

Paul's example of what it is to be a Christian

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[0 : 00] Now the portion of divine truth, this is on my mind to speak from, you will find in the chapter that we read together, that is the second of Corinthians chapter 10, and I will ask you to look at the last two verses, 17 and 18.

But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord, for not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

I trust that most of us, I would all of us, has such a knowledge of what the Bible says, especially this morning concentrating our minds upon the Apostle Paul who wrote these words under the pen appointed by the Holy Spirit, that we have a sufficient knowledge of his background to be able to appreciate the wonder of his confession in the spirit of the text that we are later on to examine perhaps a little more thoroughly.

Now, you know, we're born into the world, and we're born into the world with an inclination so natural and so universal that we want to be something.

We want to be something. And there is, in young children, a fruit that I'm referring to, that a proud little man, proud little girl, isn't she?

[2 : 09] There she is, preening herself in her new crop. She looks, thinks she looks lovely, and she's very proud of herself, isn't she? And then we have that boy who seems to rise in his spirit to a sense of manhood, and he's doing something that's beyond his power, but he's trying to show that he is capable of certain attainments which are associated to being, as it were of the male category as opposed to the weaker vessels of the female.

There's pride. Pride. And it surfaces. And yes, parents only know too well the true diagnosis of the complaint, and they know much to their humiliation that that complaint was passed down from parents to children, that our children inherited from us a nature which is fallen, a nature which is not centered in the glory of God, and those things that are asked for the advancement of God's cause and interest in the earth.

And my friends, what an enemy is pride. The pride of nature. It's an enemy. It follows us.

It follows us up through the years. We get very elated when we're somewhat commended for our attainments, or we may be blessed in certain ways when we come into our school life.

We are not the bottom of the class. We have a certain ability in certain subjects that seems to identify us as specialty in certain ways.

[4 : 33] Some are fond of maths, and others can write a good story, and their ability to communicate their thoughts to pen and paper brings them to an exalted position, as it were.

Well, that's a good essay you've written. That's worth pursuing. I remember in my own case, we were asked in class to do a report on an airplane crash somewhere near where we lived.

We applied our minds to just, it was all imagination, to such a thing happening in our close, reasonably close proximity, and we had to write a newspaper report.

That's what it was, the challenge. Well, the whole class, as it were, submitted their results to the teacher, and the teacher commended certain of the class.

That it was excellent. You know, you should eventually be a newspaper reporter at this age, being able to describe all the detail in its interest in that particular imaginative, detailed experience.

[6 : 04] And, look, you know, it's not the child at the bottom of the class, really, that evidence is the fruit of a fallen nature.

There's a sense of shame and bitterness, perhaps, because of a comparative weakness. But it's those that, you know, they're good, they're unusual, they're talented.

God has given them certain gifts, and those certain gifts are finding expressions in natural ways in their school life. And eventually, of course, they come, years ago, it was to 11 years of age, and they went in for examinations, and they changed schools.

And eventually, perhaps, if they were especially good in our days, they went to the grammar school. And that was about as far as they could get until they were somewhat 16 years of age, when they had to launch out into higher education or into business commitment in the world.

But following us along, my dear friends, following us along the avenue of opportunity and God's gifts that were presented to us by the providential direction of heaven, we weren't very ready to take second place, were we?

[7 : 41] We wanted to be thought well of. We wanted to be commended. We wanted things to, as it were, evidence themselves that we were so, only too glad to go home at the end of the day and tell mum and dad how well we'd been commended by the master or mistress that was responsible for teaching us.

Pride. Pride. Pride. Wretched pride. For not he that commendeth himself is approved.

Oh no. Oh no. Let me put this to you. Some things that naturally are most desirable and by the help of God, and I underscore that, the help of God, natural abilities developed and took us quite a way up the ladder.

Quite a way up the ladder. And it may be, I never was anywhere near the opportunity and ability, but we heard that so-and-so was going to university, higher education, and sometimes it really was a most impressive thing if they had had an entrance to Cambridge, Oxford, London, Edinburgh, one of the leading centres of education in our country.

But, you know, attainment, natural attainment, unsanctified, centres around self-condemnation.

[9 : 48] All with, you know, we're getting on well. The prospect for the future is grand. It's all working out. And obviously, I'm better placed in certain areas that have promise of a marvellous future.

Don't you remember some of your dreams when you were young that, well, some of the foremost places in your opportunities were waiting for you to qualify and take the responsibilities and the professions of one sort and another.

But, the text says, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. Where did you get your gifts from?

Who made you as you are? who gave you an advantage over other people of the same age? Who, as it were, put you in the avenue of success?

That you were quite a capable person and perhaps you were made in the environment of the school you were educated in.

[11 : 14] a house captain and there were four house captains in the class and you were one of the four and you had special duties to discharge when the master was not available to lead the whole class in the particular instruction and you went on and you went on and you went on from whence did you gain your success?

Who gave you the gifts? Now let's come to the apostle Paul he sat at the feet of Gamaliel he had the highest education that was available in Jerusalem at that particular period who gave him so to speak the talents that enabled him to go step by step by step up the ladder of success and as he was of a religious turn of mind and it may be that his parentage was of such a direction that he became a Pharisee of the Pharisees the highest element as it were of religious prosperity in the nation he became one of the topmost people oh what a wonderful gifted man was the apostle

Paul naturally a tremendous successful rise in the world by various supportive providences of God that took him down that path and granted him success after success so he was certainly a figure notorious a man to be respected and whose talents were valuable if exercised in your personal interests this is the man that was the Lord ordained ultimately I should say but he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord naturally speaking we are what the

Lord has made us to be and not all generals in an army there has to be some foot soldiers too we can't all rise to the managerial minority that run the factory or the firm oh no no no somebody's got to do the labouring jobs the menial tasks but in the ordering of God's providence in society generally there is a provision made generation by generation so that the various professions are peopled with talented people who have come up through and they've shown they have some special gifts it may be of law it may be of music it may be a number too many for me to possibly suggest to your mind but you know what I'm trying to say and here the apostle

Paul is as it were at the pinnacle of success while a comparatively young person and what a future prospect must have stood before him as he looked ahead but what was all this doing what was all this God given success producing a proud Pharisee a proud Pharisee success unsanctified excites that wretched abominable experience of pride and God it's in the 16th of Proverbs God abominates pride because it robs him of the glory due to his name it as it were takes from the arena of life that which is only as it is because

[16 : 11] God is a God of providence God gives talents God exercises opportunities God brings to the surface as it were certain stratas of society that we all have to respect because they're people away above us in human talents and abilities my friend are you thinking upon yourself with that measure of pride that as it were in no way leads you to appreciate that you are what you are by the goodness of God by the goodness of God not only did you give you the ability but he ordered your life in such a way that you had the opportunity and those things materialized under the ordering of God that you are where you are as you are and appreciate it there's a great difference between glorying and commending yourself and the appreciation of others that by your talents by your gifts you're able to solve some of their problems and you're able to help them on the way when they come into certain difficulties that they're not sufficient to unravel but you've got the superior knowledge and you can tell them the way through and the way that will be the least trouble to them in a natural development of life

I hope the apostle Paul is such a wonderful illustration of natural success sanctified he came to a point and he was so zealous in the course of the pharisaic religion that he went about persecuting the church he went about hailing men and women to prison who were Christians they were people that were giving glory to God they were people that were humbly acknowledging that they were as they were where they were by the ordering of a sovereign providence and that God and alone is worthy of the glory man's a thief if he starts thinking it's me that need the commendation and the praise will a man rob

God oh my friend if there's an inclination within you to as it were attract attention to your capabilities and prosperity I say oh seek grace seek grace to take the lowest place and we have in the I think it's the 12th chapter of this very letter that he wrote to the Corinthians and at verse 11 he concludes his assessment of the situation and he says though I be nothing though I be nothing you'd say well look at look at the position that he occupied look at the recognition that was given to him and the power that was in his hand that would tail men and women to prison and to death guilty guilty guilty of terrible persecution of the best element in the whole kingdom the people of God oh the devil turns the world upside down how he causes poor people who pray for their country who seek as it were its welfare seek that the principles of godliness shall prevail and man would love his neighbor as he loves himself and all those principles of God and godliness that are sent to us given to us to regulate our approach our attitude to things well now

God determined that the apostle Paul should be a preeminent servant of his kingdom he's off down to Damascus because he hears that there's an element of Christianity in that foreign city and he's going to do there what he's been commended by the blind Jews at Jerusalem for doing persecuting the people of God and my friends I'm going to say this this morning the element of that persecution is present in our society today Christianity is not the prevailing commending principle in our society there's progressively strong element of hating

Christianity hating those people that follow this old fashioned religious outlook I tremble sometimes because the devil's the master of anti-Christian outlook and the devil he doesn't rest he goes on from strength to strength as God permits him so to do to persecute the church to bring the freedoms that are so priceless to us in our worship and in the manner of life we live according to the teaching of God's word and the principles of godliness which we so value and covet because we know to live subject to God is peace it's suitable not only in the worship of God it's so suitable to the agreement the peace of society he is our peace it's said of Jesus

[23 : 29] Christ and he is if we all lived as disciples of Jesus Christ in the spirit of Jesus Christ there'd be peace on earth it would be heaven below all the contention that exists in the world are the seeds of bitterness sown by Satan he's our enemy he's our enemy he's the enemy of God he's the enemy of the godly and he's powerful and he doesn't rest if he doesn't succeed look he seems to have succeeded in the world to enslave a great part of the world to false religion to various pursuits of religiosity in the most God dishonoring and unprofitable pursuit for now the apostle

Paul he was off to Damascus and God didn't allow him to get there one of the wonders one of the wonders of God's grace to that man was he stopped him in the way oh has the Lord stopped you in the way can't you now do things don't you want to do things in the future that you have done in the past you look back as he looked back upon his history oh he was so ashamed he was so ashamed he couldn't take any glory to himself he said though I be nothing I'm less than the least of all saints and to me this grace is given that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ he that was my enemy and I fought against him with every power in my being but he's the only one now that can do me any good

I've got into such a condition and position that no human agency is capable of touching the case it's Jesus only he's the savior of sinners I'm the chief of sinners and my hope of salvation is absolutely dependent upon his love his grace and his mercy exemplified by leaving the father in heaven and coming down to this world and taking a nature like unto our nature unfallen pure sinless but nevertheless living with as it were those natural reactions sin accepted oh let me emphasize that the purity the righteousness of Christ is such an essential part of our salvation that never never would we suggest that anything sinful fell from his lips or was acted by his anything that he ever did toward any person and his whole burden was the glory of his father as he fulfilled the work that his father gave him to do and he fulfilled it to perfection it was as pure he was as pure when he died as when he was formed in the womb of the virgin

Mary he was he is the sinless one but we need such and one to save us we need such and one to save and he's the only one and Paul was brought down in blindness and darkness and desperation what could he do to be saved there's one named Ananias he's the man that I've ordained to come to you with the solution to your problem Paul had never had a bigger problem he'd never been confronted with anything worse the displeasure of God as he persecuted those who trusted their salvation in his son what do you think of the gospel what do you think of the gospel isn't it wonderful that God against whom we have sinned at the greatest cost he's ever expended in any direction at all he exercised in sending

Jesus Christ into the world as the saviour of sinners when Christ left heaven and came to earth and he lived out his life and he died on the cross and was buried and he rose again the third day and he went back to heaven one of those that lay on his heart to intercede for Saul of Tarsus Paul the apostle it's hard for thee to kick against the freaks you're fighting against the king of kings and lord of lords you can't win the battle nobody ever has it's an utter impossibility for any person to fight against god and win I'm a witness of that ever a new weakness in my life when the lord stopped me but my friends not he that commendeth himself oh the awfulness of being stopped and shown just what we are and where we are as

[30 : 08] Saul Tarsus was on the Damascus road the lord just shone with the light of heaven upon him the light that exceeded the light of the sun nothing could be hidden nothing could be as it were to keep the power of the light from him oh I remember my own experience I went under the clothes I was on my bed when the lord came and I went under the clothes I wanted to get somewhere out of sight and I couldn't the light under the clothes was as bright as the light in the room I couldn't find a refuge couldn't find the covering couldn't find a way to escape the glory of the lord and he cut me I thought I'm going to hell I'm going to hell I'm going to hell and I kept saying and I cried lord have mercy on me have mercy on me and the lord came my grace is sufficient for me my strength is made perfect in weakness total weakness

I can do nothing to save myself there's no human agency that can do anything to save me Jesus Christ is the only one I was a Christian from that time I'm still a Christian by the grace of God and I'm here to commend the truth to you because there's no other way for you to be saved from your sins but Jesus Christ he says the truth so simply so comprehensively he says I am the way the truth and the life no man cometh unto the father but by me if you really believe that from your heart you're a Christian you're a Christian if you're shut into Christ no help himself I find though I've sought it well the native treasure of my mind is sin and death and hell oh the apostle Paul had got nothing to boast of nothing to please to commend himself he was utterly destitute of any ground upon which to see his future in anything but eternal world but my friends what a wonderful thing it is when God in the fullness of his grace sends his holy spirit to you and shows you his way of saving oh not not because you are who you are and blessed with all sorts of talents and been so successful through school and education and you've got to university and you've passed certain exams and you're respected in your certain profession you've got a name now that's probably internationally recognized that poor man in the United

States who's recently climbed to the excellent position of the chief man on earth if I may talk of the new president of America if he dies out of Christ if he goes down the road of the Muslims and he doesn't find Jesus Christ before he dies you go to hell I don't glory in that I'd rather pray that his eyes will be opened as the eyes of Paul were opened and he will see that God's way of saving is to the glory of God from first to last not he that commended himself is approved oh no no no no no Paul couldn't take the glory to himself and say oh I'm a leading Christian and I should be a leading

Christian by my pen as well as by my preaching and no though I be nothing unto me who am the least of all saints he couldn't get low enough he couldn't get as it were the truth of his absolute unworthiness over more clearly that nobody would think of him with any particular personal glory but they would glory in the Lord that had saved him the Lord that had met with him the Lord that convicted him of his awful manner of life in persecuting the Christians in Jerusalem and going on to do the same at Damascus my friends he would say as in Romans seven oh wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from the body of this death I thank God through

Jesus Christ my Lord he commended me gloried in the Lord and in the Lord only and you and I must be brought there you must be brought there you'll never go to heaven thinking of yourself as a noble contributor to your own salvation oh no not unto us oh Lord not unto us but unto thy name be the glory but he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord oh you come to chapel you read your Bible you say your prayers you don't swear you don't like to tell a lie you're very honest in your dealings perhaps you're despised by some with whom you are employed or with whom you mix at school and that sort of thing and they think you're a strange person because you won't do this and you won't do that and on the positive side you do this and you do that you come to chapel on a

[37 : 02] Sunday you're pleased to attend the Sunday school and listen to what the Sunday school teacher has to say your life shows that you're seeking Jesus Christ you read the Bible there's a lot in the Bible that you can't understand but you bless God if somebody's able to make an explanation that you can understand you can get the feel of it that brings you to this point if my poor soul be saved tis Christ must be the way let me quote another hymn nothing in my hand I bring simply to thy cross I cling the cross was where the precious blood of Christ was poured out remember the Bible says this it's a revelation of God's mind without the shedding of blood is no remission of sins well you say well there was an awful lot of blood poured out when the

Jews were sacrificing their lambs and their bullocks and so forth on the altars in the Old Testament rituals that blood was in itself of no value not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or take away the state there's only one answer Jesus paid the price he poured out his precious blood to atone for the sins of his people these are they which came out of great tribulation they knew what soul trouble was they knew what sin what a plague sin is and how so often they've gone wrong and they've come with guilt on their conscience wondering if

God will have any more to do with them because they're so wretched in themselves but nevertheless the precious blood of Jesus Christ takes away all sin it makes the slate perfectly clean the sins of the Lord's people were laid upon Jesus the key the secret of his sufferings he never suffered anything on earth unassociated with his work to salvation of his people his burden with a single eye and humble spirit was the glory of his father I have glorified thee on the earth I've finished the work which thou gavest me to do redemption salvation salvation no longer under the law to be sent away from

God but brought to God washed in his blood made pure clothed in his righteousness as if you would live the spotless sinless life that he lived by imputation that righteousness is given to you your sins were given to him and that was the key of all the sufferings of Christ as he suffered the penalty of a broken law and shed his heart's blood on the tree of Galvary remember he that cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree he bore the curse for us he took our sins to himself he paid the price he opened the door of paradise for those that are brought by the Holy Spirit leading and teaching to put their trust in nothing less but nothing else than the work of the

Saviour in their behalf oh my friends I close this morning oh I do wish that the Lord would bless his word make you realise that to be a Christian is the greatest asset that any person can be possessed of you say well there's a man in America and he talks he's the head of Microsoft and he's a multi millionaire and he doesn't know what to do with the multiplied riches of which he is possessed he's handing it out by thousands of millions I was going to say when he comes to die he'll be among the poorest of people if he's not a Christian but if he is a Christian he'll be among the richest of the people then I put before you and as I close this morning riches and poverty it's not the rich of this world it's the poor of this world rich in faith the Lord gives them that simple trust in their hearts to cast their sin sick souls upon the salvation of God in Christ

[43 : 12] Jesus that hung and died upon the cross of Calvary paid the penalty of sin went into death itself on the third day as the King and Lord of all he rises triumphant he's waiting in heaven until every soul that trusts in him and casts their sin sick souls upon his finished world is gathered to him there'll be a number which no man can number of every nation kindred and tongue but let me say there won't be an absentee all that the father giveth me shall come to me and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out lay hold of that take that to the throne of grace and plead it before him tell him what a sinner you are and how great is the promise of salvation in and through him and see what wonders

God can do he's glorified in the hearts of his people with higher praises than even the unfallen angels and archangels that are with him in glory I hope you're able to follow me