

HOW WAS PAUL SAVED?

By G. D. FULTON (died 1995)

WE LIVE in a war-torn world where men have been butchering and killing one another from Cain and Abel until now. The only safe thing for each one of us to do is to seek the Lord, prepare to meet God. Sooner or later this old world, according to God's Word, will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus Christ. That will be when He comes back to the earth again.

And so—since the salvation of your soul is the most important need of this hour or any hour—let us look a bit into the conversion of Saul. We have so many easy-going preachers today who are getting their hearers to join in some religion and make them feel that "Heaven is sure when they die." But in this message I would challenge each listener by the experience of Saul of Tarsus. You ought to take time to read *the 9th chapter of Acts*, the greatest and clearest story of a conversion experience found in the history of the church. You need to find out what actually happened when this great man met the Lord.

Saul of Tarsus was a religious man, but still a natural descendant of Adam, because never in all his religion before now had he been enlightened or arrested by the Spirit of God. He belonged to the temple up in Jerusalem, no doubt. He was very religious but a LOST MAN. In his religious activities he was very devoted and actually thought he was doing the will of God when going about to destroy the true people of God and preachers of the gospel of Christ. As we shall read in this 9th chapter of Acts, he went to the high priest and got permission to round up all the people who believed in Christ and bring them back in bonds to Jerusalem for trial. Not many days before, the Lord Jesus Himself had been tried, condemned and crucified in this same city—and by these same religionists.

And so here is Saul of Tarsus fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the natural mind, even through a false religion, just as any other natural man will do who has not been born of the Spirit of God. By nature *a child of wrath* (Eph. 2:3), an alien from the grace of God, yet Saul was *high in religion!* And we see signs of this all about us today in the large groups of people taken into religion without the new birth. The wrath of God was yet abiding on Saul as he journeyed on towards Damascus—he had heard the gospel preached and had witnessed the sufferings and death of the faithful martyr Stephen (Acts 7). The Bible says, "*He that believeth not*" ... when he hears the truth preached, the wrath of God abides on that person. "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him*" (John 3:36). Therefore a great responsibility rests on any man who hears the gospel and

sees the evidences in the lives of the Lord's people (as Saul saw in Stephen), and yet does not believe!

Notice Paul's conversion: "*And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 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*" (vs. 1, 2). Notice the intent of the heart of this religious person—persecuting the people of God, the humble followers of Christ, and defending his own false religion.

See what happened, and it makes us rejoice to see God's mercy displayed. "*And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven*" (vs. 3). What happened? He met the Lord, and the Lord who is sovereign met him. We are dealing now with a great and sovereign God. According to His Word, God calls whom He pleases in mercy and whom He wills He hardens (Read Romans 9:18). Oh, what a responsibility to hear the Word of God! You may be drifting under the hardening of God as Pharaoh did. Many times in the Bible it says that GOD hardened Pharaoh's heart (See Exodus 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27, also Romans 9:16-17). And this Sovereign God, this God of mercy, could harden you in His wrath, so pay attention to this story of God's grace and mercy in Paul's salvation.

TO BE SAVED, we see here what must happen to this natural man, or to any other natural man. Listen now. By nature he had a heart of unbelief, but God *unlocked* Saul's heart by His grace—He *opened* his mind, the mind of flesh, and made him realize his awful condition before God. And the Holy Spirit of God has to do this same thing to you and to me if we ever come to know the Lord! When Saul's unbelief had been shaken and his heart awakened, he could now understand the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14).

"*And he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him*" (vs. 4). And you will have to hear the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ communicating to you by His Holy Spirit if you experience what this great religious man, Saul of Tarsus, experienced here on the Damascus Road. Paul is a "*pattern unto them which should hereafter believe*" (1 Tim. 1:16). Listen: "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" There Paul learned that he must deal with the Lord Himself. It's not a deal you make with the preacher. Each one who comes to know the Lord must come into contact with the Lord, come before Him guilty and plead your own case and do your own praying. There is no special power in the prayers of some preacher! "*For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Rom. 10:13).

"*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*" (vs. 5). It

was hard for this religious sinner to fight against the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he could not ignore it any longer! Notice the next verse: "*And he trembling and astonished said, Lord*"—calling the One he had been persecuting his Lord. He really bows to His Lordship there in the dust of the road. And that's what a poor sinner has to do in repentance, come forsaking all and surrendering completely to the Lord Jesus Christ. And you'd better examine your own relationship with God now! Time is running out for each one of us in this world, and you need to experience this great salvation that Paul experienced before you leave this world, or you'll be lost and ruined forever!

"*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" (vs. 6). He is completely broken now, totally surrendered to doing the will of the Lord. "*And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*"

Before this experience, Saul had been only a natural man in religion. I want you to notice what the Bible says about the natural man: "*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Cor. 2:14). You cannot understand the gospel until the Holy Spirit comes and UNLOCKS your heart of unbelief and unlocks that fleshly mind. You may have "gone to church" all your life, and you may have held all the high offices in religion, and yet be but a natural man without the Spirit of God. "*If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His*" (Rom. 8:9), and at the judgment he'll end up like the foolish virgins—having a religion but with no oil in the lamp.

ONE OR TWO THOUGHTS IN CLOSING:

How did you get into the kingdom of God? *Paul didn't walk a church aisle.* He met the Lord and fell down guilty before Him.

Saul was not even seeking the Lord. The Lord sought him. And I experienced this. I was already a church member, but when I dropped into an old-time revival something happened to me. The Lord by His Spirit convicted me.

There was nobody preaching to Saul when the Lord called him. No person could boast about "getting Paul saved!" And, my, it is terrible to hear people talking about how many souls they have won to the Lord. NO! It is the Lord alone who saves a poor sinner! And that poor sinner who is truly born into the kingdom of God will come in repentance and faith, dealing with the Lord Himself, as Saul did.

It is a sad time in religion today in America as well as the world. But all we can do, if we have been born of the Spirit, is to preach the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then when lost people are brought under

conviction, when the Holy Spirit is dealing with them and unlocks their hearts (opens their hearts as Lydia in Acts 16:14)—*then all we can do is point them to the Lamb of God* (John 1:29). Then the Lord will come in by His grace and save and give that person His Holy Spirit to comfort him and to guide him from then on to the long ages of eternity.

TRUE RELIGION FOR SAUL AND FOR YOU is more than joining some denomination, some church. It is to be born of the Spirit! And you **MUST** be born again—I'll tell you that—before you can *qualify* as a member of the Lord's church! That is the only true church, and if you belong to it then you are safe for all time and eternity.

May we all examine our relationship with God. Have you experienced what Saul of Tarsus experienced when the Lord saved him and made him into Paul the apostle?

Have YOU met the Lord who saved Paul?

[**Note:** This was a radio sermon by my late father **Gabriel D. Fulton** (1909-1995). It was preached in the 1980s over Station WKMT in Kings Mtn. NC, and subsequently published in tract form. This message has also been translated into the French, Spanish and Swahili languages, and they are available in printed form, if you wish to distribute some of them. Contact Wylie Fulton]