

The Conversion of Saul

Acts 9:1-16 Bible Commentary

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

Saul's conversion is recounted three times in the Book of Acts: the first time in Acts 9:1-16, the second time in Acts 22:1-11, and the third time in Acts 26:9-18. When our sovereign God chooses to repeat events and teachings in His word, we should consider very carefully just what He is saying to us.

At the time of Saul's conversion, he was still thoroughly intent on persecuting the church. He had made no decision at all to come to Christ. In Acts 9:1-2, we see that he was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord", and that he was on his way to Damascus to bring back to Jerusalem in chains any followers of Christ he found there, to be punished (See also Acts 22:4-5 and Acts 26:9-12).

Saul had heard the Gospel message. He knew what it was about, and he was opposed to it. We see from these accounts of his conversion in the Book of Acts that he had remained steadfastly opposed to the Gospel, right up until the instant in time when he was confronted by Jesus Christ Himself.

However, this persecutor of the church and enemy of the Faith was one whom God had foreknown from before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5). In His time, though Saul was overtly hostile to the Gospel of Christ, God intervened in his life to bring him to faith. God forcefully overcame Saul's own will, which was hostile to the Gospel message as is the case with all unregenerate men (Romans 8:7). And as a result of God's forceful intervention in his life, Saul then responded to Jesus Christ as his Lord for the first time, as we see recorded in Acts 22:

“But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’ And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.’ (Acts 22:6-10)

If we read the text in the passages of the book of Acts recounting Saul’s conversion, and if we refrain from adding our own thoughts and conditions to the text, we will come to this conclusion: *Saul got saved contrary to his own will, and apart from his own decision in the matter.* At the time of Saul’s conversion he was still hostile to the Gospel message; he had made no decision to come to Christ. God intervened in Saul’s life to change him and bring him to faith, and He does the same in the lives of every one of us who comes to faith in Christ.

Paul himself emphasized the inability of unregenerate men, all unregenerate men, to respond to the things of God when he wrote: “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for *it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:6-8, emphasis added).

Paul taught us in these verses that “the mind set on the flesh”, or the mind of unregenerate man, is hostile toward God; it will not subject itself to the law of God *because it is not even able to do so*. Sinful, unregenerate man is unable to accept or subject himself to the word of God, and therefore he cannot please God. Paul’s teaching in these verses is consistent with his teaching in Romans 3:10-12, where he emphasized that no one seeks God, not even one. Since no unregenerate man will seek God, because he is unable to do so, how then can man be saved? How can sinful man be freed from his inability to respond to the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ and through him alone?

The answer is that God must intervene in a man’s life to overcome his own will, which is hostile toward Him, and He must forcefully and effectually bring him to faith, just as He did in the life of Saul. When God does this, a man’s regeneration has occurred; he has been born again (John 3:3). The evidence that he has been born again is that he responds to Jesus Christ as Lord, and he believes the Gospel message, just as happened in the life of Saul. This is the lesson that God communicates to His people through the conversion of Saul, which is recounted three times in the Book of Acts. And this same teaching is consistently communicated through many other passages of Scripture as well.

So what can we learn from the three biblical accounts of the conversion of Saul, who became the Apostle Paul after his conversion? The Scriptures reveal that Saul was openly hostile to the Gospel message, and even actively involved in persecuting the church, right up until the moment in time when God forcefully intervened in his life to bring him to faith, apart from his own will and apart from any decision of his own.

The lesson for all of God's people that is given to us from these three accounts of the conversion of Saul in the book of Acts, from Romans 8:6-8, and from many other passages of Scripture as well, is that all men are by nature hostile toward God, and that those who do come to faith do so not because of a decision made of their own will and volition, but because God chose to intervene in their lives to bring them to faith in His John Jesus Christ.