

2. Before and after

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As many of you know I've been in the advertising industry for over 25 years as a graphic designer and am still somewhat involved in designing brochures and web site stuff for other Calvary Chapels.

One of the most effective ways to promote the products or services a company wants to sell to the consumers is showing 'BEFORE' and 'AFTER'. I am sure you've seen many diet pill or health equipment advertisements. Before they used this particular product, they were heavy and out of shape. But after they used it for a half day, they lost 50 pounds and totally slim and trim.

I don't think that that kind of products qualify as a miracle. Impressive? Yes. Obvious? Of course. Long-term? Sometimes. But not miraculous. Only the supernatural touch of God can bring miraculous changes – the kind that took place in the apostle Paul's life and all the born-again Christian's lives.

Before we get into the texts from 1 Timothy we have to get a glimpse of what Apostle Paul used to be like before he became the most influential disciple of Jesus Christ in Christianity.

A. SAUL OF TARSUS

Acts 7:57-58 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Acts 8:1-3 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

Acts 9:1-6 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then 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?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." 6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Before he became an apostle of Jesus Christ, he was named as "Saul" whose name came from the first king of Israel who was a head and shoulder taller and more handsome than anyone in Israel. I am sure that his parents wanted their son to be like Saul.

Previously, Saul a meticulous observer of the Law – at least outwardly. A Pharisee of Pharisees, he was the cream of the crop. A gifted student, he sat under the tutelage of the distinguished teacher Gamaliel.

Saul's misguided zeal for the Law led him to hate Christians. He tore them from their homes, threw them in prison, even approved of their torture and death. All the while, he considered his zealous persecution of Christians a service to God.

On his way to Damascus, Saul ran straight ahead into the blinding grace of God. The Lord Jesus Christ transformed him into a champion of the Gospel, and he began to openly condemn the legalistic system he once followed and cherished.

Whether speaking to allies or accusers, he used his testimony regularly as evidence of God's grace. His letters drip with gratitude for the Lord's mercy. And woven into his theology are reflections of God's loving intervention.

Paul understood what Jesus meant when he talked about the woman whose many sins were forgiven would love Him more than anyone.

Luke 7:47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

B. ONCE THE ENEMY OF JESUS, NOW THE FOLLOWER

1 Timothy 1:12-14 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, 13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

When Paul wrote down "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God" in v11, he was compelled to share his own personal testimony. He was "Exhibit A" to prove that the Gospel of the grace of God really works.

I, too myself, am thankful to the Lord for what He did in my life. From a self-righteous snob to the minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, what a transformation He made in me! If somebody told me that I would be the pastor of a church when I was in college, I would be the one who would fall off a chair from laughing so hard. I would have said, "That is impossible."

The Lord takes us to the situation where we are way over our heads. At that point, we have to decide whether we will obey Him, or whether we will just quit, giving in to our natural limitation.

God's callings are always accompanied by His enabling. He will never call us to do something without also enabling us to do it. Many times, the Lord asks us to do something that is impossible. Then, working in us, by His Spirit, He proceeds to do the impossible through we who are incapable.

Remember this: Where God guides, God provides.

By God's mercy and grace we are saved. God in His mercy did not give Paul what he did deserve. Instead, God in His grace gave Paul what he did not deserve. Grace and mercy are God's love in action.

Ignorance and unbelief never excuse our sin. But they do invite God's mercy, because sin in ignorance and unbelief makes one less guilty than the believer who sins knowingly.

I don't know about the spiritual condition of many of you at this point. You might have that hidden sins that no one knows. But God knows them all too well. If you truly repent, God is there to forgive you and to restore you back to Himself once you had with Him.

C. IF IT CAN HAPPEN TO ME, IT CAN BE FOR ANYONE

1 Timothy 1:15-16 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Paul makes it clear that this salvation is not for him only, but for all who receive Jesus Christ. If Jesus could save Saul of Tarsus, the chief of sinners, then He can save anybody. We admire Paul's humility that he considered himself to be the chief sinner.

The grace of God turned the bully persecutor into a merciful preacher, and the murderer into a minister and a missionary. So dramatic was the change in Paul's life that even the Jerusalem church suspected that it was a trick, and they had a hard time accepting him.

God gave Paul his ministry. He did not get it from Peter or the other apostles. He was called and commissioned by the risen Christ in heaven.

It doesn't matter what kind of sins you have committed in the past, but if you come to Him in humility and repentance, there is no sins that God can not and will not forgive, exception of the sin of continual rejection against Jesus Christ.

D. SPONTANEOUS PRAISE TO THE LORD

1 Timothy 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul could not think anything else other than how great the salvation of God was, and how great the love of God was, without simply breaking into spontaneous praise.

Any of agnostic and atheistic people should take a note even if they don't want to. God knows more about them and about their future than themselves. They will meet Him someday when it is too late for them to change their minds.

If we ever have trouble worshipping God, it is because we don't know Him very well.

E. STAY AT IT, DON'T DESERT YOUR POST

1 Timothy 1:18-20 This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, 20 of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Again, Paul used military language to enforce his statement, because the word 'charge' means "an urgent command handed down from a superior officer". Paul also reminded Timothy that God had chosen him for his ministry.

It was not easy to serve God in pagan Ephesus, but Timothy was a man under orders, and he had to obey. God had chosen him and sent him. It was this fact that could give him assurance in difficult days. If you are God's servant, called by the Spirit, obeying His will, then you can "stay at it" and finish the work because the Lord will empower you.

I know that there is a formula that the devil uses to bring men and women of God down:

1. The devil isolates that person and makes them think about themselves only.
2. The devil brings up just about any excuses not to read the Word of God and pray to the Lord daily.
3. The devil makes them think that God and His people don't care about them and love them. He makes them stop attending church services. He makes them feel sorry for themselves and encourages them to take care of themselves since no one cares.

When a person follows these three steps, the devil has that person in his hand firmly.

That is what happened to the people apostle Paul mentioned in v19. Nobody makes them be spiritual shipwreck – only by their own choice.

How can a person get back into the relationship with God again?

1. Come to the Lord in humility and repentance and confess your sins.
2. Get back into reading the Bible and praying to the Lord daily
3. Get back into the local church fellowship where they teach the Word of God, the Bible.
4. If you have to forgive someone or ask for forgiveness from someone, do so even if it hurts your pride which is very good for your spirit and it pleases the Lord.

Trials and tests in our lives can either make us run to God or push ourselves away from Him. It is strictly our choice.

We know nothing of Hymenaeus and Alexander other than what Paul said of them here. Paul apparently disciplined them for their disobedience to God in heresy, in conduct, or in both.

We see that Paul was not afraid to point out opponents of the truth by name. While Christians are not to judge one another's motives or ministries, we are certainly expected to be honest about each other's conduct. That is why sometimes you hear me mentioning some of the false doctrine teachers' names from this pulpit.

"Delivered unto satan" implies an apostolic discipline and disassociation from the local church.

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, I deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

When a Christian refuses to repent, the local fellowship should exercise discipline, excluding him from the protective fellowship of the saints, making him vulnerable to the attacks of satan.

The true intention of 'delivering a person to satan' does not come from a vengeful attitude, rather from a loving heart. As we just read from 1 Corinthians 5, because of the destruction of the flesh, that person might come back to the Lord to renew his relationship with Him.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Where God guides, God provides.

God's callings are always accompanied by His enabling. He will never call us to do something without also enabling us to do it.

2) Grace and mercy are God's love in action.

God in His mercy does not give us what we deserve. Instead God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve.

3) One of the quickest ways to get to know God is writing down all the blessings you have received from the Lord. Starting with your breath and heartbeats.