

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL. Acts 9:1-9

INTRODUCTION:

Samuel Johnson, in his LIVES OF THE MOST EMINENT ENGLISH POETS, tells us about the 18th century

English statesman George Lyttleton, who said that "The conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation."

Lyttelton had, (in the pride of juvenile arrogance) doubts of the truth of Christianity; but when he grew older he thought the time had come when it was no longer fit to doubt or believe by chance of heresay, and he applied himself seriously to the great question.

His studies were honest and ended in conviction. He found that religion was true; and what he had learned he wrote down in a treatise on the Conversion of St. Paul -- a treatise which infidelity has never been able to answer.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO SAUL ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD?

We can never really adequately explain it all.

But this we know; he was converted to Christ.

Conversion is a necessary religious experience for all who would be truly Christian.

Some modern conversion experiences are almost as dramatic as Saul's.

Perhaps the most striking modern parallel to the story of Paul's conversion is Sundar Singh's story of his own conversion after a period of bitter hostility to the gospel.

Praying in his room in the early morning, he saw a great light.

"Then as I prayed and looked into the light, I saw the form of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It had such an appearance of glory and love.

If it had been some Hindu incarnation I would have prostrated myself before it.

But it was the Lord Jesus Christ whom I had been insulting a few days before.

I felt that a vision like this could not come out of my own imagination.

I heard a voice saying in Hindustani:
"How long will you persecute me?
I have come to save you; I am the way you were praying to know the right way.
Why do you not take it?"
The thought then came to me,
"Jesus Christ is not dead but living and it must be He Himself."
So I fell at His feet and got this wonderful Peace which I could not get anywhere else.
This is the joy I was wishing to get.
When I got up, the vision had all disappeared, but, although the vision disappeared, the Peace and Joy have remained with me ever since."

Several things make it difficult to explain Sundar Singh's experience as a dream or as the effect of self-hypnotism. Another remarkable thing about this is that he said that to the best of his remembrance "at that time he did not know the story of St. Paul's conversion.

Moreover, here too, we cannot properly evaluate Sundar Singh's account of his conversion experience without taking into consideration the remarkable life and ministry which followed it.

I. THE MAN WHO WAS CONVERTED - SAUL OF TARSUS

- A. His Greek and Hebrew background
- B. His mental mood at the moment
 - 1. "breathing hard, out of threatening and murderous desire."
 - 2. Guilt is often transformed into hostility.

He must have felt guilty because of his complicity in the stoning of Stephen.

3. He was fighting hard against conviction.

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II. THE CONVERSION ITSELF.

- A. Cannot be explained in natural terms
 - 1. Not epilepsy
 - 2. Not a purely psychological experience
- B. Notice the naturalness of the supernatural to the early Christians
 - 1. Jesus was alive and working
 - 2. He appeared and spoke and dealt immediately with his own.
- C. A sudden surrender to Christ
 - 1. A recognition of the Lordship & deity of Christ (though not immediately at first; We must not read in too much meaning into the word "Lord" in the first question, "Who art thou, Lord?")
 - 2. He was conquered, defeated & captured -- the blind slave of Christ.

III. AFTER THE CONVERSION

- A. He was a changed man.
He had "intended to enter Damascus like an avenging fury," but he "was led by the hand into that city, blind & helpless as a child." (Barclay)
- B. He was an obedient man
 - 1. Christ said, "Go into the city, and you will be told what to do."
 - 2. Up to this moment Paul had been doing what He liked, what HE thought best, what HIS will dictated.
 - 3. From this time forward he would be told what to do.
 - 4. Never again would he take his way, but ever after Christ's way.
 - 5. "The Christian is a man who has ceased to do what HE wants to do and who has begun to do what Jesus Christ wants him to do." (Barclay)

