

Paul's "Conversion": A Change of Heart and Mind

Although Paul continued to regard himself as a loyal Jew and Pharisee after his encounter with the risen Christ, he does seem to have changed his thinking about some matters.

- *Jesus.* Paul had considered Jesus to be a false messiah; after his encounter he viewed Jesus as the true Messiah and, indeed, the Son of God (2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20).
- *The last days.* Paul had believed that God's Messiah would put an end to the old age of evil and initiate a new age of righteousness; after, he decided that this would occur in stages: the new age (ripe with possibility) had begun with the resurrection of Jesus, but the old age (with all its attendant problems) would continue until Jesus returned (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 10:11; Gal. 1:4).
- *The cross.* Paul had considered death by crucifixion to be a shameful sign that one was cursed by God (Gal. 3:13); after, he understood the crucifixion of Jesus as a voluntary sacrifice that reconciled sinners with God (Rom. 5:6–10; Phil. 2:8).
- *The law.* Paul had believed that the law (Jewish Torah) kept people in a right standing with God (Gal. 2:16; 3:12); after, he decided that the law only reveals the extent of people's enslavement to the power of sin—a power that must be broken by Christ (Rom. 3:20b; 7:7–12).
- *Gentiles.* Paul had believed that gentiles were outside the covenant that God had made with Israel; after, he believed that gentiles and Jews were united as the people of God in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).
- *Circumcision.* Paul had believed that circumcision was the rite through which people became part of Israel, an exclusive community of God's chosen people (Phil. 3:3–5); after, he believed that baptism was the rite through which people became part of the church, an inclusive community of Jews and gentiles put right with God through faith (Rom. 6:4).
- *Persecution.* Paul had considered his violent persecution of the church to be an indication of zeal for his religion (Phil. 3:6); after, he viewed Jewish hostility toward the church as sinful opposition that would incur God's wrath (1 Thess. 2:14–16).