

News & Notes

Sunday, November 27, 2005

Remember in Prayer: Al Alberson; Sandra Albertson; Gather Bennett; Buck Brooks; Sally Etta Crawford; Lawrence Dawson; Tommy Dawson; Flora Estes; Richard Gore; Carrol Holmes; Carolyn Jordan; Dot Kethum; Ruth Ann Long; Deliah Mann; John Mann got a good report from the doctor this past week; Charlie Matheny; Howard Moody; Tate Peeler; Wanda Pestes; John Bill Richardson; Janet Rooker; Katherine Shaw; Lillie Mae Shelby; Austin Simpson; Linda Smith; Jayme and Trucilla Spence; Calvin Ursery got a good report from the eye-doctor this past week; Ollie Ursery; Betty Vincent; Lee Walls; Bob Weikel; Alvie Williford; Carolyn Winstead;

Sympathy is extended to the families of Mammie Lee Grisham and James Williams.

Pantry item for the month of November is canned goods.

The next **elders' meeting** is today at 5:00 PM. If you have anything you would like to bring to their attention, please do so then.

Sermon In Preview:

AM: Does God Care About Our Standard of Authority?

PM: The Cross Words: "It is Finished" (John 19:30)

For the Record (November 20, 2005):

Attendance: 102 Contribution: \$1579.00 Budget: \$1205.00

The Ashland Church of Christ

P. O. Box 25

Ashland, MS 38603-0025

ashlandcoc@juno.com

Sunday:

Bible Study 9:30 AM

Worship 10:30 AM

Worship 6:00 PM

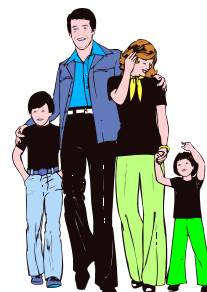
Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 PM

Shepherds:

Barney King

Carrol Street



The Ashland Announcer

*"Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
Give to the Lord glory and strength" (Psalm 96:7).*

The Testimony of the Man From Tarsus

Kyle Butt

Since Christianity is, and always has been, based on historical fact, then any person trying to discount the story found in the New Testament must create a scenario that adequately explains all of the facts better than the scenario found in the Scriptures. This task proves Herculean, to say the least, and in more than a few instances becomes absolutely impossible. One of those instances is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

From Saul's own pen, we learn that he was a zealous Pharisee who had surpassed many of his Jewish contemporaries in his efforts to keep the Jewish traditions of his fathers (Galatians 1:13-14). He was educated by Gamaliel, one of the most respected Jewish rabbis of his day. His hometown of Tarsus stood as one of the larger metropolitan areas. And his Roman citizenship gave him access to some of the most coveted civil rights of the first century.

In his zeal for keeping the Jewish tradition, Saul made it his mission to crush Christianity—a new sect that seemed to be rising out of Judaism. These Christians were proclaiming that their leader, Jesus of Nazareth, after being crucified by the Roman authorities, had come back to life three days after His crucifixion. Thousands of Jews who heard the message of Christ were converting to Christianity, and consequently were leaving the paths of ancient Judaism. One Christian preacher, Stephen, had so aggravated the Jewish authorities with his preaching and

condemnation of their hypocrisy that they stoned him to death. As an interested observer fully consenting to his death, Saul stood by and watched the garments of those involved in the stoning (Acts 7:58).

It is not difficult to imagine Saul's motive in persecuting the Way. At the core of Old Testament teaching—the Ten Commandments—God specifically instructed the Jews to have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3). Moses also had written: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Yet those following Jesus were proclaiming that He was God, and that He was one with the Father (John 1:1; 10:30). This heresy deserved the severest penalties.

Having his heart set on destruction of this perverse new religion, Saul, armed with letters of authority from the High Priest, turned his faced toward Damascus. Yet, something happened on the trip to Damascus that changed the course of Saul's life—and the course of history itself. Saul became a follower of Jesus Christ. Saul's named changed to Paul, and with that change came a transformed life. Paul's own pen testified to the fact that he was converted from an adamant **enemy** of the cross to an ardent **follower** of the Christ (Galatians 1:13-14).

Therefore, we must ask ourselves, what type of evidence must have been presented to this well-educated Roman citizen that not only made him rethink his position, but also caused him to do an about-face and preach that Jesus was the Christ. What facts and arguments could convince a brilliant mind like Paul that his murderous intentions toward the Way were misguided, and that his view of Jesus was altogether inaccurate? If we look to Paul's writing for the answer, we find it in 1 Corinthians 15. There, Paul explained that Christ died and rose again. After He rose from the grave, “He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time” (vss. 7-8). Paul said that he personally saw the resurrected Christ; he was an eyewitness to the fact that the grave where the body of Jesus had once laid, was empty.

Whether or not a person believes in the resurrection of Christ, he cannot begin to challenge the fact that Paul was converted because

he believed strongly in that resurrection. A quick glance at his writings shows even the casual observer that the resurrection of Christ was at the core of the message Paul preached (Galatians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

During Jesus' time on this Earth, Paul was the farthest thing from His follower. He did not travel with Jesus around the Galilean countryside helping Him preach and minister to the villagers. He was not in the chosen group of apostles who ate with the Christ or who were sent out to preach. Yet, after Paul's conversion, he wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament, and became the leading apostle sent to the Gentiles. F.F. Bruce wrote:

It is reasonable to believe that the evidence which convinced such a man of the out-and-out wrongness of his former course, and led him so decisively to abandon previously cherished beliefs for a movement which he had so vigorously opposed, must have been of a singularly impressive quality. The conversion of Paul has for long been regarded as weighty evidence for the truth of Christianity. Many have endorsed the conclusion of the eighteenth-century statesman George, Lord Lyttelton, that “the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation” (1960, p. 77).

Anyone attempting to discredit Christianity must first adequately discredit the testimony of Paul and the evidence responsible for his conversion. Attempts at this have failed miserably in the past, and will do the same in the future. Irrefutable evidence for the truth of Christianity comes from the testimony of a man from Tarsus.

REFERENCE

Bruce, F.F. (1960), *The New Testament Documents—Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), fifth edition.

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