

Consider Paul's Amazing Transformation

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LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—Imagine, if you will, that you were a Polish Jew during World War II. Frequent incursions into the Warsaw Ghetto have seen your friends and family herded off and stuffed into boxcars. You have seen unprovoked beatings in the streets, and your only means of sustenance is what you can scrounge from the gutters or the black market.

Then, one day the SS guy Adolf Eichmann himself knocks on your door. But, instead of being surrounded by a detachment of Storm Troopers, he comes alone.

And, instead of beating you with a nightstick, he states that he has changed, and, not only has he changed, he now wants to become a member of your synagogue—with all that implies in Nazi-occupied territory.

I suggest that you would not just be shocked at this turn of events, you would likely wonder at his motives.

Imagine what Ananias, the servant of Jesus, must have thought when Saul of Tarsus showed up at his door, blinded by the light on the Road to Damascus, claiming that he had seen the Lord and that he was now one of them (Acts 9:1-19).

Surely Ananias can be forgiven for being doubtful and maybe a little afraid, suspecting that this sudden change of heart was merely a ruse to gather intelligence on the followers of the Way.

How could the people of God in Damascus know if Saul's conversion was real?

Some are teaching today—and some have always seemed to teach this—that the proof of God's favor is prosperity and good health. If God loves you, we're told God's blessings will rain down on you.

The same teaching implies that, if you are suffering through trials, you must have incurred God's disfavor somehow, and your suffering is proof that you are under a curse.

Paul, however, offered a rebuttal to this. The proof Paul offered was the best proof of his sincerity to both the believers in Damascus and all who would later challenge his apostleship.

Do you remember when Paul was compared to some "super-apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5, English Standard Version)?

You do realize that such was a term of sarcasm if there ever was one.

Paul cited as proof of his credentials his willingness to suffer for the sake of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:23-29 (ESV)—"Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?"

A man won't willingly put his life on the line for a racket, but he will do so if down to his bones he believes in the cause.

After Paul's startling conversion and his road reaches Damascus, the people who were once his friends in crime plotted against his life for defending the Way. In fact, he had to be spirited out of town for his own safety (Acts 9:22-25).

Paul didn't need the imprimatur of men to prove his credentials. His life story was all that was needed.