



Summary

This powerful message takes us to one of the most dramatic conversion stories in all of Scripture: the transformation of Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road. We encounter a man so consumed with religious zeal that he became a terrorist against the early church, dragging believers from their homes and voting for their execution. Yet in Acts 9, we witness something extraordinary—Jesus doesn't destroy this wicked man but saves him. The blinding light that knocked Saul to the ground wasn't just physical; it represented the spiritual blindness of his religious pride being stripped away. For three days without sight, Saul could finally see clearly for the first time, understanding that all his righteousness was nothing before God. What emerges is a profound truth: grace cannot be earned, and no one is too far gone to be saved. Paul himself would later write that he was the 'chief of sinners,' yet he obtained mercy to become a pattern for all who would believe. This story challenges us to examine our own hearts—are we like Ananias, hesitant to extend grace to those we deem unworthy? Or do we recognize that we ourselves were equally undeserving when Christ saved us? The scales that fell from Saul's eyes remind us of our own conversion experience, when we moved from spiritual blindness to sight, from death to life.

calvary
chapel
gulf coast



Points

Title: The Grace That Transforms: From Persecutor to Apostle

Sermon Summary:

This sermon examines the dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, emphasizing that salvation comes entirely by God's grace, not by works or religious observance. The pastor explores how Saul, one of the most violent persecutors of Christians, became Paul the Apostle through an encounter with the risen Christ. The message underscores that no one is too wicked to be saved and that believers must extend the same undeserved grace they received to others. Using Saul's conversion as the ultimate example, the sermon challenges the congregation to examine whether they truly understand grace or have slipped into thinking their religiosity makes them deserving of God's favor. The role of Ananias, who overcame fear to welcome his former enemy into the faith, serves as a model for gracefully receiving and giving grace within the body of Christ.

Key Points:

- Saul of Tarsus was actively persecuting Christians, voting for their death, and traveling to Damascus to arrest more believers when Christ intervened
- Jesus' question "Why are you persecuting me?" reveals the intimate connection between Christ and His followers—when believers are persecuted, Jesus himself is persecuted
- Saul was "kicking against the goads," fighting internally against the truth he had witnessed in Stephen's sermon and Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection
- Jesus blinded Saul physically so he could finally see spiritually, giving him three days to reflect on how Scripture pointed to Jesus as the Messiah
- No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit, revealing that Saul's conversion was genuine and immediate
- Paul later understood himself as "chief of sinners," making him the trophy example that no one has sinned beyond the reach of God's grace
- Salvation is "not of works, lest anyone should boast"—it is entirely a gift of God's grace through faith



- Ananias demonstrated remarkable grace by calling his known enemy "Brother Saul" and baptizing him in the Holy Spirit
- The church must be as graceful as Jesus is, extending grace especially to those we might consider undeserving
- We must avoid becoming like the older brother in the Prodigal Son parable, resentful when grace is extended to others
- If the church errs, it should err on the side of grace rather than law

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 9:1-19 (Primary focus: Saul's conversion on the Damascus Road)
- Acts 22:3-5 (Paul's testimony about his persecution of Christians)
- Acts 26:9-11 (Paul's reflection on his violent past)
- Matthew 25:31-46 (Judgment of nations; what is done to believers is done to Christ)
- Romans 3:10, 21-23 (None are righteous; righteousness comes through faith in Christ)
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 (New creation in Christ; old things passed away)
- Ephesians 2:8-9 (Salvation by grace through faith, not of works)
- 1 Timothy 1:12-17 (Paul as chief of sinners saved by grace)
- 1 Corinthians 12:3 (No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit)
- John 9:39-41 (Jesus came so those who don't see may see, and those who see may be made blind)
- Genesis 32:24-32 (Jacob wrestling with God and receiving a new name)

Stories:

- The conversion of Saul on the Damascus Road, including his blinding by heavenly light and encounter with the risen Christ
- Ananias receiving a vision to go to Saul, overcoming his fear to welcome his former persecutor as "Brother Saul"



- Jacob wrestling with the pre-incarnate Christ and receiving both a blessing and a limp as a reminder of his encounter
- Stephen's martyrdom and sermon (referenced as influencing Saul's internal struggle)
- The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), particularly the older brother's resentful response to the father's grace
- The pastor's personal testimony of conversion at age 38, describing it as scales falling from his eyes

calvary
chapel
gulf coast



Scripture References from the Sermon

Explicitly Referenced and Read:

1. **Acts 9:1-2** - Saul breathing threats and murder against disciples
2. **Acts 22:3-5** - Paul's testimony about persecuting the Way
3. **Acts 26:9-11** - Paul's account of persecuting Christians
4. **Acts 9:3-5** - Saul's conversion on the Damascus road
5. **Matthew 25:31-46** - Judgment of the nations (sheep and goats)
6. **Acts 22:6** - The light at noonday
7. **Acts 22:9** - Those with Saul heard but didn't understand
8. **Genesis 32:24-32** - Jacob wrestling with God at Peniel
9. **1 Corinthians 12:3** - No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit
10. **Acts 9:6-9** - Saul blinded and led to Damascus
11. **Romans 3:10** - There is none righteous, no not one
12. **Romans 3:21-24** - Righteousness of God through faith in Christ
13. **2 Corinthians 5:17** - If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation
14. **Acts 9:10-16** - Ananias's vision and instructions
15. **Ephesians 2:8-9** - Saved by grace through faith, not of works
16. **1 Timothy 1:12-17** - Paul as chief of sinners
17. **John 9:39-41** - Jesus on spiritual blindness
18. **Acts 9:17-19** - Ananias baptizes Saul
19. **Luke 15** - Parable of the Prodigal Son (alluded to)

Additional References Mentioned:



- 20. **Acts 7** - Stephen's sermon (referenced but not read)
- 21. **Acts 13** - Christians first called by that name at Antioch (mentioned)
- 22. **Acts 2, 4, 8** - Previous instances of Holy Spirit baptism (referenced)

Relevant Verses for Themes Discussed (Not Explicitly Mentioned):

- 23. **Romans 5:8** - God demonstrates His love while we were still sinners
- 24. **1 Timothy 1:15** - Christ came to save sinners
- 25. **Galatians 2:16** - Justified by faith, not by works of the law
- 26. **Titus 3:5** - Not by works of righteousness which we have done
- 27. **Romans 9:15-16** - God's mercy and compassion
- 28. **Philippians 3:4-9** - Paul's former confidence in the flesh
- 29. **Acts 7:58-60** - Stephen's martyrdom with Saul present
- 30. **Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28** - Jesus on anger and lust (referenced in discussion)



Quotes

When the body of Christ is persecuted, Jesus is persecuted.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.

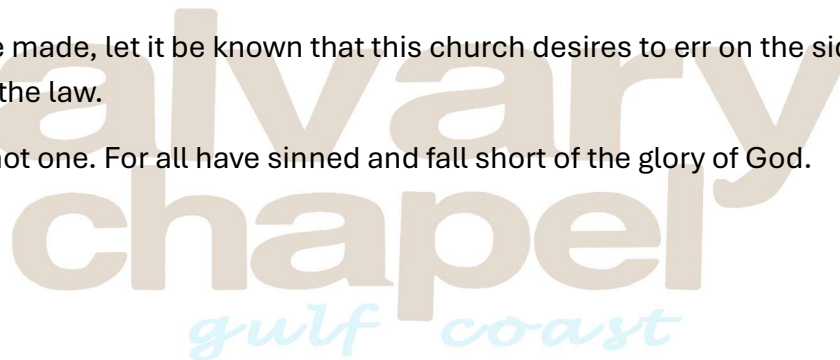
We must be careful determining who is worthy of receiving God's grace. And we must be as willing to extend the grace of God as Jesus is.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

In order for grace to be grace, it must be gracefully received and gracefully given. Otherwise, the world remains blind to it.

If there is a mistake to be made, let it be known that this church desires to err on the side of grace and never on the side of the law.

No one is righteous, no not one. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.





Discussion Questions

How does the close association between Jesus and His followers, demonstrated when He asked Saul 'why are you persecuting me,' challenge or deepen your understanding of what it means to be part of the body of Christ?

In what ways might we be 'kicking against the goads' in our own spiritual lives, resisting what God is trying to reveal to us despite mounting evidence or conviction?

Ananias had to extend grace to his known enemy who threatened his life. Who in your life might God be calling you to extend undeserved grace toward, and what makes that difficult?

Paul wrote that 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away.' Why do you think believers struggle to accept this truth about their past being erased, and how does this affect their spiritual growth?

The sermon emphasizes that we must be careful in determining who is worthy of receiving God's grace. How might we unknowingly act like the older brother in the prodigal son parable when grace is extended to others?

Saul was blinded physically so he could truly see spiritually. What forms of spiritual blindness might religious activity or self-righteousness create in our own lives?

How does understanding that Paul considered himself the 'chief of sinners' change your perspective on your own worthiness or unworthiness before God?

The sermon states that grace must be both gracefully received and gracefully given, or the world remains blind to it. Where have you seen grace fail to transform because it was given grudgingly or received with entitlement?

What does it reveal about God's character that He chose to save and use the very person who was murdering His followers, rather than simply destroying him?

If we truly believed that salvation is by grace alone and not of works, how would our attitudes toward ourselves and others in the church community fundamentally change?



Small Group Guide: The Grace That Transforms

Acts 9:1-19 - The Conversion of Saul

Opening Prayer

Begin by asking God to open hearts to understand His grace more deeply and to help the group be as graceful to others as Jesus is to us.

Ice Breaker Question

Share briefly: What did you think Christians were like before you became a believer? How has your perspective changed?

Sermon Summary

This week we studied the dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road. Saul was a religious terrorist—breathing threats and murder against followers of Jesus—yet Jesus chose to save him rather than destroy him. Through Saul's story, we learn that no one is beyond God's grace, and that we must be as willing to extend grace as Jesus is.

Key Scripture Passages

- **Acts 9:1-6** - Saul's encounter with Jesus
 - **Romans 3:10, 21-24** - No one is righteous; salvation is by grace
 - **Ephesians 2:8-9** - Saved by grace through faith, not works
 - **1 Timothy 1:12-17** - Paul as the "chief of sinners"
-

Discussion Questions



Understanding the Text

1. **What was Saul's state of mind before his conversion?** How does Acts 22:3-5 and Acts 26:9-11 help us understand his mindset?
2. **Why did Jesus ask Saul, "Why are you persecuting me?" (v. 4)** What does this reveal about Jesus' relationship with His followers?
3. **What does it mean that Saul was "kicking against the goads" (v. 5)?** What had been pricking Saul's conscience?

Applying Grace

4. **The pastor said, "We must be careful determining who is worthy of receiving God's grace."** When have you struggled to believe someone deserves God's grace? How does Saul's story challenge that thinking?
5. **Ananias had every reason to fear Saul, yet he called him "Brother Saul" (v. 17).** What does this teach us about welcoming new believers or those with difficult pasts?
6. **Read the parable of the prodigal son's older brother (Luke 15:25-32).** In what ways do we sometimes act like the older brother when grace is extended to "undeserving" people?

Personal Reflection

7. **Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."** What does this tell us about our own conversion experience?
8. **The pastor emphasized that "old things have passed away" (2 Corinthians 5:17) when we come to Christ.** Why do so many believers struggle to believe their past is truly forgiven? How can we help each other embrace this truth?
9. **Paul considered himself "chief of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15).** Why is it important to maintain a humble assessment of ourselves apart from Christ's righteousness?

Key Takeaways

✓ **No one is beyond God's grace** - If Jesus saved Saul, the persecutor of Christians, He can save anyone.



- ✓ **Grace cannot be earned** - Salvation is a gift, not a reward for good behavior or religious activity.
 - ✓ **When we're saved, we become new creations** - Our past no longer defines us; all things have passed away.
 - ✓ **Grace must be gracefully received AND gracefully given** - We must extend the same undeserved grace to others that we've received.
 - ✓ **Jesus identifies with His people** - When believers are persecuted, Jesus Himself is persecuted.
-

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge

Choose one of the following to put into practice:

1. **Examine your heart:** Is there someone you've judged as "unworthy" of God's grace or undeserving of acceptance in the church? Pray for that person and ask God to give you His perspective.
2. **Practice calling people "brother" or "sister":** Like Ananias did with Saul, intentionally use familial language with fellow believers this week, especially those who are new or different from you.
3. **Share your testimony:** Paul never hid from his past but used it to demonstrate God's grace. Share with someone this week how God saved you, emphasizing what you were saved *from*, not just what you were saved *for*.
4. **Memorize Scripture:** Choose one of these verses to memorize:
 - Ephesians 2:8-9
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17
 - 1 Timothy 1:15



5. **Assess your "Damascus Road"**: Spend time this week reflecting on your own conversion experience. Journal about how clearly you now "see" compared to your spiritual blindness before Christ.
-

Prayer Prompts

Close your time together by praying for:

- **Thanksgiving** for God's undeserved grace in saving each person in the group
 - **Humility** to see ourselves as we truly are apart from Christ
 - **Courage** to extend grace to difficult people, even "enemies"
 - **Conviction** where we've been judgmental or self-righteous
 - **Unsaved friends/family** who may seem "too far gone" - remembering that no one is beyond God's reach
 - **Unity** in the church to be known for grace rather than legalism
-

Closing Thought

"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." - 1 Timothy 1:16

Paul's life stands as God's trophy example that no one has sinned beyond the reach of God's grace. If Jesus saved Paul, He can save anyone—and that should make us the most gracious people on earth.

For Next Week

Read Acts 9:20-31 in preparation for next week's study on Saul's early ministry and the church's struggle to accept him.



5-Day Devotional: The Transforming Power of Grace

Day 1: When Grace Meets the Undeserving

Reading: Acts 9:1-9

Devotional: Saul of Tarsus was breathing threats and murder against believers when Jesus confronted him with blinding light. This terrorist of the early church deserved judgment, yet received mercy. The question Jesus asked—"Why are you persecuting me?"—reveals how intimately connected Christ is with His followers. When we suffer for our faith, Jesus himself is touched. Today, consider this: if Jesus could save the chief of sinners, no one is beyond His reach. Your past wickedness, your religious pride, your secret shame—none of it disqualifies you from grace. Like Saul, you may have been kicking against the goads, resisting what your heart knows is true. The light that blinded Saul physically gave him spiritual sight. What blindness in your life needs Christ's healing touch today?

Day 2: Seeing Clearly Through Blindness

Reading: John 9:35-41; Romans 3:10-24

Devotional: For three days, Saul sat in darkness without food or drink, finally able to see clearly what his physical eyes could not show him. Sometimes God removes our distractions to help us focus on truth. In his blindness, Saul's brilliant mind could review everything he knew about Scripture—and suddenly it all pointed to Jesus. "There is none righteous, no not one," Paul would later write. Self-righteousness had blinded him more completely than any physical darkness. The religiosity that once fueled his rage now crumbled before the reality of grace. Are you blind to your own need? Do you think yourself "pretty good" compared to others? True spiritual sight begins when we see ourselves as we truly are—desperately in need of a Savior. What "scales" need to fall from your eyes today?

Day 3: The Challenge of Extending Grace

Reading: Acts 9:10-19; Matthew 25:31-46

Devotional: Ananias faced an impossible command: welcome your enemy into the family. The man who came to arrest you is now your brother. This humble disciple, whose name means "God is gracious," had to embody that very grace. Notice his first word to Saul: "Brother." Not "murderer," not "terrorist," but brother. Grace must be gracefully given, or the world remains blind to it. How often do we withhold grace from those we deem unworthy? We become like the older



brother in the prodigal son story, resentful that mercy is shown to the undeserving. But here's the truth: we're all undeserving. Every act of kindness toward another believer—even our enemy—is an act toward Christ himself. Who in your life needs you to call them "brother" or "sister" today? What grace are you withholding?

Day 4: A New Creation in Christ

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Ephesians 2:1-10

Devotional: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." Paul never hid from his vile past, but he also never let it define his future. This is one of the least believed verses among Christians—we constantly drag our past into our present, letting shame and regret poison our joy. But salvation means the old you died. That person who sinned so grievously? Dead. Buried. Gone. You are born from above, a completely new creation. Your past has no relevance except to magnify the grace that saved you. Paul became Christ's "trophy example"—proof that no one has sinned beyond redemption. Stop living as though your past still has power over you. You've been saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast. What part of your past are you still carrying that God has already forgotten?

Day 5: Chosen to Suffer for His Name

Reading: Acts 9:15-19; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Philippians 3:7-11

Devotional: Jesus told Ananias that Saul was "a chosen vessel" who would bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and Israel—and that he would suffer greatly. Grace doesn't promise comfort; it promises purpose. Paul, who knew the full extent of his capacity for evil, spent the rest of his life proclaiming grace alone for salvation. He thanked Christ for counting him faithful despite being a blasphemer and persecutor. "This is a faithful saying," he wrote, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Your salvation isn't just for you—it's a pattern for others who will come after you. Your story of grace becomes someone else's hope. The very intensity of Paul's former hatred became the measure of grace's power. Whatever you've done, you haven't out-sinned Paul. And whatever lies ahead, suffering for Christ's name is an honor, not a burden. How will your story of grace give hope to others today?

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." - Ephesians 2:8-9