

# When Scales Fall

“Connection is the most important thing.”

Acts 9:10-19a

*Second in the series: Redemption (how Christ can change a life)*

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## Too Smart

I was with some friends discussing God and faith. Lots of interesting insights were already shared as one friend explained one of his more creative theories when Jack walked in. Jack hadn't been in the discussion until then. He was just in time to hear the idea.

You have to be careful about what you say around Jack. He was well-read and smart and very articulate. He was also pretty critical and had very little tact. So it wasn't much of a surprise when he said, "That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard;" then walked off as though he had something better to do.

What do you do with that kind of self-assuredness? Like you're dealing with someone who is so certain he or she is right that there's no discussion. You have nothing to offer them. You're expected to take in what they say because whatever your experience or insight, it's worth little in comparison. That's the attitude.

It was like another guy I once knew who had a little placard on a shelf in his office. It was set right where any guest would see it. It read,

I REFUSE TO ENGAGE IN A WAR OF WITS WITH AN UNARMED MAN.

If you are the one sitting in the seat, you get the idea that *you're* the one he means *has no wits*. Like he's always going to be right.

And being right is what it's all about.

Sometimes I say to Laura, "Being right is the meaning of life." It drives her nuts. But I'm only joking (pretty much). For some people, though, being right *is* the only thing that matters.

The first time I visited San Francisco. I was walking down a busy downtown street and could see him raised above the rest of the crowd. When I got closer I could see

that he was standing on kind of a soap box or plastic milk crate. He had a microphone wired to some speakers that were set up next to the box; and he was preaching. He was telling everyone that they needed to believe in Jesus in a certain way. And they needed to believe that the Second Coming of Christ was going to happen right away. He was saying that if they didn't believe in those things just the way he said them, then very soon they would be going to hell forever.

You could see how everyone walked faster when they passed by. Like they were embarrassed and just wanted to get away.

But he just kept preaching. And he spoke like he knew what was right. If anyone disagreed with him or understood things differently they were just wrong.

### **From Arrogance to Humility**

I tried to stop because there were some things I wanted to say; but my friend knew what I was going to do and he tugged my arm and got me to move on.

I did have something to say to him. I wanted to tell the soapbox guy that he didn't have a corner on the truth. Other people's experience and the way they understood scriptures would be important for him to hear.

And I wanted to tell Soapbox Guy that I didn't appreciate his arrogance. Some people think that all Christians are like that: preaching and not listening; thinking that they are always right. In fact, I wanted to tell him that maybe his arrogance was really keeping him from a deeper truth than the truth he thought he had.

Soapbox Guy was like Jack. Being right was everything. And just like Jack, who moved in and moved on without really belonging to us, Soapbox Guy was all alone. He just stood on his crate and preached through his microphone while everyone tried to hurry on.

I get the feeling young Saul was like that. At least, he was like Jack. Educated, top of his class: he was a zealous young rabbi who believed that he was right and that made him righteous. Later he said that he was even without sin. Pretty much: because he knew the Law for God's people and all its fine points. Knowing it meant he had the power to do it; and he did. So anyone who didn't have the means to do the Law was to be corrected or eliminated. He saw them as a corruption of the Jewish people and the reason things were not going so well for their nation at the time.

*He* was right. When the mostly unlettered Christians who had followed a discredited rabbi who had suffered the fate of the cursed started drawing attention, he knew exactly what he must do.

He was present when one of the most devout leaders of the Christians was lynched – stoned to death. He approved. After all, Stephen and the rest of his group were wrong. They had to go. And young, zealous Saul led the charge to get rid of the church.

People hurried passed Soapbox Guy. Jack threw his words like little darts and moved on. Saul did what he could to destroy. Each of these very different people had something in common: arrogance; their claim on the truth kept them apart and very much alone. Some people stand for something – Saul would have said *he* did with a passion. Truth be told, Saul was defined by what he was *against*.

So, then, what if he wasn't right? Saul was on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus. He had official papers authorizing him to have Christians arrested. And he was on his way when he was stopped dead in his tracks.

It was a bright light flashing all around and then enshrouding an image of a man Saul had never before seen. Then from the apparition came a voice he didn't recognize. It was thunderous: "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?"

For once Saul did not have an answer. For once, Saul asked a question.

He fell to the ground. Arrogance turned to humility.

"Who are you, Lord?" At least he knew that this was a God moment, and whatever it was that was confronting him was more than he had ever known before.

The voice came back, "I am Jesus." This wasn't an act of God meant to scare the wits out of Saul so that fear would convert him. It's in line with other times in ages past when prophets received their call.<sup>1</sup> "I am Jesus. Get up and go to Damascus and...

*you will be told...what you are to do.*

Saul, who had started out so full of strength and correctness, was now lifted to his feet and led into the city in weakness. He couldn't see a thing – only visions of a man named Ananias who would come for the restoration of his sight.

The end of arrogance.

Being right is *not* the meaning of life.

Sometimes, it would be good for the Jack's of the world to stop and join the group. It would have been good for Jack to just listen.

Sometimes, it would be good to get off of the soapbox. Quiet down long enough for God to get a word in edgewise.

So Saul went to the city and didn't eat a thing, he didn't even take a drink of water until Ananias came and laid his hands on Saul. The story goes that something like scales fell from his eyes; and I think about how that can be an image for someone who lets the blinders come off.

You can be so certain you are right you miss the point.

Most of all, Saul wasn't *set straight* that day: (you know, told he had been wrong, then corrected so that he would actually be right from then on). *Not corrected so much as connected.*

Because Jesus appeared to him on the road that day not on the basis of whom he's been but on whom he is to become. Jesus' plan for him was only going to become evident when Saul would start to *ask* rather than *tell*, *receive* rather than *dish out*, only when Saul would start to *listen*.

By-the-way, his conversion was not when Saul changed his name to Paul. You only see his name change when he first steps foot in the West; "Paul" is just the Western form of his Eastern name "Saul". It wasn't his name that changed. It was his heart.

Think of what he did from then on. His passion was not so much to *be right*. It was to *connect* people to Christ. He was ever just as smart as he always was, but he was humble. It was always more important to connect people to God through Jesus and connect them to each other than it was to have everything all figured out. In fact, he talked about being fools for Christ<sup>2</sup> and marveled at how God chose the uneducated and powerless of the world to know the wisdom of God.<sup>3</sup>

Saul, who sought to destroy people and drive a wedge between them and Jesus and scatter their communities, became Saul (or Paul if you'd like) who introduced people to Jesus and started churches. He brought people together and called them the Body of Christ. It was Paul who said that out of all the gifts God gives you, love is the most important.

The people of the church could hardly believe it. Then they had to run and catch up with him when they saw he was bent on offering Christ to the whole world.

Still the zealot. Only now his intellect was turned to serve rather than impose.

I believe that Christ can change a life...even Saul...even Jack...even Soapbox Guy...even the guy in his office who liked to intimidate his guests...even me.

### **Faith is Everything**

I had a professor who once said that if he were forced between having to give up his intellect or his faith, he'd give up his faith. He said faith that is not informed is nonsense.

I admired my professor. It's certain that he was both intelligent and faithful. His was a wonderful, rich spirit.

Yet, when I boil it down, if ever faced with that choice myself I'd choose differently. I'd rather be a fool for Christ.

Intelligence without faith is aloof and without consequence. And if being right gets in the way of my connection with Christ and my connection with God's children, then I'm just wrong.

Humility, not arrogance.

If you really want to know the truth...

Love is the real answer.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles," The Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol. X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 2002. pp 150-152.

<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 3:18

<sup>3</sup> I Corinthians 1:27-31