

## YOUNG SAUL OF TARSUS IN THE MODERN CHURCH

As I was writing a new book on Saul of Tarsus, I became increasingly aware that the modern church has many "Saul's of Tarsus" in its ranks. Very often these are the children of devout Christian parents who do "everything right" in raising their children. They may have been home schooled where they could be protected from all ungodly influences, and properly instructed from the time of their birth. Their minds have been programmed with the "principles of life" to the extent they have no struggle, because the "nature of sin" that is in them lies dormant, often for many years. It is only when sin is "awakened" in their heart that the struggle begins.

Saul of Tarsus, being a Jew, had no concept whatsoever of a "sin nature" Galatians 2:15. His mind was so "programmed" with the laws and ordinances of Moses, and his everyday life so filled with religious activities, that he kept the "... righteousness which is in the law, blameless" Philippians 3:6.

Most Christians know that every child is born with sin in their nature, but with love, discipline, and proper training, sin can remain "dormant" for many years. It is a certainty, however, that at some point sin will awaken in the heart of every individual. Being faced with the overwhelming emotions stirred up by sin in their heart, they become ashamed, which often gives place to "secret sin." The modern church has tried to counter the guilt and shame of sin by the constant reminder, "We are all sinners; we sin every day." This attitude displays the difference between the devout Jew under the Law of Moses and the modern church. The Jew said, "We are not sinners," while the modern church says, "We are all sinners."

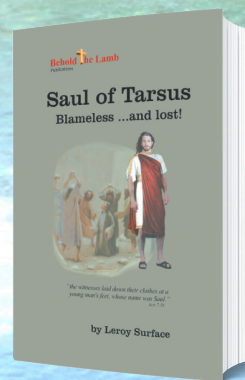
I have heard some in the modern church speak of the Apostle Paul as if he were a womanizer at heart. As though his words, "...it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" Romans 7:20, were a light-hearted excuse for his sins. This is far from the truth of this matter. It was Saul's worst nightmare to realize that doing things he didn't want to do was proof that he was controlled by sin just like the Gentiles, whom he had been taught to despise.

When Saul of Tarsus discovered by the Tenth Commandment the sin in his heart, he knew for the first time in his life that he was a sinner. This "knowledge of sin" destroyed him. He had always been in complete control of his lifestyle, but now he was under the control

of hatred and rage. This did not happen until he rejected the testimony of Jesus which Stephen gave before the Jewish Council before they stoned him to death. When sin awakened in Saul's heart it filled him with bitterness and hatred against the disciples of Jesus, and he became the great persecutor of the church.

When sin awakens, it fills the heart with "all manner of concupiscence (sinful desires)" Romans 7:8. Paul said, "...the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" Romans 7:19. The "sin" that destroyed Saul was his hatred for Jesus, which only increased as he "breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" Acts 9:1. As with all those who "hate," in time his hatred turned inward and became "self-hatred." The cry from his soul, "O wretched man that I am" Romans 7:24 was not a mere confession that revealed his humility. It was a desperate cry, which was followed by "Who shall deliver me." This was a cry that Jesus could not deny. Saul of Tarsus, who was "blameless" according to the Law of Moses, while he also persecuted the church Philippians 3:6, was gloriously saved from sin when he met Jesus on the Damascus Road.

The modern church desperately needs the same "awakened" Saul of Tarsus received. It was the Tenth Commandment that awakened Saul to the fact that he was a sinner, because it exposes the content of the heart. Oh that everyone who stands in the church on Sunday morning to say, "We are all sinners..." would hear what they say, and be convicted by their own words. If they understood what it means to "be a sinner," and what it means "to be saved from sin," revival would begin that same day. The altar would be restored in the church as "sinners in Zion" Isaiah 33:14 would repent in godly sorrow, and the "blood of Jesus Christ" would "cleanse them from all unrighteousness" I John 1:7.



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