

A Transformed Life

Freedom in Jesus Christ

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The Apostle Paul – A Transformed Life
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Published by Abiding Media
14605 SW Weir Road
Beaverton, OR 97007

Introduction

People today may talk a lot about freedom, but much of what the world calls freedom—freedom to do your own thing, freedom to sin, freedom to live the way you want—is actually bondage. The Apostle Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus before he met Jesus Christ and was converted, is a great example for us of a transformed life and the true freedom available to us in Christ. In Galatians 5:1 Paul writes, *“It was for freedom that Christ set us free.”* And Christ Himself said, *“If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed”* (John 8:36).

A good place to begin looking at Paul's transformed life is in the opening words of his letter to the Galatians, written to the people in the region of Galatia, which is today in the heart of modern-day Turkey.

“Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.” Galatians 1:1-5

The first thing Paul does is identify himself as an apostle—a “sent one”—not one sent from men, or some agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father. Paul has the audacity to assert that he had been sent by God Himself. His mission is from God.

From the beginning of this letter, in the opening greeting, Paul weaves in the gospel—the good news that God raised His Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead. Jesus came to deliver us from our sins and from this dark world and give us life and a relationship with Him. Throughout

Paul's letters, and wherever you turn in the Scripture, the gospel message is always the same. A few verses later, Paul tells us this message, and that it is supernatural:

"I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" Galatians 1:11-12

This letter is from Paul, but Paul makes it clear that it's not actually from him—it was revealed to him by God. In other words, Galatians, like all Scripture, is the result of God guiding the human author so that the very words written are the very words of God; it was written by both human authors and by God. Paul would go on to write thirteen letters, and in his final letter state this dynamic in this way, *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16,17). So, when we open our Bible, whether in Genesis or John, we are opening God's book. We are hearing from God.

The Road to Damascus

So, let's take some time to look at Paul's conversion, how he went from Christianity's worst enemy to Christianity's best evangelist, pastor, teacher, church planter and missionary. His conversion—like all real conversions—is amazing and it brings great glory to God. In fact, this is what the gospel is all about: bringing glory to God. Years after his conversion, Paul writes, Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us *"according to the will of God the Father, to whom be the glory forevermore"* (Galatians 1:5). His conversion is recorded for us in Acts Chapter 9.

"Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." Acts 9:1-2

Saul was *“breathing threats”*—his every breath was laced with threats and murder against Christians. Saul was far from being a Christian; he was anti-Christian. He hated Christ and His followers. The gospel was apparently spreading in Damascus, even under persecution, prompting Saul to go to the high priest. Saul asked for paperwork so he could go to Damascus to find and drag Christians out of their homes and throw them in prison.

Saul was first mentioned back in Acts 7, at the scene of the first martyrdom for Christ. Stephen, a disciple of Jesus, after testifying of the resurrection of Jesus Christ before the Council, the Jewish High Court, became the very first witness unto death. *“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and began gnashing their teeth at him. And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul”* (Acts 7:57-58). Saul was there, holding their coats, so to speak.

“And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ And having said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem...Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.” Acts 7:59-60; 8:1,3

There was an insanity about Saul’s hatred; with paperwork in hand, he set out on a six to eight-day journey to Damascus, to seek out any belonging *“to the Way”* to bring them bound to Jerusalem.

“And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do.’ And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one.” Acts 9:3-7

Saul was a religious zealot—a Pharisee of Pharisees. His hatred of Christ was born of a complete delusion that he was serving God by persecuting and killing Christians. Jesus said that a day would come when people would believe they were doing the will of God by killing Christians (John 16:2). This is who Saul was. Perhaps he wasn't surprised to hear from heaven because he thought he was doing the will of God. But he was undoubtedly shocked to discover who it was that was speaking to him.

Many years later, when Paul recounts his story to the people of Jerusalem, he says, *"And I fell to the ground"* (Acts 22:7). This one who set out to strike others was struck down himself. The Pharisees were a group of Jewish religious leaders who were prominent in their opposition to our Lord Jesus, as recorded in the four accounts of His life and teachings. Jesus referred to them as "blind guides of the blind," "white washed tombs" who outwardly might appear beautiful and righteous, but inwardly they were filled with "dead man's bones," hypocrisy and "all uncleanness." Such was this man known as Saul. This proud, self-righteous, arrogant Pharisee falls to the ground.

Saul heard a voice saying to him, *"Saul, Saul"* (Acts 9:4). This is sobering! In the Bible, whenever a name is repeated, it is worth noting. When God called, *"Abraham, Abraham,"* He stayed his hand from offering his son, Isaac—a beautiful picture of the gospel (Genesis 22:11). In Luke 22, Jesus says, *"Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat"* (Luke 22:31). And in Matthew 23, we hear Jesus' cry, *"Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!"* (Matt. 23:37). The risen and glorified Jesus' repetition of his name, "Saul, Saul" is solemn indeed.

Saul may have thought, "Well, I am hearing from heaven," so he asked, *"Who are you, Lord?"* Then came the reply, *"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting"* (Acts 9:5). This must have hit Saul like a ton of bricks. When Jesus said, *"I am Jesus,"* He used the words *"I am"*—*ego eimi*—declaring Himself to be Yahweh.

I can't imagine what hit Saul when the voice said, *"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."* Saul was hearing from the very One he had been persecuting. Saul's sin, like all sin, had a far-reaching effect. People often say, "As long as it doesn't hurt someone else, it's okay."

But sin is never private. When we sin, we don't just sin against ourselves—we also sin against others. And worst of all, we sin against God, our Creator.

Ultimately, it is impressed upon the very heart and soul of Saul that he has sinned—not just against the people he was persecuting—but against God. He had sinned against Jesus Christ Himself. When a person meets Jesus Christ, the enormity of our sin becomes real. When true conversion occurs we begin to see how sinful and evil sin really is.

The Goadings of Saul

Conversion is not usually instantaneous. As Paul recounts his story in Acts 26, he says, *“And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me... ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads’”* (Acts 26:14). Jesus tells Saul that he is resisting God—he was being goaded, guided by God—but he was kicking against Him.

There were likely several things that had been “goadings” Saul. First, as a contemporary of Jesus, he would certainly have known about His crucifixion and probably witnessed when the sky went dark. Although it is not recorded for us whether Saul was present at the cross, it is possible, if not probable, that he had seen and heard Jesus during His three years of public ministry. It was common knowledge throughout the whole region that this Jesus went about doing good and healing many people. Great crowds and multitudes traveled great distances to see and hear Him, and those crowds often included groups of Pharisees.

Secondly, we know that Saul had seen and heard Stephen. As one of the leaders of Israel, Saul was present on that occasion when *“they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he [Stephen] was speaking... And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel”* (Acts 6:10,15). Stephen was a Spirit-filled man. Saul, who considered himself intellectual, couldn't cope with what Stephen was saying. And Stephen was so Christ-like as he died, echoing the words of Jesus Himself, *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit... Do not hold this sin against*

them!" (Acts 7:59-60). Having witnessed this, it's not hard to imagine that this proud, self-righteous man was impacted deeply.

Saul may have tried to resist these "goads," putting them out of his mind, refusing to believe what they might mean. It could be that these things—the darkened sky, the torn veil, the earthquake, the power of Stephen's words and the witnessing of his death—could even be what drove his hatred of Christ. Often, the staunchest atheists, the loudest opponents of the truth, are the ones struggling the most inside their hearts. Jesus said to him plainly, "*Saul, you are kicking against the goads.*"

Thirdly, there was a moral conviction eating away at Saul. In Romans chapter 7 he writes that the Law is holy, righteous and good. He admits that he once thought he was okay—until he was faced with the commandment that says, "*You shall not covet*" (Exodus 20:17). This proud Pharisee, who prided himself on being morally pure and who believed he had everything checked off, had an inward sin problem that is common to all of us, namely, coveting. The Law was never meant to save, but to convict. It is a tutor, a guide designed by God to lead us to Christ.

I will suggest a fourth possible goad. At the end of his letter to the Romans, where he sends his greetings, he writes, "*Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me*" (Romans 16:7). Apparently, this hater of Christ had relatives, "kinsmen"—members of his own extended family—who came to faith in Christ before he did. We can only wonder what impact this may have had on him. Yet, even with all these things going on in his life, Christ Himself had to get hold of him—and He did!

The Humbling of Saul

Saul was fully deserving of God's wrath, punishment and judgment—and then it hit him, "I've been persecuting Jesus." Faced with the reality of his sin, he fell to the ground. When God struck him blind, I wouldn't be surprised if Saul thought, "I will never get off the ground again. I will never see again." He was completely humbled. But Christ said, "*Rise...*" (Acts 9:6). Hearing Jesus Christ say, "*Rise,*" must have been music to his ears.

Saul's first words, as recounted in Acts 22, are, *"What should I do, Lord?"* (Acts 22:10). These are excellent first words of a new believer in Christ—words of submission. *"What should I do?"* Jesus responded, *"Rise, enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do"* (Acts 9:6). Jesus is going to tell him what he must do—not directly or supernaturally—but through a man named Ananias. This was no doubt humbling to this proud man, not used to getting directions from Christians! God is going to tell Saul what to do through a follower of Jesus Christ.

"Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus" (Acts 9:8). This once proud, self-satisfied Pharisee who had been approaching the city in arrogance was now blind, being led by the hand into the city. *"And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank"* (Acts 9:9). Saul spent the next three days in utter physical darkness, but all the while he was increasing in spiritual light. We don't know what was going on in his heart and mind during those three days, but we do know this—he was waking up to who this Jesus truly is. Later in life Paul writes of this "awakening" in this way, *"But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, 'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'"* (Ephesians 5:13,14).

The Importance of Prayer

Paul's story continues with the introduction of a man named Ananias—not a well-known name like Moses or David, yet Scripture describes him as *"devout by the standards of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived in Damascus"* (Acts 22:12). More importantly, he had become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

"Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Behold, here am I, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Arise, go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.'" Acts 9:10-12

Did you notice that? All Ananias is told is that he will find Saul praying. Saul of Tarsus—a Pharisee of Pharisees—had surely done plenty of praying before. But his prayers were like those of the Pharisee in Luke 18 that Jesus describes as eloquent, self-righteous prayers—to himself! His prayers were not going beyond the ceiling of the synagogue where he stood. But now Saul is truly praying. Every true Christian prays. Some Christians are rich, some are poor. Some are mature, some are immature. Some bear much fruit, some bear less fruit. But all Christians pray.

As a young Christian, I came across the writings of J.C. Ryle—a pastor, scholar, and 19th-century Bishop in the Church of England. I remember reading an article he wrote titled, *“Behold, He Prayeth”* (taken from the last phrase of Acts 9:11, KJV). Ryle focused on the fact that all Ananias was told about Saul of Tarsus by the Lord was that, *“he is praying.”* In commenting on this, Ryle wrote some beautiful and insightful thoughts on prayer.

“Prayer is absolutely needful to a man’s salvation... I hold salvation by grace as strongly as anyone. I would gladly offer a free and full pardon to the greatest sinner who ever lived. I would not hesitate to stand by his dying bed and say, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, even now, and you shall be saved.’ But that a person can have salvation without asking for it, I cannot see in the Bible. That a person will receive pardon of his sins, who will not so much as lift up his heart inwardly, and say, ‘Lord Jesus, give it to me,’ this I cannot find. I can find that nobody will be saved by his prayers, but I cannot find that without prayer, anybody will be saved.”

The Blessing of Obedience

Jesus told Ananias to arise and go to the street called Straight and lay your hands on this notorious enemy of Christians named Saul of Tarsus, because he was praying. But Ananias responded, *“Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Your name”* (Acts 9:13-14). This is a very natural response, isn’t it? “Lord, I’ve heard about this guy.” Have you ever felt the need to inform the Lord? “Are You sure, Lord? I don’t know if You understand who this guy is, Lord. Did You say ‘Saul of Tarsus?’”

In this matter of obedience, we often imagine that God needs more information or doesn't fully understand our situation. Ananias feels the need to explain the situation to the Lord. But the Lord says to him, "Go" (Acts 9:15). I love that! The Lord simply says, "Go," and then He graciously explains, *"...for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake"* (Acts 9:15-16).

Saul—the murderous, blasphemous, arrogant persecutor of the church—is God's chosen instrument! Saul was chosen by God to be His representative before Gentiles and before kings and before the sons of Israel.

"Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"
Acts 9:17

Ananias obeyed, and in so doing, was given the privilege of speaking the first words that Saul would hear from a Christian brother's lips, *"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus has sent me."* It doesn't take a Paul to lead a Paul to Christ—it takes an Ananias. You never know how God might use you when you are obedient to Him. When the Holy Spirit prompts you, God may use you to lead to someone to Christ. Ananias was blessed to be the one who steered the apostle Paul to Christ.

The Transformation of Saul

The opening of blinded eyes is an amazing thing, *"Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened"* (Acts 9:18-19). The scales fell from Saul's eyes! He could see again! There is no question—Saul has been converted. He is a changed man. As is the case throughout the book of Acts, Saul publicly identifies with his new Lord by being baptized immediately. Later, when he told Agrippa about what had happened, Paul described his calling, *"to open [people's] eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light"* (Acts 26:18).

Some have wondered, was this the point of Saul's conversion? Or was it on the road to Damascus? Perhaps it was during those three days he spent in darkness, that the truth really began to dawn on him? Or was it at the moment when Ananias laid his hands on him and the scales fell from his eyes? I don't think the timing of his conversion is nearly as important as the fact of his conversion. What is important is that he was in fact converted, and that fact was evidenced by a changed life.

We are told that Saul arose, was baptized and *"for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, He is the son of God"* (Acts 9:19). His life was completely transformed! The Bible says that this is true in every real conversion. *"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Not every conversion is as dramatic as Saul's, but every real conversion leads to a changed life—a transformed life. There may, and indeed will, be different circumstances and varying rates of growth and transformation, but change, growth, and transformation will occur. From now on, I will refer to this man Saul, as he is better known today and through the centuries, as Paul.

Four Evidences of Paul's Transformation

First, notice who Paul spends time with. For the first several days, he wasn't with the Jews who had given him the paperwork to persecute Christians—he was with Ananias and the very people he may have been authorized to arrest. He was with the disciples. A new Christian hangs out with Christians. A new life brings new relationships.

Second, consider who he begins talking about. *"Immediately he began to proclaim Jesus"* (Acts 9:20). Saul immediately begins talking about Jesus to anybody and everybody. Every Christian can and should tell others about Jesus. We are commissioned by our risen Lord to be His witnesses. Tell others what He has done for you.

Third, what did he say about Jesus? *"He is the son of God"* (Acts 9:20). Paul spoke about Jesus and proclaimed who He is—He is the Son of God. We should never lose sight of that fundamental truth: that Jesus not only claimed to be the Son of God, but He proved it by rising from the dead.

And fourth, who did he speak to? *“Paul began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues”* (Acts 9:20). He went straight to the synagogues—right back to where his old comrades were. He does not go off somewhere else. He goes to the synagogues to boldly proclaim Jesus. There is no question whether Paul is converted. He is indeed a transformed man.

“All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, ‘Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?’ But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.” Acts 9:21-22

An Overview of Paul’s Conversion

What does it mean to be converted? In the New Testament, most occurrences of the word for conversion are translated *“to turn,”* specifically, to turn from sin to God. It is a complete 180-degree turn. You’re going the wrong way, and you turn around, you make a U-turn. While Paul’s conversion is compelling in every way, every true conversion—whether a man or woman, boy or girl—is exciting and brings glory to God. Paul writes in Galatians that the believers in Judea, who although they had not met him personally, *“...kept hearing, ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.’ And they were glorifying God because of me”* (Galatians 1:23-24).

Conversion is meeting the risen Christ. Paul never grew tired of telling his story—of giving his testimony of meeting Jesus. God ordained that Paul’s story would be recorded for us many different times. It appears in Acts chapters 9, 22, and 26. In Galatians, Paul spends most of the first chapter describing what happened in his life.

In Philippians, Paul tells the heart of his story. He writes that all the things he used to value and considered treasures, *“I count all things to be loss [rubbish] in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Philippians 3:8). Paul was a new creature in Christ. When you truly come to Christ, everything changes.

Toward the end of his life, Paul essentially says, “If Christ can save me—the worst of all sinners—He can save anyone” (1 Timothy 1:15). He was not exaggerating. In 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter, Paul marvels that the risen Lord appeared to him, *“For I am the least of the apostles... not fit to be an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am”* (1 Corinthians 15:8-9). Paul had met the risen Christ—and that changed everything. Meeting Christ changed the way he thought, acted and lived. It changed his values and priorities. In short, it transformed him.

Truth About Conversion

As we look at the conversion of Paul, let me underline five truths the Bible teaches about conversion. First, conversion is essential. Jesus said, *“Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 18:3). Conversion is not optional—you must be converted to enter God’s kingdom.

Second, conversion is of God. Paul wasn’t seeking God. God sought him. He “grabbed him by the neck” so to speak. On our own, we are so sinful that we do the opposite of seeking Him. Paul writes in Romans, *“There is none who seeks for God”* (Romans 3:11). But Jesus says, *“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10). It is God who initiates conversion. He opens blinded eyes, delivers us from darkness, and shines His light into our hearts so we can truly know Him.

“Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the very image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. For God who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Third, conversion is transformative. What if Saul simply said, “Well, that was some experience. I’m not going to do any more persecuting,” and then returned to Jerusalem a nicer, quieter Pharisee who no longer persecuted Christians? What if he never got baptized—knowing that would make him a turncoat to his Pharisaism—but he just backed off and was a little less zealous? I would ask the question: would he be saved? I would say no.

When Paul met the risen Christ, he became a completely different person. True conversion changes us from the inside out. Not every conversion is as dramatic as Paul’s—most aren’t—but in every true conversion there is real and lasting change. There will be a change in your moral behavior, your lifestyle, your attitude, and—most importantly—your desire to grow in relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, our focus, our affections, and even our very hearts are turned toward God’s Son.

I find that many people today, in speaking of their encounter with Christ, point to some past experience—something that happened years ago—yet their lives haven’t really changed. But the New Testament never tells us that our hope is in an experience. It tells us our hope is in Christ. When someone meets Jesus Christ, He changes them. Conversion is always transformative. It’s not just changing your behavior a little bit then going back to your old way of life. Look to Him, and when you do, He changes everything.

Fourth, conversion is a call. As Christians, we are chosen instruments of God. Maybe not in the same way as Paul—we may not speak before kings—but it still is our privilege to bear His name wherever we go. Whether we find ourselves in front of political leaders, or just ordinary people, we are to bear His name and tell how He has changed us. We are to proclaim what He has done for us.

We represent Christ, the King of Kings. When that truth gets a hold of us, that “*we are ambassadors for Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:20), we will no longer fear the little kings of this world. As His ambassadors, we have the authority to speak in the name of the King of Kings. Jesus said, “*You are the light of the world. ... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they might see your good works, and glorify your Father*” (Matthew 5:14,16).

Christ humbled Himself not only to save us, but also to use us as His instruments. God still uses broken, messed-up people—those who were at one time blasphemously persecuting Christ—to accomplish His purposes. He can turn lives around, and He is still doing that today. God has saved you and He wants to use you. This is both exciting and humbling. Bless His holy name!

Fifth, conversion is a call to suffer for Christ. It is popular in some circles today to say, God wants your Christian life to be “your best life now.” Paul never said that, because that is not always true. Followers of Christ are called to take up their cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). In response to suffering, Paul writes, *“Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison”* (2 Corinthians 4:17) and, *“Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:19).

In Paul’s last letter he wrote to his disciple Timothy on his deathbed. However, it wasn’t a bed; he was in a prison cell as he awaited execution when he wrote, *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* (2 Timothy 3:12).

The same Paul who once stood and watched Stephen give his life for the Lord, ended up suffering much like he did. As we read earlier, God said of Paul, *“I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake”* (Acts 9:16). Later, Paul described to the Corinthians what suffering for Christ was like for him.

“In far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” 2 Corinthians 11:23-29

Most of us in the west do not experience overt persecution as Christians, although we may someday. But we have brothers and sisters all around the world being persecuted for following Christ. We shouldn't think that we will never have tough and trying times in our lives as we follow Him. The Apostle Peter wrote late in his life, *"Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you ... as though some strange thing were happening to you"* (1 Peter 4:12), and Jesus said, *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

Be Transformed

After looking at the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, let me ask you: Have you met Jesus Christ and come to realize that He is God? Scripture tells us that to see Christ is to see the very glory of God, *"He is the image of the invisible God"* (Colossians 1:15). Christ makes the invisible God visible to us. The *"god of this world"* is busy blinding the minds of unbelievers, yet Scripture promises, *"Whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away"* (2 Corinthians 3:16).

Maybe you are plunging along like Saul of Tarsus—just like every one of us before we met Christ—and thinking this life is what counts. But when God gets our attention and we turn to Him, the veil is taken away and we begin to see what really counts.

"The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty [freedom]. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."
2 Corinthians 3:17-18

The moment you turn and meet the risen Christ; the veil goes away. This is the initial point of conversion. From there the process of transformation begins. As we behold the glory of the Lord in the Scriptures, which James calls a mirror (James 1:23-24), the Holy Spirit does His work in us. The whole Christian life is an ongoing process of transformation where He smooths our rough edges and makes us more and more like Jesus. Look to Jesus today.

The Biblical term for the word “*transformed*” is the word from which we get our English word, metamorphosis. Metamorphosis refers to a complete transformation—a change from the inside out. It’s the term used to describe the process by which a green, worm-like caterpillar changes completely into a beautiful monarch butterfly. This term is only used four times in the New Testament, two of them are when Jesus went up on the mountain and was transformed. He was completely changed. When we look into the pages of Scripture and see Christ, He changes us, then the Spirit begins the process of transforming us from glory to glory.

Seventeen years after his conversion, the Apostle Paul is a lot more Christlike than the man who was once breathing threats and murder on his way to Damascus. His life was changed, and through ongoing transformation, he became more and more like Christ. That is a beautiful picture of what God does in a life, and what He desires to do for you.

Conclusion

The story of Saul’s conversion is not just history—it’s a window into God’s power to transform any life. Saul of Tarsus, the church’s fiercest persecutor, became Paul, its most faithful preacher. That transformation didn’t come from turning over a new leaf—it came from meeting the risen Christ. And that’s the same for us today. Christ still calls sinners to Himself, still opens blind eyes, still sets people free. The question is not whether He can change us. The question is, have we truly turned to Him? Have we been converted—not merely reformed—but transformed? As with Paul, when Jesus enters your life, everything changes.

To everyone who is reading this: look to Jesus. If you do not yet know Him, look to Him. It is not about turning to a church or a new philosophy or religion, but rather about turning to Him. Do you know him? Then turn to Him. Daily, fix your eyes on Jesus. Will it always be easy? Not necessarily. But it is simple. As the Lord said to Ananias, “*Arise and Go*” (Acts 9:11). Obey Him.

Will it be without consequences? No. There is suffering involved in the Christian life. But is it worth it? Absolutely. As Paul would later write, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not

worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). The new life that God gives, the grace that washes away our guilt, the new joy and purpose that we find in Christ is life indeed. Freedom indeed!



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