

The Life & Teachings of Paul #4

Acts 8–9

by: Ronald L. Dart

The death of Stephen marked a turning point for the church. There had been persecution before but by and large the church had been tolerated, they went about their business, they were looked upon as being really just another sect. They are called in fact in one place the sect of the Nazarenes and sects was nothing new to the Judaism. You had the Pharisees and the Sadducees which were also sects. You had the Essenes a much smaller sect and here comes the sect of the Nazarenes. And it was at first viewed as nothing more than just another sect of Judaism. And so consequently it was for the most part tolerated. It was only when they really began to succeed that they began to feel the pressure, and of course it was only after Stephen had been effective that they really began to feel it and perceive the threat, a very real threat, that was developing as it happened.

And so at Stephen's death we're introduced, almost like an aside, to a young man whose name was Saul. [tape break] who is of course writing much later and he already realizes how important Saul is in the church, the church's history, the direction of the church, what the church is going to be. But he just tosses it off. There was a young man whose name was Saul. Now in chapter 8:1 he tells us, "And Saul was consenting to his death." That is to Stephen's death. There seems to also be much in that phrase, consenting means more than just willing to let it happen. There's every indication that Saul was an active participant and what was going on. The witnesses laid their garments at his feet, he was there to help, he was there to be involved, there's no hint that he picked up a stone and threw it but he might as well have.

He was consenting to the death of Stephen, and at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem. And they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. Now this in itself is also interesting because why weren't the apostles scattered along with everyone else? The indications are that even though the apostles were carrying on with preaching and teaching, that they had managed somehow or other to accommodate themselves to the Jews and therefore had not received the pressure that many of the others had. But there were the zealots among them, there was Philip, there was Stephen, there were others as well I suspect who were healing the sick. Who were preaching effectively and powerfully and arguing with people. And arguing so effectively that they had to be gotten rid of in one way or another.

So comes along a young man named Saul, and other Jews who were like him who were just not that enthusiastic about what these people were doing. And the persecution seemed to have focused on the activists in the church. Because we are told that these people went out, except the apostles which stayed in Jerusalem. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church. Entering into every house and hailing men and women, committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Philip went to Samaria. And we have quite a lengthy discussion about what happened to Philip. But others went everywhere else. You know you have this image in mind of who is preaching the gospel. You have the feeling, well here is the church over on the side quietly minding their own business and just going about taking care of widows and fatherless and the needy people, and visiting the sick and so forth. And on the other hand here are the apostles who were out preaching the gospel. Well in this particular case it was the apostles who were left at Jerusalem and those that went everywhere were scattered abroad, went everywhere they went, preaching the word wherever they went. And it seems to have been generally accepted that every one of them, every Christian had the right and maybe even the responsibility to preach, to teach, to introduce some new person, whoever they met, wherever they met them to the gospel. And it was through this, frankly that the church really began to spread after persecution arose against it.

Now we all know that when Jesus, just before he departed, told the apostles and the others, "Go ye therefore into all the world and make disciples of all nations." That their going was part of their commission. They were supposed to get up and go. The gospel was not to be simply something for the Jews only, it was to go to the world at-large. Now here we are years later and no one seems to have gone anywhere. They're all still at Jerusalem, they're baptizing people right and left. They're healing the sick. They're really enjoying being Christians and enjoying one another's company. And having all things common and going out and selling properties and sharing things among themselves. But they're not going. And it is almost as though they came to a point in time to where God says, "Well if you are not going to go, I'm going to scatter you." And so arises persecution against the church, allowed by God. But the result was, the gospel went everywhere. And instrumentality in this, interestingly enough is a man named Saul. Who even before he was a Christian was instrumental in spreading the gospel. Spreading, you notice I said, not preaching. For while he was not preaching the gospel he was spreading Christians around and that spreading Christians around inevitably sends the gospel with the Christian no matter where he goes.

Now about this man Saul. We don't know a great deal about him personally. Ancient witnesses tell us that he was a short man, that he was bowlegged. That later in his life he was bald. He had kind of bristly eyebrows that met in the middle, so that he sort of had these caterpillar type eyebrows and a very large prominent nose we are told. Altogether not exactly what you would call a prepossessing man. Not the sort of person who would awe you by his physical appearance. It's just as well that Paul in his letters tends to support the

idea that he is not a physically impressive man. Because it's kind of hard to believe otherwise. Because what you find in this man is one who will become the towering intellect of Christianity. He will become the prime mover, he will become easily, apart from Jesus himself, the most influential Christian teacher in history. And it's very easy to see as you read his letters that you are dealing with a man of considerable intellectual, mental, physical power. And yet, apparently as far as any externals are concerned, very unimpressive. He is a very serious minded man I have little doubt. He is a zealot, he is a fanatic as it were. And fanatic's generally are not people with strong sense of humor, they are generally speaking fairly stern, fairly serious. And maybe some people might even say grim people. They don't like the idea of laughter. They're uncomfortable with laughter, to some extent probably because they feel out of control. And people like this like things to be under control. They like for themselves to be under control. They like their environment to be under control. The zealot will tend to be stern, others may even say grim. And it never occurs to them that the devil himself is grim. He's grim because he knows where he is going. He knows what his end result is going to be, the devil doesn't have just a real big sense of humor. He is not a buffoon, a clown. And those people who serve the devil are themselves grim people.

Actually if they had had a little different approach, if these people had had, Saul and the people around him had some sense of the absurd, they would not have killed Stephen. When he said, I see God and I see Jesus at his right hand. And instead of stoning him to death they would have laughed at him. Ironically, they probably would have been more effective in neutralizing Stephen if they had laughed at him instead of killing him. But, Saul was one of these people who didn't think that way. His sense of humor was not that well-developed and beyond that it was necessary to intimidate the masses. Intellectuals, people of training and of experience and of education, well now we can handle a man like Stephen, but the people they can't handle that sort of thing. They're not able to cope with that. And so we must deal strenuously and strictly and sternly with the heretic. What's funny about it, it would not have even occurred to Saul and the others around him that he and other intellectuals, and members of the Sanhedrin had decided to answer Stephens arguments with stones instead of with their own arguments. But they couldn't trust the people to hear Stephen and to respond to Stephen. They had to take matters into their own hands. And they took it in their own hands just like zealots of every age have handled heretics. You get rid of them by whatever means you have at your disposal. If you can kill them kill them. If you can't kill them, you excommunicate them. You take whatever steps are necessary to get the heretic away from the people because after all it's our job to protect God's church. And of course there is God who might have something to say about how and where and when his church is going to be protected.

But let's return now to the eighth chapter of Acts. Beginning in verse four. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and he preached Christ unto them. Now Samaria, for those of you who haven't taken a look at the map in the back of your Bible is somewhat north of Jerusalem. It's in the hill country probably about the same altitude, maybe a little lower than

Jerusalem hence down to Samaria. But it is up to the north, it was of course the capital of the 10 Northern tribes who were carried into captivity. And the people who were brought back into Samaria were not Israelites they were Gentiles. However because of problems that arose they actually reintroduce the religion of Israel, they brought back the Torah, the Pentateuch and introduced it among these people with some priests. And they made priests of the gentiles, and the Samaritan religion developed. Now the Samaritan religion was similar to Judaism, but it had not quite the same idea of centrality of worship naturally because they worshiped in Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. Whereas the Jews worshiped in Jerusalem. But the Samaritans again, they were Gentiles for the most part. But they were quite aware of the scriptures. They had their own Pentateuch, available to this day in the general form of the Samaritan Pentateuch. And of course access to the other scriptures and a belief in prophecy.

So Philip went down to the city of Samaria and he preached the messiah to them. And the people with one accord gave heed to those things that Philip spoke. They heard him, and he also did miracles. When they saw the miracles that he did. For unclean spirits crying with a loud voice came out of many that were possessed with them. And many who were taken with palsies, and they that were lame were healed, and there was great joy in the city. Now there was a certain man there named Simon who before time in the same city used sorcery and he bewitched the people of Samaria giving out that himself was some great one. To whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest saying this man is the great power of God. To him they had regard because for a long time because for a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. I have to presume that Simon Magus was not exactly a young man at this particular point in time because he had been active in Samaria for quite a long time.

He is Simon the magician, Simon Magus as the term is often applied to him. And a man who has gotten quite a bit of attention in early church history. Many of the early church fathers write of him, some of the things they write of him are incredible, some quite fabulous. He is supposed to have gone to Rome, he is supposed to have established a sort of sect of his own in Rome. To have resisted Paul and Peter at one time or another. It's a rather interesting study, some have speculated that Simon Magus is the Simon of Rome who is supposed to have been the one, from whom the legends of Simon Peter having been in Rome have arisen. But that's rather of dubious value it's probably unlikely that that's the case for the earliest church writings of Simon Magus represent him as himself, as Simon Magus. Even the ones that positioned him in Rome, that this is who he is, this is who he is known to be as Simon Magus not Simon Peter. With his consort and carrying on what ever it was that Simon was doing. Sometimes it was performing sorceries, even represented as having raised himself up into the air and levitated himself at one occasion in the presence of the apostles. Who then took away his power of levitation and caused him to fall to the earth and break a leg. Strange things. No real facts of course are available regarding the man.

Luke of course by the time he wrote his epistle is aware of the succeeding activities of Simon, and I have to presume that his readers were as well. Because he introduces the man

much like he introduces Saul. He is a character apparently of some import, else Luke would not have given the time to explaining how this man became introduced into the Christian religion. Now he is never named again as being a factor in any of the Christian heresies. Some have speculated that Simon Magus was behind the Galatian heresy because the Galatian heresy seems in many ways to be a syncretism, a putting together of the truth with Judaism with a smattering of paganism all tossed in for seasoning. And the Samaritan religion was not unlike that, the assumption being then that Simon took the Samaritan religion which involved circumcision and the observance of certain laws. A smattering of paganism mixed in with it and then tossed in a little bit of Christianity for garnish and went on to make his fortune as an itinerant preacher. I have little doubt that Simon did exactly that. That he was involved in the Galatian heresy seems relatively unlikely, he probably was not the person who was there.

On the other hand this type of teacher rose up very early in the church and there were doubtless many of them, and probably every sort of Heinz 57 varieties of Christianity existed before the turn of the first century. It's quite logical and fully to be expected because communications were not strong there were no ways for the church to really keep any kind of control over it. For one thing they didn't seem to have a hierarchical structure that would have lent itself to that control. And in the second place they didn't have the communications to stay on top of what all these itinerant preachers were doing. It was up to the individual Christian to open the Bible like the Bereans are later going to be shown to do. And to search the scriptures daily to see whether these things are true and whether they are not. And you've just got to look in the Bible and you've got to say is this man telling me the truth or is he not telling me the truth? And you don't believe a man just because of who he is. And certainly after reading about Simon you don't believe a man just because he can perform miracles. The man can call down fire from heaven you know perhaps. Or the man could cause somebody to rise up in the air and be levitated. He could do all sorts of strange sorceries and bewitch people and still be of Satan the devil, not of God. What do you do then? Well the answer is simple and it's all through the Bible. You look to the scriptures, you look to God, you look to God's word and to the law and to the testimony. If they don't speak according to this word it's because there's no light in them.

And every Christian will have to do this for himself. For even an established teacher can go astray. Paul says of himself, I keep under my body lest after having preached to others I myself should be a castaway. Sobering thoughts. So here is the origin of one rather well-known false teacher which Luke includes in the account of how this man got started. So that we can understand what oftentimes did happen. So Simon believed, were not told he disbelieved, he believed, he said he believed in Jesus. He believed Jesus was raised from the dead, he just wanted to get in on the act. So anyway when they believed Philip, concerning the things concerning the kingdom of God, verse 12, in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women in Samaria. Simon himself believed also and when he was baptized he continued with Philip. Now, he believed and he was baptized. Does that make him a Christian? Well I'm not quite prepared to say he wasn't in. Because it doesn't say that

he didn't believe. And we're told by another biblical writer later, you believe there's one God you do well, the Devils believe and tremble. So believing I guess is a good thing but it is not all there is to it. Simon himself believed also, and when he was baptized he continued with Philip and wandered, beholding the miracles and the signs which were done.

Now continuing in verse 14. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John. Who when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the holy spirit. For as of yet he was fallen upon none of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the holy spirit. Now this is one of the very important scriptures that help us to realize the laying on of hands is important. Why is it important? Well the whole history of laying on of hands is in itself rather interesting. And it's not difficult to study through if you have a concordance. You can simply look for the word hands and follow back through the Bible to see what was done when hands were laid on, Moses for example laying hands on Joshua. We're told he conveyed some of his power, or his authority upon Joshua in the process. Then we have the example of the receiving of the holy spirit by the laying on of hands. Jesus laid his hands on little children and blessed them. So there is the precedent for the conveying of a blessing and of course the holy spirit is certainly a blessing, by the laying on of hands. The curious thing about this is the fact that these people did not receive the holy spirit immediately upon the baptism by Phillip. And yet Philip was ordained, he was selected as one of those people in Jerusalem. Actually went out of there we assume as a deacon. But certainly a man in whom was the holy spirit. And a man with the full authority to baptize people. And we've often wondered because we are aware of the fact that the laying on of hands for the receiving of the holy spirit could not possibly have been purely restricted to the apostles through all generations. Why was it in this case? Probably because it was necessary that the Samaritans be pointed towards the headquarters of the church. That they be pointed toward the twelve apostles. That they who had a resistance to Jerusalem, and a resistance to anything coming out of Jerusalem under many circumstances, had to be shown clearly and distinctly that Jerusalem was where it was happening, Jerusalem was where it was at. That was where the leadership of the church was established. So they were not allowed just to go off on their own as it were without realizing where the source of authority was in the church.

Now, when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles hands, the holy spirit was given. He offered them money, saying give me also this power that upon whomsoever I lay hands he may receive the holy spirit. Peter said your money perish with you because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. As a result of this act by a man named Simon, through all generations the practice of attempting to buy church office with money is called the practice of simony. Simony, the practice of attempting to purchase an office in the church by some means other than simply having it given to you as the gift of God. Some people, if they don't try to do it with money, they try to politic for position or for power or for influence in the church. But the fact of the matter is that the gift of God, which is the gift of God, the laying on of hands for the receiving of the holy spirit is a gift. It's not something you can earn, it's not something you can buy. It's not something you can politic

and get. Either God will give it to you or you will not have it. That's an important thing to understand. And as a result of what happened to Simon, I don't think very many people nowadays would even think, well I want to try to buy or to get an influential position in the church through money. We still oftentimes catch ourselves trying to make points or trying to ingratiate ourselves by some other means, which is just as bad. But Peter replied, he said, "Your money perish with you." The gift of God cannot be purchased with money, you can't politic your way into the gift of God either. He then said you have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right in the sight of God. There's a lot in that little verse.

Peter himself had a lot in the matter, because he was chosen by Jesus Christ originally. Matthias had received his office in the apostleship by the casting of lots, it was his lot in that way. And he says to him, you have neither part nor lot. In other words there is no way that you can be an apostle, for what he was asking for, what he was striving to achieve was apostleship. And of course since he had not had a part in Jesus ministry, had not seen Jesus alive after his resurrection, he couldn't be an apostle in any case. And then on top of everything else, Peter said to him, your heart is not right in the sight of God. How did he know that? Well, Peter couldn't see his heart. He couldn't look on the heart like God does. But Peter knew because of what Jesus had told him about out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. And if his heart had been right he could never have made that kind of an offer. Or even made that kind of suggestion. We would oftentimes like very much to look on the heart, we'd like to be able to say well I'd like to understand and discern a person's attitude and mind, but you see we can only judge by the outward appearances. We condemn a person for judging by outward appearances, but isn't that all we have? How can we do anything else but judge by the outward appearances? What we do is we look at the fruits, we look at the results. And that's what Peter did when he looked at this man and he saw what was coming out of his mouth, he saw the attitude and the expression on his face and he saw what he was trying to do. And what he was trying to do showed he understood nothing of what the church was doing.

And then he called upon him, the man who had believed and been baptized, he called upon him to repent. "Repent of this your wickedness and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." The word iniquity is *anomia*, which is nothing more than taking the word *nomos* or law and putting the negative in front of it, which is in the Greek done by putting an *a* in front of it. *Anomia* means no law or lawlessness. I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of lawlessness. Then answered Simon and said pray you the Lord for me that none of these things which you have spoken come upon me. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. And the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, arise and go towards the south to the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert.

Now already, as a result of what's happening here the gospel is going to Gentiles. Because the Samaritans were Gentiles. They were, I suppose in many cases looked upon by the Jews as half breed. They did keep the law, they were circumcised, and so they were in a little different category than other Gentiles. But nevertheless the gospel is already going out.

Now comes another remarkable instance of the gospel going out. Philip is actually picked up and moved into a key position by an angel of the Lord, because of something he wants to do. So he took him down by the way which goes down to Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went, verse 27. And behold a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the Queen of the Ethiopians. Who had charge over all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem to worship. Interesting. That even though he was an Ethiopian, which I presume he was a dark skinned man. He was under Candace the Queen of the Ethiopians, a very influential man. But he was a proselyte of the Jews. That is, he believed in the God of Judah and of Israel, and he went up to Jerusalem to worship that God. Now he is on his way back to Ethiopia.

And as he was returning, he sits in his chariot reading Isaiah the prophet. So the spirit said to Philip, go near and join yourself to this chariot. So Philip ran over to him and he heard him reading, the man apparently was reading aloud. Which is by the way, one of the best ways to read Isaiah, for Isaiah is a poet. And he said to him, do you understand what you are reading? And he said, well how could I unless some man should guide me. He desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place in the scripture which he read was this. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away, and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth.

And the eunuch asked Philip and said, I pray you, of whom speaks the prophet this, of himself or somebody else? And Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached to him Jesus. And as they went on their way they came to a certain water and the eunuch said look here is water, what's hindering me to be baptized? And Philip said if you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God. He commanded the chariot to stop, they went down both into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water the spirit of the Lord caught away Philip that the eunuch saw him know more, and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus and passing through he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

This is a fascinating instance here, this entire segment, because of the things that it reveals. It is intriguing that God would send Philip down to this man, give him so little teaching, and then baptize him. For indeed, even though the Ethiopian did know a great deal about God, he had an awareness of the law. He was carrying with him a part of the scriptures and reading it to himself. A rather rare thing I might add. Because apparently the man understood Aramaic or Hebrew. So he was educated in the things of Judah, he didn't need to know much more about the old Testament, but wouldn't you have thought that he

needed to know more about the new? And yet Philip, just after a short time of preaching to him is willing to baptize him on a profession of faith and belief in Jesus Christ.

Now not only this but this man goes off and away to Ethiopia where he will of a certainty be the only Christian on the continent. Sobering thought. No one to teach him, no minister to direct him, nobody to anoint him when he's sick or pray for him, he's all by himself. One of the reasons I believe, why this is recorded here is so that every Christian will know and will understand that he can grow in grace and in knowledge, that he can come to know God's way. That he can make it into God's kingdom alone. Oh to be sure it's not desirable, there is definitely a need to be involved with the church and to have fellowship with the church. And one of the purposes of that fellowship is to create a cohesiveness and a unity, to make the church effective in carrying out a work. But on the other hand, the Ethiopian as he went back home was not alone. And he made it into God's kingdom without the help of an apostle or a minister or even so much as a deacon. Other than the one who spoke to him and introduced him to the truth in the first place.

Now continuing with the ninth chapter of Acts. And Saul yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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 to Jerusalem. And now we are reintroduced to Saul of Tarsus. The grand inquisitor, the master persecutor of the church. What's going on with this man? What's with him? Something is driving him, something is pushing him on. It's strange, but I suspect that this man was having some doubts. I think he may have been afraid that Stephen was right. I'd be willing to bet that the apostle Paul had done some very careful investigation of all sorts of allegations that had been made about Jesus Christ. I suspect that he had been to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. I suspect that he had stepped inside, and with his own eyes looked around and searched for evidence. I have little doubt that he had questioned carefully the guards that had been placed out in front of the sepulcher. I suspect that he had even examined, possibly under torture, people who claimed to have seen Jesus alive after his death.

These are the actions of a troubled man. Because not every Jewish leader, not every Jewish official was breathing threatenings and slaughter against the church. And going into houses and dragging people out and questioning them and torturing them. And putting them in prison and doing his dead level best to stamp out this religion. These are the sort of things done by a man who's afraid, and interprets his fear as hatred. And reorganizes his mind and decides if he can stamp it out then it's not of God. And I'm going to stamp it out! So he went to the unusual length of asking for letters of authority so that he could go all the way to Damascus. That's a long way by foot. It's a long way nowadays if you're going to drive by car, but in these times he had to walk the whole distance. It would take a better part of a day to drive to Damascus, to go up there now if you had a Volkswagen to drive it. But Saul walked it, every step of the way.

As he journeyed he came near to Damascus and suddenly there shown round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the ground and he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And he said, "Who are you Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you persecute. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Now this in itself is an interesting expression. For what essentially it is saying is that Saul was being prodded. The word goad is an ox goad or like a cattle prod where you walk up behind the animal and you stick it to make it move. And the implication is that God had already been working on this man. And he was kicking against it and he was resisting and he was fighting. He did not want to accept what his eyes were telling him was true. Because he had seen the faces of the people, he had seen Stephen's face when he died. He had seen the face of women and other Christians who even under torture had refused to recant and deny Christ. And it troubled him. And Jesus Christ was already working on Saul before this time. And he identified himself and said, "I am Jesus whom you persecute. It's hard for you to kick against the goads." And he trembling and astonished said, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" In this one moment in time, his entire world, everything he lived for lay in shattered remnants around his feet. His whole life was stripped away. His whole education was stripped away. What he had believed in, what he had fought for, what he had worked at was gone. And he stood there, spiritually speaking, naked before God. For Jesus identified himself and Saul knew it was him. And he knew he was alive. And he knew all this work and all this threatening and slaughter and all this entering into houses and hailing men and women into prison was in truth and act against God. And now for the first time, he knew.

Jesus said to him, "Arise and go into the city and it will be told you what you must do." And the men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no man. Chapter twenty-two verse nine will say that these men didn't actually hear the voice. And I think what it means essentially is that they probably heard a noise, they heard a voice speaking but they did not understand the words that were spoken. Only Saul understood, only Saul knew what happened. And he arose from the earth and when his eyes were opened he couldn't see, he was blind. They led him by the hand and they brought him to Damascus and he was three days without sight and did neither eat nor drink.

It's difficult to imagine what that three days of blindness would have done to him. His whole life shattered. Everything he had stood for, everything he had believed in. And bear in mind now this wasn't a man who did things halfway. This was the kind of man who gave himself wholeheartedly to what ever he was doing. Who was very serious about what he was doing. Who was sincere even though there were doubts working on him, he still was very sincere in what he was doing. And everything, suddenly was destroyed.

Now for three days and three nights with his life, with his life in shatters. With him sitting there wondering what the next day will hold for him. What do you suppose he saw in his mind's eye as he lay there night and day blind? What do you suppose he thought about? Do you suppose he thought about the men and the women that he had hauled off into prison? Do you suppose he thought about the people who were tortured and humiliated in an attempt

to suppress the Christian religion? Do you suppose he ever saw in his mind's eye Stephen falling to the earth under a hail of stones while he held the garments of the ones who were killing Stephen? It's difficult, I would say it's impossible to assess from our perspective the terrible mental agony that Paul experienced for these three days. That fast may not have even been a voluntary thing on his part, he may have not just been able to eat with all that had happened to him.

There was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias. And God spoke to Ananias in a vision and said, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold I am here Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the street which is called straight and inquire in the house of Judas for a man named Saul of Tarsus. For behold he is praying. And he has seen in a vision." So by this time Saul had actually been given a vision. He has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. So Ananias answered and said, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man. How much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And I have heard that here he has authority from the chief priest to arrest anyone that calls on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go your way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the gentiles and Kings and the children of Israel."

The three-fold commission that Paul was given. He was going to bear God's name before the Gentiles, something which others might have done, but had not done. And before Kings, and the Children of Israel. So even though the apostle Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter the apostle to the Jews. Nevertheless Paul also has a commission to the children of Israel. He goes on to say, "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." One of the great ironies of history is that this man who was a persecutor, a man who caused people to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ, was himself going to suffer greatly for the name of Jesus.

So Ananias went his way and went into the house and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord even Jesus that appeared to you in the way as you came has sent me that you might receive your sight and be filled with the holy spirit. And immediately there fell from his eyes like scales, and he received sight immediately and he arose and was baptized. And an interesting thing happened, he got hungry. When he had received meat he was strengthened and he stayed with them for several days eating and drinking. We are told interestingly enough, immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the son of God.

Now you are not dealing again with a man who did not know anything about the Bible. You are dealing with a scholar of no small reputation, a man of considerable influence in Jerusalem, very well known and it was not unknown to the Jews in the synagogue there what he had come for. After all, the people who had brought him into Damascus were still there. And they had told what Paul had come for and they told what had happened to him. Now here he is in the synagogues preaching that Jesus Christ is the

Son of God. Every one that heard him was amazed and said isn't this the man that destroyed them that called on this name in Jerusalem? Didn't he come here for that intent that he might bring them bound to the chief priests? But Saul increased more in strength and he confounded the Jews that dwell in Damascus proving that this is very Christ.

After many days had passed, the Jews took counsel to kill him. Now we are going to find interestingly enough about this man, that wherever he went he caused trouble. He was a fire brand. He was a cause celebre. He was a man who would create a problem who would generate a problem almost anywhere he went. Oh it wasn't that he was teaching anything that wasn't true. In fact, it was very true and it wasn't that he wasn't effective. In fact, he was very effective. But there was something about this man that you didn't exactly peacefully coexist with. You didn't just sort of get along with Paul. People either loved him or they hated him and wanted him dead. It seemed to have been the way of his life. I expect that he had an awful lot of hostility still bottled up in him. Even though now it was directed away from the church and toward the Jews, the hostility was still there because it was a part of his character, a part of his makeup. He was an argumentative type of person. It was a part of the nature. The same drive, the same energy, the same convictions that drove him to persecute the church now drove him to fight with or to argue with or to dispute with those who would persecute the church. And so after a lot of days of preaching in Damascus, and of course we know from Galatians that during this period of time he went away into the wilderness and was taught by Christ personally.

But after he had been in Damascus for some time, the Jews took counsel to kill him. But their lying in wait was known of him. They watched the gates day and night to kill him, but the disciples took him by night and led him down on a wall in a basket and Saul left and returned to Jerusalem. When he got back to Jerusalem, naturally, he attempted to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and would not believe that he was a disciple. What an experience for him. He needed it. It was good for him, but he suffered an awfully strong powerful rejection when he returned to Jerusalem. He went back, he expected that people would receive him. He did not exactly expect to be received with joy, because he was going to be coming eyeball to eyeball with people that he had himself personally afflicted in one way to another. And so he attempted to join himself to the church. They would not believe him. They thought he was a spy. They thought it was a trick. They thought they were headed for trouble if they had anything to do with this man Saul. And so for a little while he experienced total rejection by the church. But Barnabas took him. His name means son of consolation and he brought him to the apostles and declared to them how he had seen the Lord in the way. How he had spoken to him, how he had preached boldly in Damascus in the name of Jesus and he was with them coming in and going out in Jerusalem. He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Grecians and then they went about to slay him.

Now he is down in Jerusalem. Now mind you the apostles have been here all of the time. They have been carrying on the work. They have been giving themselves to the word of God and prayer. They have been, I suppose, preaching to people along the way and they

were not going around trying to kill them. But when Paul shows up on the scene and he starts preaching and disputing they were ready to kill him. Which, when the brethren knew that, they brought him down to Caesarea, which is on the coast, and they sent him forth to Tarsus his home. Then had all the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the holy spirit, were multiplied and grew.

Isn't that interesting? That the church was able to grow without Paul. They were able to get along just fine without him. They were not persecuted without him, but when he was there he was an absolute fire brand. A source of discontent and trouble and people wanted him dead. It is important to give you a hint to the mind, the personality and the attitude of this man. It is important for us to understand the remainder of his career as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

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Transcribed by: kam

Ronald L. Dart is an evangelist and is heard daily and weekly
on his Born to Win radio program.

You can contact Ronald L. Dart at Christian Educational Ministries
P.O. Box 560 Whitehouse, Texas 75791
Phone: (903) 839-9300 — 1-888-BIBLE-44

www.borntowin.net