

THE PREPARATION OF SAUL: THE NEEDS OF A NEW CONVERT

ACTS 09: 10–18

Introduction

The person who has just come to know Christ has many needs. As a new convert, he is helpless and usually doomed to falling and returning to the world unless his needs are met. This is the challenge of the church, of mature believers. The needs of new converts must be met.

- I. Need 1: help from a very special believer (disciple) (vv. 10-15).
- II. Need 2: to know that he is a chosen instrument of God (vv. 15-16).
- III. Need 3: to experience the help and ministry of God's disciple (vv. 17-18).

I. Acts 09:10–15 Support of a Special Disciple

The new convert needed help from a very special believer. Apparently the believer was not one of the apostles or deacons nor an ordained minister. The believer was a simple unknown disciple named Ananias. But the traits Ananias possessed were exactly what was needed by the new convert, Saul. (See Acts 22:12 for two other traits of Ananias mentioned by Paul: a strong testimony, and being devout or godly.)

1. Ananias was sensitive to God's call. When God spoke to Ananias, he listened. He was alert and sensitive, aware of and familiar with the voice of God. He was a man of much prayer. Therefore, when God called him, he knew the voice of God and he answered.

Thought 1. The new convert needs the ministry of a disciple who knows the voice of God. He needs to learn how to be sensitive to the call and direction of God.

Mat 28:19-20 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

2 Tim 2:2 *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

1 Pet 5:5-6 *Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

2. Ananias was willing to face difficult assignments. Reaching out and helping a new convert is always difficult, a heavy responsibility. And the more depraved the convert
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has been, the more difficult the task becomes. This was true with Saul; this is true with all new converts.

In dealing with the new convert, there is always some apprehension, for he is somewhat unknown and to some degree a stranger and a novice in the faith. There is the difficulty...

- of learning where he is in spiritual and Biblical understanding
 - of learning where he is in emotional maturity
 - of knowing what to teach, where to begin, and the pace at which to teach
 - of determining how much time is necessary to disciple him
 - of being on guard against becoming a stumbling block, because he is always observing and watching one's life
 - of rooting and grounding him in the faith by life and example, instruction and *personal attachment*
 - of leading him to love and not to be critical and judgmental, opposing and attacking other believers
 - of protecting him from falling and from returning to the world, from returning to his former life of sin
3. Ananias was willing to be the answer to prayer. Note how God assured the believer, Ananias.
- a. God told Ananias that Paul was praying: he was truly a new convert, seeking God's face. He was broken and trembling, stricken and apprehensive...
- over the shattering appearance of the Lord Jesus
 - over the warning from the Lord that he was on the brink of disaster and doom
 - over having rebelled and opposed the Lord and His people
 - over his terrible sin
 - over his obstinate unbelief and over deception, having fought and struggled against God
 - over having to wait for the Lord's Word instructing him what to do
 - over his having been stricken blind and being in total darkness
- c. God told Ananias that Paul had been given a vision — clear assurance — that a believer (named Ananias) would come and help him.

The point is this: the new convert who is genuine prays for help. He prays for God to send mature believers into his life who will help him to grow and to know the Lord's will for his life. It is the mature believer himself who becomes the answer to the new convert's prayer.

Thought 1. How desperately the Lord needs believers who will reach out to help those who are new in the faith, believers who will stand in the gap and become the answer themselves to the prayer of new converts.

Thought 2. All converts who are genuine desire to grow in the knowledge of the Lord. They long for believers to befriend and help them. It is up to us to become the person, the believer, the very answer to the new convert's prayer. There is no one else except us.

Mat 28:19-20 *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Acts 20:35 *"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

Rom 15:1 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

2 Tim 2:2 *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

4. Ananias sensed inadequacy and apprehension. He knew about the former life of Saul, the terrible sin and shame, the threat that he was to believers. He shrank from helping him, sensing both an inadequacy and apprehension. But note: this is exactly how the believer should feel about the call of God, no matter what the call is. Feeling inadequate and being apprehensive makes the believer cast himself upon God. It teaches him to trust God, His grace, His suffering, His strength more and more.

Thought 1. The very thing Saul (and all other converts) needed was the help of a disciple who knew what it was to feel inadequate and apprehensive. All new converts (just as Saul) have to face difficult tasks all through life, tasks that demand God's special grace if they are to be worked out for the most good. A believer who senses inadequacy can teach the new convert to trust and depend upon God rather quickly.

John 3:27 *To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven."*

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

2 Cor 3:5 *Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.*

Psa 116:6 *The LORD protects the simple-hearted; when I was in great need, he saved me.*

5. Ananias was willing to obey when God said go. The new convert needs an obedient believer helping him. He would be helpless and most likely ruined if the believer was not obedient. Obedience, learning to obey, is the supreme trait and evidence of the true believer.

a. To obey is to believe and to believe is to obey.

Heb 5:9 *And, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (See Believe, Jn. 2:24)*

Acts 5:32 *“We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*

Rom 6:16 *Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

Jer 7:23 *But I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.*

b. To obey is to love and to love is to obey.

John 14:21 *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*

1 John 2:5 *But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:*

c. “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22).

II. **Acts 09:15–16** *Confirmation of Call to Minister*

The new convert needed to know that he was a chosen instrument of God. Saul needed to know this glorious truth; so does every new convert. The Lord says this clearly:

John 15:16 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”*

The new convert is a priceless instrument, a instrument that must not be knocked over and broken, cast away, or neglected and ignored. The new convert needs to know God has chosen to use him in His work and service, giving him the greatest possible purpose on earth. There are two things in particular he needs to know.

1. God has chosen the believer to carry the Lord’s name.

a. He needs to know that he is to carry the Lord’s name in his heart and in his behaviour and actions. Christ is in his heart and the Spirit of God Himself indwells his life. His body has become the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). He is now precious to the Lord and counted as a dear child of God. He is a member of the

family of God and an heir of heaven and of eternity. The new convert must be taught; he must learn and come to know...

- that he is to deny self, and take up his cross daily

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

- that he is to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world

Titus 2:12 *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.*

- that he is to offer his body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God

Rom 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.*

- that he is not to give up meeting together with other believers, but to seek their fellowship

Heb 10:25 *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

The presence of Christ within the believer's heart is said to be a "treasure in jars of clay" (2 Cor. 4:7). It is a treasure that brings fellowship and communion with the Lord Himself, the perfect assurance and confidence that all things are well both now and eternally. The Lord's presence assures the believer that the Lord cares and is looking after and will carry him through the trials of life victoriously, even through death. Therefore, the convert must be helped to diligently seek God, to conform his life to Christ, and to guard and watch where he goes and what he does and says.

- b. He needs to know that he is to carry the Lord's name in verbal witnessing. He is to witness before all men, high and low, as he can *make opportunity*. The new convert needs to know that his primary purpose for being on earth is to share the glorious salvation that is in Christ Jesus. He is to reach out and help all whom he can, ministering and meeting their needs in the love of Christ. Wherever he is, he is to witness and help others: at work, at home, at play, at school. The world needs Christ even as he does.

Mat 20:28 *"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Luke 19:10 *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

Acts 1:8 *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Acts 4:20 “For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

2 Cor 4:13 It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.

Titus 2:15 These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

2. God has chosen the believer to suffer for the Lord’s name. Every true believer is abused and suffers at the hands of the world. Christ has forewarned believers: they shall suffer persecution. The new convert needs to know this. (See note, Mt. 5:10-12.)

Phil 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

2 Tim 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

1 John 3:13 Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

1 Pet 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

III. Acts 09:17–18 *Experiencing Help and Ministering*

The new convert needed to experience the help and ministry of God’s disciple. Just imagine the brokenness and trembling, the stricken and apprehensive heart of Saul (see note, Acts 9:15-16). He desperately needed four things (as do all new converts).

1. He needed the touch of a disciple’s hand and faithfulness. He needed the presence of some disciple who was faithful enough to come and touch his life. He needed to see faithfulness in action — love, care, concern, interest, help — all ministered to him in the name of Christ. Nothing could help the new convert more than seeing the faithfulness of a disciple reaching out to help him in his need.
2. The recognition of being a *brother* in the Lord. Note: Ananias called Saul *brother*. This one word probably caused Paul to break out in tears. He was being reached out to by a dear believer of the Lord, accepted and welcomed into his heart despite the terrible wrong he had done to the believers. He now had confirmation; he had been truly forgiven and received by the Lord. He had been truly accepted by God and he was beloved in the name of Jesus, the name he had abused and hurt so much in the past.

How he needed to hear a dear child of God say “brother!” And now he had heard it. Only eternity and a conversation with Paul will reveal the impact this one act had upon Paul.

3. The power of his healing ministry. Saul was afflicted. He needed Ananias to help him in his affliction. He needed his eyes healed, his sight restored, and God used his dear disciple to heal Saul. The scales of darkness fell from his eyes, symbolizing how the scales of spiritual darkness and sin and shame had been removed from his heart.
4. The sharing of the Holy Spirit’s infilling; the power of the Spirit. (See *Saul’s Infilling of the Holy Spirit*, Acts 9:17-18.)

Gal 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

Eph 3:17-19 *So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

2 Cor 9:10 *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.*

Eph 4:15 *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

1 Pet 2:2 *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*

John 10:10 *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” ■*

ACTS 09: 17–18

PAUL’S CONVERSION AND INFILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord — Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized. Acts 09: 17–18

Was Paul saved on the Damascus road, or when he was infilled with the Holy Spirit? The question is debated by various scholars. Note exactly what Scripture says.

1. Saul called Jesus “Lord”: “Who are you Lord?” (v. 5). However, Saul did not know who was speaking to him out of the light (vv. 3-5). He was asking. But note this.

=> The “light [was] from heaven” (v. 3)

=> The voice was from heaven (v. 4).

Saul knew something: whoever was speaking was of heaven; He was a heavenly being. He knew it was bound to be just who He said, “The Lord.” He knew it was the Lord in the same sense that Cornelius did (Acts 10:4), not knowing God personally, but knowing that it was the Lord God of heaven.

2. Saul prayed (v. 11). He spent three whole days in prayer. Keeping in mind how shattered he was, a person has to really stretch the imagination to hold that he was not saved. Note it was the Lord Himself who said, “He is praying.” So his praying must have been acceptable to God.

3. The Lord gave Saul a *true* vision which, when the details of it are studied, is phenomenal. Again, the imagination has to be really stretched to hold that he was not saved.

The evidence is strong: Saul surrendered to the Lord on the Damascus road. It was there that the Lord (the Holy Spirit) entered his heart and life. And, as he was to experience the need for many infillings of the Spirit in the future, the need existed when Ananias visited him. So God infilled him then, the first of many inducements of power that were to come upon him. (See *Holy Spirit*, Acts 2:1-4; *Holy Spirit*, Acts 8:14-17. See Eph. 5:18.) □