

Under New Management

Acts 9:1-19

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

Saul's Conversion

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord's followers, so he went to the high priest.

² He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them--both men and women--back to Jerusalem in chains.

³ As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him!

⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "**Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?**"

⁵ "Who are you, sir?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "**I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!**"

⁶ **Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do."**

⁷ The men with Saul stood speechless with surprise, for they heard the sound of someone's voice, but they saw no one!

⁸ As Saul picked himself up off the ground, he found that he was blind.

⁹ So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days. And all that time he went without food and water.

¹⁰ Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "**Ananias!**" "Yes, Lord!" he replied.

¹¹ The Lord said, "**Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you arrive, ask for Saul of Tarsus. He is praying to me right now.**"

¹² **I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he can see again."**

¹³ "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem!

¹⁴ And we hear that he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest every believer in Damascus."

¹⁵ But the Lord said, "**Go and do what I say. For Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.**"

¹⁶ **And I will show him how much he must suffer for me."**

¹⁷ So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

¹⁸ Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.

¹⁹ Afterward he ate some food and was strengthened. Acts 9:1-19 (NLT)

☞ **PRAY** for God's guidance

- 😊 How might the medical profession today explain what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus?
 - He was struck by lightning
 - He had a physical breakdown
 - He had a mental breakdown
 - He had a partial stroke that rendered him temporarily blind
 - He had a psychological crisis due to an overly-religious personality
 - He suffered from repressed guilt for his role in persecuting people
- Sometimes God breaks into a life in a spectacular manner, and sometimes conversion is a quiet experience. What was it like for you?

3. What do we know about Saul at this point? (see Acts 7:54-8:3)
4. Saul's former teacher was Gamaliel (see 22:3). What had Gamaliel advised the Sanhedrin regarding Christians in 5:34-39? How is Saul responding to this advice? What does this show about him?
5. Was Saul's heart open to Jesus' arrival? Why or why not?
6. How do you think Saul felt when confronted by Jesus (vv. 4-6)? Given his previous activities, what would he be thinking about during those three days of blindness and fasting (v.9)?
7. How would you feel in Ananias' place? How would you summarize his role in Saul's life?

What is significant about the way Ananias addresses Saul (v. 17)?

8. Do you assume some people are beyond God's reach?

How does this story challenge those assumptions?

8. Who has played the role of Ananias in your life?

Wrap-up: Is there anyone to whom the Lord wants you to play the part of an Ananias?

Prayer: For one another

LIFE GROUPS

A safe place to build friendships and grow spiritually.

- L** ♦ Learn..... applying Biblical truth for everyday living
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- E** ♦ Evangelism..... reaching others with the hope of Christ

Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible
Acts 9:1-19

Notes for Verse 2

Saul (later called Paul) was so zealous for his Jewish beliefs that he began a persecution campaign against anyone who believed in Christ ("who belonged to the Way"). Why would the Jews in Jerusalem want to persecute Christians as far away as Damascus? There are several possibilities: (1) to seize the Christians who had fled, (2) to prevent the spread of Christianity to other major cities, (3) to keep the Christians from causing any trouble with Rome, (4) to advance Saul's career and build his reputation as a true Pharisee, zealous for the law, (5) to unify the factions of Judaism by giving them a common enemy.

9:2-5 As Saul traveled to Damascus, pursuing Christians, he was confronted by the risen Christ and brought face to face with the truth of the gospel. Sometimes God breaks into a life in a spectacular manner, and sometimes conversion is a quiet experience. Beware of people who insist that you must have a particular type of conversion experience. The right way to come to faith in Jesus is whatever way God brings *you*.

Notes for Verse 3

Damascus, a key commercial city, was located about 175 miles northeast of Jerusalem in the Roman province of Syria. Several trade routes linked Damascus to other cities throughout the Roman world. Saul may have thought that by stamping out Christianity in Damascus, he could prevent its spread to other areas.

9:3-5 Paul refers to this experience as the start of his new life in Christ (1Corinthians 9:1; 1Corinthians 15:8; Galatians 1:15, 16). At the center of this wonderful experience was Jesus Christ. Paul did not see a vision; he saw the risen Christ himself (Acts 9:17). Paul acknowledged Jesus as Lord, confessed his own sin, surrendered his life to Christ, and resolved to obey him. True conversion comes from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and leads to a new life in relationship with him.

Notes for Verse 5

Saul thought he was pursuing heretics, but he was persecuting Jesus himself. Anyone who persecutes believers today is also guilty of persecuting Jesus (see Matthew 25:40, 45), because believers are the body of Christ on earth.

Notes for Verses 13,14

"Not him, Lord; that's impossible. He could never become a Christian!" In essence, that's what Ananias said when God told him of Saul's conversion. After all, Saul had pursued believers to their death. Despite these understandable feelings, Ananias obeyed God and ministered to Saul. We must not limit God -- he can do anything. We must obey and follow God's leading, even when he leads us to difficult people and places.

Notes for Verses 15,16

Faith in Christ brings great blessings but often great suffering too. Paul would suffer for his faith (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-27). God calls us to commitment, not to comfort. He promises to be with us *through* suffering and hardship, not to spare us from them.

Notes for Verse 17

Ananias found Saul, as he had been instructed, and greeted him as "Brother Saul." Ananias feared this meeting because Saul had come to Damascus to capture the believers and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). But in obedience to the Holy Spirit, Ananias greeted Saul lovingly. It is not always easy to show love to others, especially when we are afraid of them or doubt their motives. Nevertheless, we must follow Jesus' command (John 13:34) and Ananias's example, showing loving acceptance to other believers.

9:17,18 Although there is no mention of a special filling of the Holy Spirit for Saul, his changed life and subsequent accomplishments bear strong witness to the Holy Spirit's presence and power in his life. Evidently, the Holy Spirit filled Saul when he received his sight and was baptized. See the second note on Acts 8:15-17 for more on the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Directed By The Spirit

Romans 8:1-17

☞ **What would you like to praise God for today?**

Life in the Spirit

1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

2 For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death.

3 The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

4 He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

5 Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.

6 If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace.

7 For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will.

8 That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

9 But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all.)

10 Since Christ lives within you, even though your body will die because of sin, your spirit is alive because you have been made right with God.

11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you.

12 So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do.

13 For if you keep on following it, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it and its evil deeds, you will live.

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

15 So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family--calling him "Father, dear Father."

16 For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God's children.

17 And since we are his children, we will share his treasures--for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours, too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. (NLT)

☞ **PRAY for God's guidance**

1. When you were young, who caused you to change your behavior by their powerful influence?

2. Why do you think God's law was given: * How do Romans 5:20; 7:7, 10 support your answer?
- Means to follow in order to be saved?
 - Guide to follow once we are saved by grace?
 - Stumbling block, impossible to follow perfectly, which only points the sinner to God's grace?

2. How serious is sin? How was it's seriousness demonstrated in the Old Testament? (see Heb. 10:1-10)

3. What do you remember about the Ascension of Jesus and His promise to send the Holy Spirit to indwell His followers at Pentecost (Acts1)?

4. Paul divides people into two categories in vv. 5-6, what are they?
 In verses 5-11, what does Paul say about the option Christians have in living their life?

5. Where is the battle for the control of your life going to be fought.. and won or lost?

6. Since we are not set right with God by doing good works, what is the motive for changing our lives?

7. How are we to deal with our sinful nature (vv. 13-14; also 6:11,13, 19)? What does it mean to "reckon" or "consider" in 6:11?

8. Paul uses adoption or "sonship" to illustrate the believer's new relationship with God. What does it mean to you that you are not God's slave, but His child?

Wrap-up: What priority should the Holy Spirit have in our lives?

Prayer: For one another

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Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible Romans 8:1-17

Notes for Verse 1

"Not guilty; let him go free" -- what would those words mean to you if you were on death row? The fact is that the whole human race *is* on death row, justly condemned for repeatedly breaking God's holy law. Without Jesus we would have no hope at all. But thank God! He has declared us not guilty and has offered us freedom from sin and power to do his will.

Notes for Verse 2

This Spirit of life is the Holy Spirit. He was present at the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2), and he is the power behind the rebirth of every Christian. He gives us the power we need to live the Christian life. For more about the Holy Spirit, read the notes on John 3:6; Acts 1:3; Acts 1:4, 5; Acts 1:5.

Notes for Verse 3

Jesus gave himself as a *sacrifice* ("sin offering") for our sins. In Old Testament times, animal sacrifices were continually offered at the temple. The sacrifices showed the Israelites the seriousness of sin: blood had to be shed before sins could be pardoned (see Leviticus 17:11). But animal blood could not really remove sins (Hebrews 10:4). The sacrifices could only point to Jesus' sacrifice, which paid the penalty for all sins.

Notes for Verses 5,6

Paul divides people into two categories -- those who let themselves be controlled by their sinful natures, and those who follow after the Holy Spirit. All of us would be in the first category if Jesus hadn't offered us a way out. Once we have said yes to Jesus, we will want to continue following him, because his way brings life and peace. Daily we must consciously choose to center our lives on God. Use the Bible to discover God's guidelines, and then follow them. In every perplexing situation ask yourself, "What would Jesus want me to do?" When the Holy Spirit points out what is right, do it eagerly. For more on our sinful natures versus our new life in Christ, see Rom 6:6-8, Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:3-15.

Notes for Verse 9

Have you ever worried about whether or not you really are a Christian? A Christian is anyone who has the Spirit of God living in him or her. If you have sincerely trusted Christ for your salvation and acknowledged him as Lord, then the Holy Spirit has come into your life, and you are a Christian. You won't know that the Holy Spirit has come if you are waiting for a certain feeling; you will know he has come because Jesus promised he would. When the Holy Spirit is working within you, you will believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son and that eternal life comes through him (1John 5:5); you will begin to act as Christ directs (Romans 8:5; Galatians 5:22, 23); you will find help in your daily problems and in your praying (Romans 8:26, 27); you will be empowered to serve God and do his will (Acts 1:8; Romans 12:6ff); and you will become part of God's plan to build up his church (Ephesians 4:12, 13).

Notes for Verse 11

The Holy Spirit is God's promise or guarantee of eternal life for those who believe in him. The Spirit is in us now by faith, and by faith we are certain to live with Christ forever. See Romans 8:23; 1Corinthians 6:14; 2Corinthians 4:14; 1Thessalonians 4:14.

Notes for Verse 13

"Put to death the misdeeds of the body" means to regard as dead the power of sin in your body (see Rom 6:11; Galatians 5:24). When we regard sin's appeal as dead and lifeless, we can ignore temptation when it comes.

Notes for Verses 14-17

Paul uses adoption or "sonship" to illustrate the believer's new relationship with God. In Roman culture, the adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate child in his new family. He became a full heir to his new father's estate. Likewise, when a person becomes a Christian, he or she gains all the privileges and responsibilities of a child in God's family. One of these outstanding privileges is being led by the Spirit (see Galatians 4:5, 6). We may not always feel as though we belong to God, but the Holy Spirit is our witness. His inward presence reminds us of who we are and encourages us with God's love (Rom 5:5).

8:14-17 We are no longer cringing and fearful slaves; instead, we are the Master's children. What a privilege! Because we are God's children, we share in great treasures as co-heirs. God has already given us his best gifts: his Son, forgiveness, and eternal life; and he encourages us to ask him for whatever we need.

Notes for Verse 17

There is a price for being identified with Jesus. Along with the great treasures, Paul mentions the suffering that Christians must face. What kinds of suffering are we to endure? For first-century believers, there was economic and social persecution, and some even faced death. We too must pay a price for following Jesus. In many parts of today's world, Christians face pressures just as severe as those faced by Christ's first followers. Even in countries where Christianity is tolerated or encouraged, Christians must not become complacent. To live as Jesus did -- serving others, giving up one's own rights, resisting pressures to conform to the world -- always exacts a price. Nothing we suffer, however, can compare to the great price that Jesus paid to save us.

Weighing Out Our Values

Luke 16:19-31

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

The Rich Man and Lazarus

19 Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed and who lived each day in luxury.

20 At his door lay a diseased beggar named Lazarus.

21 As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores.

22 Finally, the beggar died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried,

23 and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Lazarus in the far distance with Abraham.

24 "The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish in these flames.'

25 "But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish.

26 And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. Anyone who wanted to cross over to you from here is stopped at its edge, and no one there can cross over to us.'

27 "Then the rich man said, 'Please, Father Abraham, send him to my father's home.

28 For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them about this place of torment so they won't have to come here when they die.'

29 "But Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read their writings anytime they want to.'

30 "The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will turn from their sins.'

31 "But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.' " **Luke 16:19-31 (NLT)**

☞ **PRAY** for God's guidance

1. If Jesus commented on our view of wealth today, what might He say?
 - a. The "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" is not the way to go.
 - b. You are grabbing for it all, but missing the true meaning of life.
 - c. It's difficult to see any difference between Christian values and secular values.
 - d. You have so much, but you are spiritually bankrupt.

2. How do you feel about discussing the subject of hell?

3. How do the lives of the rich man and Lazarus compare on earth (vv. 19-21)?
After death (vv. 22-24)?

4. What does this story teach about the dark side of human nature?
 - a. People can be very selfish.
 - b. People can block out the needs of those around them.
 - c. People can shut out God's Word.
 - d. People can resist the testimony of miracles.
 - e. People can ignore Jesus Christ in general and His resurrection in particular.

5. What determines who enters heaven?

6. What does this passage teach about the afterlife?

7. How is verse 31 prophetic?

8. Since lack of knowledge is not the brothers' problem, what is?

Why is it so difficult for people to be convinced of God's ways?

9. What should we do with our lives on earth?

Wrap-up: If you died tonight, what could be said about you? Finish the following sentences with the first thing that comes to mind.

Last night _____ died suddenly.

- ☞ He/she will always be remembered for his/her...
- ☞ He/she always had time for...
- ☞ He/she felt possessions were...
- ☞ He/she treated people like...

Prayer: For one another

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Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible Luke 16:19-31

Notes for Verses 19-31

The Pharisees considered wealth to be a proof of a person's righteousness. Jesus startled them with this story where a diseased beggar is rewarded and a rich man is punished. The rich man did not go to hell because of his wealth but because he was selfish, refusing to feed Lazarus, take him in, or care for him. The rich man was hardhearted in spite of his great blessings. The amount of money we have is not as important as the way we use it. What is your attitude toward your money and possessions? Do you hoard them selfishly, or do you use them to help others?

Notes for Verse 20

This Lazarus should not be confused with the Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead in John 11.

Notes for Verses 29-31

The rich man thought that his five brothers would surely believe a messenger who had been raised from the dead. But Jesus said that if they did not believe Moses and the prophets, who spoke constantly of the duty to care for the poor, not even a resurrection would convince them.

Notice the irony in Jesus' statement; on his way to Jerusalem to die, he was fully aware that even when he had risen from the dead, most of the religious leaders would not accept him. They were set in their ways, and neither Scripture nor God's Son himself would shake them loose.

Notes from Barclay's Commentary of the NT

This is a parable constructed with such masterly skill that not one phrase is wasted. Let us look at the two characters in it.

(i) First, there is the rich man, usually called Dives, which is the Latin for rich. Every phrase adds something to the luxury in which he lived. He was clothed in purple and fine linen. That is the description of the robes of the High Priests, and such robes cost anything from L 30 to L 40, an immense sum in days when a working man's wage was about 4 p a day. He feasted in luxury every day. The word used for feasting is the word that is used for a gourmet feeding on exotic and costly dishes. He did this every day. In so doing he definitely and positively broke the fourth commandment. That commandment not only forbids work on the Sabbath; it also says six days you shall labour (Exo 20:9).

In a country where the common people were fortunate if they ate meat once in the week and where they toiled for six days of the week, Dives is a figure of indolent self-indulgence. Lazarus was waiting for the crumbs that fell from Dives's table. In that time there were no knives, forks or napkins. Food was eaten with the hands and, in very wealthy houses, the hands were cleansed by wiping them on hunks of bread, which were then thrown away. That was what Lazarus was waiting for.

(ii) Second, there is Lazarus. Strangely enough Lazarus is the only character in any of the parables who is given a name. The name is the Latinized form of Eleazar and means God is my help. He was a beggar; he was covered with ulcerated sores, and so helpless that he could not even ward off the street dogs, which pestered him.

Such is the scene in this world; then abruptly it changes to the next and there Lazarus is in glory and Dives is in torment. What was the sin of Dives? He had not ordered Lazarus to be removed from his gate.

He had made no objections to his receiving the bread that was flung away from his table. He did not kick him in the passing. He was not deliberately cruel to him. The sin of Dives was that he never noticed Lazarus, that he accepted him as part of the landscape and simply thought it perfectly natural and inevitable that Lazarus should lie in pain and hunger while he wallowed in luxury. As someone said, "It was not what Dives did that got him into gaol; it was what he did not do that got him into hell."

The sin of Dives was that he could look on the world's suffering and need and feel no answering sword of grief and pity pierce his heart; he looked at a fellow-man, hungry and in pain, and did nothing about it. His was the punishment of the man who never noticed.

It seems hard that his request that his brothers should be warned was refused. But it is the plain fact that if men possess the truth of God's word, and if, wherever they look, there is sorrow to be comforted, need to be supplied pain to be relieved, and it moves them to no feeling and to no action, nothing will change them.

It is a terrible warning that the sin of Dives was not that he did wrong things, but that he did nothing.

Mathew Henry's Commentary - THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS. (16:19-31)

Here the spiritual things are represented, in a description of the different state of good and bad, in this world and in the other. We are not told that the rich man got his estate by fraud, or oppression; but Christ shows, that a man may have a great deal of the wealth, pomp, and pleasure of this world, yet perish for ever under God's wrath and curse. The sin of this rich man was his providing for himself only.

Here is a godly man, and one that will hereafter be happy for ever, in the depth of adversity and distress. It is often the lot of some of the dearest of God's saints and servants to be greatly afflicted in this world. We are not told that the rich man did him any harm, but we do not find that he had any care for him. Here is the different condition of this godly poor man, and this wicked rich man, at and after death. The rich man in hell lifted up his eyes, being in torment. It is not probable that there are discourses between glorified saints and damned sinners, but this dialogue shows the hopeless misery and fruitless desires, to which condemned spirits are brought.

There is a day coming, when those who now hate and despise the people of God, would gladly receive kindness from them. But the damned in hell shall not have the least abatement of their torment. Sinners are now called upon to remember; but they do not, they will not, they find ways to avoid it. As wicked people have good things only in this life, and at death are for ever separated from all good, so godly people have evil things only in this life, and at death they are for ever put from them. In this world, blessed be God, there is no gulf between a state of nature and grace, we may pass from sin to God; but if we die in our sins, there is no coming out.

The rich man had five brethren, and would have them stopped in their sinful course; their coming to that place of torment, would make his misery the worse, who had helped to show them the way thither. How many would now desire to recall or to undo what they have written or done! Those who would make the rich man's praying to Abraham justify praying to saints departed, go far to seek for proofs, when the mistake of a damned sinner is all they can find for an example. And surely there is no encouragement to follow the example, when all his prayers were made in vain. A messenger from the dead could say no more than what is said in the Scriptures. The same strength of corruption that breaks through the convictions of the written word, would triumph over a witness from the dead.

Let us seek to the law and to the testimony, Isa 8:19, 20, for that is the sure word of prophecy, upon which we may rest, 2Pe 1:19. Circumstances in every age show that no terrors, or arguments, can give true repentance without the special grace of God renewing the sinner's heart.

