

## Acts 9

### Invisible Propellants

**Read Acts 9:1-19:** I think that this chapter is a little more interesting to me than the previous times I have read it. We have more current examples of this kind of hatred for Christians. Our own nation and Europe have developed a more extreme polarity between those who want to do right and those who do not want to be told what is right. So much so, that we have congressmen trying to protect drug lords; if some of their interests align. People are being arrested in Europe for silently praying near abortion clinics. Islamic residents are more protected than native-born citizens. Ultimately, it does not matter what circumstances bring about this hatred. It is demonically inspired.

Saul of Tarsus was at war with *The Way*. He thought that he was protector of his culture and godliness; but God was about to clear this confusion up. The bible describes the fury of the dark forces and winds of this world like ocean waves that rise up as if they would fall on us at the beach. Like big roaring storm breakers on the beach, God limits how far these threats can go. They look scary until they fall flat once again. They endlessly churn up dirt and threaten to do harm. They never rest. Somehow these threats and malicious behavior towards us strengthen us. It must have to do with resistance training and dependence on God.

*And I said, 'As far as this point you shall come, but no farther; And here your proud waves shall stop'? (Job 38)*

*But the wicked are like the tossing sea, For it cannot be quiet, And its waters toss up refuse and mud. <sup>21</sup> "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." (Isaiah 57)*

Saul of Tarsus may have thought that he was acting in righteous anger; but he was a puppet of the devil. This reminds me of King Saul, who thought he was carrying out righteous anger when he called to have his honorable son, Jonathan, killed for a foolish order from Saul that was never even communicated to his son. They both lost their bearing in their zeal to carry out their mission. The Holy Spirit humbles some laser focused people, who think they are doing God's will. Part of waiting on the LORD removes our impulsive anger-driven retribution. Sometimes the moral majority is neither.

*When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" <sup>55</sup> But He turned and rebuked them. (Luke 9)*

The Holy Spirit leads us in a way of living. The ends *do not* justify the means. The Devil wants a civil war and acrimony and chaos and discord within the church. Jesus wants unity in the Father. It would be easy for us to criticize how the crusaders turned the restoration of Jerusalem into a scorched earth response...but I will not criticize them. One thing that makes Christianity unique is the manner of living that accompanies a person walking with the Holy Spirit. We are to be gentle and loving.

*<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit as well. <sup>26</sup> Let's not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5)*

God does not need us to be his religious policemen or attorneys. He is a lion who only needs to be turned loose.

*<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3)*

Sometimes our dedication can result in the opposite effect. Saul's position was unknowingly similar to the PLO or Hamas. It is ironic that the people thought they were trying to save Israel were ultimately killing Israel.

God uses poetic justice to knock Saul off his high horse. He will now put him in the same situation as a terrorized 1<sup>st</sup> century believer. He blind-sides him and knocks him to the ground. Saul is helpless and blind and confused. Now he is the one being intimidated and pushed around. Jesus also announces that he is the one putting Saul in his place. Now Saul is dependent on strangers (whom he persecuted) for mercy.

Jesus will not be mocked or let us ignore him. He keeps coming up in conversation. Even God haters can't get God out of their minds. It is like a Twilight Zone re-run. Our daughter was a college student 10 years ago. There were many classes that had atheist teachers who could not stop talking about how wrong and pathetic Christianity was. This was in classes that had nothing to do with religion or philosophy! There are many things in this world that are false...but you do not remind people about the obvious daily. This shows extreme intellectual dishonesty.

*Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 26:12)*

Saul was *tripping* over Jesus as he had to violate his conscience to support the killing of Stephen. In other words, God made sure that Saul, who saw himself as the expert 'Law Enforcer of God' violated all kinds of laws as he carried out his quest.

*<sup>44</sup> And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and on whomever it falls, it will crush him." <sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. (Matthew 21)*

*<sup>7</sup> This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for unbelievers, "A stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief cornerstone," (1 Peter 2)*

# Saul's Violation of Sacred Commandments

1. **Murder and False Witness:** As he oversaw the persecution and execution of Christians (e.g., Stephen's stoning in Acts 7), Saul violated the **Sixth Commandment:** "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).
2. **Bearing False Witness:** Pharisaical law emphasized truthfulness. By promoting false accusations against Christians, he would violate the **Ninth Commandment.**

Saul's threats to believers he pursued and incarcerated were surely having an accumulative effect in his heart as well. Where is the nobility in chasing out peace-keeping, God-seeking people? Every time that you violate your conscience you become hardened. A protester of what is right becomes more and more confused and hard core, until like they are like a rabid wolf that needs to be put down.

*"As has just been said: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.'"* (Hebrews 3:15)

When you lie about the direction of true north, to justify yourself, you begin to believe your own lies. The deceivers literally see up as down and visa versa.

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.* (Galatians 6:7)

*<sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools* (Romans 1:22)

Resisting the Holy Spirit results in a downward progression. Psalm 1 describes the progression that begins with merely associating with bad company; and ends with you being a leader in opposition of all things that are godly.

## Why So Angry?

What specifically were many Pharisees like Saul reacting to with these *free-lance followers* of God? Pharisees were originally created because the Greek worldwide culture caused the Hebrews to forget their language and forget their God. They actually forgot how to be Jews. It was a noble idea to restore Israel; but the means to do so became corrupted.

The Pharisees were essentially the *religious police*. Here are the Pharisaical job descriptions:

- Serve as religious leaders in every community, connected by the synagogue.
  - Teaching
  - Lead synagogue services

- Act as scribes and scholars
  - Copyists of scripture
  - Interpreters of the Law
    - Passing down and enforcing previously-held orthodoxy positions
    - Assumed that the untrained masses could not understand the bible without their commentaries
- Act as judges and legal authorities
  - Adjudicating disputes
  - Providing legal guidance
- Missionaries
  - Spreading teachings

The problem is that they saw themselves as the sole interpreters of scripture. They were skeptical about any Christian interpreters of scripture. They were taught (like an attorney) about argumentation and debate over resolution and soul-searching scriptural research. Saul considered himself *a cut above* as a perfectionist in keeping to all of these Pharisaical traditions. He is a case study of how religion can accomplish the opposite of faith.

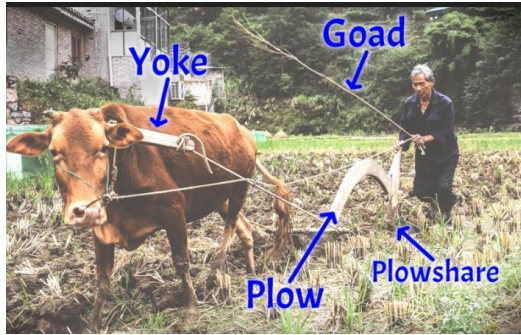
*<sup>4</sup> although I myself could boast as having confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he is confident in the flesh, I have more reason: <sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. (Philippians 3)*

*For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup> For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10)*

Now Saul is paying attention. Everything he stood for was destroyed. He had become the epitome of what he hated. Now, he had *skin in the game*, because he is being shown the need for mercy. It is easier to tell people what to do and burden them if it doesn't touch you. Once you become subject to a controlling force, life feels different. Jesus told Saul that his threats and persecutions was affecting God himself. You do not want to be the guy *poking God in the eye* with a sharp stick.

*For thus says the LORD of hosts: "He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. (Zechariah 2:8)*

Jesus points out that Saul cannot win. He is *kicking against the goads*. That is an old agricultural ox plow drafting term. The ox may be tempted to kick the farmer walking behind the plow. The farmer placed a sharp stick (goad) behind the leg of the ox to bring pain if he tried it. Saul was fighting a losing battle.



Saul was hiding in a stranger's home; blind to what was going on around him. He was afraid for his life and helpless to the same terrorism he created. He had to have some new-found friends lower him in a rope and basket over a city wall to escape religious persecution. That is a 180-degree change of circumstances. Saul lost all of his power and authority. Everything that he had trained and competed for was all gone in an instant. It is much easier to become saved if you have nothing. It is almost impossible to get through to someone who believes they are just fine. Now Saul depended on the help and compassion of others. These men who are offering compassion were the same people Saul was attacking before.

**Read Acts 9:20-30:** The church went from having the worst days to having an all-star in their corner. Saul immediately began to preach in the synagogues. His message was that Jesus was the Son of God. This message confused a lot of people, so he proved the Jesus was the son of God. His former colleagues tried to kill him too. Did Saul already have scriptural proof; on top of what he witnessed?

It is interesting how sometimes things do not seem to be going my way; only to discover a blessing that is brewing. I can really feel like I am losing, while I am actually winning. I must be careful not to pre-judge things based on my hopes and plans.

**Read Acts 9:31-43:** It sounds like there was a lull in church terrorism. The church was being strengthened and growing. Peter heals a bedridden man in Lydda, and the whole town became converted. Afterwards, Peter was also used by God to bring a deceased saint back to life in Joppa. This miracle also caused many to receive Christ as their savior.