

# From Saul to Paul

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## His transformation and our own

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### Note 7: Methodological focus of this work

We can define two basic attitudes with respect to the way in which academic theologians study the Bible (and all the intermediate positions imaginable). The first we would call “agnostic”. This is the attitude of one who thinks that perhaps God exists, and perhaps the Bible contains some divine inspiration, or perhaps not. They approach the Bible text with an attitude similar to that of a paleontologist who approaches the bone of a dinosaur. They study the characteristics in detail and form diverse hypotheses. They discuss possible interpretations of the study and elaborate interesting and complex theories and alternatives. However, none of this will necessarily have a significant influence on the personal life of the academic nor on that of his readers. It is basically an intellectual exercise.

The other posture is that of one who wants to be a disciple of Christ, a Christian. He recognizes God’s existence; he has or is seeking to have a personal relationship with the creator of the universe. He approaches the biblical text seeking an answer for his life. This is our focus.

The difference between these attitudes reminds me of a comment that I read some time back about an instructor in a military academy. His classes on strategy and tactics of warfare before the future officials were an interesting conceptual exercise. The attention given him by his students depended on his dialectical ability to present these ideas in an attractive and original manner. But then the nation went to war. The military institute then dedicates itself urgently to conclude the formation of the officers that were still studying in order to send them as quickly as possible to the battlefield. The attitude of those students was then radically different. They were aware that their own life could depend on what they learned in those classes, as well as the life of the persons under their command. What a great difference in focus!

Agnostic academics study the Bible as they might study any other book, written or edited by many people over time, and therefore subject to errors. When the Bible affirms something, they do not assume that it is certain, nor inspired by God. They base their interpretation only on the historical, cultural and literary context in which it was written, and consider that its “truth” is only truth for the author and is limited to the time and place in which it was written. They think that any authority that the Bible might have is not due to the fact that it comes from God, for it is only a historical document. Thus they limit its impact to the influence that it had on the history and culture of the nations. They apply to

their study the same focus that they would apply to the study of any other literary work, such as The Iliad or The Odyssey, without assuming that these were inspired by Zeus or Apollo.

With no pretense of exhausting the subject, that has been dealt with extensively by numerous authors, I only mention three of the characteristics that the Bible defines about itself:

1. It is inspired by God
2. It is eternal; it does not change
3. It is effective in impacting the life of the reader

**In 2 Timothy 3:16,17 Paul teaches us: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.**