

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

20 September 2026

Conversations with St. Paul

Text: "He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
"Who are you, Lord? Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he replied. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Acts 9:4-6 From Acts 9:1-9

The drama of conversion to Christ is portrayed in the conversation between Saul and Jesus in a very vivid manner.

The dynamics of conversation, the nature of conversion, and the ingredients of conversion are all here.

In fact, the experience of Saul on the road to Damascus is considered by most to be the best example of radical conversion.

Often someone will remark, "I've never had a Damascus road experience with Christ."

By that they mean they've never seen a blinding light or heard a voice from heaven.

They've never been struck down in quite as dramatic a way as was Saul.

Yet in a very real sense every person who becomes a Christian experiences what Saul experienced on the road to Damascus.

Saul's conversion was really no different from other conversions except that it was more concentrated, more focused.

The attendant physical manifestations, such as the voice and the light, are really insignificant in comparison to the deeper dynamics of what occurred on that road.

In fact, many other people have been made aware of the reality of Jesus Christ in just as dramatic a way as Saul and yet have refused to be converted.

But it is because Saul's conversion was so dramatic that it offers a good example of conversion. It teaches us the nature of conversion and the absolute necessity of it and helps us understand what it is.

Conversion always occurs because of Christ's compelling.

Jesus takes the initiative in it.

He always inaugurates it or begins the process by which we are able to come to faith in him.

The farthest thing from Saul's mind was that he might become a Christian.

He was going in the opposite direction with great zeal when the Lord took the initiative in regard to him.

Verse one says he was "breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," when suddenly Jesus Christ dramatically reached out to him.

The first ingredient in all conversions is Christ's taking the initiative.

He seeks us before we ever seek him.

In fact, our seeking of him is a result of his seeking us.

If God didn't take the initiative and reach out to us and make us aware of our need of his love, none of us would ever believe in him.

If we were left to ourselves, we would continue to be like sheep, going astray, going our own ways.

The conversation that marked Saul's conversion began with Jesus calling, "Saul, Saul."
In the Scripture when there is a repeated name our phrase, it is usually the evidence of great compassion and sorrow.
In the Old Testament David cried after the tragic death of his son, "O Absalom, O Absalom, my son."

When Jesus stood over Jerusalem and wept over its sin, he cried out, "'Jerusalem, O Jerusalem."
So with Saul, Jesus calls out in love and sadness.

In that compelling there is a conviction of sin and need.

The question that Jesus asked of Saul was, "Why do you persecute me?"

The acts of cruelty that Saul was performing against the Lord's disciples were acts of cruelty against him.

And those acts were expressions of his own sin and need.

In conversion the Lord makes us aware of our need, whatever that need may be.

He makes us aware of our need and our inadequacy.

He causes us to see ourselves as we are and the need to be changed.

That awareness is what the Bible calls conviction.

It is an inward consciousness of sinfulness and worthiness, a stark realization of failure.

It is an acknowledgment of guilt, and admission of sin.

Conversion is also an awareness of the absurdity and foolishness of sin.

Conviction is the realization of how futile and foolish it is to set one's will against God.

Conviction is admitting that living life apart from God is hurting ourselves and others, and it is unnecessary.

In conversion there is confrontation.

After Jesus' question, "Why do you persecute me?" Saul himself asked a question, "Who are you Lord?"

Realizing that it was God himself who was speaking, Saul now inquired of God.

It was, an honest inquiry.

Saul really wanted to know the Lord in a personal way.

So the Lord identified himself and revealed himself to Saul.

The Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Verse 6 says Saul began to tremble and was astonished.

This is the crucible of conversion.

A confrontation, a face-to-face meeting, took place between Jesus Christ the Son of God and Saul of Tarsus.

Surely every person's conversion will not be like this one in that everything occurs so dramatically and quickly.

Yet for a person to say, "I have been converted," he or she must be able to say, "I have had a confrontation with Christ."

Confrontation is not just acceptance of ideas or intellectual assent to a plan of salvation.

It is not just agreeing to some facts.

It involves acceptance of a person and acknowledgment of that acceptance to him.

Confrontation is saying to Jesus Christ, "I accept you as my Lord. I trust you for my salvation."

In that confrontation there is commitment.

The most significant words Saul spoke in this personal conversation with Jesus were, "What shall I do, Lord?"

Those words reflect a change of heart and mind in Saul.

There can be no conversion apart from personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

It is not enough just to want to go to heaven when you die.

It is not enough just to desire to live a better life.

Conversion requires commitment.

You must be willing to say what Saul said: "What shall I do, Lord?"

Many of us were converted to Jesus Christ in ways that were just as decisive and dramatic as Saul's conversion.

They just weren't as quick.

God's work in lives is very deliberate, but it is usually done over a period of time.

Conversions can be as much a process as an event.

Many cannot tell of the exact moment they first trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

But one thing is sure.

If they have felt the compelling of God's Spirit, if they have been convicted of sin, if they have confronted Jesus Christ and have personally committed their lives to him, they are his.

And the "good" life begins.

And it just gets better each day until he calls us home!

Wherein it becomes perfect at last!