



The Life of Apostle Paul: A Testament of God's Grace

March 27, 2022

Holy Text: 1 Corinthians 15:9-10

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 (KJV) **9** *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.* **10** *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

In our present day, there are some in the universal church that are confused about Apostle Paul and his message. There are individuals and organizations that make claims that Paul was a racist, chauvinist, homophobe who legitimized slavery. In the same breath, these individuals and organizations pit Jesus' message against Paul's (i.e. Paul preached a different gospel.)

While this morning's message will not be an apologetic for Apostle Paul, I do believe we can glean some encouragement and strength from his life. The Christian Faith is bombarded by the forces of evil with no respite. As sons and daughters of Adam, we fight with indwelling sin daily. The entertainment sphere is littered with land mines that blaspheme the true and living God, and wear down the marriages and children of the careless. The political sphere in our nation reeks of individuals who are ignorant of their God-given role and responsibility. Public education attempts to impart knowledge while dismissing the God who said that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Make no doubt about it, we are at war brothers and sisters. There is a real enemy waging real war against the Church. This spiritual war does not tire your arms or legs. It does tire your mind and spirit. My prayer this morning is that every son and daughter of the True and Living God will leave strengthened by Him today.

Who was Paul?

The Scriptures don't give us a biography of his life, but we can gather a great deal of information from his letters and the Book of Acts.

Pre-Conversion:

He was an Israelite of the Tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5-6)

He was born in Tarsus, Cilicia. (Acts 22:3)

He was a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 21:39)

He was well educated (His letters show the ability to articulate well in Greek)

He was well versed in the Law and the Prophets, being educated by Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-3)

He was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6)

He supported himself with tentmaking (Acts 18:1-3)

Paul's opposition to the Church was well known:

1 Corinthians 15:9 (KJV) *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

Galatians 1:13 (KJV) *For 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:*

Philippians 3:6 (KJV) Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Acts 7:54-60 (KJV) *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Acts 8:1-3 (KJV) And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Acts 9:1-2 (KJV) *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.*

Acts 22:4 (KJV) *And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.*

Acts 26:9-11 (KJV) *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. 11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*

It would be redundant to say that Paul was an enemy of the Gospel of Jesus and those who carried the message to others. Paul was relentless in his pursuit to eradicate the Church of Jesus Christ. As a Pharisee, I'm sure he had great passion for the preservation of the Law he spent countless hours studying and following. Leaders of different sects had come and gone (Paul's teacher, Gamaliel, brought this up to the high council in **Acts 5:27-42**), but Paul would not sit aside and watch the followers of Jesus destroy the faith he loved.

Paul's Conversion: A Divine Intervention

Public reading of **Acts 9:1-22**

Can you imagine Paul's emotions the moment Jesus said to him, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." This is the same Jesus that Paul thought was dead and in a tomb. Think back to his teacher, Gamaliel in Acts 5. He reminded the high council of two instances of sects rising up and when the leader died, the followers went away. I don't believe it's a stretch to think that Paul

was present during the instance noted in Acts 5. Jesus is NOT dead! He is alive and appeared to Paul. The trajectory of Paul's life changed the moment he encountered God the Son! Jesus spoke of Paul's new assignment in **vv 15-16**

*But 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.*

Paul was primarily sent to Gentiles, but he would also share the good news with fellow Jews.

Post Conversion

Paul's life was marked by humble obedience to Jesus' commands.

- He asked Jesus, "What wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6)
 - o His life was not his own
- He prayed (Acts 9:11)
 - o He needed the strength and direction of God
- He was baptized (Acts 9:18)
 - o He wanted to rightly obey Christ and identify with His Church
- He joined the fellowship of local believers (Acts 9:19)
 - o He understood the call and benefit of community
- He preached the gospel to unbelievers to make them disciples of Jesus (Acts 9:20)
 - o He was saved to serve

Today's Text

1 Corinthians 15:9 (KJV) *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

- This isn't some lame attempt at false humility.
- Paul truly understood who he was before meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus.

1 Corinthians 15:10 (KJV) *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

- Paul also understood that his being chosen by Jesus for his task was the result of grace alone.
- This grace resulted in Paul working harder than any other apostle.
- He even credits his work ethic to grace.

Take Aways

1. Depending on one's perspective, Apostle Paul had a past that could be both desired and rejected in the same breath. He had some worldly privilege (Roman Citizenship, Highly Educated, & Clout with religious leaders). He also had the baggage of being a murderer and false accuser. Paul's life shows us that regardless of one's past, God can save ANYONE!
2. Paul is known as the greatest missionary. He didn't receive God's grace and sit back to relax. He was about His Lord's business!
3. Paul's life trajectory was changed when he had an encounter with Jesus. Can we say the same?
4. Have you wrestled with the hard questions that arise when reading Paul's letters? Resist

the urge to explain away what he wrote. Don't quickly accept the teaching of your favorite social media 'ministry'. You have local shepherds and deacons that love you and your family. Bring your questions and concerns to the local church.