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Paul

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God."
Romans 1:1

Key verses: Acts 19-29

Key personalities: The Apostles, mainly Paul

Timeline: The Church is established and grows by the Power of the Holy Spirit and the multiplying networks, 35-60 A.D.

Paul, a man once called Saul, who hated the Christians because he felt they were a cult and subverted to The One True God. He used his passion for correct teaching and reverence to God to persecute and kill Christians until he encounters Christ who changes Saul's name and his destiny. In the Power of Christ, Paul realized Christ is God and fulfills the law and prophets. Paul makes the most dramatic conversion and goes from persecutor to Apostle, evangelist extraordinaire. Paul authors thirteen Books of the New Testament and lives for Christ like no one has ever could.

Paul was not one of the original twelve Apostles; his apostleship was unique. *Apostle* means one who is sent with authority; Paul was sent by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by Christ Himself. There are NO apostles today in the biblical sense. If someone says he or she is one, they are either deluded or extremely prideful (Acts 1:21-26; Rom. 1:1-7; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8-9; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4)!

With all Paul's accomplishments and positions, he calls himself a *"bondservant"* to Christ. A bondservant was the lowest form of a slave in Greek times and completely at the master's disposal. Bondservants were expendable; they rowed boats of war with whips at their backs. This gives us a picture of his total surrender and complete devotion. Paul is a disciple of the Lord with a will that has been sacrificed to God's Will and is totally at the disposal of our Lord! Paul considered his slavery his freedom (Rom. 9:3; Gal. 1:15; 2:20)!

Key Happening: Paul a *"bondservant,"* to Christ.

Paul was chosen by God to deliver very important messages to those of the faith. Here is one very important message: *Continue to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ, so God continues to pour out His grace so we can have peace in abundance.* The key to the Christian life is to always give thanks to Christ, and to have gratitude for who He is and what He has done for you. Our trust in Christ should show up as gratitude and in a life lived out well. We can easily do this when we see what lies ahead for us in Heaven. What we have and what we will have are astonishing, our joy now as well as our hope to come in eternity (Col. 1:1-8).

- Paul was a missionary to the Gentiles. He was a prayer warrior and servant for the Lord. He was passionate and concerned for others. His realization of what Christ did for him drove him to the ends of the world in Christ's service.

- Paul's thrust and motivation was not just his passion and character, but his realization of the debt he owed Christ and his response of overwhelming gratitude. This should be a fundamental force for us in our relationship to Christ. If we focus only upon ourselves, we will fail badly. We must be like Paul and willfully keep Christ as our head, for He already is (Acts 9:1; Rom. 1:1; 11:13-14; Eph. 3:1-8; Philp. 3:4-14; Col. 4:18).
- Our causes are rooted in our motivations which are rooted in our ideas and expectations. Our sense of obligation will certainly affect all that we do, too; we have to make sure it is rooted in God and not elsewhere! Paul's prayerfulness is an expression of his devotion and zeal (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 1:15; Phil. 1:6-9).
- Are you totally submitted to God's ways? Do you feel indebted, or do you feel owed? Being "poured out" is to take the focus off yourself and place it on others, as Christ did for us. Paul spent his life to express it! Why? What matters most to God is not our ideas of God or a mere belief that He exists. Our belief is the basis for our conviction. Our conviction becomes trust. Our trust becomes faith. Our faith in Him leads to our obedience for which we are rewarded.
- In all of Paul's writing, the core is this: Jesus takes our sins, bears them, and covers them from God's wrath by His work on the cross! We are justified and saved by Him and Him alone; no work on our part contributes to it. Jesus Christ alone--in, with, and through His Body and Blood, His death and resurrection--gives us our salvation. We only respond out of our gratitude; from that, we can do good (Lev. 17:11; Job 15:14-16; Psalm 5:4-6; Isa. 53:4-12; 64:6; Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13; Matt. 27:37; Luke 22:37; John 2:2; 4:10; Rom.10: 2-3; Gal. 3:13; 4:4; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14-22; 2:14; Heb. 2:17; 9:11-15, 28; Rev. 1:5).
- The Good News of the Gospel must make an impact on us so we can make a response. It changes lives--a transformation from the inside out, because of His Truth. And, this message of the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ continues to go out to the entire world! The message is hastened when we love God and His people and desire the lost to be reached as we obey His commands and call. We can have assurance that God is kind to us and will continue to be so and use us when we are kind to others, too. You can also be Christ's faithful servant and help further the Kingdom and glorify Christ! Indeed, you are called to be so! Because His great love is in you, His wonders can be displayed through your life. For these are the calls He has given! We are not alone in this; we have His Holy Spirit to enable and empower us!
- Thanksgiving of faith and who Christ is and what He has done (I Cor. 11:4; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; I Thess. 1:2; II Thess. 1:3; II Tim. 3:1; Philemon 4). In view of the fact that we are free from Sin, what are we going to do about it? How is it going to affect our lives and develop our purpose?

The Books Paul authors by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are called the Pauline Epistles.

There are the 13 Epistles (letters) written by the Paul that are included in the "canon" of Scripture: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Some scholars add Hebrews, which may have been written by Paul or he had a direct influence on it.

- They are masterpieces of the essential doctrines the Christian faith and tell of the deity and humanity of Christ, Who God is and how we come to Him. Paul, by the power of the Holy Ghost, tells how we are to live the Christian life. He expounds (not changes) the teachings of Jesus to make them practical. Paul tells of our relationship to God and our salvation, redemption, sanctification, justification, and reconciliation. He gives us a glimpse of how and why God saves

us not by works or efforts by us; rather, we are saved by His Love for us in that He offers us election, predestination, foreknowledge, and the Judgment of Christ. Paul also gives us a 'how to' to pastor, lead, and manage Christ's Church.

- Paul is very passionate and persuasive and gives encouragement in the perseverance of the faith and spiritual growth. He exhorts his readers--yes, us--not to pursue false teaching, mysticisms, traditions, or occultism. No additions to the faith are needed, warranted, or right. He uses complete and brilliant logic to make his case.
- As Paul lived a life of always being thankful to and for others, he suffered greatly by the hands of others. The Greek culture, like our's, was a very 'me first' centered, selfish, never-giving-a-thought-for-others society. Sound familiar? Not much has changed with the depravity of human behavior! Paul lived as an example of faith. He saw the best in others, even when it went against his culture, and his experiences. He kept his eye on the prize that was Christ the LORD! The question for us is this: Are we, as Christians, focused on Christ and what He did for us? If yes, are we showing that thankfulness back to Him and to those around us? Or are we self-focused, only caring about ourselves and giving God a passing thought on Sunday mornings? This focus will create our determination and purpose for our lives! Our focus will be on one of two things--God's perfection or our sinful nature. Which is our focus determines the bent of our lives.
- We as Christians must live by faith as this is the smart thing to do (1 Cor. 1:22-30)! As Paul taught, faith is based on knowledge given by God. Faith is not just simple trust; faith is not blind trust either, because we know the One who is leading! Our faith is based on historical evidence, logical reasoning, and valid testimonies. Our faith is based on the Holy Word of God in which there is no error. Faith is still trusting what is not seen and believing our God (Rom. 1:16-32; 5:1-11; 10:14-17; Gal. 3:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; James 2:14-26)! God imputes His righteousness unto us by what Christ has done by declaring us righteous (Rom. 3:21-26; 5:10-19; 10:3). This declaration means we, as the elect, are free from our debt of sin, but we as debtors are to be witnesses to the lost!
- Paul was totally surrendered to the Lordship of Christ! He always has in his mindset that he personally encountered Jesus and knew Him. The Christ is our living Hope that will never fade away! This gives us the confidence and conviction that our loving and living God keeps His promises and secures us in Him. It is the assurance and the fact that God has redeemed us, will bless us, and will care for us. This also means that death will not triumph over those in Christ (1 Cor. 15:54-57; 1 Peter 1:13, 21; 3:15).

The ultimate battle in life is not with armies and/or lawyers; it is not politics or our exertions. Rather, it is with our will--what we want versus what God has and desires for us. Paul's life and missions is not just about enduring suffering; it is about following God's will regardless of suffering, grief, or any other kind of life strain. This means we surrender our will to His Will. This means we are focused upon building our lives on God's precepts, not ours. The only way to be real, authentic followers of our Lord Jesus Christ is to deny what we want and pursue what He wants. This means that knowing who we are and how we are, both to God and also to others around us, is essential. We must never be the stumbling stone, trying to meddle with God's plans for ourselves or others. We must conduct ourselves with utmost integrity; be that person of faith who points to His example. Jesus does not force us to submit and surrender; He models it for us to follow (Psalm 15; John 3:29-30; Gal. 5:24).

Key Takeaway: Paul realized the Truth and reality of the Gospel. Even though he was a highly educated and influential leader as a Pharisee and with a high position politically as a Roman citizen,

he knew he was lost. He knew he did not deserve God's grace. We are never to take His grace for granted. We are not to see it as cheap, but realize its cost to our Lord, its power and impact upon our lives so we have a response that is real and valid to what Christ has done for us! Do you hear the call of God? Has the reality of Christ impacted you? If so, how have you responded? Have you responded with passion and conviction? Do you proclaim His name with impact and clarity no matter what you do or where you are at?

The Call to the Church? We must do as Paul, with a foremost call and passion to preach the gospel. Be thankful. Be encouraged by each other's faith, practicing prayer and using our gifts. Remember our Guilt (sinful nature), and our Grace (salvation, what Christ did), and Gratitude (service, how we are then to live)! As Leaders, we need to have a response that we are encouragers and equippers of and for one another (Rom. 15:1; 25-27)!

Questions to Ponder

1. Have you felt discouraged from telling others about Jesus and received little response?
2. How did the Holy Spirit call you to Christ? When you came to Christ, did your new life also change your goals in the 'earthly' (daily) life?
3. Why does Paul call himself a "*bondservant*" (Rom. 1:1; 9:3)? Would you ever use that term? What about a pastor?
4. If you were able to change, like Saul the "chief sinner" to Paul was able to change, how can this give you hope for others and perseverance to be a good witness?
5. Most people have a 'me first' identity, does this match up with the rest of Scripture and Paul's life?
6. As Christians we receive the gift of grace, but do not give the gift to ourselves. How does this make you feel that you cannot earn or buy God's most precious gift?
7. Have you struggled with surrendering your priorities in life so you are centered upon the Lord and not yourself?
8. What do trust and obedience mean to you? How are they different, does one precede the other? What can you do to be more like Paul and less like...?
9. Do you have a 'main theme' for your life? Paul's was to live by faith and not be ashamed (Romans 1:16-17). Such as a saying or slogan, or perhaps a philosophy? Being not ashamed of who we are in Christ is the key to the necessary courage that is needed to share your faith, what do you think?
10. Evangelizing and discipleing are the main goals as Paul modeled (Matt. 28) of the church and what Christ has called us to do and be. In what ways do you and your church do this? How can you do it better?
11. Read 1 Cor. 1:22-30, what are your stumbling blocks? What is foolishness to you? How have these feelings changed as you grew in Christ, or have they?
12. Our response to what Christ did for us is godly living, exercising our faith with trust and obedience, whatever we face! How have you done this? How can you do this better?