

What to Do?

Harmony M.B.C., Date Unknown

Robert P. Myers

Acts 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

Acts 9:2 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.

Acts 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

Acts 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, **Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?**

Acts 9:5 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.**

Acts 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, **Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.**

We are almost all familiar with this great historical event in the annals of Christianity, and we all love to think about it when we begin to talk about a person's conversion to Christ. Saul of Tarsus stands out as one of the great examples of how the Lord can change the direction and thinking of a person through the process of revealing Himself in a salvation experience. We all want to remember that Saul was busy being a religious man who was supposedly serving God by getting rid of heretics when the Lord showed him the real truth about Himself and what serving God really means.

One of the things that we don't often think about when we read this part of scripture or begin to contemplate the conversion of Saul, is the fact that practicing a religion, even one that is supposedly aimed at serving God, does not mean a person is saved, nor does it mean that a person is pleasing the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, there have been a lot of religious fanatics down through the centuries that have been very zealous toward serving God according to what they think is right and proper, but have been way off-base in what they did. I could use Saul of Tarsus as an example, but since the time of Saul, there have been many others.

For instance, I would use the example of the religious fanatics of the Inquisition period that began around the 12th century within the Catholic Church in France and spread across the civilized world. Their intent in all their zeal was to wipe out those which they had declared to be heretics, and they killed, imprisoned, or banished millions of our Baptist forefathers then known as Waldenses, Cathars, and generally Anabaptists.

The excuse used for these punishments by the Catholic Church and the secular law enforcement which helped them was said to “not take place primarily and per se for the correction and good of the person punished, but for the public good in order that others may become terrified and weaned away from the evils they would commit.” In other words, a moral and religious code enforced by law. In other words, state enforced religious beliefs. Nobody can deny that here was a so-called Christian religious exercise that was kept in force by zeal for what they believed. But, was it in alignment with the teachings of Christ? It was not.

I point out all this misdirected religious zeal in order to draw our attention to something that happened to Paul there on the road to Damascus...something that was the direct opposite of misdirected religious zeal. It is encapsulated in his question to Christ and it stands as a hallmark of true Christian conversion to this day. That something changes everything about religious expression and service to God. The question Saul asked Christ was simply “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” This is what I want us to think about today. The implications of Saul’s attitude toward the Lord can be a guiding light for every one of us if we are serious about pleasing our Lord.

I. The first thing Saul’s question brings to light is that his previously held religious suppositions were out the window.

- ❖ We have all probably learned while reading scripture about Paul, that he was pretty sure of his religious ambitions and felt confident he was on the right track with what he was thinking and doing. Listen to his summary of his religious profile he had back in the day when he was the Jewish zealot: **Php. 3:5-6** Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of the tribe of Benjamin*, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.
- ❖ But on this day...the day he came to know Christ...everything was turned upside down and all his preconceptions and teachings took on a different meaning.
- ❖ In other words, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” was the great indicator that suddenly Saul of Tarsus did not have all the answers, and did not think so either.
- ❖ Folks, there is no room in the service to Christ for chasing one’s own preconceived notions of what one’s religion is supposed to be and at the same time having the genuine mind-change that says, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”
- ❖ I think there is a danger that exists for every believer about duty and service; that danger is that we can be led off by preconceived notions of what we are supposed to be doing in our spiritual lives...preconceived notions born of human ideas, human conceived religion, human reasoning that from the fleshly standpoint makes sense...is reasonable. When this kind of thinking stands by itself, and is not preceded by a sincere and spiritual attitude which brings the question “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” then we are in danger of following something besides Christ.

II. The second thing we can assume about Saul's question is that he was now at a place to quit being self-willed and start being submissive

- ❖ “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” is the question of a heart that has come to realize that it isn't the authority on anything, but there is One who is.
- ❖ Like Saul of Tarsus, humans like to invent their own universe of religion, but like Paul the apostle, the born again believer is able to see that self gets in the way of being submissive to the Lord.
 - No one is less informed and more self-willed than a person who thinks they have all the answers within themselves, and therefore insist on always doing it “their way.”
 - Saul had been doing it “his way” up until this experience, but now he understands that “there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are by the way of death.”
 - I heard a story once about a mule that a farmer owned and used to plow his fields. But this mule would sometimes get to the end of a row, and instead of turning around when the farmer commanded it, he would just keep plowing right on out of the field into or through a fence and into the next field. The farmer had to work hard to break that mule and that mule got a lot of beatings during the time he was doing things “his way.”
 - When we stop in our path of life and say, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” from the heart, we have given up self-will and we are learning to be submissive to the Lord.

III. The third thing that Saul's question should teach us is that he has agreed to the itinerary and agenda of Christ.

- ❖ Most people love to set their own agenda, make up their own schedule, and operate by that. Such an agenda, and such a schedule do not always agree with the Lord's...in fact, self-styled agendas and self-styled schedules without consultation with the Lord very often conflict with the Lord's plans.
- ❖ Saul's agenda and schedule changed drastically that day...and why did it change? You might say, because the Lord changed his life. I will say yes to that, but I will also say that it changed because Saul became willing to let someone else set his agenda and schedule...how do I know? Because he said, “Lord, what wilt **thou** have me to do?”
- ❖ This part of following Christ is the hardest part of being a Christian that we have to learn and do. That is, to put to the test what we do with the question to the Lord, “What wilt thou have me to do?”
 - (As a note, Paul rehearses all that Christ had him to suffer for His namesake in **2Cor. 11:23-27** and the dedication which he showed in the language he used showed that he still lived by the question he had asked).

- ❖ In our modern society, the demands made on us by the Lord are a cakewalk compared to what was asked of disciples in history past. But, we still sometimes balk at it and want to set our own agenda. Believers can be hard-headed about following the Lord's agenda.

IV. The last thing I want us to think about concerning Saul's question is that he was asking, not ordering

- ❖ I think believers sometimes get to a point where they think that they should be telling God not only what He's going to do, but telling Him what they are going to do.
- ❖ "I told God" is a statement I hear some folks say from time to time and it precedes a story that sounds a lot like they feel they have bossed God.
 - There's a story about a young African boy who was out on the savannah, the grass was high, it was early summer, and he was out there catching grasshoppers and playing around. All of a sudden he heard a thundering sound and looked out across the top of the savannah grass (it came up even with his chin) and saw a herd of elephants stampeding right toward him. Now, he had heard that a human could yell, wave his arms and command elephants to turn aside when they were running toward someone and they would turn and go around. So the kid began to yell, "Turn! Turn," while waving his arms. Sure enough when the elephants got about 50 yards away, they split around the boy on both sides and swept by him about 8 or 10 feet on either side. The kid congratulated himself on having turned that herd of giant critters and went on forward in the grass. When he had walked about 15 more feet, he was suddenly standing on the edge of a dead end gully about 15 or 20 feet deep and 20 feet wide. The gully ran about 40 yards out and ended in a sharp narrow drain out there. (The elephants had simply been going around the ditch!) Imagine the kid's sudden dose of reality when he realized the elephants had went around him because they were going around the gully! He reminds us of some folks we know who imagine that they can order God!
- ❖ Saul's attitude was a universe away from that kind of approach – he saw himself as a servant to Christ, and as one who had no power nor right to instruct Jesus Christ about anything.
- ❖ He was also very much aware that in his relationship with Christ, he was not even in a place to tell the Lord what he (himself) was going to do.
 - Laying plans without asking the question "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" will end up causing failure.