

Pillars of the Truth

Article #10

*Lord, What Wilt Thou
Have Me To Do?*

E R Harper

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E. R. HARPER

If you were traveling down the highway, going on a mission that called for you to arrest men and women and put them in prison, and suddenly there were to shine round about you a light so bright that you could not see and you were made to fall to the earth, frightened, bewildered and not able to understand what it all meant, what would you do or say?

That very thing happened to one of the world's greatest characters: A man who was an educated man; a leader of men; a man whose life and writings have changed as many men for Christ as any man who has ever lived. This man's name was Saul; Saul of Tarsus.

In Acts 9:1-6 we have the introduction to this story. Get your New Testament and follow with me as we study the conversion of this great man of God. Beginning with verse one it says, "And Saul, yet breathing out



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threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto 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 unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus; and suddenly there shone round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 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. 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 there it will be told thee **what thou must do.**" This was personal. It shows there was "something to do to be saved." If not isn't it strange the Lord did not say to him, "Why Saul there is nothing man can do to be

saved." Instead, he told him he would be told what he "must do." It was not arbitrary on Saul's part. He had to do it for it was a "must." We will find the **only** thing he was "told to do." It will be the one thing you are being told you do **not** have to obey. Some vital principles are couched in this conversation between these two great personalities.

Questions For Consideration

We need to know who this man, Saul of Tarsus, is. Saul tells us as he says in Acts 22:3, "I am verily a man which am a Jew born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of our fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." He said further in Acts 26:4-5, "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straightest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee." From this we see Saul was an "educated man"; he was a "devoutly religious man," belonging to the most devout group of his race, the Pharisees. The conversion of this man from such a devout religion will have to be explained. Its explanation will have to be more than to say this man was demented and in his moments of hysterical insanity, he was cursed with "religious hallucinations." No man ever wrote more calmly; no man ever wrote more sanely; no man ever wrote more accurately the details of affairs than did this man, Saul of Tarsus. His writings, if followed, would change this world into a world of paradise; men would live for God; our world would be at peace; and the nations of earth would be transformed to blossom into fields, almost elesian, while on this earth we dwell. Tell me a man who can write and live like this is not capable of giving accurately his own conversion. Schools have grown up all about us but not one of them has ever produced a personality that surpasses in his works this humble man who sat at the feet of Dr. Gamaliel in the city of Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago. Yes, the change in this man must be accounted for before we throw away our Bible. (Continued on page 60)

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Not only was Saul an educated man and devoutly religious; he was an "honest man" in his religion. He says in Acts 23:1 "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Will you listen to his defense before Felix as he says in Acts 24:12-15, "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men." That you may see just how zealously honest this man was, let me read from him as he stands before King Agrippa, Acts 26:9-12, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which things I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priest, at midday, O king I saw in the way a light from heaven." Never lived a more devoutly honest man than Saul of Tarsus.

Saul was also a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38). He was a leader of his race (Acts 7:58). He was mad against the church (Acts 26:16). Here we have an "educated man"; a "religious man"; a "devoutly honest man in his religion"; a "Roman Citizen," a "leader of his people," and a man who enjoyed the "confidence of his race" before his surrender to Jesus of Nazareth. Think you he is not competent to testify concerning his own conversion!

Though an educated man; though an honestly religious man; though he believed in the resurrection of both the just and the unjust; this man, Saul of Tarsus was a lost man. It isn't enough to be, educated, honest and religious or even zealous as Saul in his religion. Man has to also obey his Lord or he remains lost (II Thess. 1:8-9).

Here is a lost man with his Saviour, He

asks his Saviour, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" His Saviour would not tell him what to do. He told Saul to "go into the city and there it would be told him what he **must do.**" There must be a reason for the Lord's not telling Saul what to do. Many people today tell me the Lord or an angel or the Holy Spirit spoke to them and told them **how** to be saved or told them they **were** saved. Strange Christ would not do that for Saul, isn't it? No, He does not do it that way! The reason Christ did not tell him what to do but sent Ananias is the same reason the angel in Acts 10 did not tell Cornelius what to do but sent Peter to him. It is the same reason why the Spirit in Acts 8 did not tell the eunuch what to do, but came to Philip and had him to join himself to the chariot.

In Earthen Vessels

Paul explains the reason for this as he says in II Corinthians 4:5-7, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this **treasure in earthen vessels**, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

Here we have the explanation to the question, why Christ, the angel, or the Holy Spirit did not tell Saul, Cornelius, or the eunuch, what to do. Christ, the Angel, and the Holy Spirit, are all "heavenly vessels" and **this treasure, this revelation of God to man** was given into the hands of "earthen vessels." If Christ or the Spirit were to come and "speak peace to our souls"; or tell us "what to do" they would be violating God's orders. No, they have never spoken to us nor have they "operated miraculously on our hearts" **apart from the Gospel of Christ** that we may be saved. They operate **through** the preaching of God's word and that only in the salvation of the sinner. Hence, Christ, the Saviour, did not tell Saul the sinner, what to do to be saved. He sent Ananias to tell him "what he **must do.**"

The religion of our Lord is an intelligent religion; it is a taught religion; it is based upon understanding; not upon superstitions or imaginations. Man's salvation is not based upon his feelings. It is too serious a matter for man to have **only**

his feelings as his guide. Feelings are the result, **every time**, of his teaching. No exceptions. A lie believed will produce the same effect as truth believed--absolutely no difference so far as contented feelings are concerned. All this time Saul "felt like he was saved"; yet he was lost. Cornelius and the eunuch both, because of their teachings, felt absolutely safe and were on the road to eternal happiness; but both were lost. The Lord said in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." We must not follow error for in it we can be perfectly contented and satisfied and yet be lost as were all these. Says one, "Brother Harper, I **know** I have received the miraculous operation of the Spirit. I **know** I am saved because I have experienced the regenerating power of the Spirit in my heart." Now humbly, kindly, with no intention of harming or wounding the most sensitive heart in my audience, may I ask you to explain this to me if that theory be correct? Why is it that those who claim this "supernatural converting power" are so divided in **what** they get and **when** they get it? Now the following is absolutely the truth: One group says, I was operated on by God's regenerating Spirit in **order to be saved** that I **might** believe **because I was saved**. Another group says to **this** group just the opposite, you are wrong; it does not come **that way**. I received this regenerating power first that "I might believe in order to be saved. Still a **third** group says, We were "baptized with the Holy Spirit" and being now "holy sanctified" we can't sin; a **fourth** group says **all of you** are wrong. We received this regenerating power and were **baptized** in the Holy Spirit and can **perform miracles** and heal all manner of diseases as did the apostles. Neither of these groups fellowships the other. On and on I could go giving different groups that claim this power yet no two of them agree but each of them denies what the other has. Each group gives the same experiences, sights and the same Scriptures. There is but one explanation to all of this: **They were taught to expect this feeling at that particular time**. Had it **really** been the Spirit doing **all this** He would have done it alike. The apostles who were baptized in the Spirit did not divide the people.

Christianity Is Intelligent

The church of Christ makes no such claims. We know that our Lord's religion is a religion based upon intelligence and reason and

He has given us the Bible that we may be taught what to do to be saved. Paul said in Ephesians 3:3 that by "revelation he made known unto me the mystery as I wrote afore in few words whereby, when ye read, ye may **understand** my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." He wrote it down for us to read, that **reading** we may **understand**. Christ said in Matthew 13:15, "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed: (They were not born that way) lest anytime they should see with their eyes; hear with their ears; and understand with their hearts, and I should heal them." In John 6:45 Christ says, "And they shall be all taught of God; every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me." After Christ arose from the dead and had met with his disciples, the record of which is in Matthew 28:18-20, he said, "Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Philip asked the eunuch, "Understandest thou what thou readeest?" He replied, "How can I except some man should guide me?" Christianity is not mysterious, it is understandable.

Since now we find that heavenly vessels cannot teach men how to be saved and that Christ has given this into the hands of "earthen vessels." We are anxious to know what this "earthen vessel," Ananias, told this sinner to do. He told him the right thing I am sure for Christ sent Ananias to Saul for the specific purpose. There can be no mistake here for Christ **sent him**.

Saul Gets His Answer

Having now asked his Saviour, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Christ sends Saul to the city. Saul is blind, does not eat, cannot sleep, and is praying for three days and nights. Yet having believed in Christ as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world; having been praying and in a penitent condition for three days and nights, he is **still a lost man**. He hasn't yet been told **what to do**. Someone is ready to say, he was saved on the road to Damascus when he talked to Christ. We shall see what the Bible says on this. It **has** to be right. Are you willing to take what it says, though it contradicts what you once believed? Saul was willing to surrender **every false idea** he had for the truth. Are we?

The Lord appears unto Ananias and sends
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 him to Saul. When Ananias came he found Saul, blind, hungry, and praying, yet lost. Had he been saved he would not have been in such a condition as found here. If he knew he was saved, why this condition for three days and nights? When the man of God came he did not say to Saul, "Saul, you must keep on praying until you have prayed through to victory." Why? Victory over sin to the alien sinner does not come that way. If it had, Saul would have already received it before Ananias came, for he had been praying for three days and nights. God demands of the lost, a penitent, believing heart, as Saul had here. But Saul's conversion shows beyond refutation that it takes more than that. Ananias told him what he **"must do"**: "Arise and be **baptized and wash away thy sins**, calling on the name of the Lord." Do what, Lord? "Arise and be baptized and wash away **thy sins**." If "salvation from sins" came at the **moment** man **believes or trusts** in the Saviour, Saul would have **already** had his sins "washed away" before Ananias could tell him "what he **must do**." Here is a conversion that proves **positively** that man is **not** saved by "faith only" nor is an **alien sinner** (one who has never been a Christian) saved by just "praying for salvation." Saul's sins were washed away in his completion of baptism and not before.

Thy Sins

There is one expression here that forever settles the question, "When was Saul saved?" Ananias said to him, "Arise and be baptized and **wash away thy sins**." No, it did not say, "symbolically wash away thy sins." Symbolic is **not** there. Saul's sins were really washed away in the blood of Christ. This little word "thy" forever tells the story of his salvation if we will just open our eyes and see. **Thy** denotes **possession**. I say "thy house." It means but one thing: It is **yours**. It does not belong to anyone else. Now your Bible said, "thy sins." The guilt of his sins was still upon him and he had to be baptized to have his sins washed away (Acts 22:16). Read Acts 9:1-22 and Acts 22:1-16. The order here was: Be told what to do; believe; repent; and be baptized; then came the **washing away** of his sins. Not the sins of someone else. But **"thy sins"**.

Buried In Baptism

Let us read Paul's letter to the church at

Rome and see further what he had to say. In Romans 6:3-4, he says, "know ye not that so many of **us** (includes himself) as were **baptized into Christ** were **baptized into his death**? Therefore we (including himself again) were **buried with him** by baptism into death; that like as Christ was **raised up** from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Now we find that Christ sent Ananias to Saul to tell him what he **"must do"**. He did not tell him to "believe"; he did not tell him to "repent." He **only** told him to "**be baptized and wash away thy sins**." Why? No need telling him to "believe," this he had done for three days. No need to command him to repent for his actions proved that he had repented. Yet he was to be told what he **must do**. The only thing he was commanded to do was to be "baptized," the very thing the world is fighting today and saying is "nonessential." Question: Why is it that baptism, the **only thing** he was told to do, happens to be the **only command** that he did **not have to do**? **This can't be answered!** Saul was saved just like **all others**. All have to be baptized to be saved.

Our Question Answered

Now the answer to our question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" is very simple in its requirements and easily understood by everyone. Here it is: Surrender your former religion, believe in me, repent of your wrongs, and with faith in me as the Son of the living God, be baptized **that thy sins be washed away**, calling on the name of the Lord. He did that. Was he saved? Yes, and became a member of the church the Lord built and was made an apostle unto the Gentiles. What he did was right. If you will do the same thing it will make you a Christian as it did Saul. Will you not today come believing in this same Christ, repenting of your sins, and then be "buried with your Lord in baptism" as was Saul, that your sins may be "washed away" in the precious blood of Christ? This, Saul was **commanded** to do! This was what Saul of Tarsus "must do." If Saul **must be baptized** that **his sins** may be washed away in the precious blood of Christ, why think you that we do not have to do the same thing?

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