

The Changed Life of Paul

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Date: 17 September 2023

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, maybe we need to sing of our Redeemer a little more often. That's an awesome song. Absolutely love that. Please turn to the book of Acts, chapter 9.
- We come back once again and join Paul just after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. And as we saw last week, the conversion of Paul shows that no soul is too far for God to bring back, and no heart is too hard for God to soften.
- Paul's conversion makes it abundantly clear that our salvation is entirely God's work. He's the one who orchestrates our encounter with His Word. He's the one who brings conviction of sin.
- He's the one who calls us to repentance and faith in Jesus. And since we never know who God is going to use to lead someone to Jesus, it is our job as believers to remain faithful to living and sharing the gospel.
- Paul, as you know, was on a murderous rampage to eliminate those belonging to the way. And there's no other way to say it than they belong to the way because they understood Jesus to be the way, the truth, and the life.
- [1 : 2 6] John 14, 6. But by the grace of God, Paul encountered Jesus and was immediately humbled. I'm going to say that again.
- By the grace of God, Paul was broken. It's kind of bringing in the conversation we were having during our Sunday school class, how brokenness in our lives is ultimately a blessing as it brings us closer to God or ought to.
- It's what he uses in our lives to draw us to himself. And so by the grace of God, Paul encountered Jesus and was broken.
- He was humbled. He was blinded, quite literally. And after being blinded and not eating for three days, God sent a man named Ananias to minister to Paul and prepare him for what would come next.
- And that's where we pick up. Acts chapter 9 and verse 20. We'll read through verse 31. I'm sorry, we're going to actually pick up in verse 19.
- [2 : 4 8] So, Paul took food. He was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. In verse 20, And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, He is the Son of God.
- And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?
- But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him.
- But their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him. But his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

[4 : 08] So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.

And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. The section of Scripture begins to reveal to us the changed life of Paul, a model which ultimately can be followed by every man who comes to Christ.

And what we see with Paul, first in verses 20 and 21, and again in verse 28, is a desire to proclaim the gospel.

A desire to proclaim the gospel. And I will say this. This is not in my notes, so I don't know where it's going to go from here. It's always dangerous.

[5 : 16] But a desire to proclaim the gospel can only come from God. It can only be given to you from God.

It's a desire that is pleasing and glorifying to Him. And it is not one that we naturally incline ourselves to. So when someone has a desire to share the gospel, someone like Aurelia, for instance, it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit working in her life.

It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit working in the life of an individual. And we see that here with Paul. See, Paul was a very passionate and bold individual whose desire has always been to serve God.

Paul has always wanted to serve God. And he did so with 100% conviction and effort. Now, he may have done things wrong.

And we see going on a murderous spree against the church was not a good thing. But he was doing it because he thought it was the right thing. And we know from his testimony in Acts 23.1, he says, brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.

[6 : 29] And in Acts 24.16, another time of his testimony, he says, I always take pains to have a clear conscience towards both God and man. 2 Timothy 1.3, I thank God whom I serve as did my ancestors with a clear conscience.

And Hebrews 13.18, I think Paul wrote this. I'll just say that. But Hebrews 13.18, pray for us that we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.

So ultimately, the goal and desire for Paul in his life was to have a clear conscience before God and before man. He always wanted to do what was right. And so Paul could do no less than serve God with a clear conscience.

And after his salvation, he had to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He knew the truth. And he had to share it.

See, this very way that he was persecuting to the death, he realizes is the truth. And he puts his passionate effort behind it. So everything that sent Paul, everything in him, his passion, his conviction, his desire, that sent him to persecute the way and to get the papers to go to Damascus and take that long week or two journey to get there and to bring people back imprisoned and to be put to death, all that that was there that led to that effort, he's now, God has changed his heart and given him new desires.

[8 : 03] And now Paul's taking all that and putting it into preaching the gospel and making sure people knew what the truth is. And even though he was a new convert, God was already working in his life to equip him for this new ministry.

Now, this is unique to Paul. It's unique to certain individuals. God brings people along at different times to be saved. And through these times and depending on their background, their life immediately afterwards may look different.

Paul, for instance, we know he really, ultimately there was no one better prepared to preach to the Jews in the synagogue than Paul. Now, he's a very learned man.

He refers to him as a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was a devout Pharisee and a keeper of the law. He studied at the feet of the finest Jewish teacher in the world at that time named Gamaliel.

He was passionate concerning the Jewish hopes and expectations, especially pertaining to the Messiah. So he's well-learned. He knows the Old Testament better than anybody.

[9 : 13] And so he's prepared to go into synagogues and have a discussion. And the only thing that kind of got added to everything he already knew is the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment as Messiah of everything he's already known and expected.

So naturally, Paul initially goes to the Jewish synagogue to preach. And remember, he's in Damascus with papers to persecute, to bring people, followers of the way.

And that's even brought up in the passage. The people notice this. You know, in verse 21, is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem?

And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests? This is a very different individual.

Not bodily. Not really in name. He's still known by Saul. But he's a different person with a... He's got a different passion, a different purpose.

[10 : 17] He came to kill, ultimately. And now he's coming to bring the message of life. And in every city he goes on his missionary journeys, his first stop is to the Jewish people.

And that's his model. Ultimately, Paul's model of ministry, his conviction about the gospel message is Romans 1.16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

And that's how Paul operated. Every town, every city that he went to, starting with Damascus. He went to the Jew first, proclaimed the gospel. Then he was the apostle to the Gentiles, so he went to the Gentiles also.

But it's important to note that Paul immediately proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues. He didn't have to take time to think about who to share with or what to say.

He went and proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God. He went to share this news. I don't know what Paul's preaching style was. I don't know how engaging of a speaker he was.

[11 : 31] But I do know this, that he had the truth, and he went and shared it immediately. See, when someone is first saved, there's an excitement to their salvation.

They can't wait to tell others and to start digging into Scripture to learn more. Now, when I was first saved, I was so excited about it that I told my grandparents. Naturally, they're the ones who brought me to church where I heard the message, the gospel message, and responded.

So they're the ones I told. I said, I got saved. I trusted Jesus. And I'm following him. And I wanted a Bible for myself to read and learn more. And I took that Bible to school with me, and I highlighted everything that I read.

I mean, I saw people highlighting in their Bibles and thought, oh, that must be what people do. It's ridiculous. I meant to bring it with me. It's actually on my desk. It's a blue King James Version Bible.

And I would open it up. You just open it up to random pages, and there's just like all these verses highlighted. There's no rhyme or reason to it. It's just whatever was read in church or what I read at home, I just highlighted it.

[12 : 36] You know, and I was just really excited. I had that excitement. And that typically is what accompanies a new believer. Somebody who comes to know Jesus and is saved has this excitement, and they can't contain it.

Some of us don't even really know what to do with it. But Paul knew what to do with it, and he went and preached. A.W. Tozer says, there's excitement in true love. And we Christians who love our Savior ought to be more excited about who he is and what he is.

Think about that. There's excitement in true love, and we Christians who love our Savior ought to be more excited about who he is and what he is.

He is God, and he is our Redeemer. And we ought to be very excited about that. We ought to be ready to sing about that. We ought to be ready to tell other people about that.

Unfortunately, though, when that initial zeal wanes, when that excitement starts to kind of dissipate, that initial excitement, believers tend to become more quiet about their faith in Christ and the call to tell others about him.

[13 : 46] The fear of man creeps in and takes over where the fear of God ought to reside. The joy of our salvation simmers to a glowing ember where a consuming fire once raged.

We're excited. We're consumed. We can't wait to tell. And then we hit roadblocks, and we hit obstacles, and we hit hardships, and that excitement dissipates and wanes and is gone.

I've listened to, there was a sermon I listened to a hundred times at least. It was from a Bible conference at Word of Life. The speaker was Johnny Hunt. And it was funny because I actually went to the audio last night to find the quote, and I found it like that.

And I looked at Bonnie. I said, you know you've listened to a sermon too many times if you know exactly where in the audio to find that quote. And what he says, like he's just talking about his own life and his own ministry.

He was a pastor for 32 years. He talked about how he's just as passionate about it as since the day he started. And he just, he makes it and he says, I wish to God there were more people that didn't get over getting saved.

[15 : 00] That's within like five minutes. That's like his introduction. And that like, the very first time I ever heard that, it just caught me. I was like, that there were more people who didn't get over getting saved.

Because I think that's where I was at when I first heard that. I was over. Not that I didn't appreciate it. Not that I didn't know that I was saved. But the excitement was gone.

The passion just really didn't live there. It was just kind of whatever. When we get to the point of getting over getting saved, we no longer have a passion or a burden to share the gospel with people.

In fact, sharing the gospel becomes a burden. It's more of a chore than an honor. Charles Spurgeon says, the new converts put fresh blood in the veins of the church.

The new converts put fresh blood in the veins of the church because there is a genuine excitement and appreciation for their salvation. And I got thinking about this.

[16 : 05] And maybe you'll think about this too. When was the last time we saw a new convert in this church? I'll let you think about that.

Do you feel like sharing Jesus is a joyless chore to you? Then get on your knees and call out to God to restore the joy of your salvation.

The changed life of a believer includes a desire to proclaim the gospel. Second observation in this text about the changed life of Paul is in verses 22 and 29.

And I call it, he had a mind to defend the faith. He had a mind to defend the faith. So we see that Paul stood in the synagogues and he confounded the Jews and he disputed against the Hellenists.

Now these terms means that he was a bold proclaimer of the truth of God, no matter who the audience was or where their disagreement lies. This is known today as the discipline of apologetics.

[17 : 14] Apologetics comes from the Greek word apologia. Which means a defense, as in a court of law defense. Christian apologetics involves making a case for the truth of the Christian faith.

R.C. Sproul says apologetics demonstrates why Christians are Christians and why non-Christians should be Christians. And Paul, being a well-educated individual in the Hebrew scriptures, could make a strong case in the synagogues for Jesus being the Christ.

Let me ask you this. Are you able to explain to someone why you believe what you believe? You don't have to answer, you don't have to nod your head or anything like that. I don't want to embarrass you.

Are you able to explain to someone why you believe what you believe? Not just that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, but why do you believe that? Why do you believe that Jesus is the Christ?

Why do you believe that he is the Savior? These are the questions that are answered in the discipline known as apologetics.

[18 : 22] And there are objections that come from Christians that I've heard concerning this in their lives. They say, well, I'm just not as smart as you are. They don't know me very well, apparently.

But I take it as a compliment nonetheless. I'm not as smart as you are. Or I can't stand up in front of people and debate. Or I don't have time to learn all this stuff.

If you go in my office, the bottom shelf in the bookshelf there has a plethora, and it's actually waned down quite a bit over the years as I've given things away, of books on creation apologetics.

Now, having been involved in creation apologetics, the Northeast Creation Ministry for 10 years here in Maine, I did a lot of studying, a lot of reading, a lot of learning, and so I had a lot of material.

And people would look at that and say, oh, I don't have time to read all that stuff. Well, I get it. I didn't read half of it either. I consulted some of it. But unfortunately, many believers have come to the conclusion that they are incapable of engaging in the discipline of apologetics.

[19 : 28] It just sounds scary. Apologetics. Ooh, sounds so official. The reality is that you don't need to be a super genius to do it. Now, I don't know who I just insulted or complimented.

I don't know. Whatever you want to say. But the fact is, you don't have to be a super genius to do it. You don't have to be a rocket scientist. Let me ask you this. Let me ask you this. This is what I got thinking about this.

I'm like, how can I explain this in a way that's not going to make it seem like apologetics is such a heady thing? Are you capable of explaining, and how you answer this question may also say a lot about you.

Are you capable of explaining to someone why you are a Republican or a Democrat? Are you capable of explaining to someone why you prefer one make of vehicle over another?

Are you capable of explaining why you root for one sports team over another? The fact is, we're all capable of explaining reasons why we prefer or do something a certain way.

[20 : 39] So when it comes to the most important thing you can believe, that Jesus is the Christ and that he offers forgiveness of sin, you should not feel incapable and relegate it only to the experts who are smart and have studied these things.

Because the fact is, you should know. There's a point in your life where you chose to believe. Why? What convinced you?

And since that point, have you been reading the Bible? Have you been studying Scripture? Have you sat through 100 million Sunday school classes or sermons? That's where you get your preparation.

Those books are great. I've read a bunch of books about Ravi Zacharias and Ken Ham and Bodhi Hodge and a bunch of other guys in the apologetics realm.

I've read them. They're great. They're interesting and all that. But when it comes down to it, apologetics is about what you believe about Scripture. What you believe about Jesus and why from the Word of God itself.

[21 : 48] In 1 Peter 3.15, Peter writes, But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense. That's the word apologia. To anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Yet do it with gentleness and respect. When you get put on the, when you get, you know, put in the spotlight and people ask you, well, why is there hope? Why are you so happy? Why are you not as bothered by this as other people?

Are you ready to share about the hope that you have in Jesus? And you know what? They're going to ask questions. Oh, what if I can't answer a question?

So do you choose not to tell them about Jesus because you're afraid they might ask a question you don't have an answer to? Can I tell you how many times I get asked questions that I don't have an answer to? I do my darndest to give an answer.

And if I don't know, do you know what I say? I don't know. I really don't. And that's okay. I'm sure Hannah could tell you how many times I've been asked in class, stumped by questions.

[22 : 52] Oh, hey, Mr. B, blah, blah, blah, blah. I don't know. I'll try to find out. Or why don't you figure it out? Once you start giving homework, they tend to stop asking questions. But you can't do that at a gas station or in a grocery store or whatever.

But the fact is, people may be prompted by God to ask, are you ready to share? As believers in Christ, we're expected to be able to give a reason for the hope that we have.

So dig into the Word of God and know why you believe what you believe. And finally, my last observation of many that I could make and many more that I will make as we go through Acts, we see the changed life of Paul, verses 26 through 29.

He had a need to fellowship with believers. He had a need to fellowship with believers. After Paul got out of Damascus and made his way to Jerusalem, he sought to fellowship with the believers there, the disciples.

Now that ought to be a clue that this was a high priority in the life of a Christian. Paul, the one who was trying to kill him, now tried to fellowship with him.

[24 : 08] And you saw, you know, they were like, I don't know about this. And then Barnabas comes along, the encourager there, and he said, no, no, this is true. This is what happened. Let's accept him in. Then he boldly went in and out preaching the gospel.

But the fact is that he sought fellowship with other believers in a different town. And to me, that just means this ought to be a high priority in the life of a Christian, but not to the exclusion of non-believers.

See, the pendulum of emphasis swings heavily one way or the other, depending on the times that we're living in. At one point in time, the emphasis can be so heavy on gathering as a church that the fellowships and gatherings define the life of a believer at the expense of developing relationships with their unsaved coworkers and neighbors.

That is to say, you do too much as a church together. At another time, the emphasis can be so heavy on relational evangelism and the need to develop relationships with unsaved coworkers and neighbors that church fellowships and gatherings are not just ignored but almost condemned.

As in saying like, well, the church has been so church-minded for so long, we need to get rid of all this and focus on all that. But the reality is that we need to have a balanced life of fellowshiping with believers and relating with non-believers.

[25 : 39] It's not an either-or predicament. It's a both-and reality. You need both the church and your relationship with non-church people.

You need to both be fellowshiping as a body, encouraging each other and building each other up, and you also need to be engaging with non-believers and not ignoring that opportunity.

We need to have that balanced life. And as we see here and other times in the life of Paul through Acts, Paul made it a priority to connect with the disciples of Christ in any town that he traveled to.

But he also made it a priority to visit synagogues, non-believers, and community gatherings. Acts 17. I took two verses from this because we're going to be getting to Acts 17 eventually, and we'll cover it more in depth.

But Acts 17, verses 17 and 22, this is what I took. It says in verse 17, So Paul reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

[26 : 55] And then verse 22 says, So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. You notice Paul was, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews.

He was in the devout persons and in the marketplace. That's, you know, just in general, in the shops. And he was standing in the Areopagus where they had idols everywhere.

And he went there to share and talk to them. And he was also planting churches and ministering to and fellowshiping with believers. So one of the undeniable facts of Scripture as it pertains to the faith is that when we believe in Jesus, and we call on him for salvation, that he will begin to work on changing our lives for his glory until the day that we stand in his presence.

We're always being worked on. He's always working on us. Now, we're not what we're supposed to be yet, but that day will come. Philippians 1.6, Paul writes, And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

If you're sitting here today and you've called on Jesus for salvation, but do not see any change in your life from the time you were saved until now, I encourage you to do as Paul urged the church at Corinth.

[28 : 26] 2 Corinthians 13.5, he says, Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail to meet the test?

Are you a believer? Do you truly believe in Jesus as Savior? And are you following him as your Lord and Master?

I leave you with this quote to consider. A guy by the name of Nathan Bingham. He says, Live in such a way that if you share the gospel with someone, they're not surprised that you're a Christian.

Let's pray. Lord God, thank you for this time in your word. Thank you for the work that you did in the Apostle Paul. Lord, thank you that you brought him and broke him.

You blinded him. Lord, you made him fully, 100% dependent on you. And so are we, Lord. And so are we.

[29 : 36] We can do nothing in and of ourselves apart from you. We cannot please you without truly believing that you are, that you're a rewarder of those who seek after you.

Lord, as we looked at these blips in the life of Paul, especially immediately after his conversion, Lord, we are challenged. We are convicted.

Lord, to be desires to proclaim the gospel message. Lord, to have a mind to defend the faith, a mind to give reason to why we believe what we believe.

And Lord, I just pray that you'd also put within us a desire to fellowship with the saints, with fellow believers, that we would build each other up and help each other to be prepared for the work of ministry, that we might pray for one another.

Lord, we would encourage each other as we seek to live a life on this earth, Lord, that is not full of this world and that is desirous of the things of this world which are passing away.

[30 : 46] but Lord, as we seek to live a life that brings honor and glory to your name, that brings people to the knowledge of Jesus and to the point of repentance.

And Lord, if that's not us, Lord, pray that you would hear the prayer of our hearts and our minds and where we're at. Lord, that you would restore to us the joy of our salvation.

And Lord, soften our hearts and break our hearts, Lord, for what breaks yours. Pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.