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W. O. Vaught

Ouachita Baptist University

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PAUL'S WITNESS BEFORE KING AGRIPPA
(continued)

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 131
ACTS 26:17-21

Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr.
Immanuel Baptist Church
Little Rock, Arkansas

ACTS 26:17-21 "Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me."

In this part of the conversion story of Paul, he reported to King Agrippa exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ said to him.

ACTS 26:17 "Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee," The word deliver is a very important word here. It is from "exaireo" and it means to lift out from danger. In Jerusalem Paul had temporarily gotten out of the geographical will of God and also out of the operational will of God. He had actually allowed the legalistic Jews to persuade him to go into the temple and offer a legalistic vow. In that instance Paul compromised his whole grace stand and compromised the whole structure of Bible doctrine. In that incident Paul failed the Lord and was disciplined rather severely from the Lord. The ministers in Jerusalem told Paul that he would have no worthwhile ministry in Jerusalem unless he demonstrated quite clearly that he stood on the Mosaic Law and Paul temporarily fell into their trap, took a legalistic vow, and entered the temple. Now this was entirely out of line with all the doctrine that Paul knew about the Church Age. Paul had temporarily fallen into this legalistic trap and but for the mercy and grace of God he would have lost his life over this error. But God had other grace work for Paul to do, and he led him through this rather dangerous and bitter experience.

Paul had now rebounded and had been filled with the Spirit and was back in fellowship with the Lord. So as Paul stood before Agrippa we find him completely relaxed as he related these details about his conversion. Paul knew quite well that he had been delivered by Christ and was standing there before King Agrippa with great confidence that he was in the center of God's will.

The present, middle participle of "exaireo" indicates that God will continue to deliver him. The middle voice indicates that Paul will be benefited by this deliverance. "Unto whom now I send thee" lets us know that Paul was aware of the fact that he would eventually be sent to Rome and would eventually stand before Caesar.

ACTS 26:18 "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Here we find an outline of the divine objectives of the life and ministry of Paul after his conversion experience. "To open their eyes" and this refers to the eyes of the soul. This meant that Paul will present the gospel to the Romans and many of them will open their minds to gospel truth and they will recognize it as truth and will believe. This "open their eyes" is an aorist, active, infinitive and it means to enlighten their souls. "Anoigo" means to open their eyes by presenting information. It doesn't mean to persuade them, to twist their arms with emotional junk and force them down the aisle and get them quickly baptized. Paul isn't going to try to prize their eyes open, but he is going to open their eyes by presenting the truth of the gospel.

We now have a second aorist, active, infinitive "to turn them from darkness to light." The word is "epistrepho" and it means to go from one status to another. They will be turned from darkness to light. "That they may receive" is an aorist, active, infinitive of "lombano" and this verb always has a grace meaning to it. It means that on no merit of their own will they receive this forgiveness of their sins. This is always the way God works and salvation is always by grace and grace alone. When God saves he always does a complete job and there is no way you can nullify it or change it.

"Forgiveness of sins" is potential to the whole human race. The reason for this is that at the cross, Christ paid for every sin of every man. But this propitiation, this forgiveness is not authentic until it is received. "Lombano" means non-meritorious reception as in JOHN 1:12 "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:"

All the sins of every unbeliever were paid for on the cross but the forgiveness is not valid until it is received through the faith of the one believing. The pardon is there, it is authentic. Salvation is available, but the individual has to believe in order to enter into salvation. When we receive by faith this provision Christ has made for us, then we are saved. When we reject this provision Christ has made for us, then we are lost.

JOHN 3:18 "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

So Paul made it quite clear to King Agrippa and Bernice and Festus that if they were ever to be saved they would have to receive the salvation which Christ provides. Paul proved to be quite a good evangelist as he stood there before these important people in that Roman judgment hall. Then Paul said, "And inheritance among them who are sanctified." The Romans all thought in terms of an inheritance, for they were wealthy and successful. So inheritance here is a word the Romans understood quite well. The Roman Republic was built on a system which afforded every Roman with three acres of ground, and this was his inheritance. Later on, as the Roman Empire developed, they became wealthy. They had a law that you could not take a man's inheritance away from him. So when Paul said "inheritance" they knew exactly what he meant. Then in Roman history, when Socialism arose and the people were in danger of losing their inheritance, it was Julius Caesar who came along and stabilized the Roman system and gave them a system of law which caused the empire to last for almost 500 years. The idea of a small plot of land belonging to a family forever was common to two nations in the earth--the Jews and the Romans. This is why this word "inheritance" meant so much to these Roman listeners.

"Them which are sanctified" referred to all of those who by faith had accepted Jesus Christ. Sanctify is not some experience we achieve, by some act of our own. Sanctify means "set apart" and this is the work of God and not an achievement of man. This is potential sanctification, and it happens at the moment of salvation. Christianity is a relationship, not a religion. Our union with Christ means we are set apart. Then there is a phase two sanctification and this is the filling of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of the Word of God.

EPHESIANS 5:26 "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,"

Then there is what the Bible calls "ultimate sanctification" and this takes place at the time of the death of the Christian.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23 "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:8 "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

ROMANS 8:29 "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

The word as used in our passage here in Acts is from "hagaizo" and means to set apart, and the sanctification in view in this verse is salvation. There are three agents in the sanctification process.

The Son of God is said to be a sanctifier.

HEBREWS 10:10 "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

The Holy Spirit is said to be a sanctifier.

ROMANS 15:16 "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."

The Word of God is said to be a sanctifier.

JOHN 17:17 "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

"By faith" is in the instrumental case of the word for faith and it means a non-meritorious way of thinking and the thought is always centered "in Christ." It means this happens only by faith, and by faith in Christ.

ACTS 26:19 "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:" Here in this verse we have a short summary of Paul's ministry. He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. "I was not" is an aorist, middle, indicative of "ginomai" and it means "I did not become disobedient to the heavenly vision" and it actually means that he accepted Christ immediately as a result of meeting him on the Damascus road.

ACTS 26:20 "But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." The word "shewed" is from "ap angello" and means he announced from the ultimate source of himself. Now notice the ever expanding circle of his influence. First at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, and this included those three missionary journeys. "That they should repent" is a present, active, infinitive of "Metanoeo" and this means to think objectively.

"Nous" is the thought box and "Noeo" is the thoughts.

"Dia noeo" is subjective thinking.

"Kata noeo" is to think in terms of a certain doctrine or standard.

"Meta noeo" means to change your thinking and means to repent. You are to change your thinking about Christ. The gospel, correct information, is the thing that changed the thinking of Paul. Repent does not mean to change by being emotional, or to renounce sin, or to walk down an aisle, or to feel sorry for your sins. Repent means to change your mind about Christ. Then Christ in you will change your mind about sin.

In our next study we will begin with ten points on the doctrine of repentance.