day of blessing for which all Israel had longed and hoped. Similarly we find today noble Christian people opposing the present truth in the very same spirit. It is not that they love or appreciate persecution, but that they believe they are doing God service, – that the promulgation of present truth means the shaking if not the overthrow of all the religious systems in which they trust – which they believe to be of divine origin, and through which they are hoping to bring about the Kingdom of God condition through missionary efforts, and the conversion of the world. Present truth declares all these efforts to be misdirected and futile; it points out the fall of Babylon and everything pertaining to her; it declares the establishing of God's Kingdom, and the exaltation of the royal priesthood outside of sectarian lines; ignoring sect membership, it acknowledges only "Israelites indeed," personally attached to the Redeemer. The revolution of thought, the *conversion* necessary now, is almost as great, and almost as difficult as was that which came to Paul and other sectarians of his nation. Let us rejoice then, if by the Lord's grace our eyes are opening to the truth; and let us have more of compassion for others who are still in the condition in which Saul of Tarsus was when he persecuted those of "this way."

The light which shone about Saul and those who went with him, was evidently a supernatural one, because the time of the manifestation was about noon (Acts 22:6) and the light was far brighter than that of the sun which at the same time, no doubt, was shining with great brightness, as is general in that country. The phenomenon was seen by the entire band, but its special features were known only to Saul; the others saw something of the light but they saw not the vision which Saul saw representing the Son of Man in his

glorified condition. The others heard a sound but did not distinguish the words which Saul heard. All fell to the ground, but all apparently were able to rise again and to stand wondering, except Saul whose eyes were seriously injured so that he was blind. Similarly Stephen saw a vision while those who were near him saw nothing: similarly John saw the dove descending upon Jesus while the others about saw nothing: similarly Jesus heard certain words of the Father while the multitude said it thundered. It is even mentioned here that the voice spoke in the Hebrew tongue: whereas those who were with Saul probably spoke in the Syriac or the Greek language.

Saul's astonished answer was, "Who art thou Lord?" This was the entire difficulty, he did not know the Lord; and as our Master himself declared, this lack of knowledge of the Son implied a lack of correct knowledge of the Father. We have his further explanation that however others in the past might have known something *about* God, they could never really know him, in the sense of personal acquaintance and appreciation of his character and spirit, except through the Son – a part of whose object in coming was to reveal the Father. So we might say of all who have persecuted the body of Christ, even when they did it ignorantly, it was because they did not know Jesus – because they had not received of his spirit in sufficient measure. Let us beware that no such spirit of persecution finds any sympathy or lodgment in our hearts, or any expression in our words or deeds. This will not mean, however, that we shall never offer criticism either of persons or doctrines; nor that we shall never reprove or rebuke and that publicly (2 Tim. 4:2); but it surely does mean that our reproofing and rebuking, of teachings and of teachers, shall be done from a Scriptural standpoint – giving reasons, giving them plainly but without bitterness, without harshness, without unkindness in any degree.

The statement, "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" quite probably well explains Paul's condition of body and mind at the time; but these words are not found

in the ancient Greek manuscripts: likewise the words, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," are omitted.

For three days Saul neither ate nor drank, and was totally blind. What a season for reflection! **[R2969 : page 78]** What a humiliation to think that he had fought against the truth! What prayers for forgiveness, and what pledges of consecration to Jesus, we may imagine filled his heart during those days! Unquestionably it was a time of good resolution as respected the future, if peradventure, the Lord would graciously forgive him and grant an opportunity to retrieve the past. He had a dream, too, and in it he beheld a man anointing his eyes, restoring his sight. On the fourth day a man, a poor and humble disciple of Jesus, named Ananias, came, not without fear, to visit Saul; – knowing him by reputation, as an enemy of all who believed in "this way;" knowing that he was lodged in the house of one who was not a friend of the truth, but assured of the Lord that Saul was praying and would welcome him, having been informed in a vision: Ananias when sent of the Lord courageously did his part.

There is a lesson here for all of us; the Lord did not send one of the Apostles from Jerusalem, nor **[R2970 : page 78]** was Ananias one of the elders or deacons, as far as we know; but he was a plain, humble, obedient disciple, "A broken and emptied vessel, for the Master's use made meet." Let all of the Lord's dear people be similarly filled with the Lord's spirit, and on the alert; emptied of self, feeling their own brokenness and littleness, let them be ready and anxious to do God's service; that they may be used of him as opportunity shall occur. What a blessing must have come to Ananias in connection with his service! Ever afterward he could think how he had been a humble instrument in the Lord's hands in carrying a blessing to one who subsequently became such a noble servant of the cross of Christ. Likewise some of the Lord's faithful ones in recent times have taken the Lord's message either by word or tract or pamphlet, and have opened the eyes of some who subsequently have become mighty for the truth and for the pulling down of the strongholds of error. What a rejoicing such have had in

the privileges of their service! We know not which will prosper, this or that, therefore let us diligently use every opportunity as it may come to us; praying the while for much wisdom and grace and many opportunities for service.

The Lord's foreknowledge is clearly displayed in verses 15,16; he knew Saul – knew of his honesty and of his zeal; – he knew that this honesty and zeal as soon as they should be rightly directed would make just such an instrument for his service as he desired to use. The Apostle Paul recognized this himself, and even traces divine providence so far back as his birth, declaring that the Lord had chosen him from his mother's womb. He could see in the light of subsequent events how all of his affairs, from earliest childhood, had been tending in a favorable direction to prepare him for his work of ministry, as an apostle; – and even his experiences as a persecutor proved profitable, for they humbled his estimate of himself and undoubtedly gave him a larger degree of sympathy for those suffering from a similar blindness, increasing his helpfulness toward them. This does not signify, however, that God had predetermined that Paul should have a place in the Kingdom: that he determined for himself, – making his calling and election sure by faith and obedience. The Lord providentially guided his steps in childhood and youth, so that he learned certain lessons, and gained certain preparations which might be useful in due time; and in due time he opened the eyes of his understanding, knowing well what would be his own choice thereafter. Nevertheless, this same Apostle declares that even after having preached the gospel to others, he, himself, might have become a castaway; – having borne the Lord's name before the Gentiles and Israelites and kings, and having suffered great things for the Lord's name's sake, he might still fail to maintain, faithfully to the end, the character of an overcomer, and thus fail to become a joint-heir with his Lord.

Ananias coming to Saul introduced himself beautifully – he had the Lord's spirit: he was glad to know Saul as a brother; glad to forget that he had been a persecutor of the Church; he did not upbraid him;



he did not say, You deserve eternal torment; nor You deserve a cowhiding; – he made no unkind allusion to the past, but addressed him on the contrary in the light of the information the Lord had given him, saying, "**Brother Saul.**" There is a beautiful lesson here for many of the Lord's people who seem more disposed to chide and upbraid than to commend and rejoice with former persecutors: this is one of the necessary lessons to be learned by all – it is an evidence of the indwelling of the spirit of Christ, the spirit of love, parts of which are brotherly kindness, gentleness, meekness.

Great scales fell from Saul's eyes, and a measure of natural sight was restored; but oh, how much greater was the spiritual sight which he received, – the illumination of his heart, his mind! The darkness and obscurity of tradition upon the Law and the Prophets were now largely dissipated, because he saw Jesus – Jesus as the Redeemer suffering death for the sins of the whole world; – Jesus glorified, directing the election of the Church, his members, his body, his joint-heirs, – and who were, by and by, to be with Jesus the Messiah in glory and majesty to bless, to restore, to uplift Israel and all the families of the earth. True, the evidences are that Paul never fully recovered his eyesight; and he likewise testifies that his spiritual sight never reached perfection, saying, "Now, we see through a glass obscurely, then, face to face."

Having taken his stand for Christ, he acknowledged him in the usual way, by baptism, and not by joining a sectarian system. He joined the body of Christ, and thus became a fellow-member with *all* who are joined to Christ, the one Head of the one body. Immediately he met with the Lord's people; he was no longer ashamed of them; he could not now do too much for them; any honor and dignity which were his by virtue of his birth, and wealth, and Roman citizenship, were none too good to be sacrificed for the Lord, and having learned that in persecuting the Lord's people he persecuted the Lord himself, so he now understood that in meeting with the Lord's people and honoring them, he was meeting with and honoring the

Lord. Forthwith he preached Jesus. He preached him as the Son of God, the one in whom the prophecies of the past were being fulfilled, the Messiah who had redeemed, and who in [R2970 : page 79] God's due time would deliver Israel and the world from the bondage of Satan – sin and death.

### OUR GOLDEN TEXT.

This is from Peter's discourse shortly after the day of Pentecost; his words were doubtless in some degree prophecies; they point down to the second coming of our Lord – though Peter may not have comprehended how far distant that event would be. The exhortation to be converted to the Lord was delivered to the Jews who were already his typical people, in covenant relationship, but who needed now to accept the conditions of the New Covenant and to make a corresponding change in their lives – from membership in the house of servants, to membership in the house of sons – from being amongst those for whom atonement sacrifices were made year by year continually, which could never take away sin, to be of those accepting the one sacrifice of Christ and its redeeming merit, – to trust for a present covering for their sins, through faith in the precious blood, and to hope for an ultimate *blotting out* of them at the second coming of the Lord, as the text declares.

So long as the believer is blemished physically, mentally, morally, by sin, so long he has the evidence that his sins are not *blotted out*. He may, nevertheless, rejoice greatly as the prophet indicates, saying "Blessed is the man whose sins are *covered*," but he should look forward longingly to the time when every evidence of the sin, every mark of guilt, will be so completely *blotted out* as to need no further covering. This to the saints of the gospel age will occur at the second coming of Christ, when they shall be "changed," in an instant, receiving the new spiritual bodies which the Lord has promised them in the first resurrection. To the world this blotting out of sins will come gradually, during the Millennial age. In proportion as each being

comes into full harmony with the great Prophet, Priest and King then reigning, each will gradually experience the blessings of restitution – eliminating all traces of evil and sin, and restoring gradually to the original perfection lost in Adam, redeemed by Jesus, and restored by the blotting out of sins under the ministry of his Kingdom.

