

## Used to be

I am told that Abraham Lincoln used to be a rail splitter. This was an especially demanding job, requiring arduous labor. Over the course of years, this type of work extracted its toll from those individuals who would follow those endeavors, usually leaving them more like victims than retired workers. Retirement usually meant a pine box.

I am also told that Mr. Lincoln used to be an attorney. He obviously had found a way out of being a rail splitter by studying law, which, as history will attest, led to his political career. This political career culminated in his election to the White House as the 16th President of the United States. In 1865, while attending a show in Ford's Theater, Mr. Lincoln fell victim to John Wilkes Booth's bullet.

He went from simple beginnings in 1809 to attain the highest office in the land at his death in 1865. His progression up the ladder of success was marked by his leaving behind those aspects of his life which marked plateaus where it would have been easier in some respects, to remain at that station in life. Through courage, determination, and faith he left behind those aspects of his life on the pile of "used to be's". What was before became a stepping stone to what would be, while passing through part of life called "what is".

The Apostle Paul used to be a devout Pharisee[1], but a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus[2] left his worldly used to be's on the rubbish heap of history[3]. No doubt Paul worked at his worldly endeavors and with great zeal[4]. However, it took his encounter with the Lord Jesus to leave him broken to the point where he then could be lifted up to follow the way more correctly[5].

Our personal lives are festooned with the used to be's of life. For the most part, we have used them as reverberation or bouncing off points, much like a pinball machine has its bounce off points. The pinball machine tallies scores off these points, but the ball still ultimately will "fall into the abyss". Though we do not accumulate any points off of our lifetime "bounce off points", we do use them as learning opportunities.

It is at these "bounce off points" where God turns the direction of our lives and steers us from ultimate and certain disaster to successful Christian living. These "bounce off" turning points may not be as dramatic as Paul's, but as we reflect on our past, we can see how God is turning our lives around in much the same fashion as He turned the apostle Paul from what used to be to what could be.

These turning points are all marked by a conscious decision to change. Abraham Lincoln left his turning points behind through courage and determination. The Apostle Paul chose to be a tool in God's hands rather than continue his fight against the Jesus of creation. We are born into life as sinners, yet we have a choice. We can continue on as we are and die as we were born, or we can change and receive the free gift of God which is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord[6]. When we decide to accept Jesus Christ as did the apostle Paul, we can accept the full promise of no condemnation because we are in Christ Jesus[7]. Our victory in becoming all we can be is attributable to God, Who, through Jesus Christ gives us victory.

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[1] Acts 23:6; Philippians 3:4-11

[2] Acts 9:1-9

[3] Philippians 3:7-8

[4] Acts 8: 1-3

[5] Acts 9:17-31.

[6] Romans 6:23

[7] Romans 8:1