

Paul's Upbringing

Acts 22:3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

Acts 26:4-5 "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; 5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

Philippians 3:5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Paul's Lifestyle and Actions

Acts 9:1-2 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 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 22: 4-5 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished... 19 And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. 20 And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.'

Note he made confession of his involvement by name (Stephen). Admitted his wrongs.

Acts 26:9-11 "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

It's what we believe that drives our lifestyle and actions.

The people had created a system that Jesus did not conform to. It was not what had put in place from the beginning.

Paul's Transformation

Acts 9:3-7 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." 7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 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. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Acts 22:6-11 " But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, 7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 8 And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' 9 And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. 10 And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.' 11 But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.

Acts 26:12-18 " While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; 17 rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

Acts 9:18-22 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; 19 and he took food and was strengthened. **Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 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?" 22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

This was a pivotal, transforming moment that immediately changed Paul's direction and outlook in life. But it was not a "bottom" that we so often refer to in recovery.

We can't create An encounter with God. We might think we can through emotional or religious observances but we can't. We may say things like I'm going to a place to make my heart right with God, as if we are glad God can schedule us in.

From this point forward Paul did not want to bring vengeance upon anyone. He began to lead a life of love.

Is it possible that we glorify hitting bottom?

Is it possible that we could "see the light" without coming to a place of desperation and hopelessness?

Paul certainly was living a life of what he perceived as satisfaction and God pleasing but he was wrong. He had the wrong God, Ephesians had the wrong God, The Athenians had the wrong God, The Israelites had the wrong God, and this is nothing new. What is our God(s).

Acts 4:13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

Acts 6:7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, **and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith**

Paul's New Understanding

Acts 26:6-8 And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. 8 Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

Ephesians 5:6-13 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 **for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light** 9 (for **the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth**), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But **all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.**

Have we seen this greater light?

There is a light greater than our self, whether we admit it or not. We can't see everything. Without light we can see nothing. The light Paul saw was greater than the sun. Can we even imagine that?

Philippians 3:7-14 But **whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,** 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For **I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.**