

Press on to Glory

✦ **Trade rubbish for righteousness. (vv.8-12)**

✦ **Follow the upward call home. (vv.12-21)**

In the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, dear faithful stewards, managers of God's gifts:

Can you imagine spending your whole life as a violent government official with a fanatical religion to harm men, women and children? We hear from other countries and pray God it never happens here. Evil people will spend eternity blaming God as they suffer torture like they put on others in life.

Now imagine the sky fills with blinding light that drives you to your knees. Suddenly you hear the voice of God calling your name: ***“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”*** (Acts 9:4ff) Just when you thought you were doing the most good for God by getting rid of Christians, you find out you're actually fighting against God's Son. You deserve to be punished and keep praying for days. Finally a trembling disciple named Ananias is sent to baptize you and announce your new position as missionary of Christ. Your whole new life is to **Press on to Glory** and ...

✦ **Trade rubbish for righteousness. (vv.8-12)**

By the time we catch up with Saul in this text, he's called Paul and is in prison for Christ. He has literally lost everything: his high position as a Jewish rabbi, his wealth, his health. How does he feel? Totally satisfied. In plain English, Paul is saying, ***“I made the right choice.” “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”*** Previously, Paul had no use for Baptism or Lord's Supper. He was sure he was following God's Word by obeying the Ten Commandments. But suddenly Paul realized he was not even keeping the First Commandment because he was persecuting God's people. He was breaking the Second by blaspheming the Name of God's Son. He shattered the Third by preventing Christians from hearing God's Word and worshiping Jesus. He thought the ledger of his life held a surplus of righteousness by his own hard work and personal sacrifice. He was dead wrong.

Now Paul sees his old life as a Pharisee was full of holes. Instead of bleeding his own holiness, Paul discovered that God's own Son lived a holy life in his place, then bled an innocent death to wash his sins away. While Paul vehemently opposed God as his enemy, God kindly corrected and converted Paul as the best and truest Friend any of us could have. Paul goes on: ***“[I want to] and be found in [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”*** Paul wants to go into God's courtroom with Jesus as his Lawyer and Judge whose findings all amount to pure grace and blessing.

See how completely Paul has repented of his failings? How eager he is to adjust his lifestyle to God's priorities and the real treasure of God's Word? Paul wants to seize every opportunity to share the message of sins-forgiven and heaven won. Now he's pursuing God's ways with the same determined energy that previously persecuted Christians to their death, ***“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*** He doesn't know how he'll die, but he's ready.

This is why you and I need a “Fresh Look at the Ten Commandments” like this Fall in Sunday Bible Class or a less detailed study Tuesday evenings in BIC. If you find your heart is cold and you don't

really care about God as much as you should, if you're wrapped up in your own goals and missing God's, the first step is into the light of God's Law. Like all of us, you need to see how far you've fallen and failed. Then you'll really appreciate God's grace. As God convicts and comforts you with the Good News as He did for Paul, you will joyfully, eagerly **Press on to Glory** and...

✦ **Follow the upward call home. (vv.12-21)**

Salvation is a free gift and so is the hand of faith that receives it. You're either a believer or you're not. There is no middle ground where maybe you might fear, love and trust in God above all things. God turns on the lights with His holy Law then soothes your soul with the sweet announcement that your sins are all forgiven. Your guilt is taken away. Now you're ready for a whole new life. Instead of swirling downward into the sewer of selfishness and sin, you're moving onward and **upward** toward **home**. God has given you a whole new home in heaven, so life will never be the same on earth.

Look at this! God has declared us holy in His sight for Jesus' sake, so we can honestly admit our personal weaknesses like Paul: *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* Before conversion we all fight against God. But as soon as He turns us around in the love of Christ, we leave the past behind. Moving forward, we struggle against our sinful nature. Now our whole being is aimed at the goal of eternal life in heaven won and done by Jesus. We're not there yet, but knowing Jesus died for you, you're totally committed to **Follow the upward call home**.

Have you reached stage three yet? As Luther noted, first, God converts your head, second your heart, third your wallet. This is not a matter of church budgets or needs. It's above the Old Testament law of 10%. We've had a total make-over of the heart. We want to honor God as the Giver of all good. Have you learned the joy of setting aside firstfruit offerings for God? Not waiting to give God the leftovers as if your desires come first? Firstfruit offerings say to God, "Thank you for giving me all I need and more. Let me give you a grateful return of these blessings to help others learn and grow and go with the Gospel. Gracious God, I trust you to decrease my bills, stretch my dollars and increase my income as needed to fulfill my obligations. You have been so generous with me, dear God. In honor of your grace and goodness, make me as generous expressing my confident trust that you still care for me."

"All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained." Since God has declared us, "Not guilty!" for Jesus' sake, let's live up to that in our offerings.

Maturity of faith realizes how right Paul is that some will refuse to follow his example. Instead they seek only to satisfy themselves. One license plate said it all, "No Time 4U." No time for your neighbor means no time for God either. Some people spend their lives daring God to punish them. They will get their wish eternally. *"Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."* But God's love for you gave you a whole new *"citizenship...in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."* That's better than free health care! Heaven care will give you a transformed, glorified body like the one Jesus has ever since the first Easter. Rejoice in God's Great Exchange: His holiness for your sin. Wow! What a wonderful God we have! Next time your bills and taxes are hurting your wallet, take a moment to thank God for His grace. You'll be amazed how generous God truly is when your whole life is aimed **upward** toward **home**. **Press on to Glory**. Amen.