

OBEDIENCE SHOWS THAT YOU BELIEVE

For the past couple of weeks, we have been looking at a New Testament character who is referred to as both Saul of Tarsus—and the apostle Paul. Why spend so much time talking about him? There are lots of reasons; here are three.

- 1) God used him to write 13 of the 27 books of the NT—and nearly **half** of the book of Acts is about him. And since God made him one of the main “characters” in the New Testament, God obviously wants us to know a lot about him!
- 2) One of the 13 books he wrote is the book of Colossians—a book we will begin a verse-by-verse study of after the first of the year. As we study books in the Bible, it is important to familiarize ourselves with the **human author** so that is another reason we are taking the time to learn about Paul now.
- 3) A third reason—the one we are going to be looking at this morning—is this: Paul was an incredible example of how to live **in humble obedience to Christ**.

But Paul is **not the only one**—there are many, many others! One of those “many others” that lived in humble obedience to Christ is a man named “Ananias.” Who is Ananias? It is kind of interesting—and sad at the same time—that when most people hear the name “Ananias,” they think of the one who was killed—along with his wife Sapphira—for lying to God!

That is obviously not the Ananias I’m talking about! The Ananias I’m referring to is really the “unsung hero”—the human instrument—that God used in the conversion of Saul as found in Acts 9. Please turn there and follow along as I read verses 10-18.

This morning, we are going to look at the obedience of Saul as a seeker—and the obedience of Ananias as a servant. And from these two men, we will see this very important truth: “Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe!”

First, let’s consider... **1. The physical and spiritual blindness of Saul**

One difficult-to-answer question that comes up regarding the conversion of Saul is this: At **what moment** was Saul actually converted? In other words, at what point in Acts 9 was Saul changed—by God—from a person who **hated and hunted** Christians to becoming a Christian himself?

--It’s obviously not in verses 1 and 2 because we see him wanting to slaughter Christians!

--It’s not in verses 3 and 4 when he sees the light from heaven, falls to the ground, and is asked by Jesus, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me”—a clear indication that he is not converted at that point.

--And it is not in vs 5 where Jesus says to him, “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks”—meaning he was fighting against the conviction that was going on in his heart.

So the “earliest” it could have been would be the moment he said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” But...as I studied this out and thought about it a little more, it was probably toward **the end** of his three-day blindness referred to in vs 9. Here are **two reasons** why I say that.

A. Physical blindness versus spiritual blindness

In the Bible, the word “blindness” doesn’t just refer to the lack of **physical sight**—it sometimes refers to people who are **spiritually blind**. God led Paul himself to write about that very thing in **II Corinthians 4:3-4**—“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are **lost**: ⁴In whom the god of this world [Satan] hath **blinded the minds of them which believe not**, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

Lost people—those who are not forgiven and not saved—are **spiritually blinded** by Satan whether they realize it or not! And that was Saul’s condition! As mentioned last week, Saul was not **an atheist**—and he didn’t belong to a cult! In fact, he was extremely “religious.” He followed the letter of the law to a “t.” But he was **blinded by** his pride and thought he could work his way to heaven. So Jesus brought **physical** blindness to show him his **spiritual** blindness. And once his **spiritual eyes** were opened, Jesus gave him his **physical sight** back.

A second reason is this... B. The way Ananias greeted Saul

Notice how Ananias greets Saul in verse 17. **What** does he call him? “Brother Saul!” God would not have led Ananias to call Saul his “brother” if Saul was still a **spiritually blinded unbeliever!** Nor would it make sense—IMO—for God to “leave Saul in the dark” for 3 days if he became a believer on Day 1!

So I’m of the opinion that when Saul said in vs 6, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do” he **wasn’t saved yet**—but he certainly **was a seeker!**

What do I mean by “seeker?” I’m using the word “seeker” to indicate someone who has been **confronted** about their sin...and **understands their need to be forgiven** of that sin...and is **seeking forgiveness** for their sin. This stirring of conviction is something God does in the heart—just like Jesus did in Saul’s heart. Keep in mind that Saul did not come to Damascus **seeking Jesus**—he came to Damascus seeking to **arrest Christians!** Instead, Jesus sought—and “arrested”—Saul!

Based on that assumption, let’s now look at... **2. The obedience of Saul as a seeker**

First, we see... A. The desire to obey

How do we know Saul **wants** to obey? From his words “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do” that I just mentioned from verse 6! Does asking that question indicate **a desire** for obedience? Yes...**sometimes**—but **not always!** Why do I say that? Because sometimes people ask the question to determine if they are **going to like doing** what they are **being asked to do before deciding if they are going to do it!**

Here’s another question: Does **everyone** who is awakened about their sin—and senses their need to be forgiven of their sin—have a desire to **obey** God? You **would think** they would—and they might say **they do**—but many of them really don’t!

Why do I say that? Because when “push comes to shove,” they don’t **want to know** what God says about forgiveness! Instead, they are content to trust in their **own opinions**—or the opinions **of a church**—instead of what God plainly **tells us in His Word!**

Saul was not like that, though! He asked “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do **after** he is blinded by—and **spoken to**—by Jesus. He has no “eyes”—but he is “all ears!” He is **not asking** what Jesus wants him to do so he **can determine** whether or not **he will like doing** it! He is asking because he **wants to obey—period!**

Next let’s notice... B. The directions to obey

--We see the directions—the instructions that God gives to him—in the middle of vs 6: “And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”

--Now jump ahead to vs 15. “But the Lord said unto him...” Who is the “him?” Ananias—not Saul! Notice Jesus’ message to Ananias in the rest of verses 15 and 16. Why did Jesus **tell Ananias** the future plans he had for Saul—but not tell Saul directly? **We don’t know!**

--But we **do know** this: What Jesus said to Saul was short and sweet and consisted of three steps:

1) Arise; 2) Go into the city; and 3) Wait for further instructions.

Now let’s think about... C. The difficulty in obeying

--Were these directions difficult **to understand?** No; pretty straightforward, right?

--Were they difficult **to follow?** Probably much more difficult than **we realize!** Let’s think about the 3 parts.

1) “Arise.” Where was Saul? On the way to Damascus—but he was **on the ground!** So Jesus told him to get up!

2) “Go into the city.” Does that sound like a hard thing to do? Not really—unless **you’re blind**, of course, like Saul was! Notice what it says in vs 8. Schnabel makes an interesting observation: “Although he was seeking to persecute those who described themselves as ‘the Way,’ he is now **unable** to find **his own way**.”

(*Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Acts)*; pg 445). Wiersbe noted that “the leader had to be led” and “the angry bull had now become a docile lamb!” (*Be Dynamic*, pg 112).

3) “It shall be told thee what thou must do.” In other words—as already mentioned—Saul is told to **wait**.

Is it hard to wait? It is, isn’t it! And I think you’d agree that sometimes it is **much more difficult** to wait than at other times—especially when you **don’t know exactly what you are waiting for!**

Did Saul know—at this moment—*if* he would get his sight back...*or when?* No; he didn't! All he knew was that he met Jesus... and was now blind...and had to be led by the hand...and was told **to wait** until he was given further instructions.

And let's not forget the fact that because of his blindness he was **basically helpless**—and was being led into the very city where he had **come to arrest believers** and drag them back to Jerusalem! And the believers **knew that's why** he was there! Ananias says as much in verses 13 and 14. Talk about a gift! Have your fiercest enemy brought to you in a state of meekness, weakness, blindness, and confusion!

D. The decision to obey

Did the now-blind Saul **fear for his life** while being led to Damascus? We can't say for sure, but he certainly was trembling after personally hearing from Jesus! Regardless of how he felt—and what he feared—he **did what he was told**. He didn't tell those that were with him to **take him back** to Jerusalem—he was led by the hand to Damascus in obedience to what Jesus had told him to do.

Third, let's consider... **3. The obedience of Ananias as a servant**

Why am I referring to Ananias as a **servant**? Notice what it says about him in verse 10 – “And there was a certain **disciple** at Damascus...” Simply put, he was a genuine, whole-hearted follower of Jesus. **How long** he had been a Christian—and how he **had become a Christian**—we are not told. We know from vs 13, though, that he knew that Saul had done “much evil” to fellow believers in Jerusalem. And as we look at Ananias, we'll see that **his obedience** consists of the same 4 “ingredients” that **Saul's obedience** did.

A. The desire to obey

--Vs 10. “Behold, I am here, Lord” is kind of like Samuel's “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth”—and like Saul's, “What wilt thou have me to do!” It indicates a willingness to obey, but we really don't know **how strong someone's desire** is to obey until they are asked to do something—and they actually do it!

B. The directions to obey

--We see the directions of Jesus to Ananias in verses 11-12. Notice how specific they are.

--“Go into the street called Straight....” I found it interesting to learn in a commentary that this street is **still called** by that name! According to Schnabel, it is the main east-west street of Damascus in the eastern part of the Old City and leads to the East Gate (Schnabel, 446).

--He is given much more than just the street name, though. He is given **the house** he was supposed to go to—which was obviously known by Ananias—as well as the **name of the man** he was looking for. On top of that, Ananias is told by Jesus what Saul **was doing**—praying—and that Saul had seen a vision of Ananias coming to him, putting his hand on him, and Saul regaining his sight!

--Why were these directions so specific? David Guzik suggests: “The specificity was necessary and important, because God asked Ananias to do something bold and dangerous in meeting Saul, the great persecutor. He needed confirmation along the way that God was guiding him, and God gave him ways to confirm this.” (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-9/>)

C. The difficulty in obeying

Whose instructions were more difficult to obey: Saul's or Ananias'? Ananias', right? How eager would you have been to go meet Saul, knowing he had come to your city for the purpose of hunting you down, arresting you, then bringing you to Jerusalem to be put into prison? And even though Saul had been blinded by Jesus and was waiting and praying, Ananias apparently **hadn't gotten the news** about that yet!

So Ananias does what I'm quite certain we all would have done—make sure Jesus knew **why Saul** was in Damascus! We see that in vss 13-14. Did Jesus scold Ananias for “arguing”—or at least slightly protesting? Jesus didn't do that, did He? What did Jesus say to Ananias? Notice again what it says in vss 15-16.

One other thing that would have added to the difficulty of meeting Saul would have been the message Jesus asked him to convey to him. There was **good** news: he was forgiven by God...and chosen as a spokesman for God...and had his sight restored! But...there was also **bad news!** What was the bad news!

That Saul—the one who had **caused the suffering** of many—would now be **the sufferer!**

And then there's... D. The decision to obey

In spite of the potential danger in meeting Saul, Ananias is told to "Go thy way" in vs 15 and we see his obedience in vs 17 "And Ananias went his way..."

--Did **Ananias obey Jesus** because he knew Saul would become a famous missionary and Scripture writer someday? No! He didn't know that ahead of time—only God knew that!

--Did **Ananias become famous for being the human** instrument God used to commission Saul as a missionary? In one sense, no! **The only time** Ananias' name is mentioned in the rest of the Bible is in Acts 22 when Paul shares how he was converted to Christ. But...his name **is recorded in God's Word** as an example of being faithful. Jesus didn't have Peter—or any of the other 11 disciples—come to Damascus to meet with Saul. Jesus didn't need a **famous** person—He needed a **faithful**, obedient servant. And that's what Ananias was!

Lastly, let's look at... **4. The obedience of you and I**

So what about us? Which of these men do you most resemble?

A. Are you like Saul before he met Jesus?

What was Saul like before he met Jesus? **Outwardly religious**—but trusting in **his works** to get him to heaven. And because of his trust in his works, I don't think it is at all surprising to see that God used Paul to write a lot about the **failure of works to save us!** Here are several examples of many:

Romans 3:20 "Therefore by the **deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight**: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

Romans 3:28 "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith **without the deeds of the law.**"

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **Not of works**, lest any man should boast."

Titus 3:5 "**Not by works of righteousness which we have done**, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" (See also Acts 13:38-39; Galatians 2:16; 3:11)

What about you? Works don't work—and if you could work your way to heaven, **why did Jesus come to earth to die?** To again quote Paul: **Galatians 2:21** "I do not frustrate [nullify; set aside] the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." Simply put, if you could be saved by good works and rule-keeping, then **Christ died needlessly!**

B. Are you like Saul when he was a seeker?

How was Saul as a seeker? He knew he was **sinful and needed forgiveness**—and waited to be told what he needed to do! If God has been working in your heart and has been stirring you **to seek Him**, don't settle for anything other than **finding Him!** God wants you **to know** you are forgiven—not hope or guess or wonder!

How do **I know** God wants us to know? Because **He says so!** **I John 5:12-13** "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. ¹³ These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; **that ye may know that ye have eternal life**, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

I know I'm going to heaven. Why? Because I **have the Son**—meaning Jesus! I don't just know **about Jesus**, I possess Him! I am His—and He is mine! And because I **have Him**—and not just know **about Him**—I have eternal life! And "these things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God that **ye may know** that ye have eternal life!"

C. Are you like Ananias the obedient servant?

I sure hope so! **If you are a born-again believer**, obedience is not **optional**.

--If we love Jesus, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15).

--If we are a believer, we need to glorify God—meaning do that which pleases Him—because we've been bought with a price (I Cor 6:19-20).

--If we are born again, we "should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him which died for us, and rose again" (II Cor 5:15).

"Does God want to use **all believers** in His work?" Yes; He does! How do we know?

Because God—through Paul—tells us!

I Corinthians 15:58 “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

“Beloved brethren” means **all believers**—not just pastors and not **just men!** God wants to use every blood-bought, born-again believer in His work—the “work of the Lord.” But...if we don’t humbly **seek His will**—and don’t **want to obey** what He tells us to do—He cannot/will not use us in the way He desires to!

Was Ananias **afraid to meet Saul?** Yes, he was—but he was sure glad that he obeyed God and went! Will we always see the results of our labor? No; not always! But...our labor “is not in vain in the Lord”—and His Word will accomplish that which He pleases!

Pastor Randy—aka PR—was the Youth Leader at Calvary Baptist Church in Watertown before he became the director of Camp Chetek. I remember him telling the story years ago about two teenage boys in the Youth Group. I don’t remember their names—which may be a good thing—but I do remember him saying they “gave him a run for his money”—a nice way of saying they made things **difficult for him!**

Needless to say he was quite surprised—and very thankful—when both of them went to Bible college as mission majors and are now serving overseas as missionaries!

We never know who God is going to use—and how—but He **won’t use us** if we aren’t willing to obey Him!

So what would God have us do in light of what we’ve heard this morning?

In my mind it’s pretty simple—be honest about which one of these men you most resemble—and do something about it!

1. If you are like Saul and thinking your good works will get you to heaven, stop! Works don’t work—and God plainly states that in His Word!

2. If you are a seeker—if God has been stirring in your heart and you agree with Him that you need to be forgiven—come to Him His way—through Jesus Christ! Jesus was born to die; He came to take our place and He is in heaven now willing to receive those who receive Him.

--I would love to talk to you more about that. If you aren’t willing to do that, I would encourage you to take this outline and look up the verses in the Bible for yourselves.

--I would also encourage you to take some Bible tracts in the racks by the door as you go out.

3. If you are an obedient servant like Ananias, keep it up! If not, get going and start obeying!