

Saul Before Paul

Acts 7:54-9:19 | Galatians 1:11-24 | Philippians 3:4-11

SERIES QUESTION What problem is being addressed, and how does the gospel answer it?

BIG IDEA Saul's religious certainty made him deaf to God's truth and violent toward God's people. By grace, Jesus confronted him, overturned his confidence, and brought him into the church he tried to destroy.

Follow the story

ACTS: WHAT HAPPENED	GALATIANS: WHO ACTED	PHILIPPIANS: WHAT CHANGED
Saul approved violence, opposed the church, met the risen Jesus, and entered Damascus blind.	God set Paul apart, called him by grace, revealed his Son, and commissioned him.	Former gains became loss; knowing Christ became Paul's surpassing treasure.

A striking contrast

Stephen is filled with the Spirit and sees clearly. The council is religiously certain but refuses to hear. Stephen speaks about the heavenly court. The earthly court dissolves into a violent mob.

Stephen's final prayer included Saul: Saul was present, approving and assisting those carrying out the killing. Scripture does not say that Stephen's prayer caused Saul's conversion.

REMEMBER Before Saul knew he needed grace, Stephen was praying for grace to be shown to his persecutors - including Saul.

Grace confronts and creates a brother

- Saul intended to enter Damascus as a captor; he entered blind and led by the hand.
- 'Why do you persecute me?' - Christ identifies himself with his suffering church.
- Ananias obeyed Christ, laid hands on the persecutor, and called him 'Brother Saul.'
- Saul's conversion was sudden enough to knock him down, but it was not sudden to God.

The Gospel Then and Now

Church problem then: Religious certainty and zeal were used to resist Christ and harm Christ's people.

Church temptation now: Doctrine, heritage, morality, politics, worship traditions, knowledge, or service can become grounds for confidence and superiority.

Gospel-shaped church: We submit every credential to Christ and receive those whom Christ receives.

Discuss

1. What warning does this story give churches about religious certainty that refuses to listen?
2. What did obedience require Ananias to believe about Jesus - and about Saul?
3. What good religious gifts can churches turn into grounds for confidence or superiority?
4. How can a church value those gifts without placing its confidence in them?

ECO CONNECTION Essential Tenets III.A: God's grace in Christ; III.B: election for salvation and service. eco-pres.org/constitution/

READ MORE ONLINE BibleProject, Guide to the Book of Acts: bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-acts/

BEFORE NEXT WEEK Read Acts 9:1-31; Acts 13:1-12; and Romans 15:14-33. Notice who calls and sends Paul, what mission he receives, and how he understands his responsibility to churches and people who have not heard.



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