

## 9. What is Stopping You?

The story of the Apostle Paul is compelling and speaks to us today.

So let's look at Paul's situation. He was raised from a child to be a Pharisee. Paul describes himself as a Pharisee (**Scripture 1. Paul as a Pharisee – Philippians 3:3-7**).

Paul (aka Saul) as a Pharisee was very successful and well known. Pharisees did well financially and had all the finest things (**Scripture 2. Pharisees loved money - Luke 16:14-15**). People all over the land knew who Paul was and what he was all about. He had a mission in life to take Christians as prisoners, which would probably lead to a horrible death (**Scripture 3. Paul's Mission – Acts 9:1-2**).

Jesus spoke about Pharisees as being prideful, selfish, and condemned to hell. Though they followed all the Jewish laws and traditions, they totally lacked in service, love, and humility (**Scripture 4. Jesus Spoke of Pharisees – Matt 23:27-28 & 33**).

So Paul was not only a prideful Pharisee, but he was a Christian killer, very strong and proud in his beliefs.

But God touched Paul in a miraculous way. Jesus struck him blind (**Scripture 5. Paul blinded – Acts 9:3-12**). God knew it would take something miraculous to get Paul's attention. The Lord touches each of us the way that we need to be touched in order to believe the truth and be saved.

Paul had a lot to give up and to be afraid of. If he turned to Christ, he would gain enemies of his former fellow Pharisees and chief priests. Surely, they would want to find him and kill him. He also had significant wealth and possessions as a Pharisee which he'd have to give up. And certainly, Christians wouldn't trust him, being that they knew him as a Pharisee seeking to kill them. As a Pharisee, Paul obeyed all the Jewish laws and traditions, but following and serving Christ is a completely different way of life that he would have to learn and adjust to. It was an extremely difficult transition for Paul.

But even with all that, Paul grabbed the bull by the horns and was a powerful Christian leader. He started so many churches, which included bringing in the Gentiles to Christ. Most of the New Testament is letters that Paul wrote to churches. Paul performed many miracles (**Scripture 6. Paul Performed Miracles - Acts 19:11-12**). The Lord used Paul in such a powerful way.

I was in my 40's when I finally turned to Jesus. I was a realist and needed proof before I believed anything. Thankfully (thank you Jesus!), the Holy Spirit touched me (so powerfully, I could not deny it) when I was at my lowest point of my life. The Lord was patient and waited for the perfect time and place, touching me the exact way I needed.

If you haven't yet made that step to make Christ your lord, what's stopping you? Is there something you don't want to give up? Are you concerned about persecution? Do you just feel you don't need a lord? Do you think you're a good person and that is enough? Do you just not believe all this Jesus stuff? It sure looks like the Apostle Paul had good reason to consider all these things. But thank God, he still chose Jesus and made a big difference in the world. Why don't you choose Jesus today!

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### Scripture 1. Paul as a Pharisee

**Philippians 3: 3-7** For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—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.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

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## Scripture 2. Pharisees Loved Money

Luke 16:14-15 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight."

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### Scripture 3. Paul's Mission

**Acts 9:1-2** Meanwhile, Saul (later called Paul) was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

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## Scripture 4. Jesus Spoke of Pharisees

Matthew 23:27-28 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Matthew 23:33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

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### Scripture 5. Paul Blinded

**Acts 9:3-12** As he (Paul, aka Saul) neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

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### Scripture 6. Paul Performed Miracles

Acts 19:11-12 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.