

1 Timothy 1 12-20 Psalm 32

**If you're a happy forgiven sinner and you know it clap your hands.**

Tom Phillips died this past January 9<sup>th</sup>. Most likely you don't know him, even though he served as president and chairman of Raytheon Corporation from 1964-1991, which made him one of the more powerful and influential persons of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But you do know of one person's life that Tom Phillips had dramatic impact upon. That person was the lawyer Chuck Colson, Richard Nixon's primary "hatchet man," and the first member of the Nixon administration to be incarcerated for Watergate-related charges. (*Nixon resigned from the Presidency in 1974 rather than face impeachment and removal from office*).

As the story is told, in 1973 knowing that he was going to be brought up on criminal charges, Colson visited his friend Philips seeking advice on what to do next (powerful friends, legal maneuvers that might get him out of this mess). What Colson didn't know was that as a result of a recent Billy Graham crusade Philips had become a dedicated Christian (which he stayed the rest of his life). Philip's point blank advice to Chuck Colson was that he needed repent of his sins and accept Jesus Christ as his savior. Phillips then shared some excerpts from CS Lewis' Mere Christianity and gave Chuck a copy of the book to read. Colson replied that he would have to think about it. But after returning to his car, he sat there for thirty minutes unable to drive as he wept uncontrollably and gave his heart to Christ.

Many prominent newspapers belittled Colson's "religious conversion" as an effort to receive a lighter sentence. But his conversion and turnaround were as genuine and dramatic as that of the apostle Paul. Colson actually worked with the prosecution to come up with a charge to which he could honestly plead guilty. At his sentencing, Colson was subsequently barred from legal practice and given 1-3 year prison term.

Emerging from prison, Colson wrote the book Born Again, and founded both Prison Fellowship and Prison Fellowship International which have had a dramatic impact, leading thousands of inmates to faith Christ and then discipling them through their prison terms.

Then, in the 19 years remaining before his death in 2012, not because of his former political activities but because his Christian witness, Colson received 15 honorary doctorates and was awarded the million dollar Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, given to one person who "*has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension.*" He was also awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by another dramatically changed born-again Christian: President George W. Bush.

Chuck Colson the Christian was truly an humble man, who remembered what it meant to be a forgiven sinner , and who had dedicated the rest of his life thereafter to sharing the message of God’s love and forgiveness with all who would listen.

**What about you, do you remember?**

**Have you lately thought about what it means for you to be a loved and forgiven sinner?**

If not, today you should ... it might just as dramatically change and fill up the rest of your life with joy and new found purpose: hence this title, *If you’re a forgiven sinner and you know it CLAP YOUR HANDS !!*

There have been many such People like Chuck Colson whose life was dramatically altered by their equally dramatic coming to faith in Christ: Bob Dylan, George Bush, Jane Fonda, George Foreman, Jeff Gordon, Mark Wahlberg, Bubba Watson, and of course the Apostle Paul. In a way I think that gives them the advantage over those of us who “grew up Christian,” because they remember where they were formerly headed and who they have now dramatically differently become as a Christian.

Realizing who we have become as a Christian in contrast to who we had been (or might have been) is what Paul is trying to help Timothy remember. Having grown up “Christian,” Timothy had little experience with and was thus becoming discouraged in his attempts to minister among those people whom Paul described *as lawless and disobedient, godless and sinful, unholy and profane (vs.8)*, so Paul reminds Timothy the dramatic difference Christ had made in his own conversion.

I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man of violence... The foremost of sinners (vs. 13,15)
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Here is how Paul described his former life from his current Christian perspective

This is a dramatically different self-assessment from that which was held by Saul of Tarsus. Describing his former self-opinion, Paul now writes: *If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.* (Philippians 3:4-6)

What could make a man who had at one time considered himself “with regard to the law – blameless” now call himself the “foremost of sinners”?

Perhaps it was Paul's realization that the worst kind of sinner is not the poor, down-on-his-luck, bum who knows of no other life, but rather that person who thinks that they have earned their holiness and deserve their self-purported relationship with God; whose reputation and public display of religiosity, either excuses or blinds them to their own sins that they continue to commit.

The worst of all sinners is that person who thinks of himself as spiritual, perhaps even as a teacher of religion, while failing to see his/her on sinfulness.

Jesus once called such people *blind guides leading the blind ... both right into a [spiritual] pit* (Matthew 15:14, 23:12-22). These are the kind of people that Timothy was attempting to straighten out; such as *Hymenaeus and Alexander*, who not understanding what they are teaching had *deviated from the Gospel* and were thus making a shipwreck of both their faith and others.

So let's look at how Paul's conversion changed his attitude about himself and God. then we will take some time to remember our own conversion experience and play the "what if" game.... What if I had never become a Christian?

Before he met Jesus, Saul had thought that it was his god-given mission to hunt down and persecute Christians; a mission he carried out with angry, hateful zeal! So it took Jesus literally knocking him off his horse and blinding Saul before he was able to see himself as a sinner in need of God's forgiveness. For three days Saul sat in the dark and thought through his life. When God then sent Ananias, to assure him of God's forgiveness, something like scales fell from his eyes. Perhaps for the first time, Saul clearly saw his own sinful life and need for Christ's love and forgiveness. Even before breaking his fast, Saul immediately received baptism and then went on to become such a powerful witness for Christ that now the Jews began trying to kill him (Acts 9:20). Paul describes his own conversion this way...

But I received mercy because  
I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,  
and the grace of our Lord **overflowed** for me  
**with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.**  
1 Timothy 1:13-14

Later, when Paul wrote to the Roman Church, I am sure he was thinking of himself as he penned these words.

But God proves his love for us  
in that while we still were sinners  
Christ died for us.  
Romans 5.8:

Paul described his former self as “*the foremost of sinners.*” Because he was that type of religious person who was so confident in his own self-achieved holiness that he was blinded to the fact that he was fighting against and himself in desperate need of forgiveness from the same God that he claimed to be serving.

After his conversion, Paul then became his own prime example of how faith in Christ could dramatically change one’s life. As recorded in the book of Acts, apparently Paul would gladly tell his own story of coming to faith anytime he could (cf. Acts 22, 26). Which is a really smart idea, telling your own story -- in religious speak, we call this “giving your testimony” – is not bragging but rather is one of the most powerful ways you can share your faith with another. They can try to argue theology, but they can’t argue against, “*I once was lost, but now am found.*”

As Paul pointed out...

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**  
1 Timothy 1:15

**So what about you? What’s your story?**

**Do you remember your life before you met Jesus?**

**Or can you imagine what your life would have been like had you not met him?**

How grateful are you for the overflowing love of God given to you by the faith and love of Christ Jesus for you?

To the King of the ages,  
immortal, invisible, the only God,  
be honor and glory forever and ever.  
Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17

Let’s take some time to remember together right now.

*(Reader’s note: At this point I leave the pulpit walking down into the aisle to briefly tell my own story of being a thoughtless youth given meaning and a life direction by my faith in Christ. I will then invite members of the congregation to perhaps tell a bit of their own story, or to speculate on their life without Christ.*

*If you happen to be in the congregation this Sunday, having already read this sermon, I urge you to be prepared to say something about your faith. We desperately need to hear each other speaking of our faith.*

STUDY GUIDE TO: Lessons in Leadership #2. (1 Timothy 1 12-20 Psalm 32)

**If you're a happy forgiven sinner and you know it clap your hands.**

This was a short message focusing on Paul's remembrance of his "before" and "after" life in Christ Jesus; Before: a "violent blasphemer." After: an encouraged, strengthened apostle. His - and this sermon's - specific intention was to get Timothy (and you) to remember or imagine what your life was or would have been like had Christ not reached out to save you and then to respond with new-found love and dedication towards God our savior and Christ our hope.

1. So read Psalm 32 and in reflection upon this psalm, talk about a time in your life where you hid a sin but eventually confessed and how you felt before and then after (if you don't want to confess a specific sin, then speak in generalities).
2. Paul declared himself to be the "foremost of sinners," because his attitude of religiosity actually blinded himself to the sins he was committing, and his own need of a savior. Have you had such a time in your life?
3. Like Chuck Colson, like the Apostle Paul, abolitionist Anglican Pastor John Newton – who wrote "Amazing Grace," before his conversion was the captain of a slave trading ship. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/pastorsandpreachers/john-newton.html> But coming to faith in Christ, completely changed both his life and his values. Talk to each other about how your life has changed since you came to faith.
4. Finally At the end of his testimony, Paul breaks out in praise to God – *To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.* What needs to happen in your life to make you want to sing praises to God?
5. End your time singing Amazing Grace and in prayer thanking God your savior and Christ you hope.

AMAZING GRACE: John Newton

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see.

Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me, His Word my hope secures;  
He will my Shield and Portion be, As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess, within the veil, A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, who called me here below, Will be forever mine.

When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we'd first begun.