

Walking the Road of Grace

Acts 9:1-20 – Have you been converted? Conversion is a total transformation from one thing to another. (Heb 13:8-9 - “established in grace”)

Saul was angry, “*breathing out threatenings and slaughter*” against the disciples of the Lord, the end product of his religion in his life. *Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from a religious conviction.*

Context:

1st Century Palestine was an environment where the Jews were oppressed by foreign powers. The scene was ripe for the many Messiah figures that manifested themselves. The Romans and the Jews had to deal with these would-be conquerors and the aftermath.

This time, however, people were following this “resurrected” Messiah and corrupting Judaism. An explosion of healing, wonders and believers had completely disrupted Jerusalem. In Saul’s eyes, the city of David and the religion of Yahweh had become contaminated by this Jesus, stealing the glory of Jehovah.

Saul of Tarsus had authority, from Jewish officials and from his own understanding of the Old Testament law, for his personal campaign to punish these waywards. He was a purist (not a reformer) – his goal was to rid the religion of this heretical movement.

He had supreme confidence in the flesh, in his lineage, performance, knowledge of and love of the Law. But something happened – **He met Jesus Christ face-to-face**. This was the end of Saul and the beginning of Paul. A single incident completely changed everything about his life.

A revelation of Jesus Christ was the beginning of a transformation in Paul’s life:

1) **New Identity (who he was)** – who Paul was and who he thought God to be changed completely. The foundation, the meaning and the purpose of his life were shaken.

- * He was no longer right, no longer righteous, no longer better than others, no longer living through his own power.
- * He now had a different agenda, a different criteria for making decisions, a different frame of reference, a different motivation and a different power.
- * He had different drives, different responses and an entirely different identity.

2) **New Theology (what he believed)** – Paul’s theological life was rocked

- * “What is God like?”
- * “What does He think about me?”
- * What does he want me to do?

What Saul thought and what Paul thought were poles apart. *All of the essentials of Paul’s theology were revealed to Him through his conversion experience.*

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In one day, everything changed:

- > **Who Jesus is** - Jesus Christ is Lord, the Jewish Messiah (Christology)
 - * the breaking in of a whole new understanding of the person and purposes of God
 - > **How salvation is gained** - Salvation is found in Jesus, not in the keeping of the law (soteriology)
 - * a turn from trusting in works to trusting in grace
 - > **The Church** - When I persecute followers of Jesus, I persecute Jesus himself (ecclesiology)
 - * a revelation of the body of Christ
 - > **God's Purpose** - God's provision of salvation is also to be extended to the Gentiles (missiology)
 - * a turn from exclusion to inclusion
 - > **How to live life** - "I will show him how much he must suffer for my Name's sake" (incarnationality)
 - * a revelation of incarnational suffering in order to bring about the purposes and the kingdom of God
- 3) **New Walk (how he lived)** – obviously, he stopped persecuting Christians, but he also went from being law-centered to Christ-centered – **he began to live in grace.**
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Here we will focus on how a revelation of Jesus Christ will free us to live in grace, be accepted by grace, work by grace.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him — Col 2:6

Living in Grace - Paul was introduced to the concept of grace (none of Jesus' disciples were Pharisees – this was God's first call of a religious man to be an apostle).

1) **Grace causes me to understand that all of my life and work was initiated by God and is sustained by God (Gal 1:13-17)**

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

- a. Paul's description of his conversion (Gal. 1:15-16) My "previous way if life"
 - God set me apart** from birth (divine call)
 - God called me by His grace** (Grounded in love of God)
 - God revealed his Son in me** (revelation of Jesus)
 - God sent me** to preach among the Gentiles (Mission and purpose)
- b. If I did not have the power to start it, how can I, in my own power, sustain it? God made us alive; God works in us; God sustains us by grace.

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2) Grace causes me to switch the foundation for my life from confidence in the flesh to confidence in relationship with God (Philippians 3:4-12)

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

My righteousness is in Christ. The foundation of my life is not my performance, not what I do, but what Jesus Christ did. Paul's "perfect" performance was not enough. His heart was bad. He didn't love.

The moment you begin to undervalue Jesus and His work, you begin to overvalue yourself and you have moved right into idolatry. Instead of living your life in complete dependence upon and appreciation to Jesus for everything you are and have, you go back to depending on yourself and earning your way to heaven.

Building Our Own Religious Resume

The Apostle Paul is identifying a false belief where people were replacing the gospel of grace with religious activity.

There were many converts in the church that were formerly Jews. When they accepted Jesus as the true Messiah they unfortunately had a difficult time letting go of the 'forms of religion' that were so prevalent in their past.

One such form was circumcision. In their minds, being circumcised was so important to them that it became a 'must do' in order to be a true, authentic follower of Jesus. It was THESE people Paul was referring to. The issue was not that circumcision of itself was bad, but requiring it to be a true follower of Jesus missed the entire point of grace.

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How does Paul address the problem?

Philippians 3:4-6 – *“though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.”*

In order to drive home his point Paul decides to show them his ‘Religious Resume’. We need to understand up front Paul was setting out to ‘beat them at their own game’. He wanted to drive home the fact that if they wanted to use the measurement of their religious actions and pedigree none of them would stack up to him.

The contrast of grace to a ‘Religious Resume’

Philippians 3:7-11 – *“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”*

Paul’s ‘Nail in the Coffin’ or, in modern terms his ‘drop the mic’ argument is found in these verses. Paul basically is burning his Religious Resume right in front of them by saying he considered them a ‘loss’ which basically means he gave them up with no regrets. He even goes as far as saying they were ‘garbage’.

Other scriptures addressing the religious resume (Have people read each passage)

Luke 18:9-14 – Jesus’s parable about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is a great example of a ‘Religious Resume’

Colossians 2:16-17 – People were judging others because they were not keeping specific holy days or were eating meat offered to idols or drinking wine.

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What is the Application for Today?

Unfortunately Christians today have a tendency to have their own unspoken Religious Resume. We are so used to being rewarded and acknowledged by our actions and deeds that a mindset begins to slowly erode away at the truth of the Gospel and causes us to minimize the importance of what Christ did and elevate our actions to a level of importance they should not have. If we act right, God will “owe” us heaven.

Examples of a modern Christians ‘Religious Resume’

1) **Becoming defensive when people try to infringe on your area of service** – How do you react when someone tries to step in and serve in an area that you usually do? Do we get defensive and think thoughts or even say things like, ‘Hey, this is my job. Go help somewhere else?’

2) **Telling people of your good deeds** – Have you ever done a good deed that nobody else saw and then find yourself of thinking of ways of subtly telling other Christians?

3) **Doing a good deed out of obligation** – Have you ever been guilty of doing something a Christian should do but you are doing it begrudgingly and because you felt God ‘expected it’ from you? It demonstrates that our hearts are in the wrong place and we are focused on an obligatory walk with God rather than one where our actions are out a heart that has been transformed. Indeed we do many things out of obedience to Christ out of simple Christian duty that we may not, in the flesh, enjoy. However, we choose to do them because we love him. That is different that obligation.

4) **Judging others when they don’t do what you do – This can come in any number of forms.** **Maybe** you serve in the Children’s ministry and feel more righteous than those who have children and yet don’t serve in that ministry. **Maybe** you rarely miss services and note others whose attendance is more sporadic. You subconsciously feel like you’re are a more mature Christian because of it. **Maybe** some people come to church wearing shorts or worn down clothes and you always dress up for church and you feel they are not respecting God like you are and therefore must not be as righteous as you.

5) **Keeping a mental check list of minimums** – This entails setting up our own minimum performance/actions level to be ‘righteous enough’. We establish these

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minimums when we focus on our performance and hoping that these actions make God to put us over the 'cut' line that divides those who are true believers and those who are not. An example would be: "I give 10% of my income and that is what is required so that should be enough to show God and everyone else I'm a faithful giver."

6) When you are physically unable to continue to serve and feel less of a Christian – If you are sick or injured or simply unable to physically do what you used to do and because of that feel like you are not serving God and don't like people serving you. This may be because you are not living up to the Religious Resume you have built for yourself. Your standard of Christianity.

3) Grace causes me to forget what is behind and press on to what lies ahead (maturity) (Phil 3:13-15)

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

From: confidence in the *flesh* (lineage, performance, knowledge of law, love of the law)
To: confidence in *relationship* (I want to know Him, receiving the love of God and the gift of righteousness) **Remember Paul's first question – Who are you Lord? (Acts 9:5)**

There are things we are supposed to remember and things we are not supposed to remember. The criteria is that we should remember the things that God remembers or tells us to remember and forget the things that God forgets or tells us to forget.

Staying in the past from which God has forgiven and redeemed us can hinder us from coming into the purposes that God has for us now and in the future. We have to conclude our past and turn our gaze in another direction.

What was Paul forgetting? Was it his past sins? – I don't believe so, for he knew this was under the blood and no longer an issue. I think he was forgetting those things he once put confidence in (what he had listed just before this) – His perceptions of what knowing God was – His ideas of what is important.

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4) Grace causes me to work harder and rest easier than everyone else (1 Cor. 15:9-10)

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Remember Paul's second question: **What do you want me to do? (Acts 22)**

"Yet not I but the grace of God within me"

Paul's great secret to the Christian life and ministry: "No longer I, but Christ" (Gal 2:20)

Works of performance → Rest (live loved) → Works of love

Many people struggle because they fail to live up to the way they think they should live. Paul understood that it is not possible, in ourselves, to give right. But through Christ in us, we have the power to do it.

One key to this, and indeed to living in Christ as God intended, is **learning to "live loved"**. We live as ones who are loved and accepted by God on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ. It is out of that place of grace and acceptance that we do works of love, from the purest of motives.