

The Acts of the Apostles

[Wed. Jul. 23, 2014] Acts Series, Acts 9:1- Introduction - Craig A. Thurman

Chapter eight has the first recorded church since the first church of Jerusalem: the church at the city of Samaria. The Lord had used Philip in a great way to witness Jesus Christ to them. Philip, not the apostles, not one of the 70, not a pastor, but a **former** deacon of the church at Jerusalem, who had moved out from Jerusalem because of the persecution that arose at the martyrdom of Stephen. And through this man's work the people of Samaria gave heed to the Word of God.

We cannot add any more to this than what we have been given from the Scriptures. This alone dispels the restrictive, legalistic, traditional notion of the requisite that it takes pastoral or apostolic authority to start churches. Someone retorts, but the apostles, Peter and John went down to sanction this with the giving of the Holy Spirit, and this started the church. To that I would say that this was not the pattern, but one instance where the work of Christ, **for the first time** beyond Jerusalem and Judaea, received confirmation that God was moving, as had been prophesied (Lk.24.48; Acts 1.8), to the regions beyond, step by step, and ultimately into the nations of the gentiles. We must confess that many other churches began at the same time, to which there is no record of an apostolic visit. What about the churches at Antioch and Damascus. **If** an apostolic, pastoral pattern were to be established we should have expected it to be easily shown by now. Rather, as we have said before, only one other time is this apostolic visit noted, and this is the first, wholly gentile church, the church at Caesarea, in our next chapter, chapter 10. (But for an unusual event in Acts 19, the Ephesian disciples.)

We saw that the apostles who were in Jerusalem

This doesn't mention so much the church, though the apostles are the foundation of the church; the apostles are the spearhead of guiding the church through these infant days of the church, until the Word of God is completed.

heard that Samaria had received the word of God, so they sent Peter and John down to them to bear witness of God's working in this area. (8.5, 14) Once that

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Peter and John confirm the truth of the Lord's working among others, the half-breeds of Israel, the Holy Spirit is given to them, in this instance, by the laying on of hands.

This act of laying on of the hands demands an identifiable people to whom hands can be laid upon. It further teaches the truth of the church as a local body of baptized believers in Jesus Christ. The Caesarean church shall not have hands laid upon them. The Sovereign Lord shows to the apostolic witness, without anyone asking, without the innovation of hands, that full-blooded gentiles have received the Word of Christ. This gentile church inaugurates the beginning of the Work of Christ to the nations.

So what is the proper way to start a church? What does the Bible show us? It shows us that there must be those of the N. T. church who will preach Christ; this is any member having had a faithful relationship with a N. T. church; that there must be those who receive Christ. And that the recipients of Christ must be baptized by someone who had this faithful church standing. (John the Baptist's ministry [with his disciples who baptized] has diminished and Christ's [with His disciples who baptized] has increased.) Any two or three so baptized disciples may join together and begin the work of Jesus Christ as a church immediately. (Mt.18.20)

Brethren, no matter what we do someone isn't going to agree with us. Do all we will; cross every 't', and dot every 'i' and **most churches** are going to disagree, not on biblical grounds, but on grounds of 'tradition' and say that we aren't a church. We didn't have a presbytery of elders convene, we didn't baptize in the out-of-doors, or we didn't baptize in a river, or in a lake, we didn't baptize with the face up, we should have dunked three times, head up river, repeat a certain phrase, have a pastor conduct the ordinance, didn't believe in the doctrines of grace when we constituted. There is an endless barrage of criticisms that we haven't satisfactorily answered to their likings. It is simply amazing what some preachers demand in order for there to be a legitimate N.T. church. Well; I'll say this. Thank God that it is Christ who is head over His churches and that this work is not left to the fickle judgments of men, that are in many cases great men of God. In light of this, what should we do? Do what the true churches have done from the first day until now: in the face of all opposition stand

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fast upon the Word of God. But realize this: some of our worst critics, some of our worst persecutors are brethren. Look to Christ and suffer the ostracism, the isolation, the shunning, and the name calling.

Chapter eight ended with the clearest demonstration of a baptism in all of Scripture. Immersion is the only mode for baptism. Both go down into the water and the candidate is buried in a watery grave and raised back up to walk in newness of life with Jesus Christ. The eunuch is not a part of a church. He went on his own way rejoicing, the Bible says (Acts 8.39), one man, a baptized believer. But he satisfied that demand upon his life: repent and be baptized! We believe all that needs to take place now for a church in Ethiopia is for one other properly baptized believer to join with him to carry out the commands of Jesus Christ together, and he will be in their midst (in other words the Holy Ghost shall be with and in them.) How likely is that to occur? Do we recall how that those that were scattered from the Jerusalem church had gone out as far as Cyrene?

At Pentecost these heard the gospel of Christ and in 2.41 many of these were baptized (who also did not join the Jerusalem church.)

*Ac 2:10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about **Cyrene**, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes ... (So there are baptized believers in Cyrene already. Is that correct? We are led by the facts of Scripture to conclude this.)*

And now, since the martyrdom of Stephen we see,
Ac 11.19 ¶ Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

*20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and **Cyrene**, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.*

Now, admittedly, this is not Ethiopia, but the potential is certainly there that the eunuch could meet with another baptized believer and begin a N. T. church. Why do we have this information if it is not to lead us to

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understand the spread of the gospel and growth of church both near and far?

Now, before we begin chapter 9 let's consider this man Saul, whose name shall be changed to Paul. This is probably one of the most significant portions of Scripture that demonstrates the salvation of the worst of sinners before God: that is, the religious sinner. After his conversion Paul confesses that he was the best of the worst of sinners.

*1Ti 1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; **of whom I am chief.***

It is the religious sinner that takes a lot of pride in his roots or heritage. Religious sinners like to measure themselves by themselves, rather than against a Holy God. (Here we are warned against error this in 2Co.10.12) Saul was a Pharisee. Notice how another of his religious sect prayed.

*Lu 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.
12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

In the blindness of their hearts they boast of things over which they have had absolutely no control. So Saul,

Php 3:5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews ...

Like many religious patriotic Americans, Saul was a patriot to the core. He loved his people, his nation, and his ultra-conservative religion. He stood as a great defender of his nation with unparalleled passion. He was a devoted worshipper of God, a proselytizer, a zealous Judaizer. He was absolutely convinced his religion was the only one ordained of God; that God required this kind of allegiance from him, and that He would bless him for his service. Beyond a doubt, this man, Saul thought that he was doing God service by the things that he did against the saints of the church at Jerusalem. (Jn.16.2)

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Phl.3.6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Ac 8:3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church (havock, cf. 8.3 O.T. usage; laid waste, corrupted, spoiled, ravished), entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Ac 26: 9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison (And of these we don't read of any miraculous release by an angel, no earthquakes opening the doors, no jailor coming to Christ.), having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

But what was the truth concerning Saul? His faith was a lie; he was dead in trespasses and sins; he was deceived by his desperately wicked heart; he was not alive to God spiritually; his religion was a shell of outward acts, but let's view Saul's heart by the searching Word of God. Saul's heart was full of extortion and excess; dead men's bones and all uncleanness; hypocrisy and iniquity.

*Mt 23:25 ...Woe unto you, scribes and **Pharisees**, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.*

*Mt 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and **Pharisees**, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

He was a child of wrath as all others are in their natural state without the grace of God. (Eph. 2.3) But he was ignorant of this reality.

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*1Ti 1:13 Who (I, Paul) was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious (ὕβρις, from which we have our English word *hubris*; *despiteful Ro.1.30*): but I obtained mercy, because **I did it ignorantly** in unbelief.*

All men, before Christ comes to them, are unaware of their heart's depraved condition and their present standing as condemned sinners before a just and holy God.

Ac 3:17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

Eph 4:18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart ...

This is the state of every sinner who has not yet come to Jesus Christ in faith. We do not become this way; it is not that we end up this way; we are conceived in this state; this is how we begin.

Ps 51:5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

All of the best that Saul ever did in his service to His God, before Christ was revealed by faith to his heart, was filthy.

Isa 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses (that is the best that we could bring, not the worst) are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

He stood justly condemned before God, worthy of everlasting torment in the fires of hell without Jesus Christ standing for Him to God. All of the prayers, all of the devotions, all of the sacrifices, all of the deprivations incurred in religious observances, to give up even his life for the very best, noblest causes of mankind would be to lose his own soul in everlasting shame and contempt. Why? Because he is a sinner without Jesus Christ. (Acts 13.46) All men are dead in sins in Adam.

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1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die ...

And there is only one Man, the Man Christ Jesus who accomplished the work of salvation for us to God. He either stands for us to God in our place, or we remain fallen and alone to be judged for sins against Him. Christ, in His body bore the punishment for the sins for many. (Is.53.5, 10, 11; Ro.5.19) God smote His only beloved Son with the strokes of His wrath through the hands of the wicked. (Acts 2.23; 3.13-19) There the Son of God, Jesus hanged for all men to see, He was rejected of men (Isa.53.3), and forsaken by God. (Mt.27.46) There He shed His blood, that He might pay the price of eternal redemption for us. (Particular Redemption) (He.9.12) No less than the sinless body (Col.1.21, 22; He.10.5, 10) and shed blood of Jesus Christ (Ro.3.25; 5.9; Re.5.9) could reconcile us to God. (Ro.5.10) All of those who believe that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. (1Jn.4.2) That means that their eternal life came from God and proof of it is their comprehending Christ. These are they who believe that Jesus is the all-sufficient sacrifice for them to God, and they manifest that they have eternal life because they **believe**. Faith isn't the cause of life; it is the evidence or fruit of eternal life.

*Joh 3:36 He that believeth on the Son **hath** everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

*Joh 6:47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me **hath** everlasting life.*

These have been truly born of God.

*Joh 1:12 But as many as received ἔλαβον, aor 1, ind, act) him, to them **gave** (ἔδωκεν, aor 1, ind, act.) **he power** (ἐξουσίαν, authority, right) **to become** (γενεσθαι, aor 2, inf.) the sons of God, even to them that believe (πιστεύουσιν, dat. pl, masc, part, aor 1; have believed, trusted) on his name:*

*13 Which **were born** (ἐγεννήθησαν, 3rd p, pl, aor 1, ind, **pass**), not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but **of God**.*

The sentence looks like this: As many as received him ... **were** born of God. This tells us that the new birth took place in order to receive Christ in faith.

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The result of the birth is the receiving of Christ in the hearing and the believing of that message.

God's grace is absolutely righteous and without respect of persons. There is everything right in God's bestowing His grace to whom He wills:

Ro 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

The bestowal of God's grace has nothing to do with what any one has or has not done.

Ro 9:11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

He saves the harlot, the tax collector, the fishermen, the noble, the religious man, the ungodly, the pagan, the Jew, the intellectual, unlearned, and ignorant; all according to His own sovereign, good pleasure.

Mt 21:31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. (Why? Simply because they had manifested the fruits of everlasting life.)

1Co.1.27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

*29 **That no flesh should glory in his presence.***

*30 But **of him** (meaning by the power of God) are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:*

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

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*Re 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and **for thy pleasure they are and were created.***

And so we come into chapter nine. Saul's days as an unregenerate sinner has run its course. This day is salvation come to Saul (Lk.19.9, 10); not to a single other person that made up his evil entourage; just him. Did they all deserve to be left as blinded, dead, depraved sinners? Yes. But it was the will of God to show mercy one. Once again we are faced with the awesome display of God's sovereign, election of grace. (Ro.11.5) The grace of God comes while we are dead in trespasses and sins, while we are yet sinners and enemies of God in our experience. (All of the elect of God were in fact, O.T. & N. T. justified and reconciled at the moment of Christ's death on the cross. (Ro.5.9, 10) Saints of God, salvation is not a reformation which changes the old creature into a new one; rather, it is a transformation where once I was blind, but now I see; I was darkness, but now I am light in the Lord; I am a new creation in Christ Jesus, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. (2Co.5.17)

In closing, is Christ Jesus our only hope? Or do we still hang on to some of our own self-righteousness for justification before God.

Ac 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Ro.10.9 That if thou shalt (should) confess

*ὁμολογήσης, 2nd p sing, aor 1, **subj**, act. (subj. expressing the obligation or duty, the possibility)*

with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt (should) believe

*πιστεύσης, 2nd p sing, aor 1, **subj**.*

in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (σωθήση, 2nd p sing, fut, ind, pass.).

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This is not stating a cause and effect. It simply states this fact: *should this be so, that you confess and believe, you shall be saved.*

Faith does not bring salvation. It is the grace of God which brings both life (*grace of life, 1Pe.3.7*), faith, love, and salvation.

Eph 2:5 Even when we were dead in sins, [God, not faith] hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) In this instance what is the demonstration of God's grace? That we were quickened when we were **dead in sins**. No one can have being dead in sins! **So, says Paul, we are saved by grace!**

And then we read this concerning faith and love:

*1Ti 1:14 And the **grace** of our Lord was exceeding abundant with **faith** and **love** which is in Christ Jesus.*

That is, the object of the faith and love that the Heavenly Father implanted in Saul by His grace, when He quickened him from the dead, was Jesus Christ. Saul, as we shall see from his own confession, had no faith or love for Christ prior to God's bestowal of grace upon him. No amount of human effort could make any one believe in and have love for Jesus Christ.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. (Those that know Christ shall say so. The fruit of life is profession of Christ. Profession does not bring life.)

12 ¶ For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.