

## **“THE HUMAN AND DIVINE INGREDIENTS IN A GENUINE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION”**

**(Acts 8:25-40)**

The entire Christian movement started when Jesus got His small band of disciples together and said to them, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Beginning at that intense moment, the Christian movement has penetrated the earth so that now there is a Christian community of believers and a witnessing group of people in every nation on earth.

The four geographical areas Jesus mentioned in His Commission in Acts 1:8 form a perfect outline of the Book of Acts. Chapters 1 through 7 record the Gospel’s growth in Jerusalem, chapters 8 through 12 the growth in Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13 through 28 the growth to the uttermost part of the earth. Our text for this study falls into the Judea and Samaria section, and it provides a remarkable study of “the human and Divine ingredients in a genuine experience of salvation.” It is the well-known story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, and it is a case-study of the cooperation of Heaven and earth to bring a ready soul to Christ. What are the human and Divine ingredients in a genuine experience of salvation? To put it personally, what collaboration took place to get *you*—or *me*—or *anyone*, saved?

### **A PRESIDING SOVEREIGN**

First, in every true and genuine experience of Divine salvation, there is *a presiding sovereign* arranging all the necessary items in preparing for and providing the experience of salvation. Of course, God is the sovereign, and it is because of His responsibility and by His initiative that sinners are eternally saved. The command to witness and the control of the witnesses are both acts of God.

The presiding sovereign is God the Father, and both Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit are the co-equal Agents of His administration. It was Jesus Christ who said, “You shall be My witnesses,” voicing the will of His Father for the Christian movement, and it was through the personal work of the Holy Spirit that the movement was endowed and guided through the Book of Acts. In Acts chapter eight, the chapter that contains our text, God the Father “arranged” a persecution which launched the reluctant early Christians out of Jerusalem and scattered them abroad. Then, “they that were scattered abroad went every where, preaching (the word is “evangelizing, or “good newsing”) the Word.” As a part of this stress-promoted evangelism, “Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). A mighty moving of the Spirit of God occurred as Philip preached, and many were saved and baptized (Acts 8:6-8, 12). All of this took place under the sovereign administration of God Himself. The same Divine administration is clearly evident in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, and by the Divine arrangements, the eunuch was saved.

It was the Holy Spirit who *started the search in the seeker*. The eunuch quite obviously had a prior history checkered by the work of the Holy Spirit. Here is another classic picture of *prevenient grace*, which is the active grace of God in the life of a lost sinner before his salvation, steadily “pushing” him toward Christ and salvation. Prevenient grace is the grace of God which *protected you, provided for you, and prepared you—before you were saved!*

Sometimes this prevenient grace acts within the sinner to produce a longing for “some thing” or “someone” (Someone) that wells up mysteriously within us. This longing does not spring into existence on its own. The German theologian von Hugel said, “God is always previous.” In C.S. Lewis’ The Silver Chair, one of his child’s fantasy stories called “The Chronicles of Narnia”, Aslan the Lion King explained to Edmund and the other three children from England concerning his summons to them from England into the magical land of Narnia, “You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you.” In his Letters to an American Lady, Lewis wrote this postscript to a “Mrs. Sonia Graham”: “P.S. Of course God does not consider you hopeless. If He did He would not be moving you to seek Him (and He obviously is). What is going on in you at present is simply the beginning of the treatment. Continue seeking Him with seriousness. *Unless He wanted you, you would not be wanting Him.*”

The Apostle John wrote, “We love because He first loved us.” You see, God’s yearning for us stirs up our longing in response (though we may not know it is God we are longing for). God’s initiating presence may be ever so subtle—an inward tug of desire, a more-than-coincidence meeting of words and events, a glimpse of the beyond in a storm, or a scene, or a flower—but it is enough to make the heart skip a beat and to make us want to know more. When Saul of Tarsus was saved, the Lord said to him, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” That is, I have been goading you to grace and to God throughout your entire life on earth, and things are now ready. The same could be said about the pre-conversion history of every sinner. It was certainly true in this eunuch’s story.

It was the Holy Spirit who *stimulated the service of the saint* who would lead the eunuch to Christ. The Spirit-filled early believers were directed moment-by-moment and step-by-step by the Holy Spirit. He “played everything close,” even to minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, person-by-person, precision in order to accomplish His work.. Fast forward to Acts 10 and re-read the account of how “Heaven’s switchboard” was alive in directing the “moving parts” to accomplish the conversion of Cornelius. It is an incredible story of synchronizing of times and schedules to get the soul-winner and the seeking sinner together (suppose either Philip or the eunuch had been fifteen minutes earlier or an hour later for their “encounter”), resulting in the remarkable conversion of Cornelius the Roman centurion.

In our story, the Holy Spirit pushed the saints out of Jerusalem by a persecution, led some of them to Samaria (including Philip) to evangelize the city and the area, and then He sent an angel to personally instruct Philip to “go toward the south unto the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza”, etc. So the entire episode is a clear picture of

the work of a presiding sovereign in preparing for and providing salvation to a prominent Ethiopian government official.

I believe that every born-again person can see the evidences of such a Sovereign governing his steps toward his saving encounter with the Son of God. In my own case, I have not the slightest doubt that Heaven was moving all of the players in the story to get me saved. “God’s works are perfect,” and this certainly includes His pre-conversion preparation of the sinner’s heart and the timely provision of eternal salvation to that prepared sinner.

## I. A PREPARED SEEKER

What a story this is! When Philip arrived at “ground zero,” the place where the sinner would meet the Saviour, he found a seeker who was more-than-prepared to meet Christ. Though we feel ourselves to be familiar with this man, we don’t even know his name. No matter. This sexually-altered Prime Minister of Ethiopia is a very intriguing case study.

First, he was an *individual*. Philip was engaged in a big movement of “mass evangelism” in Samaria (Acts 8:1, 5-14a) when the angel of the Lord directed him to leave this exciting work and “go toward the south” where he would witness to *one person*. In the middle of a giant crusade for Christ, God said to the evangelist, “Go.” Can you imagine Philip trying to explain that? “God told me to go.” But when the Holy Spirit is the “Chairman of the committee on evangelism,” the personal worker can trust the guidance he receives. No evangelist experiencing an outpouring of the Spirit such as was occurring in Samaria would want to leave the “crusade” where so many were being saved. But there is no hint of resistance from Philip, because he had learned to trust the guidance of the Spirit. His next crusade was to be focused on *one man*! Not very hopeful, right? But *God was preparing to begin the evangelism of another continent, the continent of Africa*—and the work would begin with the witness of one Spirit-filled, Spirit-led Christian and the conversion of one man already traveling back to Africa!

Second, the “prospect” in the story was an *important* man. He was “secretary of the national treasury” for Queen Candace and the entire Ethiopian empire. In those days, “Ethiopia” was used in a broader sense to describe the upper Nile region. This was an important man.

Third, the eunuch was an *intelligent* person. Now, the fact that a person is intelligent may stand between him and God and prevent his coming to Christ, or it may be a means of his coming to Christ. People with college degrees, or post-graduate degrees, are not made more competent to understand the Bible or to relate to the real spiritual world. In fact, their educational advances may *prevent* their understanding because they lead to a misplaced self-confidence. There is no question about this eunuch’s vocational intelligence. No man of little intelligence could have long held his national position. Furthermore, he was intelligent enough to want to learn more (see Acts 8:28, 30 and 31, 34). The truth is that the man who has stopped learning has stopped

living, and the greatest field of knowledge is the knowledge of God. This man was intelligent enough to live on the growing edge of knowledge and the quest for God.

Fourth, he was an *intensely inquiring* person. Many Christians would call him an “inquirer after Christ.” He was far ahead of most people—he knew his need was spiritual, and he was looking for a spiritual answer. His heart had been so aroused that he was willing to pay a gigantic price to find what his heart was longing for. Think of the great *distance* he traveled, all the way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. Think of the great *dangers* he faced and the *discomfort* he endured to reach his goal. How many days was he in transit from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, and back again? Remember, he did not have an air-conditioned automobile and there were no dual-laned interstate highways, nor were there speeding jet airplanes. He traveled in a rough-riding chariot and on a narrow, rough, dusty road. *In search of God!* God had said, “You shall seek Me, and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart,” and here was a man acting out the human part of that Divine drama. Then, think of the terrible *disappointment* he met with in Jerusalem. He found that Judaism, the very best religion known to man, could not answer the ache in his heart. He was thwarted at every step of his search, until a stranger joined him on the seat of his chariot as he was sadly going back unfulfilled to Ethiopia.

Ah, but there was one great factor that was already moving in his favor when we come into the story. *Somewhere he had gotten a copy of the scroll of the Old Testament book of Isaiah.* Maybe he had heard someone read from it while in Jerusalem, and he had gone to the “bookstore” and purchased a copy of it. So he was *interested* enough to go far beyond the usual course and get a copy of this Old Testament book. You see, God was “setting him up” for Heaven, for salvation, for eternal life, and he thought all of these steps were taken because of his own independent decisions!

The story doesn’t sound too hopeful when we learn that, though he was reading from the book of Isaiah the prophet, and though he was reading it aloud as if using every human aid to understand it, he still was *ignorant* of the Subject and of the Person the text referred to. When Philip “heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ he said, *How can I, except some man should guide me?’*” Without Heaven’s assistance, and often without human assistance as well, a sinner cannot understand Divine things. He is improperly equipped by his sinful nature to understand Divine things. He is like a dog trying to understand a symphony—not a chance! This man had probably kept his financial books straight, but without help he couldn’t get the Divine Book straight! He kept good books, but He was ignorant of *the Good Book!* One of the tragic things in our society today is that multitudes of *ignorant* people speak as if they are *experts* about God. This intelligent man admitted that he was ignorant of the identity of the Person who was presented in the text he was reading.

The eunuch’s reading of Scripture was not enough, so the Holy Spirit sent His own surrogate witness, Philip the deacon, to tell him of Christ. The eunuch was quickly *informed* of all that was necessary to be saved. We will examine the information he received in our last point of this study, but he received enough plain and simple Gospel truth to become a Christian.

The second ingredient in a genuine experience of Divine salvation is the prepared seeker.

## THE PROCLAIMING SAINT

Finally, there must be *a proclaiming servant/saint/soul-winner* if the Personal Savior and the Prepared Seeker are to come into a saving relationship. Would the eunuch have been saved if Philip had not arrived “just in (God’s) time?” No, he would not! “Other arrangements” are not an option when a presiding sovereign is orchestrating the account. Today, there may be a gracious God, and there may be seeking souls, but where are the willing workers? What part did Philip play? How important was he in the story? And what did he do to complete the transaction?

Philip was a man with an outstanding previous history before this story opened. He was a man with a previous record that showed us why he was enlisted for this desert mission.

He had a previous history of being a *servant*. Remind yourself that he was one of the original deacons in the early church (Acts 6:5). And remember that the word “deacon” is a word that describes intense and faithful service. In the early church, a deacon was not a member of a governing body for a church fellowship. I recently heard a pastor facetiously refer to his church as a “deacon-possessed church.” Many churches could be so described, but there is no New Testament authorization for such a description. In the early church, the deacon didn’t attend meetings; he attended to people’s needs—and he did it in a hurry. The word “deacon” means “one who kicks through the dust,” or “one who hastens”. Philip was a deacon, and in our story we see him *running* (Acts 8:30)—and *in the dust of the desert*, no less--to fulfill his Divine assignment.

Philip also had a previous history of being a *student* of the Word of God, and a Biblically-based *spokesman* for Him. How crucial it is for a Christian steward and servant to know the full truth about Jesus Christ and the way of salvation—and to tell what he knows! Every Christian should echo the urgent request of John Wesley, “Oh, God, make me a man of Your Book!” The Bible presents Jesus Christ, but not as people guess Him to be. The Bible offers salvation, but not on the terms of man’s surmising. We dare not be wrong about this things; we dare not gamble our souls or the souls of others on carnal guesswork. As Christians, we are admonished to “Study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen who don’t need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (II Timothy 2:15). Philip was called upon to give an impromptu exegesis of a critical Old Testament text about Jesus, and he had no time to consult commentaries or counselors!

Note the precision and assurance of the words of the text. When the eunuch asked Philip, “I ask you, of whom did the prophet say this? Of himself, or of some other man?” the text happily reports, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:34-35). The word translated “preached” literally

means “He *evangelized* unto him Jesus.” Even more literally, “He *good-newsed* unto him Jesus,” or “He *good-newsed* Jesus unto him.” You see, almost the entire life-history and redeeming history of Jesus can be easily seen in Isaiah chapter fifty-three. His Birth is there, His Life is there, His Death is there, His Burial is there, and His Resurrection is there, and Philip surely explained all of these to the eunuch. Note that the Object of the Christian witness is always to be Christ. Christ alone, not Christ also! Christ period, not Christ plus! You see, the Spirit of God is deeply concerned that we don’t substitute faith in the *saint*, or in the *servant*, or in the *soul-winner*, for faith in the *Savior*. No wonder that in a short while “the eunuch went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). Philip had a previous history as a student of the Word of God, and it was evident on this witnessing occasion.

Christian, are you a regular student of the Word of God? Have you mastered it, so that you hold “on ready call” multitudes of verses and passages of the Word of God? If so, God will likely use you to “good-news” multitudes to Jesus. If not, you will likely stand as a “very unhappy camper” at the Judgment Seat of Christ. With a Command and Commission from Jesus to engage in Total World Impact through evangelism, missions, and disciple-making, none of which can be properly and adequately done without the regular preaching, teaching and sharing of the Word of God, you instead chose to remain delinquent and ignorant of the Book of Books, or you chose to be silent about the treasures of this great Book. Perhaps *you* should face up today to Paul’s admonishment to Timothy: “Study to show *yourself* approved unto God, a workman who doesn’t need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

Philip had a previous history of being *submissive* to the guidance of Heaven in setting his schedule, establishing his agenda, and declaring his message. The angel of the Lord told Philip to leave Samaria and go to the desert (Acts 8:26)—and he obeyed. The Spirit of God told Philip to go to the chariot and identify with the eunuch (Acts 8:29)—and he obeyed. His previous history of obedience and service established momentum for the same humble obedience here. Dear friend, you are daily building a history of selfishness, indifference, and fruitlessness, or you are daily establishing a momentum of selfless involvement with other people and fruitfulness for Christ. If you continue tomorrow on the running track you have been following, what will tomorrow bring in your life?

In this story, a saved man, a servant, a student, a spokesman for Christ, a submissive believer, led this African official to Christ. If these were the qualifications God looked for in selecting “useable witnesses,” would He be likely to use *me* today? Would He be likely to use *you* today?

It is worthy of note in our story that the Holy Spirit did not tell Philip what to do when he met the eunuch. No, He just told him where to go. He already knew from Jesus what he was to do (see Acts 1:8), and he knew generally where he was to do it. The early Christians didn’t ask, “What am I going to do today?” They even knew the large arena where the assignment was to be accomplished. They depended on God to send them to the *exact place* to meet the *exact person*, the person whom God had prepared.

A short time later, after Philip and the eunuch engaged in conversation over an open Bible, the eunuch had *stated his new-found belief*. “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” he said. You see, *the confession of new-found faith in Christ is crucially important*. This confession has two sides, each very important.

One is the *inner* side, what the confession means to the one confessing. Used this way (as in Matthew 10:32-33), the word means “to say the same as.” Used this way, confession means to say the same thing about Jesus that God has said. And God said, as reported in Matthew 3:17, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

The other side of confession, the *outer* side, is the witness borne to other people, to anyone who hears, by that confession. As a classic and powerful example, William Shakespeare, three weeks before he died, drew up a will which opens with a confession that sounds like the creed of a church council: “I commend my soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Savior, to be made partaker of life everlasting, and my body to the earth whereof it is made.” Students of Shakespeare should take special note that his confession proclaims that he was a believing Christian. The same is true of the confession of the Ethiopian eunuch.

Then, the eunuch *sought baptism*, the first act of obedience of a new-born believer in Christ. Note that he didn’t *resist* baptism, or *reluctantly submit* to it; no, *he requested* it! The fact that he sought baptism likely means that Philip had already begun the instruction of disciple-making, beginning with the “ABCs” of new life in Christ.

A man was playing ball with his pet dog. Occasionally the dog would become distracted and lose sight of where the ball went. He would come back to his master, tail wagging furiously and tongue hanging out. The man would say enthusiastically, “Over there!” as he pointed toward the ball. But you usually can’t tell a dog where to go by pointing. When the dog sees the pointing finger, he will come to the man and sniff his finger. We may laugh at a dog’s failure to understand a pointing finger, but many people have done the same thing with the Biblical truth about baptism. Baptism is a finger which points to some big truths beyond itself, but many, when they see the pointing finger, want to “sniff” at the pointer, the water itself—and thus *they miss the big truths that baptism points to*. I’m quite sure that Philip explained that baptism points to the new believer’s *identification with Christ’s Death, Burial and Resurrection*, as well as *his total incorporation into Christ by the grace of God*. No wonder the eunuch requested immediate baptism to register his testimony and his understanding of God’s truth about his own new life in Christ!

Philip had joined with the Holy Spirit in publicizing Christ, in presenting the Gospel, and in promoting the eunuch’s decision for Christ. Shortly thereafter, “the Spirit caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). Philip went on to new serving and preaching assignments (Acts 8:40), and

the eunuch departed to begin sharing the Good News in the sprawling dark continent of Africa!

Today, I am either depending upon God, or upon myself or some other source that cannot adequately guide my life. I am either “seeking those who are lost”—for Christ’s sake, or I am moving through life at a steady pace but totally indifferent to the destiny of hell-bound sinners. I am either “turning people into disciples”—that is, radical lifetime followers of Christ with total world vision, disciples who will reproduce others of the same kind and thus will multiply to the ends of the earth until the end of time, or I am spending my life with no eternal dividends to show in return.

With regard to *dependence upon the sovereign God, seeking prepared sinners to present the Gospel to them, and discipling the new-borns so that they can faithfully follow Christ,*

*What kind of movement would the Christian movement be,  
If every other Christian were just like me?*