

Three Days Before Baptism

“So they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank” (Acts 9:8-9).



The story of the conversion of **Saul** (his Hebrew name) is one of the most thought-provoking in all of the Scriptures. It is told in the book of Acts in chapters 9, 22 and 26. Prior to his conversion to Christ, he had been hostile to Christianity, even imprisoning Christians and putting them to death. He later said: *“I was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth”* (Acts 26:9). But an amazing thing happened to Saul when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, proving that Jesus was indeed the Son of God! Convicted of his misguided life, he asked: *“What shall I do, Lord?”* and was told: *“Go into Damascus and there you will be*

told all that is appointed for you to do” (Acts 22:10). For the next three days he spent his time in total darkness for he was blinded by the light. He did not eat anything. He spent his time praying. At the end of these three days a Christian came to him and said, *“And now why do you wait? Arise and be baptized (immersed) and wash away your sins, calling on His name”* (Acts 22:16).

It was most unusual in Bible times for sinners to wait three days after believing in Jesus before being baptized. Other conversions in the book of Acts tell of people who were immersed the very day they learned about Jesus and God’s plan to save them. One day 3,000 were baptized after hearing only one sermon (Acts 2:37-41).

A jailor was baptized “*at once*” the very hour he heard the gospel message (Acts 16:33). A reader of Scripture, riding in a chariot, became convicted of his need for forgiveness and asked: “*What prevents me from being baptized?*” (Acts 8:37). He was immersed immediately (Acts 8:38). But Saul who was destined to become an apostle was not ready to be baptized for three days following his encounter with Jesus. He spent every hour in misery, fasting and praying. What was he praying about?

Surely he was reflecting on his sinful condition. What a shock to realize that he had wasted years of his life trying to destroy God’s kingdom! He came to grips with the thought of people he had killed, families he had ruined. lives he had shattered. He must have asked himself: “Is it possible for God to forgive me after all I have done? Certainly, I must have been the worse of sinners!”

Saul needed time to repent. He could never undo all the terrible things he had done, or correct all his mistakes. He could not change the past. He could not pay for his sins by doing penance. However, he could start living the right way and doing the will of God *from that day forward!* He could change. That’s what repentance demanded.

It is reasonable to believe he prayed about his future. What was God’s plan for his life? Whatever the Lord had in mind for him he wanted to do. After three days of fasting and praying he learned God intended for him to carry the name of Jesus “*before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel*” (Acts 9:15). He needed to be committed to a new way of living that would shape his character and his choices for the rest of his life. Up to that point he had no idea that he was destined to become an ambassador for Jesus or to write 13 books of the New Testament! Soon he would become best known by his Roman name: **Paul**.

Three days of prayer and fasting prepared him to receive God’s message of salvation.

Saul would have prayed for someone to come tell him what was appointed for him to do (as the Lord promised on the Damascus road). In a vision he had seen a man coming to his house, but little did he know all God was doing behind the scenes, preparing Ananias so he could heal his blindness and tell Saul how his sins could be forgiven. Ananias told him only one thing to do: “*What are you waiting for? Rise and be baptized (immersed) and wash away your sins*” (Acts 22:16).

Saul was ready to hear God’s call to action! He did not delay to do what God required. He arose and was immersed. His time of fasting and mourning was now ended (Acts 9:18-19). God gave him strength to take on the Christian life!

Is your life, like Saul’s, messed up by sin and bad decisions? Do you need a new start? Do you want to change? What are you waiting for? Rise and be baptized (immersed) and wash away your sins. Let us know how we can help you do what God requires..

— David Tarbet

Church of Christ, New Milford, Connecticut

HARMONY

The word of God teaches that as friends and relatives we must seek to live together in harmony.

*“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition** in your hearts do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is **earthly, unspiritual, demonic**. For where **jealousy and selfish ambition** exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first **pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere**. And a harvest of **righteousness** is sown in **peace** by those who make **peace**” (James 3:13-18).*

Living in Satan’s domain, we are ever pummeled with the work of Satan. He causes us to have dissent. This is one of his many tools to disrupt us, to create stress in our families, broken relationships in our friendships and division in His church. A spirit of worldly wisdom makes us say and do unkind things to one another.

The way to defeat dissension is to continually look to God Almighty through Jesus his Son and to praise him in all things. If we use the wisdom of God in great things and small things we will make wise choices.

In order to see harmony we must come face to face with our sins, to repent of them and to give our lives to Jesus Christ in obedience to his commands. He wants to become our personal Savior! He pleads with us:

*“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be **kind** to one another, **tenderhearted, forgiving** one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32). And finally, “Above above all these, put on **love** which binds everything together in **perfect harmony**” (Colossians 3:14).*

— Bernard Barney McBrearty
New Milford, Connecticut





Has the question, “What is the meaning of life?” ever been posed to you? That question has confounded philosophers, theologians and people in general for as long as man has walked on earth. It is a question that transcends culture, race and religion. The answer can only be sufficiently answered in one way— God. But what is the meaning of life for someone who does not believe in God? The answer to that question is as perplexing as it is simple: “Procreation.” You see, without purpose given to you by God, you are only good for one thing, which is the survival of the species.

Exclude God, and there is no other purpose beyond that. Life is ultimately meaningless because meaning will never be found in procreation. Our intelligence demands that we are more than that. No wonder the world is so lost and confused, living each day in a daze, with depression being the order of the day. But when we accept the power and presence of God, acknowledging Him as the ultimate power and authority, we begin to see ourselves as more than

“baby-making machines.” Scriptures like Jeremiah 29:11 show us God has a plan beyond our natural instincts: *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord; plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

The future for a Christian has a plan and a purpose from birth that grows and changes even as we do. God is always there to adjust our purpose as needed. Scripture says: *“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10).

Life is not a set of random happenings out of control. We are not victims of circumstances, bouncing around like pinballs in an arcade game.

The world around us will never discover a meaning that will fill you with anticipation, delight and a future for all eternity. God and God alone can provide that inner worth.

— Cleve Stafford
Berkshire County Church of Christ,
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

DEALING WITH



GUILT

At times I have found myself unnecessarily burdened down with guilt. Before I was a Christian I found it very difficult to deal with guilt. When I turned to God's word and understood the promises of hope, I learned there is freedom from guilt in Christ Jesus. This freedom is the result of walking in the light. This is a walk that is focused upon God and His principles of living as revealed in the Bible. As one given the promises of God, I can deal with my guilt today.

Acknowledging my guilt. Guilt is not a result of a sickness, alienation, etc. It is a result of un-dealt with sin. I must acknowledge I have sinned first against God.

Blaming no one but myself. Sin is a result of my own choice. I do not sin because of an outside environment. I am not held guilty of sin because of my parents, spouse, family, church, society or God. I am guilty of sin because I have chosen by my actions to sin. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins (James 4:17).

Confessing my sins. Un-confessed sins will hold a person's conscience in the prison of guilt that makes life miserable. But confession is the personal acceptance of the blame for our sins. This confession should first be made to God, seeking forgiveness.

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (I John 1:7-10, NIV).

Once forgiveness from God is sought, we must understand that our actions sometimes affect others. Therefore, we should confess our sin to anyone wronged in sinning, asking them to forgive. This will release the burden of guilt from the heart and allow forgiveness to be granted. God will be glorified!

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"
(Matthew 11:28-30).

— Edward Healy
Church of Christ, Queensbury, New York



WAYS TO HELP THE DEVIL

DO NOT STUDY YOUR BIBLE

The Scripture teaches: *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15). Through the centuries many people have destroyed themselves due to lack of knowledge of God’s word. This is not because God failed to provide instructions, but because many do not hunger and thirst for righteousness. Jesus said: *“Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4).

FAIL TO TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

“These words that I command you shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Sadly, many parents place more emphasis on their children’s secular education and sports than on Biblical learning. Eternity is of extreme importance and

earthly things should take a back seat to spiritual matters. If we do not instruct our children on how to recognize and avoid the deceptions of Satan they will easily succumb to them.

GO BACK TO THE WORLD

The apostle Paul wrote of a Christian man who *“deserted”* him because he *“loved this present world”* (2 Timothy 4:10). When I was in the entertainment field time and again I observed people who were willing to sell their integrity and forfeit their souls just for a part in a movie or a play.

The world is like a deceptive and delusional amusement park. It looks good from afar but the reality is that cotton candy and candy apples can make you sick, rides will throw you, the house of mirrors will reflect distortion and the house of horrors mocks the true fear of the Lord. This world cannot offer something of eternal importance. We must *“not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs”* (2 Corinthians 2:11).

— Drew Robison
Dutchess County Church of Christ,
Poughkeepsie, NY

JESUS LOVES YOU & ME

Is there anything more important than to be loved? We seek it everywhere we go! We are desperate to find love that will make us feel complete. The problem is we are unable to fulfill this need consistently without help. Why? We are frail, weak and often damaged by hurtful people.



What if I told you it's easy to find this fulfilling love? You will be overwhelmed by its power! Would you jump at the chance to have it? I know I did! Once I understood how to find it, nothing could stop me from having this satisfying love.

This love has always been available, you just didn't know it. This love is the love of Jesus himself. Jesus has wanted to shower you with his affection even before you were even knit in your mother's womb. You probably are asking why hasn't he given it to me? Well, it's like this: most of us have been living where our frailty and weakness has produced damaging things, even things that work against our ability to accept the love of Jesus.

Here's the problem: Jesus can't have anything to do with things that are ungodly. The Bible refers to these things as sin.

Sin reminds me of a big boulder in the middle the road that we cannot get around. The boulder blocks us from Jesus. You are on one side longing for Jesus' love and Jesus is on the other side. He wants you to get to his side so He can shower you with his love. The good news is that Jesus has provided a way to remove sin in each of us.

How much does Jesus really love us? *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). Jesus wants to shower you with love. He died on the cross in order to love you for eternity. That's how much Jesus loves you! All he asks is that you love him, believe in him and obey his teaching.

Find a Bible. A free copy of the Bible is available on **the back page**. Call or visit a congregation of the Church of Christ and ask someone to teach you about Jesus. Get started now because Jesus loves you.

— Kirk Israel
Church of Christ, Castleton, Vermont

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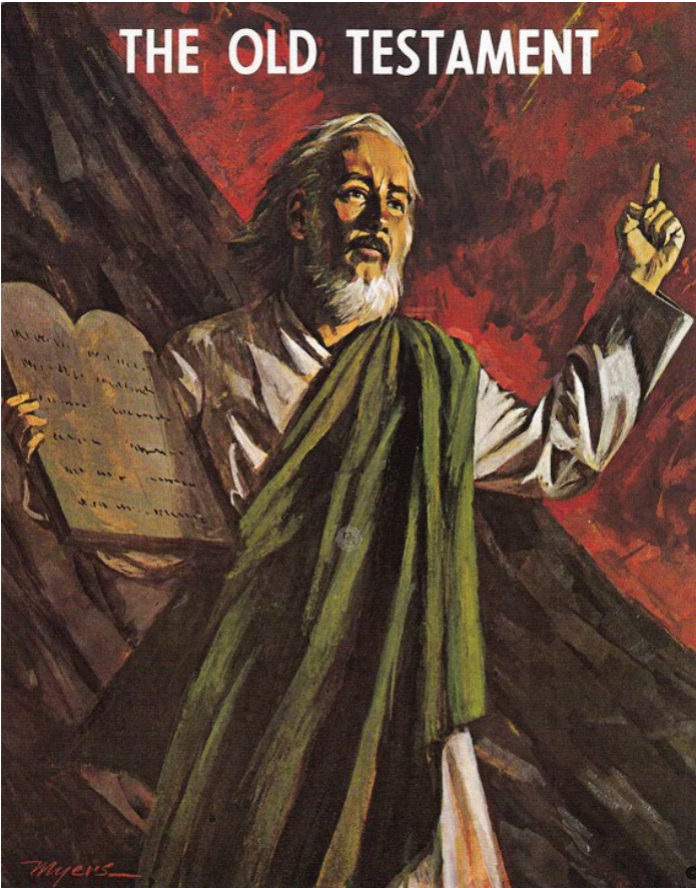
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