

IT IS SETTLED!

"Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13b)

By Howell Lasseter

"And witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts 7:58b; see also Acts 22:20).

"And Saul was consenting unto his (Stephen's) death. And at that time, there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:1-3).

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the High Priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1,2).

As we notice together examples of religious people who turned from the religion they had been following to obey the gospel of Christ, we begin with Saul of Tarsus. He is also called "Paul" (Acts 13:9). Was he a religious man? Was he doing God's will while consenting to Stephen's death? Or, while imprisoning disciples of the way, both men and women? No, he was not!

There may be those who would say that, because Saul was honest and sincere in his actions as he consented to the death and persecution of followers in the apostles' doctrine, that would make his behavior right. Often, in this 20th century, we hear the statement made that all that is necessary in order for one to please God is to be honest and sincere in what one believes. Can we not learn, from the New Testament, that one can be sincere and be **wrong**? Read what Saul/Paul himself said about his behavior and motives. And, who knows one's self better than the person himself? Notice Paul's honesty. *"Verily I thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth; which thing I did in Jerusalem: And many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (Acts 26:9-11).* Paul also affirms, *"And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1).*

Paul/Saul had been honest, sincere, and had lived in all good conscience. But, in what state had he been before God? He was lost, although he thought he was right with God. In Acts 21:27-40, it is recorded that the Jews had captured Paul, and intended to kill him. After he was rescued by the chief captain and the soldiers, Paul tells the Jews of his conversion to Christ. Let Paul tell us, in his own words, what he was told to do to change from following error to following the Truth. God sent Ananias, a disciple, to Paul (you may read of this in Acts 9:10), and Paul was told *"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).* To be honest with God, we **must obey His commands**. Yes, Saul was a zealously religious person, but wrong. He changed. So must each one do today who, in the light of the New Testament, is religiously wrong.