

The Apostle Paul, God's Chosen Vessel

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Paul's Past:

Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the Apostle, will forever stand as one of the most commanding figures in all history—both sacred and secular. Even today, this giant of the faith lives on—through those whom he influenced in life, through the books of the New Testament which he left to us under the dictation of the Holy Spirit, through his interpretation of the Christian faith, and through the magnificent victories he won for Christ.

What we know of him as a person is gleaned in sparse bits—from history, from mention made of him in the Scriptures, and from his own testimony as given in his various writings.

His parents are not named, but from his background as a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin, by religion a Pharisee, we know that his family was undoubtedly one of material means. His education under the great Gamaliel in Jerusalem indicates both wealth and social position. He was conscientiously—and *indelibly*—trained in the religion of the Jews, and throughout his ministry his devotion to his own people did not lessen, even though when they rejected his Christ he turned to the Gentiles to preach the Gospel of Grace.

He was born in the city of Tarsus, a metropolis strategically situated on the borderland between the Greek and Jewish worlds and therefore prominent commercially as well as from a military standpoint. It was made a free city by Mark Antony of Rome, and thus Paul could say, "I am a Roman citizen, *free-born*."

His education and background enabled him to be at home anywhere. As a Roman citizen, he learned of the Roman empire, he learned to respect and was respected by the Roman officials in the provinces. His knowledge of languages, including Greek, made it easy for him to preach understandably wherever he went.

Persecuting The Church:

On the other hand, his absolute knowledge and understanding of Jewish law and the Jewish religion enabled him, as a well trained young rabbi, to speak to the Jews in their own language, comprehensively proclaiming the Gospel of Grace as contrasted with and in opposition to the Law of Moses.

Paul did nothing in half-measure. His persecution of the early Church was carried on with such zeal that he is said to have *wrought havoc* among the Christians! By his own testimony we know that he enthusiastically and in all good conscience arrested and imprisoned all professing Christ-followers upon whom he could lay hold. He stood by and consented to the death of Stephen, and I have often wondered if the vision of that young martyr's face, shining with heavenly glory as he died under the stones of the mob, did not linger in Paul's memory until his dying day.

Paul's Ministries:

But when he met the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, his zeal turned just as ardently to the preaching of Christ—the Son of God, the Messiah who came, was crucified, buried, and was risen again "according to the Scriptures."

From that day forward, he never wavered in his proclamation of the Gospel of Grace.

He endured more suffering and persecution than is recorded relative to any other mortal (2 Corinthians 11:24-28); but with his face steadfastly set toward Heaven and his affections set on things above, he pressed forward—ever onward and upward—toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The date of his death is not recorded, but it is thought to be sometime in the years A.D. 65 to 67. Because Paul was a Roman citizen he was granted death by beheading, rather than by crucifixion or other more torturous means. We have no other details of his execution, but we can be sure that, having lived as he lived, he died the same way—as a good soldier of the cross, a loyal ambassador for Christ, a strong witness for the Saviour.

This mighty man, though thought to have been small of stature and unprepossessing in appearance, blazed a path-finders trail across the frontiers of Christianity, leaving an imprint that will remain as long as the world stands.

There is no doubt that the Apostle Paul was keenly aware that God had given him a special and a unique message, to be proclaimed by him and penned down for you and me. As we study Paul's epistles it is evident that he was deeply conscious of the wonder of the Gospel, as well as being alert to the fact that he was Divinely appointed to proclaim this glorious message.

The Gospel of the crucified, buried, risen Christ was supernaturally revealed to Paul—first, as he traveled to Damascus to persecute the Christians there (Acts 9:1-6); then, as he waited through three days and nights of total blindness until the Lord sent Ananias to him, where he (Ananias) being obedient to the Lord, prayed for Saul, causing the scales to fall from his eyes. Note here that **1**) Saul's eyes were fully healed, and **2**) scales fell from his eyes—demonstrating the fact that not only could Saul now *see* clearly—he was able to *supernaturally* receive revelations from the Lord Jesus Christ concerning the Gospel and the doctrines of the Church; hence "scales fell from his eyes! Remember when Jesus breathed on His disciples after His Resurrection? In this, He gave them His own *peace* they would need—and they would be able to understand His Word, supernaturally!

Saul (Paul) testified in court that same day he could see. (Acts 9:8-19); and finally, during the three years he spent in the desert in Arabia (Gal. 1:11-18). During these three experiences, God revealed to Paul this glorious Gospel, and made known to him *all truth*:

¹¹But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me *is not after man*. ¹²For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: ¹⁴And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, ¹⁶To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: ¹⁷Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. (Galatians 1:11-18—my italics/underscore)

Paul assured the believers in Rome that he was "called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1).

In Galatians 1:11,12 he testified that the message was not his own, nor was it the message of man: "...I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me *is not after man*. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

To Timothy, his son in the ministry, he speaks of "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, *which was committed to my trust*" (I Tim. 1:11).

In I Thessalonians 1:5 he speaks of the Gospel which "came not unto you in word only, but also *in power, and in the Holy Ghost, in much assurance.*"

In II Corinthians 4:3 and II Thessalonians 2:14 he refers to the Gospel as "*OUR Gospel.*"

In Romans 2:16 he speaks of "the day when God *shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to MY Gospel,*" and in II Timothy 2:8 he says, "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David *was raised from the dead according to MY Gospel.*"

In I Corinthians 15:1 and in Galatians 2:2 Paul refers to "the Gospel *which I preach.*"

In Acts 20:24 he speaks of "the Gospel of *the grace of God.*"

In Romans 1:1 he speaks of "*the Gospel of God,*" and in Romans 1:9 he refers to "*the Gospel of His Son.*" In Romans 1:16 he speaks of "*the Gospel of Christ.*"

Speaking of various *experiences* in the Gospel, Paul mentions "the *fellowship* of the Gospel (Phil. 1:5), "the *defence and confirmation* of the Gospel" (Phil. 1:7), "the *faith* of the Gospel" (Phil. 1:27), "the *truth* of the Gospel" (Col. 1:5), "the *hope* of the Gospel" (Col. 1:23), the "*afflictions*" of the Gospel (I Thess. 1:6), and the "*light*" of the Gospel (II Tim. 1:10). In Philemon 13 he speaks of himself as being "*in the bonds* of the Gospel."

In his epistles, Paul speaks of the Gospel as relating to various classes of people. He mentions those who are "*called* by the Gospel" (II Thess. 2:14), those who are "*begotten* by the Gospel" (I Cor. 4:15), those who are "*stablished* by the Gospel" (Rom. 16:25); and those who "*obey not* the Gospel" (II Thess. 1:8,).

Speaking of himself and of his own divinely appointed ministry, Paul testifies, "Woe is unto me, if I *preach not* the Gospel!" (I Cor. 9:16); and finally, he thunders out a solemn warning to any and all who may pervert the Gospel and preach any other message than that which contains "all truth":

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8, 9).

Today as never before in the history of man, the Gospel dictated to the Apostle Paul by the Holy Ghost is discredited by liberals, modernists, and founders of various cults. Today emphasis is placed on the *ethics* of Jesus, upon His *philosophy of life* as spelled out in the four Gospels. The liberals and modernists cry out, "Return to the Sermon on the Mount!" but my dear reader, if you will search the Sermon on the Mount from the first word to the last, you will not discover one drop of blood—and without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin!

Ministers today spend long hours preparing sermonettes. They talk about the goodness of God, and of the sinless example of Jesus. But it is not the sinless life of the Saviour nor the supernatural miracles He performed that save the sinner - *it is His death, burial, and resurrection.* The Gospels proclaim a wonderful message, but they point us on to the *epistles* for the deeper, fuller unfolding of "ALL TRUTH."

It is extremely interesting to discover that the Lord Jesus Christ clearly stated how the New Testament would come to be written and given to the Church. Of the Gospels He said, " ... The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

Of the epistles He said, "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, *He will guide you into all truth ...*" (John 16:13a).

Pointing forward to the glorious book of the Revelation, He said, " ... He [the Holy Spirit] shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: *and He will shew you things to come*" (John 16:13 b). (And on the lonely Isle of Patmos, the Holy Spirit DID show John the Beloved those "things to come.")

To the Apostle Paul the Holy Spirit dictated these solemn words: "STUDY to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15). And as we study the writings of this remarkable, Divinely-appointed apostle, we will see that his message contains a perfect balance between the doctrinal and the practical, and also a perfect balance between theology and ethics.¹

Paul's Sufferings:

In Acts 9:11-16, The Lord stated to Ananias in a vision, concerning Saul:

¹¹And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, ¹²And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. ¹³Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: ¹⁴And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. ¹⁵But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: ¹⁶*For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.* (Acts 9:11-16—my italics/underscore).

It's amazing that many consider Paul at this time, a weak, sickly, almost blind individual—and consider this his *Thorn In the flesh* as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:7. I believe the very thought Paul's *thorn* was his weaknesses is strongly misguided; for the scripture says different:

⁷And lest I should be exalted above measure *through the abundance of the revelations*, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." (2 Corinthians 12:7).

The scripture obviously states Paul's *thorn in the flesh* was given for this reason only: "*through the abundance of the revelations*"—and not because of his weaknesses. The alternative answer to Paul's thorn is stated in 2 Cor. 12:7), where the Word of God gives forth Paul's tremendous sufferings and His supernatural revelations.

Paul's Doctrine Concerning Law And Grace:

Paul taught we should *Stop Sinning!* The Holy Spirit is God's gift to the repenting, believing sinner who accepts Christ as his substitute, dying on the cross, and rising from the grave (Romans 10:9,10; Acts 2:14-38). The full work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is contingent upon the following actions of the believer.

A) **The Clean breach from sin:** Holiness must be sought by the believer in the appointed way of cleansing by His precious blood. This cleansing is available when one confesses his sin. There is now use to cover sin, for then God will judge it. It's best to get it out in the open, face it, and remove it by confession to Christ Jesus with the heart. Sin *must* be rejected; a clean break from sin is necessary. In order to live an overcoming life, one must resist temptations that previously had him bound, including any restitution. A compliment to our strengths would be to make sinful mistakes prior to salvation—right. Though humiliating and costly, there will be a great deterrent to repeating the same errors.

B) **The Crucifixion of Self:** If there is anything which hinders our being filled with His Holy Spirit—it is being filled with self. We pamper, pet, are proud of, pity, provide for, and place self in a

¹**The Gospel Of Grace.** Oliver B Greene; The Gospel Hour, Inc., Greenville, S.C.; Copyright © 1965; USA

place rightly belonging to Christ Jesus. In order to be filled with the gift of God, it is essential for us to forsake all sin for our own sakes—and Christ's sake. Crucifixion involves denying ourselves (Matthew 16:24). The corrupted, perverted, warped self must be no longer lord of our life. Christ alone must have that place with us. This means taking up our cross and fully following Christ—just as Apostle Paul fully and completely considered his life to be owned by Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:6-8). Paul said, *"I die to sin every day."* (1 Corinthians 15:31). We are to reckon ourselves as to be dead through crucifixion of the flesh (Law)—and to the world.

^{c)}Complete Obedience To God: The destruction of the *flesh* (Law) in our bodies is essential to our peace, our faith and our righteousness in the Lord. When we are disobedient, we grieve the Holy Spirit, and when the Holy Spirit is grieved, He cannot accomplish the works in His people that He desires to do.

The Purpose of The Holy Spirit In Our Lives:

We are born of the Spirit—*"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* (John 3:5,6).

We are assured by the Spirit—*"The Spirit (Himself) beareth witness with our spirit; that we are the children of God"* (Romans 8:16).

We are sealed by the Spirit—*"And grieve not the Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption"* (Ephesians 4:30).

But the Spirit does more than this. The divine purpose of His indwelling the life of the believer is, above all else, to conform him into the image of Christ, Himself the image of the invisible God. *"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."* (Rom. 8:29).

"Giving thanks unto the Father. . .who hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. . .who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature." (Colossians 1:12-15—in part).

Jesus in the flesh revealed the Father, and from within the believer the Holy Spirit manifests and forms the adopted child into the image of Christ. Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians, *"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you"* (Galatians 4:19).

The burden of Paul's heart was that his *children* in the faith become full grown in the faith. He wanted them to be everything they were supposed to be (and could be) for Christ, IN Christ, through the power of the Spirit. Of himself he said, *"For the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."* (Romans 8:2).

"I can do all things through Christ Jesus which strengtheneth me." (Philippians 4:13).

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the Law, but under grace." (Rom. 6:14).

Every believer should be able to give this testimony: *"We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."* (Romans 8:37).

We are "a peculiar people, ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS." (Ephesians 2:10).²

In closing, Paul said this in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "*For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad*" (2 Corinthians 3:11-15, and 5:10).

Those who continually look for Jesus' return for His church will be spiritually clean, consecrated, dedicated: "Every man that has this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John, 3:3). When the fact of His coming gets hold on us, heart and soul, we will cease to compromise with sin and with the enemies of Jesus. There is no truth in all the Word of God which will cause the Christians to be so spiritually minded as with the truth of the imminent return of Jesus for His Church.

Knowing His coming is soon, at any moment, actually, seeing friends and loved ones who are lost and bound for hell, the fact of His imminent return should lay on us a deep burden to rescue them. The fields are truly white and ready for harvest, and we should be reapers, not stargazers.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Paul made this statement near the end of his ministry on earth:

*⁷I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: ⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7, 8).*³

²**Power Through Pentecost.** H. John Ockenga; Minister of Park Street Church, Boston, Mass.; WB Eerdmans Publ. Company Grand Rapids

³**The Holy Bible. KJV;** Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tn.; Copyright