

It can be safe to say that we all either have, have had or will have our own little...

Comfort Zones

Some of us have grown up in communities where not much enlightenment existed when it came to the events that would ultimately shape our own little worlds from outside our parameters. Our personal “world views” were formed very early in life if what the Proverb writer said is true, and I’ve come to believe it is.

Pro 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

If you were really “sheltered” growing up in the early sixties like I was you didn’t have a bird’s eye view of politics and religion other than what you were led to believe about both. Your views were not your own but were formed by those you then trusted to be telling you the truth, whether parents, teachers or others. You were , at that time, innocent. Once formed, certain biases and or prejudices can become near impossible to alter, for better or worse, let alone change all together. Especially if they were taught by an authority figure.

I can remember when going to Illinois to visit my grandparents as kids. It was something we did every summer once school was out and Dad was able to take a week or so off work from the paper mill. But during the race riots in the early sixties there was news that we shouldn’t go through the Pittsburg area because of the violence there over racial tensions. What we were taught about people of different color, a.k.a. “colored people”, was not at all what I would later come to realize was based on truth. And not that any race is innocent either when it comes to bias against others.

And with biases that are bad to the point of being evil, there are also those that can be good. Such as having certain preferences for certain things like art, music, certain foods and other things. But what about, for example, having definite biases concerning religion, whether for or against? If for, is one faith any better than another? (*And this lesson will deal with the faith found in the Bible.*) Will God only judge those who don’t espouse to the Christian faith or is He okay with all religions as long as He is the focus of all devotion. Hopefully this lesson will help us step outside our “comfort zones” if we really are searching to “worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (*Jn 4:23*). Let’s look at some examples of “comfort zones” of different Biblical personalities beginning with...

Saul

Act 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any **of this way**, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. 3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? 5 And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest*: (*Emp. added*)

Mat 25:40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, ***Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.** (*Emp. added*)

So when Saul was persecuting the church he was actually persecuting Jesus.

...it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks (*Gk.2759- a point, that is, a sting or goad*). 6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

- kick against the goads- According to Thayer: *an iron goad, for urging on oxen, horses and other beasts of burden; hence the proverb, to kick against the goad, i.e. to offer vain and perilous or ruinous resistance.* Jesus was telling Paul that for him to relinquish his “comfort zone” of being a bulldog for the Jews would be, to him, like kicking against such a sharp object wearing only, what was commonly worn then, nothing more than sandals. How many of us would find it easy to kick the point of a woodstove poker in our own bare feet? Changing one’s religion, after being “trained up” in it, would be considered like that. At least it was that way for Paul according to Jesus. Especially since he surpassed all his contemporaries in the Jewish religion.

Gal 1:13 For ye have heard of my conversation (*Gk.391- behavior*) in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: 14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

And he was proud of his accomplishments.

Php 3:4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

At least until he came to understand the truth.

1Ti 1:12 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 blasphemers, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.

Paul was comfortable with what he did until he was made uncomfortable on that road to Damascus. But he wasn't the only one that Jesus made so uncomfortable.

Peter

Luk 5:1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon Him (*Jesus*) to hear the word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret, 2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing *their* nets. 3 And He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. 4 Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. 5 And Simon answering said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net. 6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. 7 And they beckoned unto *their* partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help

them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, **Depart from me; for I am a sinful man**, O Lord. (*Emp. added*)

Peter would have been used to his old lifestyle, his old comfort zone. And at that point he recognized where he stood in the presence of Jesus. But we know the rest of that story. Peter would go on to follow Jesus and experience many uncomfortable situations. Like being thrown in prison more than once for making others uncomfortable from the message he proclaimed. Which is what happened to the apostles right from the start.

Act 5:17 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, 18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. 19 But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

It was as though the angel was telling them: “Don’t get too comfortable in those cells apostles, you have a job to do.”

Act 5:21 And when they heard *that*, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. 24 Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

If the word got out that the apostles disregarded their authority, and with God’s help, what next? The apostles were gaining ground over the high priest and his cronies and they were not comfortable with it.

Act 5:25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. 26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

This time using diplomacy they entreated the apostles to accompany them back to meet with their former abductors. What an uncomfortable thought that at any time they might do something to incur the wrath of the multitude that yearned to hear what these “delinquents” had to say.

Act 5:27 And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28 Saying, Did not we strictly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. 29 Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Peter was getting comfortable telling it like it is and the council knew it. Later it would be Herod that would throw him in prison.

Herod

Act 12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church. 2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 4 And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions (*Gk.5069- squad of four Roman soldiers*) of soldiers to keep him; intending after Passover to bring him forth to the people.

One would think it would be overkill to have a poor Galilean fisherman guarded by such a strong group of sixteen battle hardened men. Even Peter must have thought that his end was near since Herod was able to get away with killing James, another prominent figure in the church. After all, not only was he being kept in prison, he was chained between sixteen soldiers **even** when he was to be asleep. How could God deliver him from such a predicament? But he would later realize that the God Who created everything from nothing was surely able to loosen the bonds that held him. All the gates of the prison were open that night and even those who implored God with “effectual fervent prayer” (*Jas 5:16*) were, along with Peter, astonished that he should be set free with such ease.

Act 12:11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

In those days anyone who was in charge of a convict who allowed one to escape was to undergo the same sentence their prisoner was destined to suffer. Like in Acts 16:27 when “the keeper of the prison...drew his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled”. He knew what the penalty was for the loss of even one inmate. In this instance you can only imagine the state of confusion those soldiers were in. The only conclusion would have been that it was a conspiracy on their part. How else **could** Peter have escaped?

Act 12:18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. 19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined (*Gk.350- interrogate*) the keepers, and commanded that *they* should be put to death (*because that's what he had intended to do to Peter*). And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and *there* abode. 20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's *country*. 21 And upon a set day Herod, **arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne**, and made an oration unto them. 22 And the people gave a shout, *saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.* 23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, **because he gave not God the glory**: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied. (*Emp. added*)

Herod's comfort zone of being so popular among the people that he felt he was esteemed higher than God cost him his life, and even his soul. And he wasn't the only person esteemed of his day that enjoyed personal glory for a time.

The Scribes

Luk 20:45 Then in the audience of all the people He said unto His disciples, 46 Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the

highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; 47 Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.

Maybe you knew of someone in school (*or maybe it was you*) that got in trouble for something you were repeatedly told not to do and as punishment were told to write "I will not...." a hundred times on the chalk board (*to the younger generation that might not know what a chalkboard is just ask your parents*). It sank in after having to write it only a few times. A scribe was known for his knowledge of scripture because his job was to do just that, copy Old Testament scrolls, only with pay. Which is where his popularity came from and it was evidenced from the way he dressed. Some people can become comfortable with popularity and fame and be unwilling to give it up. Or with their possessions like the rich young ruler.

Mat 19:21 Jesus said unto him (*the rich young ruler*), If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow Me. 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: **for he had great possessions.** 23 Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man **shall hardly** enter into the kingdom of Heaven. 24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 25 When His disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? 26 But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God **all things are possible.** (*Emp. added*)

Once a person establishes a comfort zone it can become difficult to get out of it. But not impossible. Especially if we seek God's help concerning it. We can get comfortable on a couch with a remote under a blanket with a hot cup of cocoa without it becoming sin. But, when it becomes a regular habit, especially when we tell ourselves how hard we've worked and really need a day or two to relax, it soon becomes a comfort zone that we need seriously to look at. Especially when we don't even realize that we may even **have** a problem to begin with. The world would just say we've earned our rest but if it consumes a lot of time that we **should** be giving to study and reading God's word, then it's not just a comfort zone but rather a rut we've gotten ourselves into that only God can help us get out of. Comfort zones, habits, whatever you want to call them, they aren't good for Christians to get into unless of course they do help us grow spiritually and give God glory from having them. We don't want to be like the chief rulers of Jesus' day that believed in Him but lacked the courage to admit it. That's what will happen to any Christian that becomes uncomfortable even talking about the Gospel due to lack of understanding it.

The chief rulers

Joh 12:40 He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. 41 These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him. 42 Nevertheless among the chief rulers also **many believed** on Him; **but because of the Pharisees** they did not confess *Him*, **lest they should be put out of the synagogue:** 43 For **they loved the praise of men** more than the praise of God. (*Emp. added*)

They didn't want to give up their comfort zones of being with the **in** crowd. Confessing their faith that Jesus was/is the Christ would have made things uncomfortable for these rulers and they were more concerned with the temporal comforts of this life than they were the eternal comforts of the next.

King Agrippa

Act 25:23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice (*pronounced “ber-nee’-kay”*), **with great pomp**, and was entered into the place of hearing, **with the chief captains, and principal men of the city**, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. (*Emp. added*)

He must have thought he was something else to arrive in such a fashion.

Act 26:24 And as he (*Paul*) 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. (*Emp. added*)

Agrippa was comfortable with his status as king along with all the pomp and majesty that came with it. He almost would have given it up but his comfort zone was way too comfortable.

What about Us?

Are we willing to give up some comfort if it means we have to suffer even a little for the sake of helping ourselves or another lost soul find the truth about Christ and His offer of salvation? What comfort zones do we have that are taking away **precious, unredeemable** time that we should be spending getting comfortable with the word of God?

“Where once minds were so absorbed with Bible that the mouth could hardly be opened without Scripture being quoted, now preachers and members pay lip service to Scripture...”
Dave Miller- Piloting The Strait, pgs. 449-450

What things would we count but loss for Christ?

Php 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss **for the excellency (to excel in) of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord**: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things (*gave up all my comfort zones*), and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found **in Him (the true comfort zone)**, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ (*the Gospel*), the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know (*Gk.1097- to know [absolutely]: -understand*) Him, and the power (*Gk.1411- specifically miraculous power [usually by implication a miracle itself]*) of His resurrection, and the fellowship (*Gk.2842- partnership, that is, [literally] participation*) of His sufferings, being made conformable (*Gk.4833- to render like, that is, [figuratively] assimilate*) unto His death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. (*Emp. added*)

What does it mean to “assimilate” unto His death?

Rom 6:4 Therefore we are **buried** with Him **by baptism** into death: that **like** as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also** should walk in newness of life. (*Emp. added*)

Have you entered the ultimate comfort zone, the eternal one? Or, once there, have you left that area for your own? Which might only seem comfortable but really won't last into eternity. Either way, to be truly comfortable you may have to first become a little uncomfortable. You may have to give up all those preconceived, indoctrinated, taught from little up religious instructions before you can be "made conformable unto His death" by being baptized into Him. So, in order to experience the ultimate in comfort someday...

#1. You need to hear

Romans 10:14 ..."how shall they believe in Him **Whom they have not heard?**"

#2. You need to believe

Heb 11:6 ..."for he that commeth to God **must believe that He is...**"

#3. You need to repent

Act 3:19 ..."Repent ... be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..."

Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

#4. You need to acknowledge Christ as the Son of God, Who alone can save you

Joh 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.

#5. You need to have your sins washed away

Act 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

#6. Once you've done all these things, you need to remain faithful

Romans 6:4 "...we also should walk in newness of life."

#7. You need to resolve to keep growing

2Pe 3:18 But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him *be* glory both now and forever. Amen.

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