

The Life of the Apostle Paul

"*Changed by the Lord*"

Bible Passages: Acts 9:1-31; 11:19-26

Our Desperate Human Need: The *desire* to be changed into the person Jesus wants you to be.

Today's Goals: By the end of this lesson, each person should be able to. . .

- **(Know)** Identify how Jesus Christ changed Saul of Tarsus from a persecutor into a preacher.
- **(Understand)** Have confidence in Jesus' power to change you into an entirely different person.
- **(Do)** Develop a receptive heart so that Jesus can lead and teach you.

Question:

I want each of you to ask yourself this question:

In the last ten years, how have I, as a person, most significantly changed?
Let's agree to eliminate answers that include hair loss or weight gain!

In John Ortberg's book, *The Life You've Always Wanted* he tells the story of a man named Hank.

Hank had believed in Jesus since he was a little boy. Hank, now in his 60's, had difficulty loving his wife. His children could not speak freely with him and felt no affection from him. He was not concerned for the poor and less fortunate. He had little tolerance for those who did not go to church. He had a tendency to judge people rather harshly.

The demeanor Hank exhibited reflected a deeper and terribly heartbreaking reality. Hank had not, and was not, changing. But here is what is even more remarkable - The believers that knew Hank were not surprised by this.

A Second Question:

As a "*professing*" believer and follower of Jesus Christ, do you expect to change?

I sincerely hope so. Jesus is in the "change business."

Jesus died on the Cross to pay for our sins and to "free" us "from" sin and to give us the power to change. He continues, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to change us.

The essence of the word "conversion" means to change into something different. Without a doubt, there is no greater example of the Lord's power to convert a person into someone completely different than in the story of the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul (Saul) was the arch-enemy of the early church. A life-changing truth that we can glean by studying the life of the Apostle Paul is that Jesus Christ **CAN** change anybody.

Today, I want you to see two obvious and significant ways that Jesus changed Saul into another person.

Today's Life Application:

Read Acts 9:1-21

The first thing you must learn from the life of the Apostle Paul is: If Jesus is going to change you into a different person, He must first deal with --

The direction of your life.

As in the life of Apostle Paul, Jesus will change your direction.

Before Saul became a Christian, there was absolutely no doubt as to the direction and agenda of his life.

Acts 9:1 - Saul was breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

Acts 9:2 - Paul was on his way to Damascus to arrest followers of Jesus and bring them back to Jerusalem bound as prisoners.

Acts 9:13 - In the words of Ananias - "*Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem.*"

Acts 9:14 - Also, from Ananias - "*And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind **all** that call on thy name*".

Acts 22:4 - In Paul's own words - "*And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.*"

Acts 26:11 - Again, from Paul - "*And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*"

Destroying the church was the direction and purpose of Saul's life. In vs. 26:11, the phrase "*being exceedingly mad against*" is the Greek word - *εμμανομενος*; em-mahee-nom-e-nos; it means to rave or rage against.

Paul was literally obsessed with slaughtering Christians.

Ironically he thought he was doing a service to God in opposing Christianity.

To stop Saul, **and** change his direction, Jesus Christ confronted him *in person* as he approached Damascus.

Read Acts 9:3. The phrase "*there shined round about*" is the Greek word - *περιηστραπσεν*; per-ee-as-trap-sen' it means - to flash all around, to envelop in light.

Let me paint a clear picture of Saul of Tarsus - What was he like? Let's read his own words in Phil. 3:5,6 "*Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*"

He was a highly educated Pharisee - according to Jewish law and tradition.

He was a Jew's Jew - according to Jewish law and tradition.

He desired to live right - according to Jewish law and tradition.

He desired to defend God. - according to Jewish law and tradition.

Even though Saul was an extremely religious person, **he was lost** and on his way to Hell, because he thought Jesus was an imposter and not the Messiah.

Again in Paul's own words: I Tim. 1:13 - "*Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*"

Literally, Saul was driven prostrate to the earth by the blinding light of Jesus Christ.
Saul's miraculous conversion was based on a *personal* encounter with Jesus Christ Himself.
What was Paul's *immediate* answer? - κυριε τι με τηλεις ποιησαι (Lord, what will thou have me to do?)

In just three short days, Saul the Slaughterer was changed to Paul the Preacher!
Acts 9:20,21 “*And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?*”
“*Straightway*” - ευτηεως; yoo-theh-oce; at once, immediately.

Jesus completely changed the direction of the life of Apostle Paul.
Jesus had a purpose for Saul's future that was far deeper than just reading his Bible, or joining the church, or simply holding a pew in place.
“*...for he is a **chosen** vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.*”, Acts 9:15.
Your attitude, like Paul's, **MUST** be: Lord, if you have a new direction for my life, I am open, I am available, and I am willing.

The dependence in your life.

Read: Acts 9:22-31 and 11:19-26.

Once Jesus changed the direction of the Apostle Paul, He taught him dependence.
Once Jesus gets you going in the right direction, you must learn to depend on Him and not yourself.
Some Bible scholars believe that between Acts 9:21 and 9:22 there is a break of perhaps 3 years.
They use Galatians 1:15-18 as proof.

In **Arabia** Jesus taught Saul to depend upon **God's Grace**, not his own efforts.

I Tim. 1:14,15; “*And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*”

Until Saul met Jesus he was self-righteous, self-satisfied, self-fulfilled, and self-directed. He knew nothing of God's grace. In Arabia, he realized that he was just like everyone, a sinner, saved by grace.

In **Damascus** Jesus taught Saul to depend upon **God's Power** and not his own strength, see II Cor. 11:30-33.

In **Jerusalem** Jesus taught Saul to depend upon **God's Wisdom** and not his own, see Acts 22:18-21

Saul thought he was the perfect person to witness for Jesus in Jerusalem - he knew the Jewish point of view. Yet, God knew best.

In **Antioch** Jesus taught Saul to depend on **God's Timing**.

When the time was right, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul, Acts 11:24-26
It was a very different Saul who came to Antioch with Barnabas.
What made the difference?
Saul learned to depend on God's timing. Saul did not initiate this ministry, God did.

God brought him there through Barnabas.

Later, Paul revealed the Truth he had learned:

II Co. 3:5, *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;”*

II Cor. 4:7. *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”*

Paul learned to depend on:

God’s Grace
God’s Power
God’s Wisdom
God’s Timing

The name Saul is of Hebrew origin meaning “asked for” or “prayed for”

Perhaps Paul gave up the use of his Hebrew name, Saul, with its regal connotation and chose to use his Roman name, Paul, meaning “little” or “small,” because he desired to become smaller in order to present Christ as greater

Act 13:9 *“Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,”*

Just like the Apostle Paul, Jesus wants to change you - to change **your** direction and to teach **you** dependence.

I repeat Paul’s Words: *“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”*, Acts 9:6

Do you stand before the Lord astonished and trembling seeking His direction for your life?

Or do you say: “Why me Lord”? or “Not me Lord”? or “I can’t Lord”?

God has a purpose for your life. **DO NOT** drown it in an ocean of apathy and neglect !!!!!

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