

A NEW CREATURE IN CHRIST

"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature."
(2 Cor. 5:17.)

The man who wrote these words had every reason to know whereof he spoke for he had become a new creature himself under the influence of the Christ and His message. We read of his new birth in Acts, the ninth chapter.

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings 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. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

"And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named

Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the street which is called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight...And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." (Acts 9:1-12, 17-18.)

Little did Saul think that he would reach his destination as a blind man, led by his friends, but that is what happened. We do not know just how they traveled, but regardless of the method several days were required for the journey. As they drew near to the city, "suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven." It was "about mid-day" when the sun was brightest, and it was "a great light," above the brightness of the noon day sun. (Acts 26:13.) This was a miracle. This light was from the glorified Son of God, "The Sun of Righteousness" (Mal. 4:2), as seen on the mount of transfiguration and on Patmos (Matt. 17, Rev. 1:12-17), for in the midst Saul saw Jesus (Acts 26:16, I Cor. 15:8). Under this intense light he "fell to the ground," smitten with blind-

ness and filled with awe. Those who were with him saw the light and heard the sound of a voice, and were afraid (Acts 22:9), and fell to the ground (Acts 26:14).

A voice came out of heaven--it was the voice of Christ. The Lord spoke to Saul in plain words that could not be misunderstood. He said, "Why persecutest thou me?" Saul immediately recognized that it was God speaking to him, though he did not recognize the form which God had taken. So it is no wonder that Saul asked the question: "Who art thou, Lord?" Now Jesus might have said that he was the Christ, or The Messiah; but this might have left some confusion in Saul's mind. He too, was looking for a Messiah, and was persecuting one who claimed to be the Messiah, and whom he thought to be an imposter. But the voice said in a clear bold tongue, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest." (Acts 22:8.) This was the so called imposter that Paul had been so bitterly opposing. Saul saw at once that the despised Nazerene was divine. Before this he had thought that he was persecuting an imposter and serving God in so doing. Now he understood that in persecuting the disciples of Jesus he was persecuting the Messiah and that Messiah is the Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus used the expression, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," or "goads" (R.V.). This expression is full of meaning for the Palestinian. A goad is used by the driver of oxen to spur them along. The sharp point prodded the beasts along, if they struggled or kicked against them, they were hurt more. Paul was

hurting himself the more by persecuting Jesus.

Some one might ask, "Why did Jesus appear unto Saul?" He appeared unto him for this purpose: "but rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in thee which I will make appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." (Acts 26:16-17) An apostle must be an eye witness. Saul could have become a Christian without seeing Christ, but he could not have become a witness. This truth Paul used as evidence of his apostleship when it was questioned in Corinth. (I Cor. 9:1, 2.)

Upon conviction of his error in persecution of Christianity, Saul became immediately conscious of the need of doing the wishes of the Lord. So he asked a question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Paul was never a lazy man, but rather one who felt his convictions so keenly that he had to fight for them. We find him here lying upon the ground in subjection to the glory of his Master, ready and willing to do His will. When the Lord told him to rise and go into the city and await instructions, he arose; and finding himself to be blinded, he secured the help of his companions and found his way into the city. Ananias came to him according to the wishes of the Lord and baptized him into Christ.

This new birth placed a mark upon this young Jew. Looking backward in his life we see him as a deep rooted

Pharisee; we see him approving of Stephen's death; we see him laying waste the church and persecuting men and women who held to the new faith. But, now let us glance at the new creature. His new life began with the obedience to the wishes of his Master. His sight now restored and his strength returning, he began in Damascus to preach Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God and the Saviour of the World. A man today might be ashamed to turn so quickly from one point of view to the exact opposite, but not Saul. Saul had been thoroughly convinced that Jesus is the Son of God. He was never ashamed of his convictions.

Just as the bounds of the city had proved too small for Saul when trying to crush Christianity, so now did he feel them too small in Damascus and Jerusalem as he sought to proclaim it.

His zeal for the Lord in both cities made enemies for him and to save his life he was sent to his home in Tarsus. He spent a number of his early years in Arabia preaching to those who did not know him by face. According to Gal. 2:1, it was fourteen years before he went back to Jerusalem. During that period he had spent much time in communion with the Father; he says himself that he did not confer with flesh and blood first. He received the revelation of the will of the Father directly from Him rather than from one of the other Apostles.

We see him as a new creature, defending a new way of life with all of the vigor of the younger Saul. We see

him striking out into new fields to preach the word of life to those dying in sin. We see him beaten with rods and lashed with the Roman Scourges. We see him in prison and rejoicing in his suffering for the Lord. We see him standing firm even though opposed by the other apostles on the matter of circumcision. We see him arrested and eventually taken to Rome as a prisoner.

Through all of his tribulations we hear his words ringing clear, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel..."
(Rom. 1:16.)

He who had bound men and women and imprisoned them for Christ came to the end of his life as a prisoner himself, but he was not bitter, rather he seemed to be happy. Writing to his beloved Timothy, he said: "For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge shall provide for me in that day, and not for me only, but for all them that love his appearing." (II Tim. 4:6-8)

Why such a great change in a man? Paul answered himself: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." What a wonderful thing it is to be in Christ. Jesus Christ can do the same thing for you today that He did for Paul. No matter what your present condition, He can make of you a new creature. All you need to do is to place your future in His hands and obey His will. Make today your first as a Christian and the same power

that reformed Paul will make yours a new life.

Radio Sermon by Warren Morris