

The Great Stories of the Early Church
78-Paul in Roman Custody02
Memories of Sin
Acts 26:1-32

1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:

7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

- 21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.
- 22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:
- 23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.
- 24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.
- 25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.
- 26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.
- 27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.
- 28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.
- 29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.
- 30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:
- 31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.
- 32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar. KJV

Introduction:

When we left Paul in the last message from The Great Stories, he was in Roman custody at Caesarea because the Roman commander at Jerusalem had found it too dangerous to attempt to keep him there and deal with the Jews concerning him. So, he had been sent to Felix, the Roman governor of the area where he had a hearing before his accusers. Felix had deferred to render judgment but had given Paul great liberty and had called for him many times with mixed reasons.

Acts 24:22-26

- 22 And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.
- 23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.
- 24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.
- 25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.
- 26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. KJV

This process lasted over the course of two years until a replacement came for Felix, a man by the name of Portius Festus. The Jews cornered him quickly to attempt to get him to bring Paul back to Jerusalem for trial but he determined to hear the matter at Caesarea before rendering judgment.

Once again there was a hearing with the Jews making accusation and Paul defending himself. Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem for trial and Paul, being uncertain of the man and of his intentions made his famous appeal.

Acts 25:10-12

- 10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.
- 11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.
- 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go. KJV

But it so happened that Festus' superior, the ruler of the larger area, Herod Agrippa, paid a visit to his new governor while plans were being made to ship Paul out. Festus apparently wanted his ears in on the subject, so a hearing was arranged for both Festus and Agrippa to hear Paul together. It really was a serious matter since Paul was both a Jew and a Roman, being accused of sacrilege by the Jews but also holding certain rights as a Roman.

Festus explained his dilemma to Agrippa in this way.

Acts 25:24-27

- 24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.
- 25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.
- 26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.
- 27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him. KJV

Festus was clearly walking a legal and political tightrope and wanted some help. So, the hearing was convened in which Paul again told his story and explained his conversion. But I saw something in his explanation that I thought we might explore together today, a question lies hidden in his testimony that a number of people have asked me over the years. Look again at a portion of Paul's account before Agrippa and Festus.

- 9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.
- 10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.
- 11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.
- 12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,
- 13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.
- 14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.
- 15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.
- 16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;
- 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,
- 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

The question is this, “How can a person who has sinned greatly against God ever be useful in God’s service?” And a second question, “What do I do with the memories of the sins I have committed?”

Paul had committed unspeakable crimes that were direct assaults upon the Person of Jesus Christ. He had mistreated people, unjustly imprisoned them, and murdered some of them. Yet, here he is standing before a Roman authority and making a case that he should not be handed over to the Jews to be executed.

I am taking a look at this topic because many believers are tormented by the memories of things they have done and find themselves paralyzed by them or profoundly confused as to how to handle the mental record they have of their crimes against God and man.

The Reality if that all of us have done terrible things.

Maybe we haven’t had anyone beaten.... or murdered..... or maybe we haven’t stolen anything.... but on some level we have all committed crimes against God and man for which we ought to be executed in this life and cast into “outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

-----Pause-----

If you think that is not the case, I recommend that you ask God to let you see your sins as He sees them because a fundamental part of repentance is dealing honestly with sin and sins.

I often wonder if the person who does not see his sins honestly has ever truly dealt with them before God. Can such a person actually be converted, truly be a Christian?

-----Resume-----

If we are a person with **integrity of soul** we truly look at our sins as worse than the sins of others.

They pain us and grieve us.... and that grief never goes away.

Here is the problem. If we are not careful the devil will undermine our spiritual peace by accusing us in our mind, in our conscience, and he has some really good arguments.

- it really happened
- we really did it
- it was horrible
- and, so he asks and provokes us to ask, “how could any decent person have done such a thing?
- people were injured (maybe)
- and maybe those injuries continue to this day, we cannot undo what we did
- and truly, only a horrible person would have done such things

So, we ask, how could Paul, responsible for many murders and untold suffering, put all of that in a place so as to be able to serve God?

What is the difference between memory of sin and guilt?

For the unconverted there is virtually no difference.

What is the difference between guilt and the sense of guilt?

The feelings in a true believer can be almost identical.

What is guilt, really?

Most people, when they think of ‘guilt’ think of the feelings of guilt. But guilt, real guilt before God, exists as an actual record in heaven of sins we have committed for which we have not been forgiven. They are recorded in God’s Book, under our name. They have no direct connection with our sense of guilt. A person can be monstrously guilty and feel very little and a person can be absolutely forgiven and be oppressed with a sense of guilt.

Our feelings are real, for sure, but they have no direct connection with our actual guilt.

If a person is not ‘in Christ’ then every sin he/she has ever committed is recorded in heaven and the punishment for every one of them is an eternity without God in a place of indescribable torment and agony. This is the reason that God has commanded “all men everywhere to repent” because “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

But, what does a believer do about the torment of his remembered sins?

First of all, we must at all times keep a firm hold on soul integrity. The devil and our conscience are absolutely right.

- we really did it
- it really was horrible
- people were really injured
- some of them may never recover from the injuries we gave them

All of that is true and it will be eternally true. The Record cannot and will not be changed, ever.

But, at the same time, the believer must understand and firmly hold on to the Work that Jesus Christ did.

If you are in Christ, you were placed into Him by God the Father.

1 Cor 1:27-30

- 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;
- 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:
- 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.
- 30 But **of him are ye in Christ Jesus**, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: KJV

That happened at some point during Jesus' last visit to the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion.

When He took you into Himself, when the Father put you there, all of the guilt of all of your sins was transferred to Him. He not only took responsibility for your sins, He actually bore them.

1 Peter 2:24

- 24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. KJV

Paul said it this way.

2 Cor 5:21

- 21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. KJV

Every thing that He suffered from the time He left the Garden until He gave up His Spirit to the Father was a part of the suffering that was required to satisfy the Perfect Justice of God.

Isa 53:3-6

- 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- 4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him

- stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
- 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.
- 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. KJV

Now, one might ask, “what difference did all of that make?”

Isa 53:11

- 11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. KJV

Perfect Justice cannot possibly be satisfied unless an absolutely perfect and complete price is paid for all of the guilt involved in the transaction.

Now this occurred long before you were born, so your feelings about your guilt have no part of the actual process of dealing with and removing guilt at all.

This was a transaction which occurred between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and although it greatly concerns us, we really have nothing to do with it.

So, that being said, there is no way that this transaction can ever be modified or undone.

Rom 8:33-34

- 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.
- 34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. KJV

The devil certainly cannot undo it. But neither can our own feelings about our sins.

1 John 3:19-20

- 19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.
- 20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

Graciously, God grants a sense of Peace to His people when He regenerates them.

Rom 5:1

- 1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Rom 15:13

- 13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Phil 4:6-7

- 6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.
- 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts

and minds through Christ Jesus.

Col 1:18-22

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled

22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:

This Peace is an official, eternal Peace but it is a Peace of Fact, not necessarily feeling.

The challenge of the Child of God is to bring his feelings into agreement with the facts.

Sustaining this connection between feelings and fact is a challenge that is continually under assault by the devil and sometimes our own minds help him.

How does one adjust his feelings when he knows they are contrary to fact?

How did you ever convince yourself that there was no monster in the closet or under the bed?

Same principle, we meditate on what we know as fact until our feelings catch up. When we truly get a grip on reality, the feelings will (imperfectly) follow.

The mature believer ultimately comes to rest on the facts: his guilt is gone and so he lays his Sense of Guilt to rest.

Does that mean, then that he no longer feels badly about the sins he has committed? How can he? There are facts as well. The removal of our guilt and our peace of mind concerning the guilt does not re-write history.

1 Tim 1:12-15

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

15 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. KJV

Paul continued to painfully remember all of those lives that he had taken and all those people he had injured until his dying day. It was only the grace of God that sustained him.

He came to be at peace that he had received mercy and that his guilt was gone. But the memories stayed with him and pained him.

There are many ways that remembered sins can be wrongly handled.

I have seen people essentially blow them off, contending that the Work of Christ has fully taken care of them and there is no need to think of them ever again. I am always suspicious that this is an unconverted person.

There are some people who are so crippled by their sense of guilt that they are paralyzed and kept from growing spiritually. There can be no growth when the Work of Christ is effectively ignored.

There are some who are made so timid that it keeps them from undertaking any form of ministry or witness to others. “How can I talk to others when I have done such wretched things?” How could Paul, or Peter, or Thomas or any of the others who deserted Christ during His trial and suffering?

I have seen people be arrogant, bragging as it were about their sins to enhance their ‘testimony’ before others. Here, too, I always think I am dealing with a lost person.

I have seen people manipulated by those who know of their sins, having their sense of guilt used against them. Again, Paul would not allow that in his own life and neither should any of us.

But, we must honestly admit that a Christian’s emotions concerning his sins can be as complex as any of his other emotions.

He is grateful beyond description to be forgiven.

But he never truly stops grieving over them because he is constantly reminded of them.

He carries with him the awareness of what he would be apart from the Grace of God and those memories are a constant testimony of that.

From time to time grief will wash over him afresh and anew. He will spend some time reflecting on the damage he has caused and will cry out to God again for healing grace and for Peace.

That is the way it works.

There is peace and there is sorrow.

There is forgiveness but the memories remain

There is comfort in Mercy but there is an abiding need for help, for Grace to be faithful.

Rightly handling our memories.

Remember everything honestly, no excuses

Remember and often meditate on what Jesus did

Take the position, always, of humble gratitude

Serve Him out of profound Thankfulness considering always how much we owe.

There is a poem that seems to say it all.

**When this passing world is done,
When has sunk yon glaring sun,
When we stand with Christ in glory,
Looking o'er life's finished story,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.**

**When I hear the wicked call,
On the rocks and hills to fall,
When I see them start and shrink
On the fiery deluge brink,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.**

**When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see Thee as Thou art,
Love Thee with unsinning heart,
Then Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.**

**When the praise of Heav'n I hear,
Loud as thunders to the ear,
Loud as many waters' noise,
Sweet as harp's melodious voice,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.**

**Even on earth, as through a glass
Darkly, let Thy glory pass,
Make forgiveness feel so sweet,
Make Thy Spirit's help so meet,
Even on earth, Lord, make me know
Something of how much I owe.**

**Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Savior's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe.**

