



Foundation of Faith

Special Edition

A STUDY OF THE LIFE OF

THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

In this edition, we would like to share insight into the heart and life of the Apostle Paul.

In Acts 9:15, God describes him as a “chosen vessel.” Other translations state, “a chosen instrument” and that “I [God] have chosen him.”

The Lord Jesus Himself chose His twelve disciples to preach the gospel and proclaim His name throughout the whole earth. According to Scripture, all believers since the beginning of time have been chosen, for Paul writes in his letter, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).

God calls all people to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ. Whoever accepts this call to faith in the Son of God receives grace and forgiveness through the blood of Christ. He receives salvation, and his name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Just as the Apostle Paul had to go through suffering and afflictions as a chosen vessel of God, the Bible says to you and me, “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction” (Isaiah 48:10 ESV). Likewise, each one of us must be purified, examined, and proved.

Dear Reader, the Lord wants all of us to serve Him. Even if we have not received detailed, clear, diligent instruction in “our fathers’ law” like the Apostle Paul did at the feet of Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3), nor have received special abilities and gifts as he did, we should not bury our talent and look on as others work hard for the Lord with body and soul. Instead, we should also fight loyally for the truth that has been entrusted to believers.

Therefore, dear Reader, think of eternity, look towards the heavenly inheritance, and you too will receive the crown of righteousness.

H. D. Nimz

Persecutor of the Church of Jesus Christ

Who Was Saul of Tarsus?

A good way to understand a person we have never met is to learn about how he lived his life. In the case of Saul (later known as Paul), we have plenty of first-hand material to work with, including statements by Saul himself.

He is first mentioned in Acts 7:58 at the stoning of the martyr Stephen. We read, “And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” This means that Saul, as a direct witness to Stephen’s stoning, saw this man of immense and immovable faith there on his knees, facing death with a joyful hope while asking God to forgive his enemies. As the events unfold, we read in verse 60, “Then [Stephen] knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

How did the stoning of Stephen affect Saul? One would think he was deeply shaken and moved to compassion, but instead, we read the chilling words, “Now Saul was consenting to [Stephen’s] death” (Acts 8:1).

Saul's Education and Beliefs

Paul himself offers some insight as he presents his defense before the high council in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3–5). Here, Paul makes several significant points:

1. Where was he from?

“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia.” With this statement, Paul emphasizes his identity as a Jew by birth, which was significant in those days and in his situation.

2. Where did he study?

He was “brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel.” Gamaliel, his teacher, was the preeminent religious and

legal scholar of his time and was “held in respect by all the people” (Acts 5:34).

3. What was he taught?

He was “taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law.” This is a reference to the Old Testament scriptures that formed the foundation of a true Israelite’s religious education. The verse also mentions how zealously Saul pursued his studies.

4. What did he learn?

He “was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way [of the followers of Jesus] to the death.” We see how the young, enthusiastic, and perhaps overly zealous Saul became a fanatical enemy of the people who loved and followed Jesus.

Let us take a quick look at Saul’s career. Considering that Saul was instructed in the Word of God by his nation’s best teacher, his subsequent path into blind opposition to God’s will and way must have been paved by his own ambition and willfulness. We can attend the best schools with the wisest teachers and collect a lot of outward knowledge about God’s Word but still not recognize His will.

Saul’s Persecution of the Followers of Jesus

Acts 8:1 reads, “Now Saul was consenting to [Stephen’s] death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” As a well-educated Pharisee, Saul must already have enjoyed a good reputation among his peers to be an instigator of the persecution, as we see in verse 3.

During times of persecutions, we notice certain repeated occurrences:



1. “They were all scattered throughout the regions”

Seeking refuge from persecution, the members of the church in Jerusalem fled from the dangerous areas to other places to save their lives and continue in their faith in Christ.

2. “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.”

In the thrall of his cause, Saul did not differentiate between those he persecuted. He had only one objective, and that was to rid the earth of the Church and all who believed in Christ.

In Acts 9:1, we find this dramatic depiction of Saul the Persecutor: “Saul [was] still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.” This picture evokes connotations of a powerful predator preparing to pounce on his prey. A similarly fervent zeal consumed Saul in his persecution of the Christians. Is it not terrifying to think that a Pharisee, educated in the scriptures of the Old Testament, was able to find pleasure in the sentencing and death of followers of Christ while believing he was serving God and doing His will? What a dangerous undertaking the delusional Saul carried out! ■

Alfred Brix, Chilliwack, BC

Paul's Conversion

The conversion of Paul is without a doubt the most famous one reported in the Word of God. It so impressed Luke that he relays it in three separate places in the book of Acts (Acts 9:1–22, 22:6–16, and 26:12–18). How does a man like Saul, who had hated the name of Jesus and had persecuted and murdered Christians, become not only a Christian but the preeminent preacher of the gospel? The only answer is that he encountered Jesus Christ on his way to Damascus.

Questions about Conversion

Saul's conversion raises several questions: What is a conversion? Is it really necessary? Is it the same for everyone? What does it do? Is it something that fades with time and dies out altogether, or is it something that lasts?

Some people argue that a conversion is a form of brainwashing to which Saul and all Christians after him fell prey. However, nobody can justify or prove this assertion. Paul personally encountered Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Lord. Because Saul's conversion and each new conversion provides yet more proof for the gospel and for the resurrection of Jesus, they present a big problem to Satan, and he fights them. Saul's conversion is particularly persuasive proof that Satan lost his power. Paul later writes to the Corinthians, "Death is swallowed up in victory.' O Death, where is

your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:54–55).

However, not every Christian's conversion matches Saul's experience. Jesus healed people in various ways, but despite all differences, the underlying principle was always the same: to glorify God. This is the case for every conversion as well. No matter how different each case may look, it will always include experiencing God and being born again through repentance and atonement.

Every conversion has its own set of circumstances. Saul persecuted the Christians, who believed in Jesus and preached His resurrection. We read, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1–2). Jesus had warned His disciples, "They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service" (John 16:2). Saul, too, thought He was serving God, that he was doing God a favor. He wanted to fight for God's cause and His people but took the wrong approach.

Many people have been drawn to Christ through a sermon, accepting Christ as their Savior when the Spirit of God spoke to their souls. Many others have been born again in si-

lence, in the presence of God alone, and some have sought God from the depths of a hopeless financial or emotional crisis. The road to conversion is as varied as people's relationships with God.

New Life

Conversion creates new life. It is always the result of God working. As with Saul, new life has been given to everyone who has personally experienced spiritual rebirth in God: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Paul clearly stated that he had done nothing to deserve salvation. On the contrary, he said of himself, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15). "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9). No one can claim to have performed, earned, or deserved salvation. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Conversion and Consecration

Paul offers us insight into his thought process through various epistles in the New Testament. After his con-



version, he never allowed himself to forget his past of bitter enmity with Jesus. This awareness led him to consecrate his life to Him on a deep and personal level. He loved Jesus passionately until the end of his life. The Lord expects this complete commitment from everyone who has experienced salvation.

Paul called himself a servant of Jesus Christ. His ambition was to tell the whole world about Him, as he wrote to the Galatians, “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

He was ready to suffer for Christ—in fact, he saw it as a great honor. He knew Christ had given everything for him, and he wanted to do the same for his Lord. His desire was to become more like Christ, to be pleasing to Christ, to be formed in Christ’s image, and to live in Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Conversion opens the way for people to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Keeping the Faith

Paul was true to his Lord until death. Shortly before his end, he triumphantly cried, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

The Lord expects the same loyalty from you and me so that one day we, too, may receive the crown of life. ■

Manfredo Günter
Oberá, Argentina

The *Power* of the Gospel

Paul writes, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16). Let us analyze this verse.

Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), everyone needs a Savior. Sin separates us from God and bars us from His glory. There would be no hope for the future, no hope of eternal life, no hope to escape the wrath to come since “we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Nobody (except Christ) lived a sin-free life. Is there no hope?

Yes, there is a remedy, a way out, a hope. It is the gospel of Christ. The Greek word “gospel” (*euaggelion*) means good news. The good news of Christ is that there is salvation for everyone who believes. It must be connected to Christ because, as Peter insists, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

There is only one power (Greek: *dunamis*) that can save us. It is the *dunamis* of God (*dunamis* comes from the same root as dynamite). This *dunamis* is the only power to salvation, the gospel of Christ. There is no greater power, for nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death on the cross can atone for our sins and bring us back into fellowship and favor with the Almighty.

This good news is for all people. When Paul says “for the Jew” and “for the Greek,” he is including all Israelites (not just those of Judah), and all heathen peoples (not just the Greek). Here Paul is using synecdoche, which is a figure of speech, a type of metonymy, that serves to include everyone. This good news is for you and for me. If you believe, putting your trust in Christ for salvation, you will be saved. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). “For, whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be saved” (Romans 10:13).

Paul experienced this. Being a Jew, he had tried to find righteous-

ness by following the Law. Yet he did not have the power to overcome temptation. He says “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24-24). But then he found the power of God to salvation, the gospel of Christ! So to the question, “Who will deliver me?” he answers, “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25). He is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it has delivered him from death, from the law, and from shame. He concludes, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). That is what the gospel of Christ can do. That is the power of God. Have you experienced this power of God? Have you been delivered from your sins? Ask and you shall receive (Matthew 7:7a). ■

Gerry Mielke
Hamilton, ON

Paul

It's midnight; the Apostle Paul is praying,
and fervently he seeks the face of God.
He brings his concerns to the Lord, relaying
the grief that he carries as onwards he plods.
In gloom and in darkness, hear him express:
"Oh Lord, take from me this thorn in the flesh!"

"The messenger of Satan, he buffets me;
Oh, do not allow this to linger on!"
Kneeling in submission, hear Paul humbly plea:
"I'd be more effective if this were gone."
See him in agony, asking afresh:
"Please Lord, take from me this thorn in the flesh."

"My life is dedicated fully to You,
yet without this thorn, there's much I would gain;
If You would relieve me, there's more I could do;
the wicked now sneer and laugh in disdain."
A third time, Paul pleads in his great distress:
"Oh Lord, take from me this thorn in the flesh."

And as he is wrestling in prayer with the Lord,
despite his infirmities, he is blessed.
He softly discerns these comforting words:
"My power in weakness is manifest.
No matter what happens, I'll see you through,
So let My grace be sufficient for you."

"Lest you be exalted by things you were shown,
and great revelations sent from above,
Boast in your weakness, your power's not your own.
Bask in My presence and trust in My love.
That Christ be honored, despite the distress,
God has provided this thorn in the flesh."

Paul cherished the answer God gave by His Word;
His grace is sufficient for ev'ry day.
Paul bore on his body the marks of the Lord;
He gave God the glory, thus he could say,
"In weakness I'm strong, abundantly blessed;
I patiently bear my thorn in the flesh."



A Special Confession

“I am a debtor” (Romans 1:14)

The apostle Paul, along with Timothy, his guide, and others, was on his third mission trip in Corinth. He had received a hearty welcome and warm hospitality in the home of Gaius.

In Corinth, during his second mission trip, he preached the gospel for one and a half years. For twenty years, he traveled from place to place to fulfill the command of the Savior: “Go into all the world.” Although he aged, his enthusiasm, love for Christ, and willingness to work in the service of his godly Master did not decrease. Just as the Lord came to Ananias in Damascus and said, “for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15), so the apostle bore this godly message in his heart.

Therefore he was in Corinth with an assistant named Tertius by his side, to whom he was dictating a letter to Rome, a worldly city: “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also” (Romans 1:14-15).

Was Paul’s motivating force wanderlust and his own wishes and wants? Oh no, absolutely not! What was it then? Here is his answer.

I Am a Debtor!

A debtor must pay off his debts. It does not matter whether he is pleased with them, whether he gladly or grudgingly does it, or

if it suits him or not. No, he has an obligation. He must pay them off or work them off, regardless of what it may cost him.

Most people do not want to be debtors. The majority deny their debts. Many ascribe their debts to others or deny everything and present a plethora of excuses. However, the apostle Paul said before all, “I am a debtor”!

In one of his sermons, he clarifies, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship” (1Corinthians 9:16-17).

He saw himself before God as a debtor for all people: the Greeks, the Jews, the educated, the uneducated, the rich, and the poor. He was not concerned about outward appearances but each individual’s soul.

He found God-fearing Lydia, a rich business woman, and he led her to belief. Then there was the poor maid who was set free from being possessed by a fortune-telling spirit. He preached to the workers in Lystra and to the philosophers in Athens. Paul wanted to preach the Word in Rome and, if possible, travel to Spain also (Romans 15:24).

Surely some had said that he was difficult to understand, but they acknowledged the burdens and circumstances he had to work under and what sufferings and tribulations he bore for the sake of Christ. Surely Paul could have answered, “I was lost, con-





fused, and deceived, was zealous with lack of judgment and persecuted God's church. However, Christ has called me, saved me, chosen me, and made me strong." Surely, he could also have said, "It is not for nothing that I have experienced His love and compassion, His grace, His care, and His faithfulness."

Furthermore, he could say, "It is so difficult for me to understand why many ignore God's call and invitation. They treat the Word of God so carelessly and superficially, tread on the blood of Christ, and do not consider themselves worthy of eternal life." Nevertheless, clearly and decisively he testified, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Dear Reader, we are all debtors before God because we have all sinned. Therefore, we all need redemption through the blood of Christ to be born again. "For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23).

"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

Have we recognized the love of Jesus? "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Therefore, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Dear Reader, you and I have only one life, and we have been blessed with the gift of a Savior, a sin-cleanser, Jesus, the Lamb of God, Who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Therefore, run to Him. He forgives our debts. Then serve the Lord with all your heart!

Now the question: where are the servants today, the brothers and sisters, the old and the young, who carry such a burden on their hearts, who see themselves as debtors before God? ■

H. D. Nimz



In Persecutions

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

There are many opinions on what exactly the “thorn in the flesh” means. It is often explained that Paul suffered from a chronic illness. But no one knows what disease it may have been. Others claim he had carnal temptations, as monks and recluses had in their cells. But all these assumptions are not supported by evidence in the Bible and cannot serve as a satisfactory answer.

Ambrose of Milan (339-397), John Chrysostom (344-407), a presbyter in Antioch, and later Martin Luther declared that the “thorn in the flesh” was the persecutions on the part of opponents of Christianity. E. E. Byrum also argued the same thing in his book *The Secret of Salvation*. We want to examine the biblical basis for this idea.

Both in Acts and in his letters, the apostle Paul mentions various details of his life. Although Paul writes very openly about himself, we never read directly about an illness.

Persecutions of the Apostle

Paul understood that the Lord had given him a special path to keep him humble. The apostle himself explains what “thorn” means. He means an angel of Satan, a certain evil spirit. But what was the effect of this spirit in the life of Paul? When we explore his life, we quickly realize that his greatest sufferings came from manifold persecutions.

The Russian translation states “a stinging in the flesh,” but the Greek original contains the word *skolops*. This does not just mean “a stinging,” it also describes a stake to which those sentenced to death were tied, or a post on which the convicted were placed.

In this way, Paul describes the marks of a death sentence he already carries on his body. “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure,

above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us” (2 Corinthians 1:8-10).

Notice the phrasing, “delivered us,” “does deliver,” and “will still deliver us.” The apostle was constantly threatened with death. Already in the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul declares, “God has displayed us, the apostles . . . as men condemned to death” (1 Corinthians 4:9).

In the original text, our initial verse expresses, “beating his face with a fist”—Satan struck Paul constantly. All these words and statements in the Greek language best characterize this “thorn in the flesh,” the evil angel of Satan, who wounded him both spiritually and physically.

Paul was a chosen vessel of God. And yet—or because of this—the Lord said to Ananias, “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16).

As he parted from the elders of Ephesus, Paul prophesied, “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me” (Acts 20:22-23). In every city where Paul preached the gospel, he was persecuted by opponents of the gospel. He writes to the Corinthians, “Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:9-10; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:30-31, 35-36). Paul’s attack by Satan was unfathomably powerful. “For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears” (2 Corinthians 7:5).

Summing up all these testimonies and accounts of the persecutions in Paul's life, we must conclude that every chronic disease is minor compared to the effect of the spirit that persecuted him and constantly "buffeted" him.

Paul asked God three times for relief in his commission. He wished to be freed from this "thorn." But the answer was, "My grace . . ." Paul humbled himself and exclaimed, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Illnesses in the Life of Paul

In the aforementioned verse, Paul expressly emphasizes hardships and persecutions but does not say a word about illnesses. When he speaks of "infirmities," it could be that illnesses are meant. However, we find in other translations here the word "weakness," which is closer to the original Greek text. If a "thorn in the flesh" was a chronic illness, Paul would have said just that.

Nobody can say that Paul was always healthy. Like any human being, he may have had a cold and may have suffered from the fever which was very common there. He traveled long distances on foot and had to negotiate mountains and canyons. During his lifetime, he may even have broken a foot or a hand. Paul could include all this in the word "infirmities."

The word "infirmities" could also include personal inability, helplessness, vulnerability, lack of strength, fatigue, etc., which made Paul totally dependent on the Lord. The power of God is proven in the lives of weak people, in our weaknesses. Therefore Paul testified, "But in all these things we overcome, for him that loved us" (Romans 8:37, cf. Philippians 4:13).

Unfortunately, we see people denying the possibility of divine healing from illness and justify this by referring to Paul and his "thorn in the flesh." Even if he had been ill, this circumstance cannot be an argument against the doctrine of the divine healing of the body. We read, "Now

God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul." And this related also to the divine healing of the sick (Acts 14:3; 8:10; 19:11-12; 20:9-12; 28:3-9).

Many sick people do not believe God can heal them, and they defend themselves with a "thorn in the flesh." If they argue that way, then they should also conclude as Paul did, to be content in their illness. The "thorn in the flesh" is not an argument against the doctrine of the healing of the body. It should never be the cause for not seeking help from Jesus in the case of illness.

Encouragement for Us

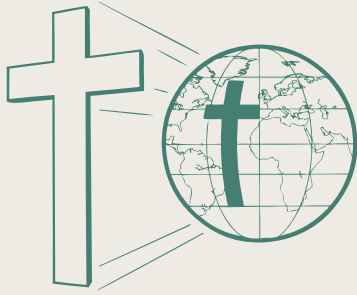
The apostle rejoiced in afflictions. The well-known challenge to the Philippians, "rejoice in the Lord always," is especially important to us because Paul wrote precisely this phrase while sitting imprisoned in chains.

If we observe the apostle's fruitful life more closely, it will serve as a great blessing to us. It is amazing how brightly and outstandingly the life of the Apostle Paul shines into our time. His was a life of complete self-denial, which he led not in the walls of a monastery but in the midst of the people.

No single movement in the history of the world has been so persecuted; nothing has been attempted to be eradicated as often as Christianity. On the other hand, the whole course of the history of human society has not been so positively influenced by any single movement as by Christianity. And no wonder, because people such as Paul lived at the source of Christianity. It is very clear to us that such supernatural work was only possible through God's power. Paul recognized this and glorified the Lord alone.

Therefore, in our time, we also want to be people who recognize their own weakness, bear the burden patiently, and live daily by the power of God and glorify Christ with our lives. ■

Harry Reinik
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Radio Program Message of Salvation

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“None of These Things Move Me”

In Acts 20:2-24, we find an extraordinary and profound statement. It was spoken by the great apostle Paul, missionary to the Gentiles. This is not about an indifferent carelessness that is often found among various people. A superficial person, who recklessly ignores all serious things in life, may say, “Nothing moves me” or “I don’t care about anything.” But this kind of an attitude doesn’t fit the character or life of Paul at all. Spiritual matters always came first for Paul. He let us see his clear, unerring faith and complete commitment to Christ. His life was filled with many hardships, resistances, and challenges from all sides. In response to this, he said, “But none of these things move me.” He was determined not to be irritated or distracted by anything but to live his life for the Lord and to persevere in the service of God. Seen from this point of view, our text acquires a special meaning and encourages deeper reflection.

We know of his life from Scripture. He had a very emotional, deprived, and pain-filled life. From the beginning of his relationship with Christ, the Lord said, “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). That is exactly what happened! We want to closely examine the things that did not stop nor shake up this man.

Paul had many adversaries during the time of his ministry. He had become a Christian. He distanced himself from the strict, legal Pharisees and preached Christ in a very determined way. This led to bitter enmity and persecution. This was the situation in the years following, until he was literally driven to his death. In his second letter to Timothy, he emphasized his sufferings with the

statement, “What persecutions I endured” (2 Timothy 3:11). In 2 Corinthians 1:8, he speaks of the tribulations in Asia: “we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.” In Romans 8:36, notice the almost incomprehensible statement, “We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter”! Can we understand what these statements really mean and how very serious his situation was? “None of these things move me,” was his resolve.

The spiritual ministry of the apostle involved the greatest hardships. He spoke of dangers, fears, hunger, lack of clothing, and how he had to learn to be “brought low and how to abound, how to have abundance and to suffer.” He thanked the Philippians for their active help in looking after his needs. They had helped him through caring benevolence (Philippians 4:14-16). It couldn’t have been easy to constantly be on arduous journeys for the sake of the gospel, “in toil and labor, in hunger and thirst, in frost and heat, in daily anxieties and worries, and whatever else happened” (2 Corinthians 11:27-28). But above all that was his bold and clear intent: “None of these things move me”!

His service for the kingdom of God was marked by many struggles. He did not fight for personal gain or his own reputation and honor but for the faith in Christ and the victory of the truth. He clearly knew and saw that he could not win this fight alone. Nevertheless, he wanted this fight to be exemplary and inspiring for others. It was a fight against false teachings and fallacies, against evil and seductive spirits, and against the constant obstruction of unbelieving and mentally unhinged people.



From Ephesus, he wrote to the believers at Corinth, “For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9). Paul experienced not only victories in battle, but also setbacks and losses. John Mark had left him during the first missions trip. “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10), he complained, and others “all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:21). There were losses on the spiritual battlefield, and these made the apostle’s struggles even more difficult. Is it any wonder that he repeatedly requested intercession from the children of God, writing to the congregation in Rome, “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints” (Romans 15:30-31). He wanted to move forward in his service, and setbacks and losses were not going to stop him.

Jesus was his best support, his best example in all the painful experiences of life. He wanted only one thing: to complete his race with joy. We also want to learn to overcome all obstacles so that we can achieve this goal.

He had to endure contempt, misunderstanding, and slander. In Athens, the worldly-wise philosophers opposed him and contemptuously said, “What does this babbler want to say?” (Acts 17:18). This was not the worst, since it came from the world. In his second letter to the Corinthians (chapter 10:10), we read, “‘For his letters,’ they say, ‘are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.’” This statement came from the believers in Corinth, in spite of Paul describing himself as the “least of the apostles” in his letter to them and openly saying that he had become all that he was and could be only by the grace of God. But even this could not shake him nor make him despondent. He held fast to his decision to persevere and said, “None of these things move me.” He clung to Christ and, leaning on Him, he convincingly exclaimed, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13)! Jesus was his best support, his best example in all the painful experiences of life. He wanted only one thing: to complete his race with joy. We also want to learn to overcome all obstacles so that we can achieve this goal. ■



Nevertheless, Praise God

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God” (Acts 16:25)

Paul and Silas sat inside the jail, where they had been locked up, waiting to be convicted. Their clothes had been torn from their bodies, their backs had been flayed bloody, and their feet were in shackles. They had to have thought, “Maybe we shouldn’t have started on the road to Europe. Maybe it was a false call that Paul received from the man in Macedonia. And where was that man in Macedonia who asked for help?” When Paul and his coworkers arrived at Philippi, the capital of Macedonia, no one welcomed them with open arms. Instead, they came in contact with a gathering of women. Even though a fabric seller named Lydia came to believe when she heard what Paul spoke, things were probably not as they had expected.

We don’t read about doubts arising in the hearts of these two men that this path to Europe couldn’t be God’s will. In contrast, they prayed and joyfully praised their God. During the night, they were unable to kneel to pray as they were surely accustomed to (Ephesians 3:14), but their hearts were bowed in humble adoration before God, and their voices proclaimed that they were joyful and confident. They praised God, and no lament came from their lips.

Their Lord and Master had foretold, “for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you” (Matthew 10:17). What happened was according to the Scripture. It was therefore not unusual that they suffered for their Lord. Maybe they even thanked their Lord to be considered worthy to suffer for Him, as the early apostles had (Acts 5:40-41).

Right there in that jail, Paul and Silas proved that their joy in the Lord was not dependent on their circumstances, a truth the Apostle Paul repeatedly emphasized during his time in jail in Rome. If we think of all the occurrences in Philippians (chapters 1:4; 4:4) where Paul wrote about his joy in the Lord, even though he was in jail, we have proof that our joy in the Lord is not dependent on our circumstances. The enemies of Jesus Christ may kill the body, but they are unable to kill the soul. The faithful martyrs, for Jesus’ sake, will always have the hope of eternal salvation. This blessed hope fills our soul with joy.

The two missionaries joyfully praising God had an audience. According to Acts 16:25, the other prisoners heard their midnight praises to God. We don’t know whether



Paul and Silas praised God so loudly that they woke up the others or whether they hadn't yet fallen asleep. We can probably assume that those prisoners must have listened with curiosity and might have asked themselves how these men could exude joy in this situation.

The angels in heaven were also listening. God's Word names them as "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). These angels are deeply involved in the spreading of the gospel and are joyful for each new sinner who repents (Luke 15:10).

God most definitely heard their singing that rose to Him, and He answered with an earthquake in the city. The jail was shaken down to its foundation. All the doors opened, and the chains holding the captives fell off and they were freed. This earthquake awoke the jailer, who had been sleeping until then. When he saw that all the doors of the jail were open, he wanted to fall on his sword because he assumed that all the prisoners had fled. Their escape would have cost him his life. By calling to the jailer not to harm himself, Paul saved him from committing suicide, because all the prisoners were still present. How wonderfully God had intervened! The apostles had no reason to doubt that their capture was ordained by God.

Following the story of the jailer, we find more evidence that God's hand was at work here. The jailer asked for a light to convince himself of what the prisoner Paul

had said. Then the more important question arose about his spiritual condition: "What must I do to be saved?" How good it was that Paul and Silas were present to show him the way. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Most certainly, the apostles explained more fully the way of salvation to the jailer and his family, which they all accepted. All became convinced of this truth, believed, and were baptized. The jailer, who was responsible for their punishment by flogging their backs until they were bloody, was willing that same night to wash off their blood. The apostles also experienced the jailer's hospitality in his home with his family. This family was joyful about their new life in Christ and the opportunity to have fellowship with other believers.

We, too, have reason to rejoice in God. Just think of Paul and Silas who, in spite of their pain, suffered in the jail in Philippi and became an example and blessing for us. What a shame it would have been if both apostles had succumbed to temptation! What a shame if you would be one of those who succumbs to temptation. So remind yourself that if Paul and Silas were joyful in their situation and praised God, then so can we. May the Lord help us! ■

Reinhard Roesler
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The *Goal* of His Mission

A Pure Congregation, Not Just a Huge Crowd

What are you trying to accomplish with mission work? Quality or quantity? When we look at the work of the Apostle Paul, we see that his concern was not about how many people gathered together, but the purity of their hearts. He said in 2 Corinthians 11:2, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” He was probably very happy when many people came to hear the gospel, but his main focus was a pure heart, a pure life. He knew that the Bridegroom, to whom the Bride belonged, was not only happy about a large group of believers but more importantly, a pure church (a virgin bride). Jesus was not impressed by the large crowds that followed Him. We find a poignant story in Luke 14:25-27: “Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sister, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.’” Jesus

is the Bridegroom who is betrothed to the born-again church (the bride). Paul knew that Jesus would not be pleased if she was not pure and holy. It was his desire to present Jesus with a pure virgin. He did not want a church indifferent in her worship, nor a church that knew and professed all the right doctrine but didn’t obey it. It was not important to him how the church appeared before men but what the actual state of her heart was.

Pure Conduct Towards the Needy

We find examples in the Word of God that testify of the fruit of pure worship. For example, in James 1:27 we read, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

The context of the letter shows us the sober attitude of the apostle. No one has the right to talk about divine love if they ignore their needy brothers and sisters. At the final judgment, Jesus will say, “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). Jesus wants us to live out God’s love



*“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy.
For I have betrothed you to one husband,
that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”
(2 Corinthians 11:2).*

and mercy every day. Our lives should be so filled with gratitude for our salvation through Jesus that we help others out of love, wherever we have the opportunity and the means to do so.

In particular, it was important to the Apostle Paul that the Corinthians open their hearts and collect money to send to Jerusalem to ease their plight. He said, “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). He asked them to show their love to their fellow believers through their gifts. To help others in need is part of the pure conduct of the church.

A Pure Mindset, as Jesus Had

Not only our words and deeds should be pure, but also our inner attitude. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no

reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8). Genuine purity of heart is seen in the fruit of humility and the willingness to serve. Jesus even said that the greatness of a person is recognized in his willingness to serve (Matthew 20:25-28). It’s much easier to put our fellow man on the same level as us and serve him if our hearts are free from pride and stubbornness. Otherwise, we like to put ourselves above others. Just as Jesus treated everyone without respect for persons, so must we. We want to be pure in our attitude and mindset.

With Jesus, it is the state of the heart that counts, not the size of the crowd. In the end, Jesus will only accept a pure bride. Dear soul, do you belong to this pure assembly that will joyfully enter His glory? If not, that can still change today. ■

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A failure?

*“This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Her-
mogenes.” (2 Timothy 1:15)*

At the time of this writing, Paul found himself in prison in Rome for the second time. He felt lonely and wrote a letter to Timothy. The first letter to young Timothy served as instruction, but the second one was a very personal letter.

Paul remembered. It still hurt when he thought about it. Everyone had turned away! Was this the outcome of his work in Asia? Was Paul actually a failure?

Upon first glance at this verse, one might think so, but whoever knows the whole of Paul's life knows that the end result of his work was very positive. At that time, however, it looked depressing. In this passage, we see clearly that Paul, like every other person, had feelings and emotions. Once in a while, the Bible grants us a glimpse into his inner life. We want to look closer at several situations in his life.

After a long boat trip from Caesarea to Rome (it lasted several months), not just Paul, but everyone was exhausted. The journey took its toll, not only physically but also spiritually. When they arrived in Rome, Paul didn't know what would happen to him. He desperately needed encouragement. Then we read in Acts 28:15, “And from there, when the brethren heard about us,

they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.” Encouragement came!

There were plenty of situations in Paul's life in which the enemy discouraged him and whispered to him, “Give up, you are a failure.”

Acts 14:19-20 tells us, “Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” When the disciples encircled him, Paul's reaction was pivotal. Would he reveal his discouragement? No! He continued on. He stood up and went into the city and “preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples,” returning “to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch” (verse 21).

Shortly before that, we read that the people in Lystra acknowledged Paul and Barnabas as gods and worshiped them and wanted to sacrifice to them. But when the Jews came, the multitudes were quickly persuaded the other way and stoned Paul. This shows how fickle people can be and how they can be tossed around by all kinds of opinions and circumstances.

In Acts 28:1-6, we see a very similar picture. While a snake fastened onto Paul's hand, the people thought he was a murderer, with justice clearly doling out the punishment of death (although he had escaped the sea). But when nothing happened and Paul shook off the creature into the fire, their opinion changed, and they thought he was a god. First he was damned to hell, and a few seconds later he was being praised and made equal to God.

This sudden shift in opinion seems almost unbelievable. But are such shifts totally unfamiliar to us? How quickly a person can give in to temptation! One moment you're standing firm for the Lord, and a short time later during temptation, you're ready to give in, with evil thoughts running rampant.

Our thoughts need a footing, an anchor, and that is Jesus. This is what Paul learned. How did he learn it? Like every other person, Paul needed the power of God, and he gained it primarily through prayer. We often read about his answered prayers.

“Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city’” (Acts 18:9-

10). Paul noticed that the Jews were once again devising plans against him. He prayed at night to God and was encouraged. Prayer is the strongest remedy for victory over the enemy and over circumstances.

Sometimes, Paul felt weak and asked for the support of others. "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me" (Romans 15:30). Here we learn that although personal prayer is a powerful weapon, we also need the prayer support of our brothers and sisters.

It is wonderful when we can count on the support from our spiritual brothers and sisters. In Paul's life we see, however, that there were moments in which he was left all alone. Such situations can come up in our lives, but they are not an indication that we have failed.

Even Jesus Himself was abandoned by many people. In John 6:66, we read: "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." And in the most important moment of His life, even the last and most faithful abandoned Him. John 16:32 says: "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And

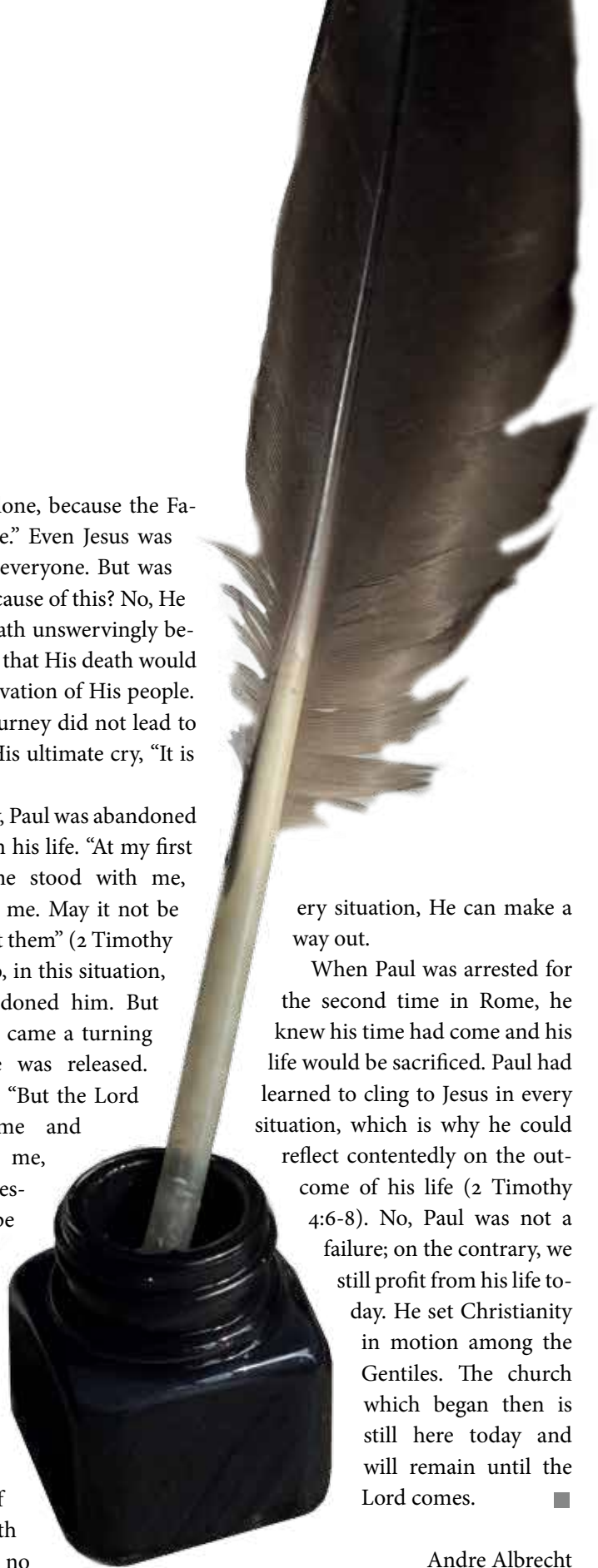
yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." Even Jesus was abandoned by everyone. But was He a failure because of this? No, He approached death unswervingly because He knew that His death would serve as the salvation of His people. This painful journey did not lead to failure but to His ultimate cry, "It is finished!"

Additionally, Paul was abandoned several times in his life. "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them" (2 Timothy 4:16). Here, too, in this situation, everyone abandoned him. But suddenly there came a turning point, and he was released. Verse 17 states, "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." With God, there is no "impossible!" In ev-

ery situation, He can make a way out.

When Paul was arrested for the second time in Rome, he knew his time had come and his life would be sacrificed. Paul had learned to cling to Jesus in every situation, which is why he could reflect contentedly on the outcome of his life (2 Timothy 4:6-8). No, Paul was not a failure; on the contrary, we still profit from his life today. He set Christianity in motion among the Gentiles. The church which began then is still here today and will remain until the Lord comes. ■

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As the Pastor

Who Was Paul?

Paul's great personality shines over the millennia even into our own time, into our present day. In his general letters to individual churches, as well as in his personal letters to co-workers and friends, we see the marks of a great man of God, a man whose heart is aflame and filled with undying love for lost souls.

Paul was not one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. At first, he is portrayed in the Bible as a fanatical persecutor of the church. His conversion was extraordinary. His success as a follower of Jesus was also extraordinary. Almost half of the books in the New Testament were written by Paul. His mission among the nations is well known, as he was instrumental in spreading the gospel. After the resurrection of Jesus, the church consisted primarily of Jewish believers, but only thirty years later the gospel had spread throughout the Roman Empire and into Europe.

What Does Paul Say about Himself?

Paul described himself as a promising young Jewish theologian, zealous for the law of Moses. Born in Tarsus, he belonged to an emigrant Jewish family. The geographical location of Tarsus lies in southeast Turkey today. Paul came from a respected family belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. In his early teens, he was a student of Gamaliel, a respected Jewish scribe (Galatians 1:13-14; Acts 22:3). His zeal for the law was so acute that he persecuted the Church (Acts 22:4; 26:10-11), which was then still in its infancy.

Paul gladly gives account of his conversion. He had a dramatic encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. When Christ stepped into his path, he was divinely enlightened. Suddenly, he recognized his sinfulness and his rebellion against God. Through his brutal aggression against the Church, he had brought great guilt upon himself. There on the road to Damascus, he became aware of his pitiful state, his hopelessness, and his sin. He saw no way out. Then Paul experienced the blessedness of God-given pastoral care enabled by the Holy Spirit.

Pastoral Care

By falling into sin, the human condition was altered. The relationship changed:

- a) towards God
- b) towards other people
- c) towards oneself

This miserable condition of the soul necessitates the need for pastoral care. Healthy, normal relationships are wanting, have become diseased, and are in need of a cure. Only Jesus Christ, through His atonement, provides effective medicine for this predicament.

Pastoral care serves with the intention of healing the inner person and restoring the whole person to health. Good pastoral care is successful in reaching and speaking to the mind, the will, and the emotions of the individual.

Pastoral care begins with care for the soul. It is concerned about those souls who have no salvation and have not yet found healing for their sin-shattered hearts and lives. Pastoral care also offers guidance for those who are converted and serve the Lord.

The most important issue for the person offering pastoral care is to make a correct diagnosis in order to understand and address an individual's spiritual need. It is important to understand which relationship has been damaged, the relationship with your neighbor, with God, or within yourself.

Paul's Pastoral Care

In Acts, Luke relates how Paul labored in public but also how he provided pastoral care in private: "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). In public, he was able to reach people from a reserved distance, but in personal pastoral care he could meet the individual's specific need. Focusing on the individual's specific circumstances, he could provide the necessary help from God's abundance. Just like a knowledgeable pharmacist selects the right medicine, so Paul could select those admonitions and promises of God that were right for the soul seeking help. Concerning his stay in Rome, we are told, "Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him" (Acts 28:30). It was probably similar in other places where Paul stayed as well. People came and were able to have personal conversations with him and receive spiritual help and strength.



His Success as a Pastor

When Paul needed help in Damascus, he received outside assistance. Ananias and Barnabas were used by God to give him the help he needed. The person offering care must assure the seeking individual that there is hope for him or her. In his repentant state, Paul was totally confused and saw no way out. In conversation with Barnabas, who offered him pastoral care, the way to a hopeful future became clearly evident. Paul learned from this personal experience in order to be successful in his own ministry as a pastor.

Later on, he would often relate how Christ had lifted him out of the deepest abyss, and therefore he could offer hope for others. His own dramatic experiences gave him a foundation to refer back to. He never forgot the depths he had come out of, and this kept him humble and filled with gratitude.

Foundational to the Apostle Paul's success as a pastor was his intimate, personal knowledge of Jesus. He knew the power of Christ and could credibly share this with those in his sphere of influence. He had personally experienced God's power and could therefore tell those who were hopeless and laden with sin about the love, compassion, and faithfulness of Christ. The depth of his own personal guilt and the saving knowledge of Christ were his prerequisites for understanding the spiritual misery of others.

It is important for those in spiritual distress to know that their counselor understands their situation. Only then will they be able to open up and talk about what is essential. They must know their counselor is not just repeating finely polished phrases and giving advice without having a deep concern for their situation. The Apostle

Paul did not just recite empty words of comfort. He was genuinely concerned that those seeking spiritual help actually received the advice they needed to get them out of their predicament.

By having an intimate relationship with God, a pastor is able to address even those concerns that an individual may not be able to express. By being sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit during counseling, a pastor can see the real need and consequently give real help. The person being counseled will sense the counselor's understanding and sensitivity to the situation, enabling them to be shown the way forward. Ultimately, the counselor is only a tool in the hand of our compassionate God, striving to be humbly led by the Spirit.

Paul had learned the theoretical aspects of the Old Testament law from Gamaliel, a distinguished scribe. But it was through Christ and from his own experience that he learned how to provide pastoral care in the work of the Lord. Paul's fatherly advice given in the pastoral epistles (1 Corinthians 4:14-15; Galatians 4:19) clearly show how tender and full of love his counsel is.

This aspect of Paul's work did not always come easily. At times, he was at a loss of exactly what to do (Galatians 4:16; 2 Corinthians 10:10). If at the start he sometimes felt helpless, Paul could thank God in the end for the wisdom, goodness, compassion, and unending faith given to him. The same God who was with Paul is also with His people today. He will enable His servants to be useful counselors through experience, leading them by His Holy Spirit and verifying the promises given in His Word. ■

Waldemar Adler
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Preacher and Consecrated Writer

Paul, also named Saul, a son of religious parents, was proud to belong to the community of Pharisees. He was also a very ambitious rabbinical student who studied under the teachings of the famous Gamaliel. His course of studies was carried out with total dedication, resulting in the recognition of being a scribe in his early years.

When Stephen was stoned, we read, “The witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul” (Acts 7:58). In order to supervise an orderly stoning, an officially authorized scribe had to be in control of the execution. At this time, Paul was at least 30 years old.

Paul, the Preacher

After Paul’s miraculous conversion and his experience with Christ, the Son of God, while traveling on the road to Damascus, he began sharing the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah. This created a huge outrage among the Jews because they could not grasp the radical change in him and his great love for Christ; therefore, they plotted to kill him and guarded the city gates day and night. “Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket” (Acts 9:25).

After escaping Damascus, he went back to Jerusalem and found accommodations with Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement.” Barnabas

helped Paul in his newfound faith, and people began accepting him and believing his testimony regarding his conversion to Jesus Christ. However, opposition arose among the Jews, who made plans to kill him. Following the advice of his Christian brothers, he left Jerusalem and sought out his hometown, Tarsus.

Christ had called him into the ministry to work for Him. However, his actual missionary work first began years later. Prior to this, Saul experienced a time of quietness for a period of ten or twelve years. Then, while some believers from Cyprus and Cyrene were in Antioch, Syria, a great revival took place. The church in Jerusalem heard this and sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he saw the great number of people who had been saved by the grace of Jesus, he departed for Tarsus to seek Saul; and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. “So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26).

It was from this point that they departed on their first missions trip. “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (Acts 13:2). The Apostle Paul then carried out a year of ministry

work. During this time, something noteworthy took place. Barnabas was the older, more experienced brother; Paul was quite a bit younger and less experienced. At first, we read, “Barnabas and Saul,” but from Acts 13:13 forward, he was no longer “Saul” but rather “Paul”; and from then on, Paul was mentioned first and then Barnabas. The older brother allowed the younger one to lead the way. Just like it was back in the day, he was “holding the reins” while placing the younger one on the horse, and then sat back and followed.

From this point on, Paul was the head preacher, taking the initiative in many situations. His main topic was “the crucified Christ.” He wrote to the Galatians, “In my sermons I have portrayed Christ as crucified so clearly among you” (Galatians 3:1).

The apostle preached in synagogues, in the marketplace, in villages and towns. In the towns where there were no Jewish services, he found the places where people were praying and preached to them there. We read how in Philippi, a God-fearing woman named Lydia, along with others, was converted after hearing the sermon. In Ephesus, as he spoke publicly and in various homes, Paul reminded the elders and testified, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Along with Silas, also called Silvanus, Paul undertook the second missions trip, departing from Antioch. They traveled through Tarsus, today known as Turkey, towards Lystra, where Paul was stoned, and then passed through Troas to Europe. On his third missions trip, he went to Rome.

Paul, the Writer

In the Old Testament, God already had a number of people who were active in writing, for example Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Isaiah, and many more who were servants of the Lord. God spoke to Isaiah, “Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it on a scroll, that it may be for time to come, forever and ever” (Isaiah 30:8).

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, God’s chosen servant, had a special role. Peter wrote two letters, John wrote the fourth Gospel, plus three letters, as well as the Book of Revelation. There were several other writers who wrote one or two letters, but Paul wrote the most, a total of twelve books of the Bible.

First, we have the two letters to the Thessalonians. With love and self-sacrificing commitment, he wrote, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father” (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3). Unfailingly, Paul encouraged them, answered their questions, and drew their sight towards heaven.

Then we have the letters to the Corinthians. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city; two-thirds of the city was slaves, and there were poor and

rich people. In this coastal metropolis, immorality and idol worship prevailed to a dreadful extent. The newly-founded Christian church was threatened from all sides and stood in great danger. Paul tried to establish clarity, remove misunderstandings, and in an unwavering manner, showed the plan of salvation. His letters reveal how he labored and explained the way to them: “Daily he carried deep concern for all the churches” (see 2 Corinthians 11:28).

We are also aware that the Apostle Paul wrote even more letters which have been lost and were not included in the New Testament, according to God’s wise counsel. We marvel at how this apostle used his time and opportunities wisely to do his best in God’s work.

The greater part of his work as writer was fulfilled in Rome. This is where his letters originated, while in prison.

He wrote to the Ephesians, “For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles . . .” (Ephesians 3:1). Even though he was a prisoner of Christ, he wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). He praised God’s grace and showed them that through Christ, the Gentiles are fellow heirs as believers in the family of God, and he expounded on the Church, where Christ alone is the Head and we are members of His body! Yes, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32).

In his letter to the Philippians, he wrote, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phi-

lippians 2:5). Although as a prisoner his future was uncertain, he often wrote about joy: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4)!

To the Colossians he wrote: “For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 1:1-3). Are we able to understand what Paul means when he writes about a conflict? And at the closing of his letter, in chapter 4:18, he pleads, “Remember my chains.”

Last, we have the letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon during his imprisonment in Rome. He wrote, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:6-7).

Dear Reader, we have had the New Testament with the twelve letters of Paul for almost 2000 years. Millions of people have drawn hope and comfort from this treasury and were blessed. These letters have been translated into more than 1000 languages. Eternity will reveal a huge, countless host of people gathered around the throne of God, who were touched and inspired through the gospel and work of the servants of God. It is my desire to be there as well! ■

H. D. Nimz

Journey to *Rome*

Around 62 A.D., the Jews made an accusation against Paul, even though he had not sinned against the Jewish law or against Caesar. He stood pure and innocent before God and man, without fault, as God expected. Paul defended himself in a speech before King Agrippa. Here he gave testimony of his conversion to God. Toward the end Agrippa said to Festus, in Acts 26:32, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

Due to his own appeal to Caesar, Paul was handed over to Julius, along with other prisoners. This is how the report of Paul’s trip to Rome in Acts 27 begins. They boarded a ship from Caesarea. They sailed to Sidon and then came to Myra (present-day Turkey). The next stop was at Fair Havens near the city of Lasea. Here Paul warned them not to continue. However, Julius was persuaded by the others, so they raised the anchors and continued on. Then a completely unexpected strong storm broke out.

From this we can learn that many people, even Christians, do not listen to well-intended warnings, and steer towards personal shipwreck. This has also occurred in churches that ignored warnings. People sometimes experience unnecessary storms in life because they are unwilling to listen. If mature brothers and sisters or parents give you good

advice, then pray, think it over, and accept the advice.

Due to the storm, they struck sail so that they might not run aground. The ship was driven by the storm. For days they saw neither sun nor stars. They were without orientation and all hope of life was lost.

This is a fitting picture for many people. Dear reader, are you without hope and direction? Look to the Lord. Christ is the hope for the hopeless. He wants to give you direction and focus. Don’t be discouraged. Don’t give up. Be encouraged.

Paul was an example in this hopeless situation. He was not upset because they initially failed to accept his advice. Instead, he sought the best for everyone—a Christian mindset which many have difficulty putting into practice. He spoke of an angel from the God he served. Paul had assurance of salvation and knew he belonged to God. The joyful, godly news from the angel said, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you” (Acts 27:24). Imagine that you were distressed at sea. How much would these words bring comfort and hope to you! Paul trusted God and encouraged 275 discouraged people in the rocking ship. When others are discouraged, children of God are calm and can support others.

Let’s remember, your trust in God is encouraging to others. Dis-

couraged people cause others to be discouraged. In complete trust in God, Paul encouraged them all to “take nourishment, for this is to your survival.” Paul took the bread. Then he raised a prayer of thanks to God upon the ship that was about to sink. May you also thank God in spite of the trouble you may be in. Chapter 27 ends with a report that all were saved.

The unknown island on which they were stranded was called Malta. The natives there showed unusual kindness at the arrival of 276 unexpected people who were in great need.

Paul was an example in every aspect. He did not stand around idly, but gathered a bundle of sticks for the fire. Suddenly, a viper came out and fastened to his hand. The island dwellers saw this. What did they think? They were completely mistaken and said, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped sea, yet justice does not allow to live” (Acts 28:4). Wrong thoughts bring wrong conclusions and false claims, which are out of line with truth. Sadly, we sometimes fall into this kind of thinking. We should keep silent about things we are not certain about.

And Paul? He shook the snake off into the fire. The islanders waited for him to die. Their wrong thinking produced false expectations. They waited and waited, but nothing happened. They didn’t know about the

power of believing in the Lord Jesus Who said, "And these signs will follow will follow those who believe: In my name they will . . . take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they lay hands on the sick and they will recover" (Mark 16:17a-18). We find an additional promise in Psalm 91:11-13: "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. . . . The young lion and serpent you shall trample underfoot." After some time, the people reached the verdict that Paul was a god.

Publius, the leading citizen of the Island, courteously entertained the 276 guests for three days. His father lay sick with fever and dysentery. Paul went into his room, prayed for him, laid hands on him, and healed him. This news spread like wildfire and other sick people were healed by the power of God. What an encouraging faith-builder this is for all those who are sick! Christ still has the same power and might today! The Maltans honored their guests and gave them all that was needed for their long journey.

They went toward Rome. From there, brethren came to meet them "as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns" (Acts 28:14-15). When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. How good is the fellowship with fellow believers! Paul was not alone. Here were brothers who encouraged him and supported him in prayer.

In Rome, Paul was permitted to move about freely under the supervision of a soldier. After three days, Paul called the Jewish leaders of the city together for a discussion. Most likely they were overseers of the synagogue. These men had not received any negative reports about Paul. Yet they knew that this sect, known as the church of God, was spoken against all over.

Justin, the martyr (who died in 165 A.D. in Rome), reported that the Jews from Jerusalem sent men out all over to warn about the Christians who were considered an atheistic and evil sect. For this reason, the Jews may have referred to them as a "sect." No matter how people might describe the church, it is still the church of the living God.

Another meeting was arranged, where numerous Jews came to hear Paul speak. From morning until evening, he spoke with them about the kingdom of God. He explained to them how God establishes His kingdom and he tried to show from the law of Moses that Jesus is the Messiah. Some were convinced and others failed to believe. It seems that a debate arose between the two sides. In response to the unbelieving Jews, Paul cited Isaiah 6:9-10, adding, "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (Acts 28:23-28).

Dear reader, has the gospel found its way to your heart? Accept salvation while it is still a time of grace. Paul remained 2 years in his rented home, and received all who came to visit. During this time Paul preached about the Kingdom of God, about Jesus, his Savior, "with all confidence, no one forbidding him" (Acts 28:31b). May God help us be joyful witnesses of our Savior. ■

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The Finished Race

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Never could the young Pharisee Saul have imagined how or where his course here on earth would end! Back then, he wanted to conquer the world and achieve great success among the prominent in Jewish society. Now, at the end of his journey, he was completely content to be “poured out” as a sacrifice. The long journey, with all its struggles, worries, tribulations, and dangers had come to an end.

How often had this man of God longed for this moment! In the midst of tremendous trials, discouragement, and the huge, sometimes overwhelming responsibilities placed on him, he often longed to be released from all of it and be home with Jesus. His riveting words are known to us: “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you” (Philippians 1:23-24). Paul had the unwavering conviction that “for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). With this knowledge, he longed from his prison cell to be rid of and free from everything and to be at home with Jesus.

Fought the Good Fight

Paul’s battle was not an easy one. He was hated and persecuted. “I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Added to that were the attacks of Satan. How the powers of hell raged against this holy warrior! “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Perhaps we might say, “No thanks, I don't want a difficult battle like that!” Paul certainly didn't want such a difficult one either, but for the sake of Christ, he was willing to fight a good battle. The immense plight of those around him and a world full of lost souls urged him on. Yet, this battle was also brimming with joy. This beleaguered Christian encouraged other children of God, from the misery of his prison cell, to be filled with joy! Why? Because Jesus was with him, strengthening and encouraging him and giving him joy.

If Paul were able to retrace his steps, would he run a different race? Never! He would choose the same path, except that he would consecrate his life to the Lord Jesus much earlier. Why? He had “fought a good fight.” This battle had eternal worth and an eternal reward. It was the only battle worth fighting. How wonderful if we can look back at the end of our lives and say, “I have fought a good fight!”

Kept the Faith

Satan especially attacks the faith of many children of God. He either tries to negate the entire plan of salvation and make it inconceivable for some, or he tries to convince them they no longer have salvation. Through bad feelings, presumption of failure, not living up to expectations, loneliness, dark thoughts, and many other emotions, Satan tries to jeopardize the faith of God's children. It is likely that such thoughts also entered Paul's mind as he sat in prison. However, he was always able to focus on the Lord and to orientate himself in His Word. He simply made the decision to keep the faith.

Keeping the faith must include the importance of keeping the correct faith. Even at that time, there were dangerous deviations from the true faith that was entrusted to believers. Jesus had warned them, “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many” (Matthew 24:11). Paul also wrote to Timothy, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1). He also commands Timothy in verse 16, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” With great effort, Paul strove to keep the true faith. Obviously, he examined himself to make sure that he wouldn't somehow stray from the correct path. And now, at the end of his life's journey, he could testify before God and man: “I have kept the faith.” In other words, “I remained faithful.” May

God grant that we may genuinely have this testimony at the end of our lives.

A Crown is Waiting

The last section of the Apostle Paul's testimony refers to the pinnacle of the journey, the crown of victory. Paul was not trying to imply that he had earned this crown with his exemplary fight. He was actually directing his readers to the Savior, Jesus, Who has promised that crown to every victor. “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10b). Paul did not even consider himself worthy to be called an apostle. Yet because of God's indescribable gift of grace, He rewards faithful service and a life lived for God with a crown. Surely we will also remove our own crown someday and lay it at the feet of the Lamb of God.

It is a crown of righteousness. It is not self-righteousness nor an earned righteousness, but the righteousness that only comes from God. “The blood of Jesus and His righteousness is my adornment!” Those who have been made righteous by God and have served Him in holiness and honor till the end of their lives will eternally glorify God, and be crowned with righteousness.

The Finished Race

Imagine Paul being there in eternity with his Savior. Do you think he regrets having suffered for his Lord or having sacrificed so much? No! On the contrary, he will be so glad and thankful he was able to do all this for Him. So let's take Paul as our example and use our remaining time wisely, living for the Lord and for eternity. With God's help, power, and grace, we want to fight the good fight. Let's not be influenced by the trends of this time and allow ourselves to be tossed by new winds of doctrine. We too want to keep the faith. And together with Paul, let's decide that “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

The crown of righteousness awaits you; the Lord has it ready for you. Let's successfully finish the race so we can rejoice in all eternity with our Lord, with Paul, and with all the saints! ■

Ron Taron

The Life of Paul

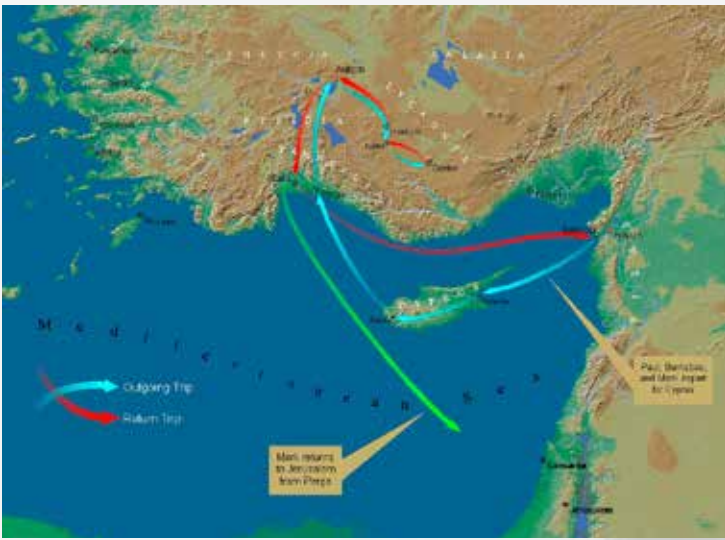
(Dates according to the Blue Letter Bible, and may vary.)

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| A.D. | |
| c. 5 | Birth of Apostle Paul |
| c. 15 - 20 | Studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem |
| c. 32 | Present at Stephen's stoning |
| c. 33 - 34 | Persecuted the Church of God |
| 34 | Converted on the way to Damascus |
| 34 - 37 | In Arabia |
| 37 | Returned to Damascus and Jerusalem |
| 37 - 46 | In Tarsus— Barnabas seeks him |
| 47 | A teacher with Barnabas in Antioch |
| 48 | First Missions Trip |
| 50 | Second Missions Trip |
| 53 | Third Missions Trip |
| 56 | Met with the elders from the Church in Ephesus in Miletus |
| 57 | Met with the Governor Felix |
| 59 | Travelled to Rome |
| 66 | Executed in Rome under Nero (date uncertain) |

Letters of Paul

Researchers estimate the following dates of their origin:

| | |
|----------------|------------------------------------|
| A.D. | |
| 48 - 49 | Galatians |
| 49 | 1 Thessalonians |
| 50 - 51 | 2 Thessalonians |
| 54 | 1 Corinthians |
| 56 - 57 | 2 Corinthians |
| 57 | Romans |
| 60 | Ephesians, Colossians Philemon |
| 63 | Philippians |
| 65 - 66 | 1 Timothy and Titus |
| 66 | 2 Timothy shortly before his death |



PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY



PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME



Today, We Need Men

*Today, we need men who are serving the Lord,
Risking their all and obeying His Word.
Strong, fit for battle, and yet humble and true,
Not bowing to others in all that they do.*

*Today, we need men full of faith, joy, and grace,
Lest they be disqualified from the race.
Men and fathers who walk in the light,
Shining as beacons in darkness and night.*

*Today, we need men who walk upright and straight,
Not afraid of Satan, knowing his fate.
Men to rely on to always be true,
Even if suff'ring and pain be their due.*

*Today, we need men, who show others the way,
Who care for the church and don't go astray.
We need men, not rich in gold but in Spirit,
Who obey God's dear Word, not just hear it.*

*Today, we need men who will never despair,
Strong in God's grace, showing others they care.
Leaders who stand strong in battle, come what may.
Great is their reward in heaven some day.*