

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Third Quarter 2018: *The Book of Acts*

Lesson 5 The Conversion of Paul

Read for this week's study

Acts 26:9–11; Deuteronomy 21:23; Acts 9:1–20; 1 Corinthians 9:1; Galatians 1:1; Acts 9:20–30.

Memory Text

“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel’ ” (Acts 9:15, NIV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Persecutor of the Church
- III. On the Damascus Road
- IV. Ananias's Visit
- V. The Beginning of Paul's Ministry
- VI. Return to Jerusalem
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “The conversion of Saul of Tarsus (who became Paul) was one of the most remarkable events in the history of the apostolic church. The importance of Paul, however, goes way beyond conversion itself, for Paul is certainly not the only enemy of the church to have become a genuine Christian. The issue, instead, relates to what he ended up doing for the sake of the gospel.” (Sabbath afternoon) Why does Luke devote so much space to the story of Paul?
2. Do zealous people often change their mind? What can we learn from that for our ministry to people?
3. “Paul was absolutely convinced that, by attacking the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, he was doing God's work in purifying Judaism from that dangerous and dreadful heresy. To his dismay, however, he learned not only that Jesus was alive but also that by inflicting suffering on His believers he was attacking Jesus Himself.” (Monday's lesson)
4. What lessons can be learned from the ways God treated Paul to encourage him towards conversion? What is the role of conscience in the life of a believer?

5. “Paul’s question ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ (Acts 22:10, NKJV) indicates contrition in view of his actions up to that moment, but more important, it expresses an unconditional willingness to let Jesus guide his life from then on.” (Tuesday’s lesson) What does Paul’s question reveal about his picture of God? How did Paul’s conversion influence and transform his picture of God?
6. What is the significance of the story of Ananias in Acts 9? Why didn’t God tell him about Saul’s conversion? The humble ministry of Ananias and Barnabas contributed to the foundation of the far-reaching ministry of Paul. Is it possible that the world does not have many “Pauls” today, because God cannot find many people like Ananias and Barnabas? What is the implication for our connecting with people?
7. Why do people often have a tendency to relay “flashy” religious experiences (like Paul on the Damascus road), rather than appreciate the humble ministry of Ananias who disappears into oblivion after performing his part in the story?
8. It is easy to assume that Paul began preaching his powerful sermons the week following his conversion. Why did Paul need 3-15 years before he could exert the influence he came to have in the early church? What is the lesson for an activist spirituality—a style that Adventism is often known for?
9. “Paul knew from the start that he would face challenges (Acts 9:16). Opposition, persecution, and suffering from various sources would be a constant in his ministry...” (Wednesday’s lesson) “Paul’s efforts met with strong opposition, posing a threat to his own life. In a vision, Jesus told him to leave Jerusalem for his own safety (Acts 22:17–21).” (Thursday’s lesson)
10. Why do you think Paul’s ministry encountered such opposition from both inside and outside the church? What makes it so difficult to change long held opinions? What can be done about it with God’s help?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

At first, as you know from the record, Saul also obeyed for the wrong reason. He worshipped a tyrannical God who would be pleased to see people persecuted, imprisoned, even stoned to death—to force them to obey. That was the kind of God he worshipped. He had many texts (he thought) to support it. And he conducted his evangelism in the name of that God. That is why he felt free to use so much force.

Then on the Damascus road he saw the light, and the truth set him free. What a difference! He didn’t change his Bible or even the name of his God. He didn’t change the day he worshipped for Sabbath, or his diet, or his dress. What did he change that day? All Saul changed was his picture of God. And from then on, who has spoken more eloquently about freedom and faith

and grace? And further, about Christ as the end of legalism as the way of being saved, and that we're not under law, but we're under grace because we worship a gracious God! {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #12, "God's Law is No Threat to Our Freedom" recorded April, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/12MMCAG>*

Lou: But here is Saul or Paul on his way to Damascus, and you've already referred to how Paul misunderstood. But he is on the way. And Acts says that a great light flashed from Heaven and he falls to the ground. That's a very impressive use of force or power. Didn't it win Paul?

Graham: No, it just floored him. But God got his attention. And I would judge, with a man like Saul, nothing less would have gotten his attention. He was a firebrand!

Now, already he was quite tormented within because of the behavior of Stephen. And when Stephen said, "Lay this not to their charge," he must have remembered the report that when that heretic died on the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them." And Saul knew his Old Testament so well; he knew that that's the picture of the ideal. And so in order to stifle the prickings of his conscience, instead of settling the theological problem he went out to conduct another evangelistic effort.

So God floored him on the Damascus road, and he got his attention. But then notice what God did. He just said, "Saul, you're having trouble with your conscience, aren't you?" And he said, "Yes, I really am."

"Then why don't you give in?"

"I give in. What do you want me to do?"

And Christ didn't say, "The following, and be sure you do it!" No, the Lord said, "Your way is to overwhelm people. Mine is: go and talk to Ananias, one of your peers. That's all I'm going to say." And from then on, Paul never pressed anybody. He said, "If you disagree with me, well—let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Before that he put them in prison or had them stoned. Now he realizes that persuasion can only really come when in the highest sense of freedom you are convinced yourself—and he adopted that method. Now he knew God. He didn't change his diet, his Sabbath, his dress, his Bible, even the name of his God. But he changed his picture of God.

But he wouldn't have done it if God had not hit him with a two-by-four on the Damascus road.

Lou: So the show of force there was to get attention and that fulfilled a function. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #7 with Lou Venden, "The

Question of Authority” recorded February, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/7MMCAG>

“Then after three years I went up to headquarters, to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days.” And you wonder what they talked about for fifteen days. I should think Paul would want a first-hand report from a close witness of all the things Jesus had said and done. I should think Paul would want Peter to tell him what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane. And I wonder if Peter confessed how he took the sword out and cut Malchus’ ear off. Wouldn’t Paul want to know what happened in the upper room? And I wonder if Peter told him how none of the disciples volunteered to wash the feet, even of the Son of God, the night before he died, and how terrible they felt afterwards. And of Peter’s foolish speech when he said, “Others may let you down, but I will lay down my life for you,” and yet he was cursing and swearing a few hours later to prove that he didn’t know Christ.

I wonder how much of that Peter told Paul, and how Paul received that. Those two had quite a relationship, and one of the last things Peter mentions in his second letter is “our dear brother Paul, who wrote some things in his letters which are difficult to understand.” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Galatians, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/65MMPOGIA66>

Further Study with Ellen White

At the gate of Damascus the vision of the Crucified One changed the whole current of his life. The persecutor became a disciple, the teacher a learner. The days of darkness spent in solitude at Damascus were as years in his experience. The Old Testament Scriptures stored in his memory were his study, and Christ his teacher. To him also nature’s solitudes became a school. To the desert of Arabia he went, there to study the Scriptures and to learn of God. He emptied his soul of prejudices and traditions that had shaped his life, and received instruction from the Source of truth. {Ed 65.3}

Faith is the medium through which truth or error finds a lodging place in the mind. It is by the same act of mind that truth or error is received, but it makes a decided difference whether we believe the Word of God or the sayings of men. When Christ revealed Himself to Paul, and he was convinced that he was persecuting Jesus in the person of His saints, he accepted the truth as it is in Jesus. A transforming power was manifested on mind and character, and he became a new man in Christ Jesus. He received the truth so fully that neither earth nor hell could shake his faith. {1SM 346.3}

When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. {SD 23.2}

The grace that Christ implants in the soul . . . creates in man enmity against Satan. Without this converting grace and renewing power, man would continue the captive of Satan, a servant ever ready to do his bidding. But the new principle in the soul creates conflict where hitherto had been peace. The power which Christ imparts, enables man to resist the tyrant and usurper. Whoever is seen to abhor sin instead of loving it, whoever resists and conquers those passions that have held sway within, displays the operation of a principle wholly from above. {FLB 117.3}

The gifts of Jesus are ever fresh and new. . . . Each new gift increases the capacity of the receiver to appreciate and enjoy the blessings of the Lord. He gives grace for grace. There can be no failure of supply. If you abide in Him, the fact that you receive a rich gift today insures the reception of a richer gift tomorrow. . . . {AG 104.2}

The work of grace upon the heart is not an instantaneous work. It is effected by continuous, daily watching and believing the promises of God. The repentant, believing one, who cherishes faith and earnestly desires the renewing grace of Christ, God will not turn away empty. He will give him grace. And ministering angels will aid him as he perseveres in his efforts to advance.—Manuscript 55, 1910. {Ev 287.3}

In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. {SC 68.1}

Many have an idea that they must do some part of the work alone. They have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, but now they seek by their own efforts to live aright. But every such effort must fail. Jesus says, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way. David says, “I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” Psalm 16:8. {SC 69.1}

Every human being is the object of loving interest to Him who gave His life that He might bring men back to God. Souls guilty and helpless, liable to be destroyed by the arts and snares of Satan, are cared for as a shepherd cares for the sheep of his flock. {MH 162.1}

The work of transformation from unholiness to holiness is a continuous one. Day by day God labors for man's sanctification, and man is to co-operate with Him, putting forth persevering efforts in the cultivation of right habits. He is to add grace to grace; and as he thus works on the plan of addition, God works for him on the plan of multiplication. Our Saviour is always ready to hear and answer the prayer of the contrite heart, and grace and peace are multiplied to His faithful ones. Gladly He grants them the blessings they need in their struggle against the evils that beset them. {AA 532.2}

In every human being He discerned infinite possibilities. He saw men as they might be, transfigured by His grace—in "the beauty of the Lord our God." Psalm 90:17. Looking upon them with hope, He inspired hope. Meeting them with confidence, He inspired trust. Revealing in Himself man's true ideal, He awakened, for its attainment, both desire and faith. In His presence souls despised and fallen realized that they still were men, and they longed to prove themselves worthy of His regard. In many a heart that seemed dead to all things holy, were awakened new impulses. To many a despairing one there opened the possibility of a new life. {Ed 80.1}

Christ bound them to His heart by the ties of love and devotion; and by the same ties He bound them to their fellow men. With Him love was life, and life was service. "Freely ye have received," He said, "freely give." Matthew 10:8. {Ed 80.2}

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17. {SC 57.1}

A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or trace all the chain of circumstances in the process of conversion; but this does not prove him to be unconverted. Christ said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." John 3:8. Like the wind, which is invisible, yet the effects of which are plainly seen and felt, is the Spirit of God in its work upon the human heart. That regenerating power, which no human eye can see, begets a new life in the soul; it creates a new being in the image of God. While the work of the Spirit is silent and imperceptible, its effects are manifest. If the heart has been renewed by the Spirit of God, the life will bear witness to the fact. While we cannot do anything to change our hearts or to bring ourselves into harmony with God; while we must not trust at all to ourselves or our good works, our lives will reveal whether the grace of God is dwelling within us. A change will be seen in the character, the habits, the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are. The character is revealed,

not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts. {SC 57.2}

The leaven hidden in the flour works invisibly to bring the whole mass under its leavening process; so the leaven of truth works secretly, silently, steadily, to transform the soul. The natural inclinations are softened and subdued. New thoughts, new feelings, new motives, are implanted. A new standard of character is set up—the life of Christ. The mind is changed; the faculties are roused to action in new lines. Man is not endowed with new faculties, but the faculties he has are sanctified. The conscience is awakened. We are endowed with traits of character that enable us to do service for God. {COL 98.3}

Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to the peace and joy that reign within. We drink in the love of Christ, as the branch draws nourishment from the vine. If we are grafted in Christ, if fiber by fiber we have been united with the Living Vine, we shall give evidence of the fact by bearing rich clusters of living fruit. If we are connected with the Light, we shall be channels of light, and in our words and works we shall reflect light to the world. Those who are truly Christians are bound with the chain of love which links earth to heaven, which binds finite man to the infinite God. The light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ shines in the hearts of His followers, to the glory of God. {1SM 337.2}

While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God. {DA 173.1}

Received into the heart, the leaven of truth will regulate the desires, purify the thoughts, and sweeten the disposition. It quickens the faculties of the mind and the energies of the soul. It enlarges the capacity for feeling, for loving. {COL 101.1}

And the effort to bless others will react in blessings upon ourselves. This was the purpose of God in giving us a part to act in the plan of redemption. He has granted men the privilege of becoming partakers of the divine nature and, in their turn, of diffusing blessings to their fellow men. This is the highest honor, the greatest joy, that it is possible for God to bestow upon men. Those who thus become participants in labors of love are brought nearest to their Creator. {SC 79.1}

Never feel that Christ is far away. He is always near. His loving presence surrounds you. {FLB 62.8}

He who slumbers not, who is continually at work for the accomplishment of His designs, will carry forward His work. He will thwart the purposes of wicked men and will bring to confusion the counsels of those who plot mischief against His people. {PK 176.1}

But though the conflict is a ceaseless one, none are left to struggle alone. Angels help and protect those who walk humbly before God. Never will our Lord betray one who trusts in Him. As His children draw near to Him for protection from evil, in pity and love He lifts up for them a standard against the enemy. Touch them not, He says; for they are Mine. I have graven them upon the palms of My hands. {PK 570.4}

The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul. No one who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but, thank God, we have a mighty Saviour, who cast out the evil one from heaven. {MH 94.3}

God has angels whose whole work is to draw those who shall be heirs of salvation. Whenever one takes a step toward Jesus, Jesus is taking steps toward him. The angels' work is to keep back the powers of Satan (MS 17, 1893). {7BC 922.5}

The Bible shows us God in His high and holy place, not in a state of inactivity, not in silence and solitude, but surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of holy beings, all waiting to do His will. Through these messengers He is in active communication with every part of His dominion. By His Spirit He is everywhere present. Through the agency of His Spirit and His angels He ministers to the children of men. {MH 417.2}