



Called to Open Our Eyes

Acts 9:1-19

By John Roy

Pelham Road Church

Greenville, SC

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Though his eyes were open, he could see nothing.

This is the truth—Saul's eyes functioned, but he never saw.

Eyes are more than what we see the world with, our eyes are a WAY to see, and when we see nothing, our eyes need to be opened.

Typically, this story is only viewed as a conversion story. It is. But to follow Jesus is to do more than say a prayer, it is to follow a call. To follow Jesus is to change, to move from blindness to sight is a good start, but even that it is not the end.

This is Saul—

"Breathing threats of murder," Paul collaborated with authorities to track down believers.

Near the end of his life when he wrote his protegee Timothy, Saul/Paul regretted that he was "formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor" (1 Timothy 1:13).

Before his conversion, calling, and journey of faith, Paul was a violent, religious fanatic. He practiced what he had heard from Leviticus "*Thus you shall keep the sons of Israel separated*

from their uncleanness, so that they will not die in their uncleanness by their defiling My tabernacle that is among them." [i]

After his eyes were opened, he summarized the entire Bible of his day in five words: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14). Don't ever weary in taking every opportunity to "do good to all people," he told the Galatians (6:9–10). With his eyes opened, he moved from zealous violence to gracious love.

Paul's story is a paradigm of how authentic religious calling validates itself by the renunciation of hatred in all forms and the demonstration of indiscriminate love for all people.

Paul describes himself as a former religious zealot who tried to exterminate the early Christian movement. He supported the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7). To the Galatians, Paul wrote, "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (1:13–14). Writing to the Philippians, he bragged, "as to zeal, a persecutor of the church" (3:6). Even as an old man Paul seems to have been haunted by memories of his abusive past, to the Corinthians, he admitted that he didn't deserve to be called an apostle, and was at best the "least of the apostles" because of his violence (1 Corinthians 15:9).

People instinctively discounted the stories about Paul. When he returned to Jerusalem after his conversion in Damascus, "he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple" (Acts 9:26). Paul remained personally unknown to most believers, of course; as he wrote to the Galatians, "People only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy'" (1:23).

Many believers today try to prove their dedication to our faith by protecting the faith from heresy, fraud, and blemishes. Oddly we don't do it by trying to out-do others with love. The Damascus road experience did not create a bigot it eliminated one. The Damascus road experience did not create a judge it removed one. The Damascus road rid the world of Saul, the

faithful, who worked out his salvation with persecution and hatred, with Paul, the faithful who lived in love and hope. The man called on the Damascus road was transformed from violent aggression to indiscriminate love, from preaching law to embracing freedom.

A lawyer once asked Jesus an obvious question. Are some parts of the Bible more important than others? Which laws are indispensable? Jesus responded that "the most important one is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength' [Deuteronomy 6:4]. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' [Leviticus 19:18].

Jesus thus drew a necessary connection between claiming to love God and demonstrating that we love our fellow human beings. This connection became so embedded in the early Christian traditions that it's repeated almost verbatim by Paul----

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Romans 13:8-9)

James

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (James 2:8)

And most memorably by John: *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother"* (1 John 4:20–21).

Let me re-frame this. We love what we can see. The only thing Paul saw prior to being blind was the law. The rules. But when his eyes re-opened. When he saw anew, he saw God and people. We love what we see.

We are called to live with our eyes wide open. Sadly, we are often squinting. Too much pain to open our eyes fully. Too much fear to not squint. Too busy to see our neighbor. God's call to Paul was to SEE. To LOOK. To not turn away, to not squint but to truly see God and Others. Likewise, our call is not complicated, but it is demanding. Open our eyes and see, and when we do, God will be worshipped, and people will be loved, and the world will grow brighter in the light of love.

We know our eyes are open and that we have responded to God's call when we move away from all expressions of hatred and practice indiscriminate love for God and all people.

[\[i\]](#) Leviticus 15:31