

SEPTEMBER 1, 1991

CHOSEN TO SERVE

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you thought what you were doing was absolutely right and you applied yourself and all your energy into doing it only to find out later that what you thought was right was really the wrong thing to do? It may be something such as turning down a wrong road or going the wrong direction on the right road. You may be making good time, but it is no good unless it is in the right direction. A lot of times we have a view of the world and how things work that is not based on the absolute truth. In the area of dealing with people, for years there was this perception that the boss knew everything and that the workers were not to think but just do what they were told. Many supervisors believed that and practiced it with a lot of vigor. Today, we have discovered a better "truth" in that we realize that the ability of the worker to think and bring creativity to the job is probably one of the most powerful resources available to us. We now think that involvement of everyone is of utmost importance. A good example that is currently on the world scene right now is the situation in Russia. For 70 years those people thought that communism was the best economic system and that the Communist Party had the right goal and objectives. They have now discovered how wrong that was and are in the midst of changing their view of things. It is a traumatic time because not everyone has seen the light of the new truth. It is a traumatic time also because many of their systems by which they operate are based on the old system and they will not work in the new system.

Such changes in the view of what life is all about (our world view) can occur in individuals also. Take Saul of Tarsus for example. He was convinced that legalistic adherence to the rules that grew out of centuries of interpretation of the Law was the only way to please God. He thought that anything contrary to his view was a threat to his world and was destructive to those who held those views. The advent of Jesus had started a movement that discounted strict adherence to law in favor of acting out of love in every situation. Saul saw such as a severe threat to what he thought was absolutely right and he worked very diligently to eliminate the influence of this new movement.

ACTS 9:1-2 The persecution of the church was underway by the Jews. Following the death of Stephen (which Saul witnessed) many of the Christian converts in Jerusalem (there were literally thousands of them) were forced to leave to avoid the persecution. The Jewish leaders had hoped to eliminate the influence of this movement by the action they took; however, just the opposite resulted. Instead of it being eliminated it spread to the surrounding areas.

In the fervor of the persecution there were those with enough zeal to track down those followers of Jesus that had left the area. Saul of Tarsus was a man of such intense emotions about Judaism that he volunteered to go to Damascus to bring back those Jews that had professed Jesus as Lord. Since this was a religious matter, he obtained a letter from the high priest authorizing him to bring Jews back to Jerusalem.

ACTS 9:3-9 You've heard of people who were so set in their ways that you have to use a 2x4 to get their attention. What happened to Paul on the road to Damascus is an example of God using drastic means to get a person's attention. Did He ever get Paul's attention! Saul recognized that something or someone of a far greater power than he had ever before encountered had confronted him. He could have rebelled. He could have remained blind in his rebellion. Instead he submitted to the authority of Jesus and said, "What will you have me to do?"

You've heard it said that God will not force anyone to be saved against their will. In Paul's case, he still had a choice of following or rebelling after the encounter. Prior to this incident, Paul

had no desire to be a follower of Jesus; however, we see God bringing about circumstances that caused Paul to change his desire (will). Sometime we have situations in our life that seem to be difficult or unfair or just do not make any sense. Could these be that God is trying to get our attention because He had something that we want us to do for Him?

God's instructions to Paul were quite simple: "Arise, go into the city, listen for the next instruction."

ARISE or GET UP is a good starting point for most of us. When there is a job to be done the first step in finishing the job is to simply get up so that we can get started. My problem in doing things is usually in getting started or just taking that first step.

GO INTO THE CITY would say that God's will for our lives can sometimes involve our being in a certain location. This may also tell us that we need to be where the action is to be able to accomplish something for the Kingdom of God. We have a tendency to practice our Christianity in the Church house and fail to take it into the city.

LISTEN FOR NEXT INSTRUCTION may be the most difficult part of following God. Once we get into some project, we often will use our own wit to complete the task. We may find ourselves working to accomplish very worthwhile objectives but using unethical means to accomplish it. We need to be in tune with God so that we not only begin well, but also end well.

Fasting was a significant part of the Pharisee's religious life. This practice was used in many occasions of crises in the history of Israel. No doubt, Paul felt that this was a crisis situation in his life that was worth fasting about.

ACTS 9:10-12 On the road to Damascus, Jesus directly intervened in the life of Saul. Such occurrences are rare. It is more likely that such intervention happens through other people. Ananias was a follower of Christ and he was used in a special way to accomplish the will of God. It is not often that we distinctly hear the voice of God directing us to do something. Most of the time when God speaks to us it is in ways that are not as clear. In this case, God did not want to leave anything to chance. In fact, God not only prepared Ananias to minister to Saul, he also prepared Saul to receive the ministry. I think that it is important for us to pray that God would prepare the hearts of those to whom we would minister or share the gospel so that it will be received in the proper way.

ACTS 9:13-16 Ananias had serious concerns about what God had asked him to do. He knew what Saul had come to do and he was concerned for his safety. But God had already taken care of Saul's hostility and had replaced it with a spirit of submission. Ananias could not imagine why God was interested in help out this man who had done so much damage to the cause of Jesus. If it had been left to Ananias, he would have just left the Saul alone in his blind condition. We need to always be in touch with what God is trying to accomplish and not try to implement our own agenda.