**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Twenty-Seventh Week Since the Resurrection

 ***Paul’s Conversion - Acts 9:1-25***

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(Unless otherwise noted, CSB is quoted.)

 In Acts 9, we have the account of Jewish Pharisee Saul pursuing to persecute those that followed Jesus. This is a story of one of the most “turn-about” lives in the Bible. An about-face in the order of God. The events that led to Saul persecuting Jesus’s followers were established in the Law given to Moses (Deuteronomy 13). As we have seen throughout the Bible, the Hebrews/Jews misunderstood the Law and its application. Saul was not any different in his zealous application of the Law. We learn that Saul was a Pharisee when he declares in Acts 23:6, “*a son of Pharisees*”, and in Acts 26:5, *I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.* This is the man God chose to serve Him and write thirteen books of the New Testament. Liberal scholars push the position that without Paul there would not be any Christianity. This is preposterous due to the facts of history and the additional authors of the New Testament. Here is the text as Luke wrote in the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

1 Now Saul was still breathing threats and murder

against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest

Saul’s heart condition was in contrast to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5.

21 "You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment.

 22 But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, 'You fool! ' will be subject to hellfire.

2 and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus,

so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way,

he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

**Reflecting Upon Our Western Rule of Law and Modern Theocracies**

 Before we go further in this biblical account, we need to make a comparison to our contemporary situation in the world. It is contrary to the American Constitutional rule of law for any religious group to issue arrest warrants. However, this is not true for many parts of the world. In countries like India, Hinduism still applies its belief system through Hindu office holders upon the people. They rule with a religious law. People can be arrested for violation of Hindu religious law.

**See Persectuation.org**

Police Arrest four Christian and Hindu Guests Under False Charges in Pastor’s Home

https://www.persecution.org/2020/08/16/police-arrest-four-christian-hindu-guests-false-charges-pastors-home/

**See Reuters**

Indian police arrest Christian priest after complaint by Hindu group

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-religion/indian-police-arrest-christian-priest-after-complaint-by-hindu-group-idUSKBN1EA06V

 We also see this in Indonesia where the Muslim religion is in the majority. Of course, the world knows the middle east is dominated by Islamic governments who rule with Shariah Law. Shariah law is the enforcement of the Quran and the Hadiths. The Hadiths detail how Muhammad lived providing a guide to everyday life for the individual. There are six canonical books called collectively Kutub al-Sittah.

Sahih al-Bukhari (most respected and revered one – Lived 810-870 A.D.)

Sahih Muslim

Sunan Abu Dawood

Sunan al-Tirmidhi

Sunan al-Nasa'i

Sunan ibn Majah

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_hadith_collections>

The Kutub al-Sittah (Arabic: ٱلْكُتُب ٱلسِّتَّة‎, romanized: al-Kutub as-Sittah, lit. 'The six books') are six (originally five) books containing collections of hadith (sayings or acts of the Islamic prophet Muhammad) compiled by six Sunni Muslim scholars in the ninth century CE, approximately two centuries after the death of Muhammad. They are sometimes referred to as al-Sihah al-Sittah, which translates as "The Authentic Six". They were first formally grouped and defined by Ibn al-Qaisarani in the 11th century, who add Sunan ibn Majah to the list. Since then, they have enjoyed near-universal acceptance as part of the official canon of Sunni Islam.

Not all Sunni Muslim jurisprudence scholars agree on the addition of Ibn Majah. In particular, the Malikis and Ibn al-Athir consider al-Muwatta' to be the sixth book. The reason for the addition of Ibn Majah's Sunan is that it contains many Hadiths which do not figure in the other five, whereas all the Hadiths in the Muwatta' figure in the other Sahih books.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kutub_al-Sittah>

**Is the Penalty for leaving Islam Death?**

Thirteen countries, all of a Muslim majority, punish apostasy (the renunciation of a particular religion), or blasphemy with death.

The annual Freedom of Thought report by the International Humanist and Ethical Union, found that 13 countries impose capital punishment upon people simply for their beliefs, or lack of them.

Reported May 2017 - Afghanistan, Iran, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen are the relevant countries. All of these countries, except Pakistan, allow for capital punishment against apostasy, while Pakistan imposes the death penalty for blasphemy - including a disbelief in God.

<https://www.indy100.com/article/the-countries-where-apostasy-is-punishable-by-death--Z110j2Uwxb>

Quran 9:5 (Medina revelation, 623 – 632 A.D.) When the Sacred Months have passed, kill the polytheists wherever you find them. And capture them, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayers, and pay the alms, then let them go their way. God is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.

9:12 (Medina revelation) But if they violate their oaths after their pledge, and attack your religion, then fight the leaders of disbelief—they have no faith—so that they may desist.

9:13 (Medina revelation) Will you not fight a people who violated their oaths, and planned to exile the Messenger, and initiated hostilities against you? Do you fear them? It is God you should fear, if you are believers.

9:14 (Medina revelation) Fight them. God will punish them at your hands, and humiliate them, and help you against them, and heal the hearts of a believing people.

 It is often heard from Muslims that they are a religion of peace, and they quote Surah 109:1-6 of the Quran to prove their point. (Surah is a chapter in the Quran. There are 114 Surahs in the most common Quran used.)

109:1-6 (Meccan revelation 610 -623 A.D.) 1 Say, “O disbelievers. 2. I do not worship what you worship. 3. Nor do you worship what I worship. 4. Nor do I serve what you serve. 5. Nor do you serve what I serve. 6. You have your way, and I have my way.”

It needs to be understood that the Quran is published with the second half of the book mostly containing revelations Muhammad reportedly received while he was in Mecca during the early years. He was not in a position of strength during the early years and could not force his religion upon others. After he moved to Medina, he received additional revelations which overrode the first revelations he received. In Medina, he grew his military might and could force others to his religion. The revelations he received in Medina are primarily published in the first part of the Quran. See conversation with Al Fadi and David Wood.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqT2jUU7VLI>

https://cirainternational.com/classes/1674/lessons/8244?locale=en

Islamic Doctrine of Abrogation Detailed in Quran

Muslims justify abrogation by citing the Quran. The doctrine of abrogation holds that later revelation received by the Prophet make the earlier revelations null and void. Four verses in the Quran justify abrogation for them.

When we cancel a message, or throw it into oblivion, we replace it with one better or one similar. Do you not know that God has power over all things? Quran 2:106

When we replace a message with another, and God knows best what he reveals, they say: You have made it up. Yet, most of them do not know. Quran 16:101

God abrogates or confirms whatsoever he will, for he has with him the Book of the Books. Quran13:39

If we pleased, we could take away what we have revealed to you. Then you will not find anyone to plead for it with us. Quran 17:86

Here is an early Medinan revelation that still show tolerance.

Quran 2:256. There shall be no compulsion in religion; the right way has become distinct from the wrong way. Whoever renounces evil and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handle; which does not break. Allah is Hearing and Knowing.

Islamic scholars interpret this to mean that if a non-believer pays the tax, then they are under no compulsion. Others see that Surahs 48:16, 9:73 abrogate this early Median revelation.

THE PUNISHMENT FOR APOSTASY FROM ISLAM by Silas

CONCLUSION

We have examined the theological foundation of Islam and found that Islam’s established ruling is that apostates are to be killed wherever they are. The Quran implies this while the Hadith, Sira, and works of jurisprudence state it clearly. When the breadth and depth of Islam are examined this is the only conclusion that can be drawn.

Islam brings a knife to the throat of all that is non-Muslim, be they Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, or apostates. It is incumbent upon Christians to expose this brutality and speak out against and oppose the darkness of this command. Supporting ministries like Voice of the Martyrs is something all Christians can do.

<https://www.answeringislam.net/Silas/apostasy.htm#_Toc157226278>

Islam was not the first and is not the only religion that has taught to kill those who leave their faith. Obviously, the Jews in the 1st century believed they had the religious duty and authority to execute people for apostacy/disbelief and those that turned away from Judaism. Jesus is the primary example of executing a person who did not believe and teach Judaism as the Temple Priests did. Saul fully believed he was doing the right thing. Today, Judaism is not known for killing people who pull away from being a Jew. We need to examine the Biblical grounds for the Jews who believed they had the religious duty and obligation to persecute those who turned away from Judaism. We find a hard passage of Scripture to read in the Old Testament regarding apostasy. We must remember that during the time of the Exodus the Hebrew people were in a war setting. As in our time, a nation at war has different rules.

So, during the time of the Exodus, when Moses and the Hebrews were at war with the pagan populations around them, God gave specific instruction concerning those that defected to the pagan cultures. The cultures worshiped pagan gods and sacrificed their children to them. They also practiced temple prostitution. Therefore, in a time of war, to defect to the pagan side was an act of treason. In our American system, the act of treason “in wartime” is punishable by death. The Jews in Paul’s day were occupied by the Romans. Any defections were obviously considered to fall under the authority of Deuteronomy 13.

Deuteronomy 13:6-10 (NAS) 6 “If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods ' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known,

 7 of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end),

 8 you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him.

 9 "But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.

 10 "So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

 Armed with the Tora, and the authority to arrest followers of Jesus, (members of the Way) Saul was determined. However, he ran into the powerful attributes of God’s spiritual calling - Judgement, forgiveness, commissioning. At first, Saul experienced God’s use of light. Then God used His voice (I am Jesus). Then God blinded Saul to remove his sense of controlling where he was going. God would now direct Saul’s life. Saul had to depend upon others that God was directing. There was a three-day period of cleansing Saul’s mind and body.

 3 As he traveled and was nearing Damascus,

a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him.

 4 Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him,

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul said.

**"I am Jesus**, the one you are persecuting," he replied.

6 "But get up and go into the city,

and you will be told what you must do."

 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless,

hearing the sound but seeing no one.

 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So, they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus.

 9 He was unable to **see for three days** and did **not eat or drink.**

**Ananias of Damascus** means **“**Whom Jehovah has graciously given**”.**

The very meaning of Ananias’ name indicates God gracefully extending to Saul a chance at repentance. God does this with all of us. We all have the same chance Saul had. Like Saul, we can be in the midst of carrying-out our sin when God comes to us.

 10 There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision,

"Ananias." "Here I am, Lord," he replied.

 11 "Get up and go to the street called Straight," the Lord said to him,

"to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there.

A play on words, Saul was directed to go to a street called “Straight.” We can say that Saul was “*scared straight*.” There was a book in the 1970’s called Scared Straight that reported placing troubled youth with convicts for a three-hour talk session. This was an effort to allow the convicts to share their failings in hopes the wayward youth would turn from their wicked ways. These programs alone had minimal effects on criminal teens. What showed more promise were programs that combined a sober dose of what criminal adult life could be in addition to spiritual applications. Currently there is another program for troubled teens called “Outback.” This is a wilderness therapy program for any troubled teens in the United States.

**God’s Grace in Times of Fear**

Saul was no doubt in a fearful state. Blind and humbled to the point of having to be led around by others, God’s grace had him in a spiritual state to listen. Saul even had a vision of Ananias. However, for Ananias, he had his own reservations due to Saul’s previous actions against Believers. But the Lord declared that He had chosen Saul as an instrument of His.

Here is where we need to take note of what being an instrument of the Lord entails. Yes, Saul was to witness to many people and kings. However, verse 16 clearly states that Saul will suffer for Jesus’ name sake. If you are going to witness in the Lord’s name, it is understood you will receive some form of push-back from society. Christian history documents this repeated fact. Today, we see all over the world Christians persecuted for their witness. See Voice of the Martyrs web site: https://www.persecution.com/

 12 In a vision he [Saul] has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so that he may regain his sight."

 13 "Lord," Ananias answered,

"I have heard from many people about this man,

how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

14 And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

 15 But the Lord said to him,

"Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites.

 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

The account of Ananias, under the direction of the Lord, is basic in understanding how the Lord works. God can choose to work alone. We see this in the Creation. God alone created our world. Here, in Acts, God chose to work through Ananias. And once again, we have a description of the laying-on of hands as we saw in Acts 8:17. We do not forget that this will not happen this way every time. We see in Acts 10 that the Spirit was received during the preaching of Peter and not through the laying-on of hands. It is evident that God chooses the timing and method of His Spirit indwelling us. In fact, this is the point of being a Christian. Paul declares in Romans 8:9 *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him*.

 17 Ananias went and entered the house. He placed his hands on him and said,

"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you may regain your sight **and be filled with the Holy Spirit."**

 18 At once something like scales fell from his eyes,

and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.

 19 And after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some time.

 20 Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues:

"He is the Son of God."

 21 All who heard him were astounded and said,

 "Isn't this the man in Jerusalem who was causing havoc for those who called on this name and came here for the purpose of taking them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

 22 But Saul grew stronger and kept confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

 23 After many days had passed, the Jews conspired to kill him,

 24 but Saul learned of their plot. So they were watching the gates day and night intending to kill him,

 25 but his disciples took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the wall.

 We also see Paul’s own account of God coming to him in the letter to the Galatians.

Galatians 1:13-16 (NAS) 13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles,

 **God at Work in t3e Lives of People**

 This account of God coming to Saul and turning his life around is proof that God interacts with people. God is not static, living a quiet life in Heaven watching the world. God comes to people. However, He does not come to everyone the way He came to Saul. God does not work the same way every time He interacts with people. There are a few instances in the Bible that highlight a change in God’s normal ways. We see in the Old Testament that God took Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) to be with Him. These two did not die a death we all usually experience. God is not limited in form, function or presentation of Himself. We need to highlight the oneness of God’s nature and the presentation of His persons when we witness the Trinity – God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What can we learn from Saul’s conversion? [following text from NAS]

1. **God is sovereign in His decisions.**
	1. Ephesians 1:10b -12 In Him, 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.
	2. Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
2. **God plans and chooses to interact with people.**
	1. Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Proverbs 16:9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.
3. **God chooses the timing for His purpose.**
	1. Psalm 31:15 My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me.
4. **God gave Himself to redeem us like Saul.**
	1. Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.
5. **God can put a new self on us**.
	1. Colossians 3:10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him
6. **God indwells us to become a new living being.**
	1. 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
7. **God chooses us.**
	1. Ephesians 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

With this said – God chooses for all of us to be with Him and does not want to lose one person (2 Peter 3:9). God affords all people to call upon Him (Romans 10:13). God does seek for us to call upon Him and He will give us a new heart as He did Saul (Ezekiel 36:37).

 **Psalms 102:17** He has regarded the prayer of the destitute And has not despised their prayer. AMEN

**The Remaining Text of Acts 9**

 26 When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple.

 27 Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and that the Lord had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.

 28 Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

 29 He conversed and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him.

 30 When the brothers found out, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

 31 So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

 32 As Peter was traveling from place to place, he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda.

 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years.

 34 Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed," and immediately he got up.

 35 So all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

 36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which is translated Dorcas). She was always doing good works and acts of charity.

 37 About that time she became sick and died. After washing her, they placed her in a room upstairs.

 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent two men to him who urged him, "Don't delay in coming with us."

 39 Peter got up and went with them. When he arrived, they led him to the room upstairs. And all the widows approached him, weeping and showing him the robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

 40 Peter sent them all out of the room. He knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up.

 41 He gave her his hand and helped her stand up. He called the saints and widows and presented her alive.

 42 This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

 43 Peter stayed for some time in Joppa with Simon, a leather tanner. (Acts 9:1-43 CSB17)