

# SEVEN SAVED SINNERS

## Or How God Saves Men

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A study of God's Varieties of Religious Experiences in the Book of Acts

by

William Ward Ayer, D. D.

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### CHAPTER SEVEN

#### THE CONVERSION OF APOLLOS

##### THE STUDY

Acts 18:24-28

##### *The Occasion*

Ephesus, a strategic Greek city, is being evangelized. Priscilla and Aquila, Paul's fellow laborers, are there, evidently doing a great work in the synagogue when Apollos, a preacher from the cultured city of Alexandria in North Africa, puts in his appearance. He speaks in the synagogue and Priscilla and Aquila hear him, and recognize his limited Gospel knowledge.

We are told that Apollos knew only "**the baptism of John,**" which was the Jewish gospel of repentance. And it would appear that he was still preaching the message that John preached. That message was definitely one of Jewish preparation for the coming Messiah. The cry of the Baptist was, "**Prepare ye the way of the Lord.**"

But, in the meantime, Jesus had come, lived, died, risen, and ascended to heaven. According to promise, the Holy Spirit had come at Pentecost and a new dispensation had been ushered in. But Apollos has no awareness of this new revelation and responsibility.

Aquila and Priscilla take Apollos home with them and teach him the truth concerning the Christian Gospel. He then goes forth fired with enthusiasm for the full Gospel message.

##### *The Subject*

Apollos, a Jew of Alexandria, a learned and eloquent man, who, through the Scriptures and the ministry of John the Baptist, became a believer in the coming of Christ, visited Ephesus about A. D. 54. His character seems to be not unlike that of Paul. After his conversion to the Christian gospel he preached with great power and success, especially among the Jews.

### *The Agent*

Aquila is a Jew born in Pontus, a tentmaker by occupation, who with Priscilla, his wife, joined the Christian Church at Rome. When the Jews were banished from that city by the Emperor Claudius, Aquila and his wife retired to Corinth. They afterwards became companions of Paul in his labors, and are mentioned by him with much commendation, being found both at Ephesus and at Rome. They appear to be devout and patient servants of God and personal workers.

### *The Accompaniment*

Here is another quiet conversion, though we do not know the conversation and discussion that may have taken place in the Aquilian home.

### *The Results*

A mighty preacher of the Gospel, Apollos becomes effective in a great evangelizing movement through his knowledge of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

### *Significant Lessons*

Lots of earnest preachers neither know or preach the true Gospel. The pre-crucifixion message, commonly called “the Jesus way of life,” which is so popular today, is not “the gospel of the grace of God.”

Christianity is a post-crucifixion, post-resurrection, post-Pentecost message; it is not the religion of Jesus but the religion about Jesus. Learning and earnestness are no guarantee of truth. No one should be received into the church and its membership on religious knowledge alone. All should know Christ, and know Him experientially. How terrible to go to hell through the Church! Priscilla and Aquila didn't scold the preacher, they taught him. Criticism is a sort of spiritual surgery, and when the operation is performed, the knife must be bathed in love and rendered sterile by the Holy Ghost.

## **THE SERMON**

### **THE CONVERSION OF A PREACHER**

Acts 18:24-28

In our study of these “*Seven Saved Sinners*”— God’s varieties of religious experiences, we have considered the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch; Cornelius, the Gentile; Saul, the persecutor; Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul; Lydia, the business woman of Thyatira, and the Philippian jailer.

All of them have been interesting individuals whose peculiar conditions God met through the Gospel and who were gloriously saved.

We come now to one of the most unusual cases—the conversion of Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew, cultured, fervent, eloquent, and valiant, yet pitifully limited because he knew only the baptism of John.

That meant that he had probably heard John the Baptist preach his mighty message concerning the way of the Lord, making straight in the desert a highway for our God. John, as you remember, was forerunner of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. John baptized those who repented of their sin in preparation for the coming of the Lord. Many who heard John and were converted to righteous living went out and proclaimed the message that he was proclaiming; and apparently Apollos was one of these.

But this was not the message of salvation!

In the meantime, Jesus the Messiah had been introduced to Israel. He had gone about doing good, healing and teaching; finally he had been despised and rejected of men and nailed to the cross for the world's redemption. He had risen again from the dead, appeared to the disciples, had given them the apostolic commission, **“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,”** and had ascended into heaven, telling them to tarry at Jerusalem until they should be endued with power.

The Holy Spirit had come on the day of Pentecost. But none of these things did Apollos know, though he was mighty in the Scriptures, preaching what he knew with fervency and with power. Apollos, like many today, was a half-Christian, and a half-Christian is in reality no Christian at all.

Yet Apollos was true to all the light he had, and what is more important, he was willing to get more light, and when the devout Christians, Aquila and Priscilla, took him in hand, told him the things that he had not learned, apparently he was an apt pupil and received the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, and went forth with renewed power in the preaching of the full gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **I. APOLLOS IS A TYPE OF A GREAT GROUP OF UNSAVED PREACHERS**

It is with sorrow of heart that I am forced to declare that many men in the pulpits, today, have no saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and, while they are pretending to help others to heaven, they are not going there themselves.

Some are deceived about the faith, having never been to the Cross of Jesus Christ. So many are preaching a pre-crucifixion message. Some years ago a noted educator, who was then the editor of a rather famous religious magazine, came out and declared that what the world needed was a propagation of the religion of Jesus instead of a religion about Jesus. Our liberal friends took up the cry, and we have had a great deal of propagating of the gospel they call “the Jesus way of life.” Its chief message is the Sermon on the Mount, the ethics, and example of Jesus. The Cross is put in the background and becomes an incident, or an accident, in the life of a Great Teacher.

Now, we do not despise the pre-crucifixion and pre-resurrection message of Jesus, but Christianity is a post-crucifixion, post-resurrection, and post-Pentecostal message. The religion of Jesus was a sort of glorified Judaism. The religion of Christianity is a religion not of Jesus but about Jesus.

If you will study the Gospels carefully, you will see that the Cross is the turning point. There were no real Christians before the Cross. John was not a Christian in the modern sense, neither was Peter. There are vastly too many people hiding behind Peter's vacillating personality before Pentecost. But don't look at Peter before he was baptized in the Spirit, but afterwards, and I'll guarantee he'll be a challenge to your life. In reality, Peter was not a Christian before Pentecost. He was simply a good Jew who was following Jesus as the Messiah.

Even Jesus was not a Christian. As a man He was a Jew. He was made of a woman—made under the law. He kept the law and was faithful to the ceremonies and to the sacrifices. Christ was not a Christian, but Christianity is Christ.

Paul gives his definition when he says: **“I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”**

Christianity is not primarily a creed. It is not a code of ethics or moral laws. Christianity is a supernatural life. It is Jesus Christ, redeemed and indwelling the human soul. Every born again Christian can truly say, for me to live is Christ. It is not the life of Jesus that the Christian glories in, but the death of Jesus, and He says with the Apostle, **“God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.”** And with the poet he sings:

“In the Cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time,  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime.

“When the woes of life overtake me,  
Hopes deceive and fears annoy,  
Never shall the Cross forsake me,  
Lo, it glows with peace and joy.”

Apollos would have made a first-class liberal as he was. Thank God, when he was converted through faith in Jesus Christ, he became a first-class Christian and Gospel preacher! Others, through apostasy, deny the faith.

Again I am sorrowful in declaring that I believe many who occupy the pulpit today are **“angels of light”** and servants of the evil one. For you know the devil has become an angel of light and his ministers, ministers of righteousness. The devil is a religionist, as we have already noted. He has ministers; and some of them occupy prominent pulpits.

If this statement startles you, let me give you some illustrations.

Take, for example, a prominent New York minister who in the book he published, some years ago, declared subtly against the resurrection of the Lord Jesus by saying: "I believe in the immortality of the soul, but not in the resurrection of the flesh," Now the apostle Paul says, **"If there be no resurrection of the flesh, then is Christ not risen, and, if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain and we are yet in our sins, and they who have fallen asleep in Jesus have perished!"**

Do not be deceived, no man is a Christian who does not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, for the Word of God says, **"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."** No man who denies the resurrection of Jesus can ever be saved.

This same author says, again: "The Master's body was like ours. He suffered and died like ourselves. Away with your theological Christ; give us an ethical leader." Harsh and unfeeling as it may sound, I declare that such a man needs to be saved.

A Baptist theological professor in a book dealing with the modernistic message, declares, in a chapter entitled "The Religion of Salvation," that the idea of inherited guilt from Adam is laughable. "One has only to state such a view to see how remote it is from the present day thought about wrongdoing." I remember as I read that book I looked all through the chapter that was supposed to deal with salvation and found no mention of the Cross, and only in the next chapter is it spoken of, and then to ridicule its message.

Another local clergyman, writing in *Harper's Magazine*, on the subject, "The Vanishing Sinner," says: "What is right in one generation is wrong in another, and vice versa. The delineation of sin has thus undergone a transition," he declares, "somewhat similar to that which has taken place in painting. The old clear-cut lines have given way to an impressionistic indefiniteness. The black and white contrasts to low-toned grays. In this the Church officially has played a part, not only for the reasons mentioned above, but for another which Prof. Coe has recently brought forth most potently. He says the Church has lightened the old darkness of natural depravity, because it cannot by contrast demonstrate an actuality of regeneration. The so-called Protestant conversions do not reveal a sufficient distinctive righteousness in our industrial order for observers to identify them as redeemed."

We realize the Gospel that these men preach would not create distinctive Christians. But whence comes the audacity of these men to deny that the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached fearlessly by faithful men of God through the centuries has created distinctive and unmistakable Christians with the righteousness of God?

- What shall they say to the conversion of Jerry McAuley, the river rat?
- What of Valentine Burke, the jewel thief?
- What of Mel Trotter? What of Billy Sunday?

What of a million others whose feet have been lifted from the miry clay and placed upon the solid rock, into whose mouth the song of salvation has been placed, even praises unto God, and whose lives have testified to the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? I declare these men need to be saved themselves, and to know Jesus experimentally.

## **II. APOLLOS IS A TYPE OF CHURCH MEMBER WHO JOINS THE CHURCH UPON EARLY RELIGIOUS TRAINING**

There are many of these, and I trust I may waken some of them out of their deadly slumber.

These are the children of devout Christians who have been brought up in the warm atmosphere of a Christian home, and who have never doubted the doctrinal realities of the Christian faith, and somehow or other they think that they are saved because they believe as their mother did, and have never denied their father's religion.

But saving faith does not come by heredity. Thank God for the children of Christian parents! What would some of us do had it not been for praying mothers? We could not sing as we do:

“I grieved my Lord from day to day,  
I spurned His love so full and free,  
And though I wandered far away,  
Yet mother's prayers have followed me.”

It is well to remember that none of us can go to heaven on our mother's religion! We must have an experience of our own, definite, clear, and unmistakable! Then there are others among this group who somehow or other feel that they are saved by religious knowledge. They have learned the catechism, they have been through confirmation, they have had their salvation passed on to them supposedly by the hands of a minister or a priest, and they have a certificate to that end, and that's all that they have.

A friend of mine, dealing with a woman in the city of Chicago, asking her about her salvation, heard her say that she could prove that she was saved by the confirmation certificate she had. She went upstairs to find it—the meeting was being held on the street—and after she was gone for considerable time, she came down in dismay, declaring that she had put the certificate in the bureau drawer and that the mice had gotten in and eaten it up, and she wasn't sure, because of this, whether she was saved or not! Oh, beloved, know Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and you will have the confirmation of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit; that's something mice can't destroy.

Many churches have “Easter hatchings” in which the children especially are all rounded up and received into the membership of the church. It makes a great showing, but when you receive a child into the church and try to burglarize its soul for the sake of a showing, you are doing the cause of Christ a terrible injury and perhaps helping to plunge a soul into eternity without God!

In a certain church of which I was pastor, a girl came to me one night after evening service in tears. She was a church member.

“Oh, Mr. Ayer, I’ve never been saved,” she said. “I was taken into the church because the pastor wanted me to become a member and be baptized at Easter-time, as others were coming in, and so I felt it was the right thing to do; but I’ve never found Jesus.”

Well, thank God, she did find Jesus, and was rebaptized upon her profession of faith.

Many years ago, while a student in Chicago, I was teaching a Sunday school class in a certain church. It was during the days of the World War, and on the last day of an evangelistic campaign; the evangelist stood up on the platform, seeking the decision of the boys and girls.

Taking the flag, which at that time was a great emotional rallying center, and holding it beside the pulpit, he gave this invitation: “How many of you want to stand for God and country, come forward, and give me your hand?”

Almost all the pupils of the Sunday School went forward on this invitation; then the evangelist went into spasms of ecstasy, declaring that he was going to wire on to the next place where he was to hold a meeting that God had given great victory there in Chicago, and that practically every soul in the Sunday school had been brought to Jesus Christ that morning! Oh, how my heart ached! I hung my head in shame. What a mockery of the cause of Christ!

But this is but a picture of the condition of thousands who are brought into the church by some such trick as this in their childhood.

They have been taught to believe in Jesus in a sort of mental way, but they have not been born again. When they reach adolescence with the tug and pull of the sinful age upon their lives, and have no power to hold them, no stability of spiritual life, they leave the church, they leave the home, they leave righteousness by the tens of thousands, and the palaces of pleasure and the pathways of sin are glutted with these poor deluded souls.

Oh, may God call some of you to salvation through Jesus Christ. How terrible to pass beneath the pulpit and through the sacred aisles of God’s sanctuary, out into the darkness of eternal separation from God, to hear the Lord Jesus say: “**Depart from Me, I never knew you!**”

### **III. APOLLOS, LIKE MANY A CHURCH MEMBER, WAS ZEALOUS FOR WHAT HE KNEW**

We have a number of church workers, today, who are zealous but unsaved. They labor in the Missionary Society, and in the Ladies’ Aid Society; they labor in the men’s work of the church, and yet they know nothing about the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Some of them teach Sunday school classes.

I know because I’ve had men and women come to me and say, “Mr. Ayer, I’ve been teaching a Sunday school class for years, but I do not know Jesus as my personal Saviour, and therefore I have never led one of my pupils to Him.”

These people are not to be condemned primarily, they are to be pitied. Many of them have never heard the Gospel presented in an uncompromising way. They have a feeling that by their good works they are going to merit heaven. They are faithful to what they believe to be their duty in the kingdom of God, and yet they are utterly deluded.

If you're one of these, let me remind you that you'll not get to heaven the way you're going. I'm reminded of the automobilist traveling along the country highway, who hailed a country lad, asking: "How far to Hilltown, Sonny?" The bright lad with a twinkle in his eye said, "Well, Mister, it's about 24,995 miles the way you're going, but if you'll turn around you'll be there in no time, for it's about five miles in that direction."

Remember the word of the Apostle Paul:

**"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost," and "by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast."**

#### **IV. LIKE MANY A CHURCH MEMBER, APOLLOS NEEDED A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH JESUS CHRIST**

Aquila and Priscilla listened to Apollos and knew that he didn't know the truth.

Now, my friend, would you know? Are you sufficiently spiritually-minded to discern the Gospel or to notice the absence of it?

Some years ago, at a young people's gathering held in the city in which I was pastor, a speaker got up and talked to a great group of young people from the Mother Goose text: "Simple Simon met a pie man going to the fair." She talked a lot of ethereal nonsense, but when she was through, the young people applauded, and many older people went up and told her it was a marvelous message. One of the reasons why we have modernists in the pulpits is because we have spiritually ignorant people in the pew. Where God's people know the truth, liberalism does not thrive.

Now these two conscientious Christians, Priscilla and Aquila, not only knew the sound of the truth when they heard it, but they knew how to deal with a situation such as Apollos presented.

Again I ask, would you? It is noticeable that they didn't fight with this man from North Africa, nor did they belittle him. They saw not only his limitations but also his earnestness.

Here is a truth for our hearing and heeding. Our sympathy must go out to some men who occupy pulpits and some Christians who are deluded, because they have never had an opportunity to know. Most of our ministers are the products of the seminaries which they attend, and if the seminaries do not teach them truth, how can we expect our ministers to know it? Perhaps we need to be more patient, but not more indifferent.

There are many men standing in Christian pulpits who need our prayers and sympathy. Scolding will do no good. Would you scold a lost child? Would you deride a drowning man? Let our hearts be touched to the quick. God pity them. Many of these men are blind leaders of the blind.

Let us be careful of criticism. It is a most delicate task we have to perform when we are called to perform it. Criticism is a sort of spiritual surgery. What would we think of the surgeon that rushed carelessly into the operating room, and lashed at the patient unmercifully with his scalpel? If God calls us to this task, and He sometimes does, we must have our knives of criticism bathed in love and made sterile by the Holy Ghost.

It is important to note that preachers are especially sensitive about their sermons. They are about as jealous of them as mothers are of their children, but Priscilla and Aquila had the right idea in dealing with the situation.

I can imagine that they worked it this way. Priscilla went up to Apollos after the morning service sweetly and said that she was very glad to have heard him and wished that inasmuch as he was a stranger in town, he might come home with Aquila and herself to dinner. Now they didn't discuss the sermon on the way home, nor did they talk about it at meal time.

No preacher should ever be criticized until after he has eaten. It might ruin his digestion!

I can imagine also that it was a wonderful meal that Priscilla prepared. Quite likely there was fried chicken, and sweet potatoes, and corn on the cob, boiled onions and Hubbard squash; and then, to top off the meal, a generous slice of pumpkin pie with whipped cream on the top and a good cup of coffee. And by the time Apollos had eaten this glorious repast, he was in an excellent frame of mind. Who wouldn't be?

Then, doubtless, they retired to the parlor and, while Priscilla washed the dishes, Aquila talked with Apollos about many things. He brought the conversation around to the things of the Spirit, and had already told him about the new truth that had come to the world; that there was another and greater message than that which John had preached; that Jesus the Messiah had come, that He had died, and that He rose again, and that He had sent the Holy Ghost. Then Priscilla joined the company and in a kind, motherly way took the young and fiery Apollos to Scripture after Scripture that he well knew, and taught him the things concerning Jesus, the Saviour.

The heart of the young preacher, already touched by their hospitality and kindness, was, through their testimony, touched by the Spirit of the living God.

I don't believe it was hard for them to get him to make a definite acceptance of Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour. Then down on their knees they go, Aquila and Priscilla with their arms about the young preacher, the tears coursing down their faces, asking God to have the Lord Jesus come into his heart by the Spirit, to give him a conscious knowledge of sin forgiven through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; to send him forth in a mighty ministry of the Gospel.

When they arose from their knees a new light was shining in the face of Apollos. He had been born again; the resurrected Christ was indwelling his heart. Small wonder that he went forth from that place believing through grace, to help the disciples of the Lord, preaching in might and power, convincing the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

This shows the essential humility of the great Apollos. Not only was he learned, but he was humble; and, best of all, he received Jesus. Will you? Oh, I realize how hard it is to make a stand if once you've professed. It's harder to save a church member than one who has never made a stand of any kind. Someone has said that the three hardest words to pronounce, in the English language, are—"I am wrong."

I have met a goodly number who are in this condition; who have come with heaviness of heart and declared that they did not know Jesus, though they were church members.

I'll never forget a girl in the city of Valparaiso, Indiana, who declared to me with tears, "Oh, Mr. Ayer, people think I'm a Christian, but I'm not. I live a good life, I teach a Sunday school class, but I've never found Jesus and I want to find Him."

Well, thank God, she found him that night, for Jesus was seeking her.

On one occasion in the city of Gary, in the same state, I baptized approximately a dozen people who had previously professed Christianity but had never accepted the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour. Some of them had been baptized into the church, but later found Christ, and now were being rebaptized upon their profession of faith.

Several years later the young lady from Valparaiso, of whom I have spoken, called me by long distance telephone while I was pastor in Gary, and asked me to pray for a certain young man, the son of a deacon in the church in that city.

"Mr. Ayer," she said, "he admitted to me some time ago that he was not saved."

"Why," I said, "that can't be; I know this young fellow well, I've known him for years. He was active in the B. Y. P. U.—surely he was saved."

"No," she replied, "he's in awful misery of soul for he knows he's not a child of God."

My mind went back over the years of contact with that family. I remembered how we visited this young man's home while he was still in high school. I remembered how I officiated at the funeral of his devout Christian mother, and I remembered how this lad, then in the early twenties, had wept so inconsolably at her loss. There was no comforting the boy.

I thought it queer for I had tried to tell him that his mother had gone to heaven and that he would see her one day, but he would not be comforted, and now I understood— he had no hope!

So I said to the girl, "Get the lad on the 'phone."

“He’s out of town,” she replied, “I can’t reach him.”

“Well,” I said, “write him, tell him to come to see me, and not fail, if he comes to this part of the country.”

“Oh, Mr. Ayer,” the girl went on, “here’s the sad thing, he’s afraid to talk with you. He’s ashamed because he’s been professing to be a Christian and he knows that you thought he was saved and a child of God. Oh, pray for him,” she cried, as she hung up the receiver.

And I did pray, and I continue to pray. I don’t know where that lad is tonight, although I’ve tried to find him. I have never seen him since, to talk with him. And somewhere there’s a fine, clean-cut, upstanding lad, whose mother went to heaven, whose father, now an old man, is trusting in Jesus, the majority of whose family are saved and safely in the kingdom, who walks in heaviness of heart, unless he has steeled his conscience against the truth. He has his name on a church book, the majority of the people think he is a child of God because he was a clean-living lad, but this boy will never see that sainted mother unless he yields himself to Jesus Christ. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, and talk with him about Jesus!

But while I’m thinking and talking about him, I am not unmindful that there are thousands of similar cases who are religious but do not know God; who are church members but who have never been saved; who, like Apollos, are living up to the light that they know, but who have not received the full light as it is in Jesus.

Oh, may God help you to heed the message that except you repent you will perish, but know, also, that the Lord Jesus is inviting you to salvation, saying, **“Whosoever will may come and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.”**

“Just as thou art, without one trace  
Of love, or joy, or inward grace,  
Or meetness for the heavenly place,  
O guilty sinner, come!

Burdened with guilt, wouldst thou be blest?  
Trust not the world, it gives no rest;  
Christ brings relief to hearts opprest;  
O weary sinner, come!”

~ end of book ~

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