



“Once I was Blind, But Now I See!”

ACTS Chapter 9

> **The Ultimate Sacrifice:** The history of Christian martyrs does not end with Stephen's death. During the first century after Jesus' death nearly all of his disciples suffered martyrdom for His sake. James the son of Zebedee was beheaded in approximately 44 A.D. Philip was crucified in 54 A.D. Matthew was killed with a halberd, an ax-like weapon, in 60 A.D. James, who is thought to be the brother of Jesus, was beaten to death, Matthias was beheaded, Andrew was crucified, Mark was torn to pieces, and Peter was crucified upside down. Jude, Bartholomew, and Thomas were also martyred. Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome where he was beheaded. Other early disciples Luke, Barnabas, Timothy, and Simon were also killed for the sake of Christ. Scholars estimate that 70 million Christians have been martyrs for their faith. In his book *The New Persecuted: Inquiries into anti-Christian intolerance in the New Century of Martyrs*, Italian journalist Antonio Socci estimates that 45 million of these Christian martyrs died in the 20th century.

(v1-9) GOD'S LIGHT!

> **Our world has been blinded by:**

- **Humanism** - A cultural and intellectual movement of the renaissance that emphasized secular concerns as a result of the rediscovery and study of the literature, art, and civilization of ancient Greece and Rome. (*A society of self.*)

- **Socialism** - Any of various theories or systems of social organization in which the means of producing and distributing goods is owned collectively or by a centralized government that often plans and controls the economy. The state in Marxist-Leninist theory intermediate between capitalism and communism, in which collective ownership of the economy under the dictatorship of the proletariat has not yet been successfully achieved. (*Political power & control.*)

- **Pluralism** - A condition in which numerous distinct ethnic, religious, or cultural groups are present and tolerated within a society. The belief that such a condition is desirable or socially beneficial. As a *Philosophy*- The doctrine that reality is composed of many ultimate substances. The belief that no single explanatory system or view of reality can account for all the phenomena of life. (*Man's idealism without truth and morals.*)

- **Relativism** - A theory, especially in ethics or aesthetics, that conceptions of truth and moral values are not absolute but are relative to the persons or groups holding them. (*Ruled by the cultural majority.*)

- **Religion** - The precise number of religions in the world is not known, but available estimates show the number to be about 4,300, according to Adherents.com. Only two religions can claim more than one billion adherents each. Christianity has approximately 2 billion and Islam 1.3 to 1.5 billion believers. According to Adherents.com, around 1.1 billion people identify as agnostics, atheists, nonreligious or secular. This number is higher than the estimated number of adherents of Hinduism, the third largest religion. Around 900 million people are Hindus. Chinese traditional religions have approximately 394 million adherents, Buddhism has around 376 million and primal-indigenous religions 300 million. Well-known religions with significantly fewer adherents include Sikhism, Judaism, Jainism, Shinto and the Baha'i faith.

- Wave after wave of socialism, humanism, relativism, and pluralism have eroded historic Judeo-Christian foundations in Europe and the United States.

- We are told in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 - *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.* (Guess who wrote this verse? Paul)

(v1-4) Jesus declares that Saul's persecution is against Him!

- 1 Corinthians 12:27- *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

- Matthew 5:11-12 - *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

(v5-9) What's a GOAD? - *The goad used by the Syrian farmer is usually a straight branch of oak or other strong wood from which the bark has been stripped, and which has at one end a pointed spike and at the other a flat chisel-shaped iron. The pointed end is to prod the oxen while plowing. The flattened iron at the other end is to scrape off the earth which clogs the plowshare.* (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia)

This is speaking of Saul's conscience. The Bible says that our **CONSCIENCE** can be **DEFILED** and **SEARED!** - Titus 1:15-16 - *To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*

1 Timothy 4:1-3 - *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.*

(v10-19) GOD'S LIFE!

(v15) - God's Calling - Galatians 1:10-24

- God's **Faithfulness** - 1 Timothy 1:12-17 - *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 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. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

(v16) Paul's (Saul) Suffering - 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 - *Are they ministers of Christ? — I speak as a fool — I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness — besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?*

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 - *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

(v17) Paul is Born Again! - "Once I was blind, now I see!"

- Jesus said in John 3:18-21 - *"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*

(v20-31) GOD'S LOVE!

(v20-22) Paul preached "the Christ, that He is the Son of God," Paul proved that "Jesus is the Christ!"

(v27, 29) Paul proclaimed boldly "in the name of the Lord Jesus!"

(v31) Observe five keys to a successful church:

(1) It's a place of peace;

(2) We get edified (built up, strengthened in the faith);

(3) We learn to walk in the "fear of the Lord," "reverential fear," of God, as a controlling motive of life, in matters spiritual and moral, not a mere "fear" of His power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him, a "fear" which banishes the terror that shrinks from His presence, and which influences the disposition and attitude of one whose circumstances are guided by trust in God, through the indwelling Spirit of God.

- Paul writes in Romans 8:15-17 - *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.;*

(4) We get comforted by the Holy Spirit;

(5) It's a place of multiplication (soul-winning).