

## **Dedicated but Deceived**

### **Acts 9:1-6**

1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest  
2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.  
3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.  
4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"  
5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."  
6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." NKJV

Who is this Saul that seems to hate Christianity so much? Notice he is not like a sheriff that does his job without hate or animosity. Instead Saul just cannot do enough to rid the world of these Christians.

What is it that compels him? Why has he taken this as a personal mission? What is it that he hopes to accomplish with this war on the churches?

Is it possible to be so dedicated to God but to still be wrong?

- I. Paul is a Jew, a Hebrew of the tribe of Benjamin.
  - A. Although born among the Gentiles in Tarsus, he was educated in Jerusalem.
  - B. He took his studies seriously, even in the almost forgotten language of Hebrew.
  - C. He was educated at the feet of Gamaliel.
    1. Ac 22:3 "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.
- II. He was a Pharisee.
  - A. One of the strictest religious sects of the day.
    1. They took a literal interpretation of the Old Testament.
    2. They had voluminously interpreted the Law of Moses.
  - B. They only approved of their fellow Pharisees.
    1. The good Jew would not have anything to do with Gentiles.
    2. And some Jews would shun other Jews that would not separate themselves from Gentiles.

3. But the Pharisees took it a whole step farther.
  4. They would not have anything to do with anyone other than the Pharisees.
- C. They had a sense of superiority.
1. John 7:45-52 (NKJV) 45 Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?" 46 The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" 47 Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived? 48 Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? 49 But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." 50 Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, 51 "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" 52 They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee."
  2. Even though they were in such a small minority they were sure that the multitudes were wrong and they were right.
  3. John 9:34 They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out.
  4. John 9:40 Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?"
- D. They were condemned by John the Baptist.
1. Matthew 3:7-10 (NKJV) 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, 9 and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 10 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- E. But it was Jesus who was very harsh with the Pharisees.
1. We can see how they hated Him for His popularity.
  2. We can see how they hated Him for His open rebukes of their traditions and their interpretations of the Law.
- III. He was zealous for his faith even to the persecution of the Christians.
- A. At the beginning, it was the Jewish leaders around the world who brought the most persecution to the Christians.
1. The Roman's saw Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism and therefore gave

it little regard.

2. That is until it became a primarily Gentile faith.

B. Paul had taken it upon himself the rid the world of Christianity.

1. He had stood by the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen.

2. He had persecuted the church at Jerusalem so severely that they went everywhere else away from Jerusalem preaching the gospel.

3. Acts 8:1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

4. It is kind of interesting that the early Christian church had little desire to spread the faith.

5. But when Paul set about to persecute them then they fled and they could not help but take the message of Jesus with them.

C. It is interesting that Paul would himself be the subject of the persecution that he himself had started.

1. Everywhere he went it was the Jews that stirred up the Gentiles against Paul.

IV. So what was Paul's problem

A. Paul describes his condition throughout his letters.

1. He was deceived and blinded.

a. 2Co 3:14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

b. 2Co 4:4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

c. Romans 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

B. Jesus described this condition

1. To Nicodemus in John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

2. When He condemned them in Mt 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

It is unimaginable for some that a man dedicated to God all of his life, trained in the word of God from his childhood could be found to be fighting against God.

But that is Saul. And that is many others who have God in their heads and not their hearts. Who have taken the word of God and made it a ladder to heaven.

But think of this, if men like Saul are not going to get to heaven then what about those who have little or nothing to do with Jesus?

1 Peter 4:18 (NKJV) 18 Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"