

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XX. The Significant And Certified Conversion Of Saul

(Acts 9:1-19)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 351.
- B. Accordingly, we can learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the Early Church era as it is presented in the book of Acts.
- C. Acts 9:1-19 records the significant conversion of Saul of Tarsus into becoming a great Apostle of Christ. However, due to his background, a credible witness had to certify his conversion before the world and the Church, a great lesson for us in discipling. We thus view the passage for our insight and application:

II. The Significant And Certified Conversion Of Saul, Acts 9:1-19.

- A. Saul's conversion to Christ "is believed by some to be the most important event in the church since Pentecost. Luke certainly considered Saul's conversion significant for he recorded it three times in Acts (chaps. 9, 22, 26)." (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 375) After all, Saul, who was later called "Paul," became the most ardent apostle of Christ, writing roughly half of the New Testament!
- B. However, his conversion to Christ was so dramatic, resulting in such a complete change in thought and action, that it left the idea of his conversion difficult for the Christian community to view as credible, Acts 9:1-9:
 1. Saul's pre-conversion life was utterly anti-Christian, Acts 9:1-2:
 - a. After the martyrdom of Stephen, Saul had heavily persecuted the Church, Acts 8:1-3.
 - b. Acts 9:1 picks up where Acts 8:3 left off, noting how Saul was still threatening injury and murder against believers, to where he even sought letters from the high priest that he might request access to the synagogues of Damascus to capture and bring Christians back to Jerusalem for punishment, Acts 9:1-2.
 - c. Damascus was outside the jurisdiction of the Jews in Jerusalem, but the Nabatean king Aretas IV who ruled Damascus hated the Romans, and he would have been willing to grant the Jews who were also anti-Roman access to Christians in Damascus to build a coalition with the Jews in opposition to Rome. (Ibid.)
 - d. Thus, Saul was going to great lengths to capture and destroy Christians and to destroy the Christian faith.
 2. However, Saul's conversion was a sudden, traumatic event, resulting in a great change in him, Acts 9:3-9:
 - a. Christ appeared to Saul as he approached Damascus, blinding him with a bright light, Acts 9:3.
 - b. Saul heard a voice asking him why he was persecuting Him (Acts 9:4), and Saul asked who the speaker was, and Christ replied that He was Jesus Whom Saul was persecuting (Acts 9:5a). [Acts 9:5b-6a are not in the best and earliest manuscripts, cf. Bruce M. Metzger, A Text. Com. on the Grk. N. T., 1971, p. 362].]
- C. Accordingly, Christ directed events to provide certification to the Christian community on the validity of Saul's conversion so that the Church might accept Saul's conversion as being real, Acts 9:6b-19:
 1. In the midst of converting Saul to the Christian faith, Jesus directed him to rise up from the ground where he had fallen and to go into the city of Damascus where Saul would be told what he must do, Acts 9:6b.
 2. Saul was now helplessly blinded from the heavenly light, so he had to be led by the hand by his fellow travelers into Damascus where he stayed for three days, blind, and eating and drinking nothing as he reeled in shock from what he had learned about how wrong he had been to oppose Christianity, Acts 9:7-9.
 3. At this point, the Lord appeared to a certain Christian named Ananias, directing him to go to Saul, to lay his hands on him to confer blessing and authority that he might receive his sight, Acts 9:10-12. Ananias was a Hebrew of sterling reputation by all the Jews in Damascus (Acts 22:12), so Christ wanted to use Ananias to certify the reality of Saul's conversion before all doubters to the contrary.
 4. Ananias initially recoiled at Christ's directive due to Saul's past record, but the Lord urged him to go to Saul, assuring Ananias that he was a chosen vessel to minister for the Lord, Acts 9:13-16.
 5. Ananias obeyed, he went to Saul, addressing him as "Brother Saul," now a part of the Church, and he laid hands on Saul so that he received his sight, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he was baptized, and he ate some food, being strengthened for life and service, Acts 9:17-19.

Lesson: *Saul's sudden, dramatic conversion from persecutor to apostle would be hard for believers to accept as true, so God used a very credible believer in Ananias to validate that conversion for the welfare of the Church.*

Application: *May we always verify spiritual conversions and transformations for the unity of the Church.*