

The Life and Ministry of Paul

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Forward

No person, apart from Jesus himself, shaped the history of Christianity like the apostle Paul. Even before he was a believer, his actions were significant.

His frenzied persecution of Christians following Stephen's death got the church started in obeying Christ's final command to take the gospel worldwide. Paul's personal encounter with Jesus changed his life.

He never lost his fierce intensity, but from then on it was channeled for the gospel.

Paul was very religious. His training under Gamaliel was the finest available.

His intentions and efforts were sincere. He was a good Pharisee, who knew the Bible and sincerely believed that this Christian movement was dangerous to Judaism.

Thus Paul hated the Christian faith and persecuted Christians without mercy.

Paul got permission to travel to Damascus to capture Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem. But God stopped him in his hurried tracks on the Damascus road. Paul personally met Jesus Christ, and his life was never again the same.

Until Paul's conversion, little had been done about carrying the gospel to non-Jews. Philip had preached in Samaria and to an Ethiopian man; Cornelius, a Gentile, was converted under Peter; and in Antioch in Syria, some Greeks had joined the believers.

When Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to check on this situation, he went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him to Antioch, and together they worked among the believers there.

They were then sent on a missionary journey, the first of three Paul would take, that would carry the gospel across the Roman Empire.

The thorny issue of whether Gentile believers had to obey Jewish laws before they could become Christians caused many problems in the early church.

Paul worked hard to convince the Jews that Gentiles were acceptable to God, but he spent even more time convincing the Gentiles that they were acceptable to God.

The lives Paul touched were changed and challenged by meeting Christ through him.

God did not waste any part of Paul—his background, his training, his citizenship, his mind, or even his weaknesses. Are you willing to let God do the same for you? You will never know all he can do with you until you allow him to have all that you are!

Chapter 1



Paul at Stephen's murder

Acts 7:58

They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. The official witnesses took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Stephen saw the glory of God, and Jesus the Messiah standing at God's right hand. Stephen's words are similar to Jesus' words spoken before the council (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69).

Stephen's vision supported Jesus' claim and angered the Jewish leaders who had condemned Jesus to death for blasphemy. They would not tolerate Stephen's words, so they dragged him out and killed him.

People may not kill us for witnessing about Christ, but they will let us know they don't want to hear the truth and will often try to silence us.

Keep honoring God in your conduct and words; though many may turn against you and your message, some will follow Christ.

Remember, Stephen's death made a profound impact on Paul, who later became the world's greatest missionary. Even those who oppose you now may later turn to Christ.

Paul was qualified to tell Jews about Jesus.

Acts 7:58

They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. The official witnesses took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Saul is also called Paul (see Acts 13:9), the great missionary who wrote many of the letters in the New Testament. Saul was his Hebrew name; Paul, his Greek name, was used as he began his ministry to the Gentiles.

When Luke introduces him, Paul was hating and persecuting Jesus' followers. This is a great contrast to the Paul about whom Luke will write for most of the rest of the book of Acts—a devoted follower of Christ and a gifted gospel preacher.

Paul was uniquely qualified to talk to the Jews about Jesus because he had once persecuted those who believed in Jesus, and he understood how the opposition felt.

Paul is a powerful example of how no one is impossible to reach and change.

Acts 9:2-5

Paul requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there.

He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

He was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, sir?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!"

Saul (later called Paul) was so zealous for his Jewish beliefs that he began a persecution campaign against anyone who believed in Christ ("who belonged to the Way").

Why would the Jews in Jerusalem want to persecute Christians as far away as Damascus? There are several possibilities:

- (1) To seize the Christians who had fled,
- (2) To prevent the spread of Christianity to other major cities,
- (3) To keep the Christians from causing any trouble with Rome,
- (4) to advance Saul's career and build his reputation as a true Pharisee, zealous for the law,
- (5) To unify the factions of Judaism by giving them a common enemy.

As Saul traveled to Damascus, pursuing Christians, he was confronted by the risen Christ and brought face to face with the truth of the gospel.

Sometimes God breaks into a life in a spectacular manner, and sometimes conversion is a quiet experience.

Beware of people who insist that you must have a particular type of conversion experience. The right way to come to faith in Jesus is whatever way God brings *you*.

Damascus, a key commercial city, was located about 175 miles northeast of Jerusalem in the Roman province of Syria.

Several trade routes linked Damascus to other cities throughout the Roman world. Saul may have thought that by stamping out Christianity in Damascus, he could prevent its spread to other areas.

Paul refers to this experience as the start of his new life in Christ (1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15:8; Galatians 1:15-16).

At the center of this wonderful experience was Jesus Christ. Paul did not see a vision; he saw the risen Christ himself (Acts 9:17).

Paul acknowledged Jesus as Lord, confessed his own sin, surrendered his life to Christ, and resolved to obey him. True conversion comes from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and leads to a new life in relationship with him.

Saul thought he was pursuing heretics, but he was persecuting Jesus himself. Anyone who persecutes believers today is also guilty of persecuting Jesus (see Matthew 25:40, 45), because believers are the body of Christ on earth

Saul was shown Christian love by Ananias.

Acts 9:17

So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent

me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Ananias found Saul, as he had been instructed, and greeted him as "Brother Saul." Ananias feared this meeting because Saul had come to Damascus to capture the believers and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). But in obedience to the Holy Spirit, Ananias greeted Saul lovingly.

It is not always easy to show love to others, especially when we are afraid of them or doubt their motives. Nevertheless, we must follow Jesus' command (John 13:34) and Ananias's example, showing loving acceptance to other believers.

Although there is no mention of a special filling of the Holy Spirit for Saul, his changed life and subsequent accomplishments bear strong witness to the Holy Spirit's presence and power in his life.

Evidently, the Holy Spirit filled Saul **Paul shared his new faith with others.**

When he received his sight and was baptized. See the second note on Acts 8:15-17 for more on the filling of the Holy Spirit.

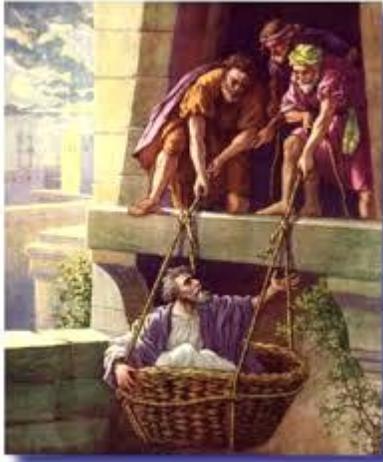
Acts 9:20

And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"

Immediately after receiving his sight and spending some time with the believers in Damascus, Saul went to the synagogue to tell the Jews about Jesus Christ. Some Christians counsel new believers to wait until they are thoroughly grounded in their faith before attempting to share the gospel.

Saul took time alone to learn about Jesus before beginning his worldwide ministry, but he did not wait to witness. Although we should not rush into a ministry unprepared, we do not need to wait before telling others what has happened to us.

Chapter 2



Paul escaped from Damascus.

Acts 9:23

After a while the Jewish leaders decided to kill him.

According to Galatians 1:17-18, Paul left Damascus and traveled to Arabia, the desert region just southeast of Damascus, where he lived for three years. It is unclear whether his three-year stay occurred between Acts 9:22 and Acts 9:23, or between Acts 9:25 and Acts 9:26.

Some commentators say that “many days” could mean a long period of time. They suggest that when Paul returned to Damascus, the governor under Aretas ordered his arrest (2 Cor. 11:32), in an effort to keep peace with influential Jews.

The other possibility is that Paul’s night escape occurred during his first stay in Damascus, just after his conversion, when the Pharisees were especially upset over his defection from their ranks.

He would have fled to Arabia to spend time alone with God and to let the Jewish religious leaders cool down. Regardless of which theory is correct,

there was a period of at least three years between Paul's conversion (Acts 9:3-6) and his trip to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26).

Acts 9:26-27

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They thought he was only pretending to be a believer!

Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus. Barnabas also told them what the Lord had said to Saul and how he boldly preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

Barnabas, a Jewish convert (mentioned in Acts 4:36), became the bridge between Saul and the apostles. New Christians (especially those with tarnished reputations) need sponsors, people who will come alongside, encourage, teach, and introduce them to other believers. Find ways that you can become a Barnabas to new believers.

It is difficult to change your reputation, and Saul had a terrible reputation with the Christians.

Why Paul returned to Tarsus.

Acts 9:30

When the believers heard about it, however, they took him to Caesarea and sent him on to his hometown of Tarsus.

In these short sentences we can see two characteristics of Paul, even as a new believer in Christ: He was bold, and he stirred up controversy. These would characterize Paul's ministry the rest of his life. The Grecian Jews were Greek-speaking Jews.

Saul's visit to Tarsus helped quiet conflicts with the Jews and allowed him time to prove his commitment. After Saul, the most zealous persecutor, was converted, the church enjoyed a brief time of peace. "Brothers" refers to fellow Christians, members of God's family.

Paul made Antioch his home base.

Acts 11:22

When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

With the exception of Jerusalem, Antioch of Syria played a more important role in the early church than any other city. After Rome and Alexandria, Antioch was the largest city in the Roman world. In Antioch, the first Gentile church was founded, and there the believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Paul used the city as his home base during his missionary journeys. Antioch was the center of worship for several pagan cults that promoted much sexual immorality and other forms of evil common to pagan religions.

It was also a vital commercial center—the gateway to the eastern world. Antioch was a key city both to Rome and to the early church.

Barnabas gives us a wonderful example of how to help new Christians. He demonstrated strong faith; he ministered joyfully with kindness and encouragement; he taught new believers further lessons about God (see Acts 9:26-30).

Remember Barnabas when you see new believers, and think of ways to help them grow in their faith.

Paul began first missionary journey.

Acts 13:2-3

So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

The church set apart Barnabas and Saul to the work God had for them. To *set apart* means to dedicate for a special purpose. We too should dedicate our pastors, missionaries, and Christian workers for their tasks. We can also dedicate ourselves to use our time, money, and talents for God's work. Ask God what he wants you to set apart for him

This was the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey. The church was involved in sending Paul and Barnabas, but it was God's plan. Why did Paul and Barnabas go where they did?

- (1) The Holy Spirit led them.
- (2) They followed the communication routes of the Roman Empire—this made travel easier.
- (3) They visited key population and cultural centers to reach as many people as possible.

- (4) They went to cities with synagogues, speaking first to the Jews in hopes that they would see Jesus as the Messiah and help spread the Good News to everyone.

Chapter 3



Paul was mistaken as a god.

Acts 14:11-12

When the listening crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in their local dialect, "These men are gods in human bodies!" They decided that Barnabas was the Greek god Zeus and that Paul, because he was the chief speaker, was Hermes.

Zeus and Hermes (also known as Jupiter and Mercury) were two popular gods in the Roman world. People from Lystra claimed that these gods had once visited their city. According to legend, no one offered them hospitality except an old couple, so Zeus and Hermes killed the rest of the people and rewarded the old couple.

When the citizens of Lystra saw the miracles of Paul and Barnabas, they assumed that the gods were revisiting them. Remembering the story of what had happened to the previous citizens, they immediately honored Paul and Barnabas and showered them with gifts.

Paul's disagreement with Barnabas

Acts 15:36-39

After some time Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return to each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are getting along."

Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark.

But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not shared in their work.

Their disagreement over this was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus.

Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply over Mark. Paul didn't want to take him along because he had left them earlier (Acts 13:13).

This disagreement caused the two great preachers to form two teams, opening up two missionary endeavors instead of one.

God works even through conflict and disagreements. Later, Mark became vital to Paul's ministry (Col. 4:10). Christians do not always agree, but problems can be solved by agreeing to disagree and letting God work his will.

Paul began second missionary journey.

Acts 15:40

Paul chose Silas, and the believers sent them off, entrusting them to the Lord's grace.

Paul's second missionary journey, this time with Silas as his partner, began approximately three years after his first one ended. The two visited many of the cities covered on Paul's first journey, plus others.

This journey laid the groundwork for the church in Greece.

Silas had been involved in the Jerusalem council and was one of the two men chosen to represent the Jerusalem church by taking the letter and decision back to Antioch (Acts 15:22).

Paul, from the Antioch church, chose Silas, from the Jerusalem church, and they traveled together to many cities to spread the Good News.

This teamwork demonstrated the church's unity after the decision at the Jerusalem council.

Paul praised God despite his circumstances.

Acts 16:22-25

A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods.

They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape.

So he took no chances but put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.

Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, and placed in stocks in the inner cell. Despite this dismal situation, they praised God, praying and singing as the other prisoners listened.

No matter what our circumstances, we should praise God. Others may come to Christ because of our example.

Stocks were made of two boards joined with iron clamps, leaving holes just big enough for the ankles.

The prisoner's legs were placed across the lower board, and then the upper board was closed over them. Sometimes both wrists and ankles were placed in stocks. Paul and Silas, who had committed no crime and were peaceful men, were put in stocks designed for holding the most dangerous prisoners in absolute security.

Religious leaders were jealous of Paul

Acts 17:5

But the Jewish leaders were jealous, so they gathered some worthless fellows from the streets to form a mob and start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd.

The Jewish leaders didn't refute the theology of Paul and Silas, but they were jealous of the popularity of these itinerant preachers. Their motives for causing the riot were rooted in personal jealousy, not doctrinal purity.

Paul presented gospel to Greek philosophers.

Acts 17:22

So Paul, standing before the Council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious.

Tarsus, an educational center, and had the training and knowledge to present his beliefs clearly and persuasively.

Paul was a rabbi, taught by the finest scholar of his day, Gamaliel, and he had spent much of his life thinking and reasoning through the Scriptures.

It is not enough to teach or preach with conviction. Like Paul, we must be prepared.

The more we know about the Bible, what it means, and how to apply it to our lives, the more convincing our words will be. This does not mean that we should avoid presenting the gospel until we feel adequately prepared.

We should work with what we know, but always want to know more in order to reach more people and answer their questions and arguments more effectively.

Paul's address is a good example of how to communicate the gospel. Paul did not begin by reciting Jewish history, as he usually did, for this would have been meaningless to his Greek audience.

He began by building a case for the one true God, using examples they understood (Acts 17:22-23).

Then he established common ground by emphasizing what they agreed on about God (Acts 17:24-29). Finally he moved his message to the person of Christ, centering on the resurrection (Acts 17:30-31).

When you witness to others, you can use Paul's approach: use examples, establish common ground, and then move people toward a decision about Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4



Paul was a tentmaker.

Acts 18:2-3

There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had been expelled from Italy as a result of Claudius Caesar's order to deport all Jews from Rome.

Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.

Paul was unjustly charged with treason.

Acts 18:13

They accused Paul of "persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law."

Paul was charged with promoting a religion not approved by Roman law.

This charge amounted to treason. Paul was not encouraging obedience to a human king other than Caesar (see Acts 17:7), nor was he speaking against the Roman Empire. Instead he was speaking about Christ's eternal kingdom.

Paul began his third missionary journey.

Acts 18:22

The next stop was at the port of Caesarea. From there he went up and visited the church at Jerusalem and then went back to Antioch.

This verse marks the end of Paul's second missionary journey and the beginning of the third, which lasted from A.D. 53-57.

Leaving the church at Antioch (his home base), Paul headed toward Ephesus, but along the way he revisited the churches in Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23).

The heart of this trip was a lengthy stay (two to three years) in Ephesus. Before returning to Jerusalem, he also visited believers in Macedonia and Greece.

Paul wanted to go to Rome.

Acts 19:21

Afterward Paul felt impelled by the Holy Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before returning to Jerusalem. "And after that," he said, "I must go on to Rome!"

Why did Paul say he had to go to Rome? Wherever he went, he could see Rome's influence. Paul wanted to take the message of Christ to the world's center of influence and power.

Paul took gift to impoverished Jerusalem church.

Acts 20:4

Several men were traveling with him. They were Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; Aristarchus and Secundus, from Thessalonica; Gaius, from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus, who were from the province of Asia.

Paul discussed this gift in one of his letters to the Corinthian church (see 2 Cor. 8:1-21).

These men who were traveling with Paul represented churches that Paul had started in Asia. Each man was carrying an offering from his home church to be given to the believers in Jerusalem. By having each man deliver the gift, the gifts had a personal touch, and the unity of the believers was strengthened. This was also an effective way to teach the church about giving, because the men were able to report back to their churches the way God was working through their giving.

The Jews tried to discredit Paul.

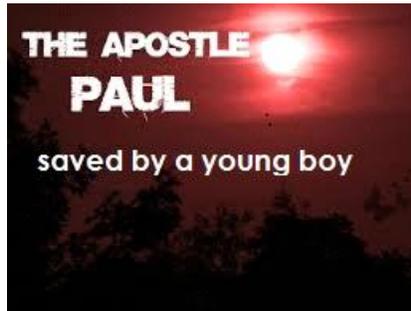
Acts 21:28-29

Yelling, "Men of Israel! Help! This is the man who teaches against our people and tells everybody to disobey the Jewish laws. He speaks against the Temple—and he even defiles it by bringing Gentiles in!"

(For earlier that day they had seen him in the city with Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus, and they assumed Paul had taken him into the Temple.)

His work would be weakened. Be alert when you hear accusations against God's workers. Someone may be trying to discredit them or to hinder their work. Keep an open mind and pray for the workers. They will be strengthened by your support. These Jews knew how effective Paul's work had been in Asia.

Chapter 5



A young boy saved Paul's life.

Acts 23:16-22

But Paul's nephew heard of their plan and went to the fortress and told Paul.

Paul called one of the officers and said, "Take this young man to the commander. He has something important to tell him."

So the officer did, explaining, "Paul, the prisoner, called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you."

The commander took him by the arm, led him aside, and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

Paul's nephew told him, "Some Jews are going to ask you to bring Paul before the Jewish high council tomorrow, pretending they want to get some more information.

But don't do it! There are more than forty men hiding along the way ready to jump him and kill him. They have vowed not to eat or drink until they kill him. They are ready, expecting you to agree to their request."

"Don't let a soul know you told me this," the commander warned the young man as he sent him away.

This is the only Biblical reference to Paul's family. Some scholars believe that Paul's family had disowned Paul when he became a Christian. Paul wrote of having suffered the loss of everything for Christ (Phil. 3:8).

Paul's nephew was able to see Paul, even though Paul was in protective custody, because Roman prisoners were accessible to their relatives and friends who could bring them food and other amenities.

It is easy to overlook children, assuming that they aren't old enough to do much for the Lord. But a young boy played an important part in protecting Paul's life.

God can use anyone, of any age, who is willing to yield to him. Jesus made it clear that children are important (Matthew 18:2-6). Give children the importance God gives them.

Paul was sent to Caesarea.

Acts 23:23-24

Then the commander called two of his officers and ordered, "Get two hundred soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o'clock tonight. Also take two hundred spearmen and seventy horsemen.

Provide horses for Paul to ride, and get him safely to Governor Felix."

The Roman commander ordered Paul sent to Caesarea. Jerusalem was the seat of Jewish government, but Caesarea was the Roman headquarters for the area. God works in amazing and amusing ways.

There were infinite possibilities of ways God could use to get Paul to Caesarea, but he chose to use the Roman army to deliver Paul from his enemies. God's ways are not our ways.

Ours are limited; his are not. Don't limit God by asking him to respond your way. When God intervenes, anything can happen, so much more and so much better than you could ever anticipate.

More false accusations against Paul

Acts 24:1

Five days later Ananias, the high priest, arrived with some of the Jewish leaders and the lawyer Tertullus, to press charges against Paul.

The accusers arrived—Ananias, the high priest; Tertullus, the lawyer; and several Jewish leaders.

They traveled 60 miles to Caesarea, the Roman center of government, to bring their false accusations against Paul. Their murder plot had failed (Acts 23:12-15), but they persisted in trying to kill him.

This attempt at murder was both premeditated and persistent.

Paul appealed to Caesar.

Acts 25:11

If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, neither you nor anyone else has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!"

Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar.

This didn't mean that Caesar himself would hear the case, but that the citizen's case would be tried by the highest courts in the empire. Festus saw Paul's appeal as a way to send him out of the country and thus pacify the Jews.

Paul wanted to go to Rome to preach the gospel (Romans 1:10), and he knew that his appeal would give him the opportunity. To go to Rome as a prisoner was better than not to go there at all.

He could appeal to Caesar's judgment. He knew his rights as a Roman citizen and as an innocent person. Paul had met his responsibilities as a Roman, and so he had the opportunity to claim Rome's protection.

The good reputation and clear conscience that result from our walk with God can help us remain guiltless before God and blameless before the world.

What Paul did while he was imprisoned in Rome.

Acts 28:30

For the next two years, Paul lived in his own rented house. He welcomed all who visited him,

Tradition says that Paul was released after two years of house arrest in Rome and then set off on a fourth missionary journey.

Some reasons for this tradition are as follows:

- (1) Luke does not give us an account of his trial before Caesar, and Luke was a detailed chronicler;

- (2) the prosecution had two years to bring the case to trial, and time may have run out;
- (3) in his letter to the Philippians, written during his imprisonment in Rome, Paul implied that he would soon be released and would do further traveling;
- (4) Paul mentions several places where he intended to take the gospel, but he never visited those places in his first three journeys; and, early Christian literature talks plainly about other travels by Paul.

It may be that during Paul's time of freedom, he continued to travel extensively, even going to Spain (see Romans 15:24, 28) and back to the churches in Greece. The books of 1 Timothy and Titus were written during this time. Later,

Paul was imprisoned again, probably in Rome, where he wrote his last letter (2 Tim.).

Chapter 6



Paul compared himself to Apollos.

1 Cor. 3:6

My job was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God, not we, who made it grow.

Some may think they don't have to worry about sin because

- (1) it's God's job to forgive;
- (2) God is so loving that he won't judge us;
- (3) sin isn't so bad—it teaches us valuable lessons, or
- (4) We need to stay in touch with the culture around us. It is far too easy to take God's grace for granted.

But God cannot overlook sin. Sinners, no matter how many excuses they make, will have to answer to God for their sin.

Paul wanted to be thought of as a servant.

1 Cor. 4:1-2

So look at Apollos and me as mere servants of Christ who have been put in charge of explaining God's secrets.

Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful.

The Jews were proud to be called children of Abraham. Paul uses Abraham as a good example of someone who was saved by faith. By emphasizing faith, Paul is not saying that God's laws are unimportant (Romans 4:13) but that it is impossible to be saved simply by obeying them

Paul's authority as an apostle

1 Cor. 9:1

Do I not have as much freedom as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn't it because of my hard work that you are in the Lord?

Some Corinthians were questioning Paul's authority and rights as an apostle, so Paul gave his credentials—he actually saw and talked with the resurrected Christ, who called him to be an apostle (see Acts 9:3-18).

Such credentials make the advice he gives in this letter more persuasive. In 2 Cor. 10-13, Paul defends his apostleship in greater detail.

Changed lives were the evidence that God was using Paul. Does your faith have an impact on others? You can be a life-changer, helping others grow spiritually, if you dedicate yourself to being used by God and letting him make you effective

Paul searched for Titus.

2 Cor. 2:13

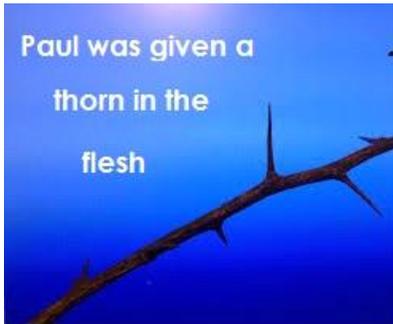
But I couldn't rest because my dear brother Titus hadn't yet arrived with a report from you. So I said good-bye and went on to Macedonia to find him.

Titus was a Greek convert whom Paul greatly loved and trusted (the book of Titus is a letter that Paul wrote to him). Titus was one of the men responsible for collecting the money for the poverty-stricken Jerusalem church (2 Cor. 8:6). Paul may also have sent Titus with the sorrowful letter. On his way to Macedonia, Paul was supposed to meet Titus in Troas.

When Paul didn't find him there, he was worried for Titus's safety and left Troas to search for him in Macedonia.

There Paul found him (2 Cor. 7:6), and the good news that Paul received (2 Cor. 7:8-16) led to this letter. Paul would send Titus back to Corinth with this letter (2 Cor. 8:16-17).

Chapter 7



Paul's thorn in the flesh

2 Cor. 12:7-8

Even though I have received wonderful revelations from God. But to keep me from getting puffed up, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from getting proud.

Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away.

We don't know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, because he doesn't tell us. We do know it was an evil spirit that was sent to keep Paul from becoming proud.

This thorn was a hindrance to his ministry, and he prayed for its removal; but God refused. Paul was a very self-sufficient person, so this thorn must have been difficult for him. It kept Paul humble, reminded him of his need for constant contact with God, and benefited those around him as they saw God at work in his life.

Paul spent many years preparing for ministry.

Galatians 2:1

Then fourteen years later I went back to Jerusalem again, this time with

Barnabas; and Titus came along, too.

After his conversion, Paul spent many years preparing for the ministry to which God had called him.

This preparation period included time alone with God (Galatians 1:16-17), as well as time conferring with other Christians.

Often new Christians, in their zeal, want to begin a full-time ministry without investing the necessary time studying the Bible and learning from qualified teachers.

We need not wait to share Christ with our friends, but we may need more preparation before embarking on a special ministry, whether volunteer or paid.

While we wait for God's timing, we should continue to study, learn, and grow. This will all turn out for our deliverance.

Paul was imprisoned twice in Rome.

Phil. 1:19-21

For I know that as you pray for me and as the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps.

For I live in eager expectation and hope that I will never do anything that causes me shame, but that I will always be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past, and that my life will always honor Christ, whether I live or I die.

For to me, living is for Christ, and dying is even better.

This was not Paul's final imprisonment in Rome. But he didn't know that. Awaiting trial, he knew he could either be released or executed. However, he trusted Christ to work it out for his deliverance.

Paul's prayer was that when he stood trial, he would speak courageously for Christ and not be timid or ashamed. Whether he lived or died, he wanted to exalt Christ.

As it turned out, he was released from this imprisonment but arrested again two or three years later. Only faith in Christ could sustain Paul in such adversity.

Why Paul had persecuted the church.

Phil. 3:6

And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault.

Why did Paul, a devout Jewish leader, persecute the church? Agreeing with the leaders of the religious establishment, Paul thought that Christianity was heretical and blasphemous.

Because Jesus did not meet his expectations of what the Messiah would be like, Paul assumed that Jesus' claims were false—and therefore wicked. In addition, he saw Christianity as a political menace because it threatened to disrupt the fragile harmony between the Jews and the Roman government.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.

**Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois:
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