

## **PAUL APOSTLE OF THE HEART SET FREE**

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Roy Jenkins, in his book on Winston Churchill entitled *Churchill: A Biography*, quotes Lady Lytton as she described her experience in meeting the great British leader: “The first time you meet Winston, you see all his faults, and the rest of your life you spend in discovering his virtues.”

This is equally true of Saul of Tarsus. We first meet him as a raging bull, standing proudly, fighting battles, and persecuting followers of Christ in the name of God. On his Hiterlian march out to Damascus, God interrupted his journey by striking him blind. For the first time in his adult life he was a dependent, being led into the city. God sent him His messenger, Ananias, who laid hands on him in commission for his work and healing his eyes. Then the Lord continued the work of transformation by preparing Saul for his mission to the Gentiles.

One look at Christ was enough to show him his error, and turn all his energies in the opposite direction. There are many of us who profess to be honest in our desire to serve God, and yet we are not very active in the service. There is no such radical change visible in our lives, as was seen in Paul’s. Why is this? Perhaps we have not seen Jesus. We have not let our eyes rest upon the perfect pattern. It is not because we have not the opportunity, but because we lack the purpose. Could we see him in the sufferings and shame that He endured for us, perhaps we too might lose sight of self, and run with patient continuance the race that is set before us, steadfastly “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

From Paul’s case we may learn what true conversion is. It is a direct turning around. His course after he had seen Jesus was exactly opposite to what it was before. His natural energy and zeal remained the same, but was turned into another channel. It would be a wonderful thing to see a stream that is rushing madly down the mountain-side, change its course, and flow in the opposite direction; but such a thing would be no more wonderful than is the change effected by the Spirit of God on the human heart. The daily life is the only test of conversion.

It must be remembered also, that Paul was not a heathen nor an infidel. He was an honored member of the church—the one that God had specially designated as His own. Not only this, but he was one of

the strictest in the performance of every duty. No doubt he would have scoffed at the idea that he needed conversion, yet he was ignorant of the essential element of true religion.

May there not be many in our time who are in similar circumstances? The testing point now is the law of God, especially the fourth commandment. It is often said, "What you say about the Sabbath cannot be true, or our ministers and learned men would have found it out and told us."

Well, Saul was a leading man, familiar with the Bible, and he was ignorant of the truth; the high priest and his associates were the leaders in the church, the ministers of God, yet they harden their hearts against the truth. Is it any more to be wondered at that such a thing should happen now and then? The Bible says that just this state of things will exist in the last days. As it was then, so it is now, that the majority will continue to fight against the truth, instead of accepting and obeying and it.

As soon as Paul had become a disciple he commenced preaching. He had found the truth, and he lost no time in proclaiming it to others. He was not content to be a silent disciple, he must sound a note of warning. His preaching, also, was not apologetic. Neither the dread of persecution nor the fear of displeasing wealthy Jews, could hinder him from preaching the plain truth. And so "straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God." Acts 9:20.

Sometimes when people are talking about their conversion, they say things like, "Well, I'm converted, but I want to be inconspicuous about it. I want to be a silent Christian." I doubt if that is possible. Some people say, "I'm naturally shy and afraid to speak up." Other people have difficulty speaking for Christ because of pressure from their parents or friends, a hostile government, etc. But when you have been captivated by the love of Christ who died for you, then you must cry out to others the good news.

During the mighty movements of the Holy Spirit in the Moody-Sankey meetings in Dublin, the worldly father of C. T. Studd was converted. He invited some of his worldly companions to come to his home so that he could tell them the wonderful news. When one wealthy English sportsman arrived at the railway station he was met by the coachman. He could not wait till he got to the house to know what had happened to his old friend, so he began to question the coachman.

“I hear that something remarkable has happened to your master. I hear he’s got religion. Please tell me about it. In what way is Mr. Studd changed?”

“Oh,” said the Irish coachman, “It’s a revolution. In one sense he is still the same man—he’s in the same body. But the best way I can explain him is he’s a new man in the old skin.”

The new creature receives a new set of appetites and a new set of attitudes. The babe in Christ has now a holy nature with a propensity toward holiness. The things he used to hate, now he loves; and the things he used to love, now he hates.

The new birth is a lot like a physical birth, and physical birth is used in the Bible as an illustration of what the new birth is like. What happens in physical birth? New life is created within the womb of the mother. It grows for nine months. Then the moment of birth comes, the baby cries, and everyone is pleased with the cry because it is a sign of a healthy baby.

It is the same spiritually. The seed of Jesus, the Word, joins with the soul. Jesus creates faith in the life. It begins to grow, and the time finally comes when the spiritual birth takes place. Someone is holding a meeting. A person gives a call. Someone steps forward. “Oh, he has been born again.”

If a baby is born and the baby doesn’t cry, something is wrong. When a person is born again, there is a bursting heart to share the wonderful love of Jesus with others. Those looking on say, “Well, that’s wonderful. That proves that the Holy Spirit has really brought the person into new life.”

That’s what happened to Paul. He went into their synagogues and preached Christ. It must have been an astounding thing! His fellow Jews never in their wildest imagination ever dreamed that this devout Pharisee would ever preach Christ. But here you have it, this neophyte Christian’s first sermon.

If you had said to Paul, “We want you to write down a statement of what you understand about the Christian faith,” this is his main points: Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the Son of God. This was his basic sermon outline.

The Christ means Messiah or “the anointed one.” In the Old Testament God had promised to send His messenger to redeem the people. Those who were anointed in ancient times were prophets, priests, and kings. The prominent anticipation was the Messiah would be a political figure to deliver the Jews from the Romans. But Jesus

had not done that. So Paul must have undergone a fundamental paradigm shift in his thinking as a result of Jesus' revelation of Himself on the Damascus road.

Jesus must be a prophet—the greatest of them all. Hebrews says, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son” (Heb. 1:1, 2). Paul preached that Jesus is the ultimate Word from God to us. He is the one from whom we are to learn what God is like.

Priests were anointed in the service of God. If Jesus is the anointed one, then He must be God's great high priest. He must be the one who was to offer Himself as the only truly adequate sacrifice for human sin. He offered Himself once for all as the perfect sacrifice.

Jesus was also a king. David was the greatest of the kings, but he died and his throne was occupied by his successors until finally the dynasty was overthrown at the Babylonian captivity, after which there was no son of David to take his father's place. Then Paul reflecting on his encounter with Jesus shining as bright as the sun at noonday, concluded that the true Son of David, the true King of Israel, was Jesus, the Christ.

The second main point of Paul's message in the synagogue was: Jesus is the Son of God.

Several years ago a preacher conducted a series of evangelistic meetings at a church. During a sermon one night, he said that no man was God since there was only one God who was the Creator. As he uttered these words, he noted that a member of the audience got up and left. He belonged to the Rastafarian sect and objected to his statement because Rastafarians believe Emperor Haile Selassie I. was god. They often make statements such as “I man a god.”

Since the evangelist had offended the man, he decided to go visit him the next day. When he realized the preacher had come to see him, he asked him to wait a few minutes. Soon, he saw people coming from all directions. He had gone to invite his friends and relatives to meet the evangelist. He asked the evangelist to address everyone. He invited the people to listen to the words since, as he said, “they were the truth.”

That night he came to the meetings and brought others with him. They came for several nights and also on Sabbath. At the appeal for baptism, he surrendered to Christ and requested baptism. The next night I looked for him in the audience and could not find him. I asked

about him and was told he was in the audience. I didn't recognize him because he had cut his hair and beard, resulting in a transformation in his persona. That is what the gospel does when people respond positively to Jesus, the Son of God.

Knowledge of spiritual things is based upon the identity of Jesus Christ as God. Why? Because if Jesus is the Son of God; then, Jesus is God. God does not err; if Jesus is God, Jesus does not err. Everything Jesus tells us can be trusted. If He tells us God is His Father who can be trusted, we can believe it because He is God Himself and speaks truthfully. If He tells us that the Bible can be trusted, that it comes from God, that heaven and earth will pass away but the Word of God being divine in nature will never pass away; then we can trust the Bible. Everything we know of spiritual things is based on the confession: "Jesus is the Son of God."

Our salvation is based upon the confession: "Jesus is the Son of God." The value of Jesus' death is linked to His being God. If Jesus were a mere man, even if He were a sinless man, His death could only have availed for Himself. It could not have been of infinite worth. Besides, if He were nothing but a man, He would be a sinner, as other human beings are, and His death would be no different from the death of other martyrs of God. But Jesus is not merely man. He is a man; He had to be a man to die. He had to take on Him our sinful flesh. At the same time, being God as well as man, He died. His sinless life as the God-man was of infinite worth. Therefore, we confess with Paul: "Jesus is the Son of God."

Paul was persecuted for his profession of faith. Why would he be persecuted for saying this if all he meant by the words "Son of God" is that Jesus was another human being?

"But all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." Acts 9:21, 22. The opposition grew so fierce that Paul was not allowed to continue his labors at Damascus.

"And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him." Acts 9:23, 24. With the adventure recorded by Luke we must compare Paul's account: "In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes

with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.” 2 Cor. 11:32, 33. Aretus IV. (9 B. C.-A. D. 40) reigned over the Nabataean kingdom in which Paul spent some time after his conversion (Gal. 1:17). It is plain that Paul annoyed not only the Damascus Jews by his activity, but the Nabataean authorities as well. There were many Nabataeans in the city, and their colony there was governed by an ethnarch, a representative of Aretas.

When the time came to take drastic steps against Paul, the local Jewish authorities and the Nabataean ethnarch appear to have made a concerted attempt to lay hands on him. But one of his sympathizers had a house built onto the city wall, and while Saul’s enemies were guarding the city gates to arrest him, we read, “then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.” Acts 9:23-25. He was lowered in a large basket or net through a window of this house which was actually cut in the city wall. Just picture this remarkable man hunched up in a fish basket (probably made out of rope), dangling from a stone wall. What a way to begin a public ministry!

This flight from Damascus drove him to an escape into Arabia. It forced Paul into the long wait in which he fully learned he was nothing, that his mightiest asset was utter weakness, which enabled God to do everything with and through him.

Some time back I followed with interest the life of a certain athlete, who was still in high school at the time. The father and mother of the athlete had divorced, and the boy was living with his father. The father had one plan in mind—that his boy would become a professional football player. He showed all the signs of athletic coordination and greatness. As a matter of fact, the first gift the boy received as an infant from his dad was a full-sized football. By the time the young champion was out of high school, he had eleven trainers. He had numerous scholarship offers and chose the school he liked best. He became an instant star. In a few years he entered the ranks of the NFL.

His dad strictly monitored everything the boy ate. In fact, the young man said on one occasion that he’d never eaten one Oreo cookie. All the while he grew increasingly independent and arrogant. Not surprisingly, he fizzled out as a professional player, and in less than five years he vanished from the scene. Few people today even know where he is.

Same song, thirty-fourth verse. Whether it's a young actor or artist, we promote them too fast. We get them quickly on the pedestal, so that by the time they turn twenty they're suing their parents for all the money they've earned.

What's wrong with that picture? We love to promote an independent spirit without ever considering the value of time-forged character. God never promotes like that. God takes His time. When God plans to use us, He puts us through the paces. He allows a certain amount of suffering. He works much more effectively in the lives of people who've learned they can't make it on their own, and they desperately need God. Saul needed to learn those lessons.

And so God gave him a time-out in the desert in order to reveal to him the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote the Galatian Christians regarding this experience: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. . . . I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." Galatians 1:11, 12, 16, 17.

The connection of which Paul mentions his visit into Arabia, throws much light on the object of that visit. Now what is the object of all the statements? Simply that he may establish his authority as a true apostle of Jesus Christ. The apostles were all men who accompanied Jesus from the beginning of his ministry, and were familiar with his teachings and practice. See Acts 1:21, 22. It was therefore necessary that Paul, to be equal with the other apostles, should be sent forth by the Lord Himself, and not receive his knowledge of Christ at second hand. To show that this was the case, is the object of Paul in this first chapter of Galatians; and as positive proof, he states that after he was converted, instead of conferring with (*i.e.*, receiving instruction from) flesh and blood, he went into Arabia. Surely the object of his visit could not be more clearly stated.

This fact is of interest, not merely as an item of history, but as showing the source of apostolic authority, and the value of apostolic practice. None of the apostles claim to have any power or authority of themselves. Paul especially repeats, again and again, that his teaching was not of himself, or of man, but of Christ. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord," is his declaration to the Thessalonians. The apostles were simply Christ's representatives, carrying on the work as they had seen Him do it. It is of primary

importance for Paul that he had been directly commissioned by Jesus.

If he didn't consult with other Christians or their leaders in Jerusalem, where did he gain all his insight into the nature of God's call, the reality of the gospel, and his direct commission from Christ? He received all that during his period of solitude, silence, and obscurity when he "went away" to a place he calls Arabia.

It may not have been that far from Damascus. Since the northernmost part of Arabia is only a hundred miles from Damascus, Saul may have gone just over the border. It was a barren wilderness, deserted for the most part, except for a few Bedouins.

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem." Gal. 1:18. He "received instruction from the Source of truth. Jesus communed with him and established him in the faith, bestowing upon him a rich measure of wisdom and grace." *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 126. The gospel which Paul preached was the word which he had received from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There is but one Gospel, namely, that which Paul preached. That Gospel was given him, not by any man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ in him.

This mystery was made known to the apostle by revelation. How the revelation was made known to him we learn in his Epistle to the Galatians, where he says, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." Gal. 1:11, 12, 15, 16.

Let us sum up the last few points. 1. The Gospel is a mystery. 2. It is a mystery that is made known by revelation of Jesus Christ. 3. It was not merely that Jesus Christ revealed it to him, but that he was made to know the mystery by the revelation of Jesus Christ in him. Paul had to know the Gospel first, before he could preach it to others; and the only way in which he could be made to know it was to have Christ revealed in him. The conclusion therefore is that the Gospel is the revelation of Jesus Christ in men and women.

This conclusion is plainly stated by the apostle in another place, where he says that he was made a minister "according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints; to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery

among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory.” Col. 1:25-27. So we are fully assured that the gospel is the making known of Christ in men and women. The Gospel is Christ in men and women, and the preaching of it is the making known to us of the possibility of Christ dwelling in us. And this agrees with the statement of the angel, that they should call the name of Jesus Emmanuel, “which, being interpreted, is God with us” (Matt. 1:23); and also with the statement by the apostle that the mystery of God is God manifest in the flesh. When the angels made known to the shepherds the birth of Jesus, it was the announcement that God had come to men in the flesh; and when it was said that this good news should be to all people, it was revealed that the mystery of God dwelling in human flesh was to be declared to all mankind, and repeated in all who should believe Him.

1. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Salvation is only by the power of God, and wherever the power of God is, there is salvation.

2. Christ is the power of God.

3. But Christ’s salvation comes through the cross; therefore the cross of Christ is the power of God.

4. So the preaching of Christ and Him crucified is the preaching of the gospel.

5. The power of God is the power that creates all things. Therefore the preaching of Christ and Him crucified, as the power of God, is the preaching of the creative power of God put forth for the salvation of men.

6. This is so, because Christ is the Creator of all things.

7. The mystery of the gospel is God manifest in human flesh. Christ on earth is “God with us.” So Christ dwelling in the hearts of men by faith is all the fullness of God in them.

8. And this means nothing less than the creative energy in God working in us through Jesus Christ, for their salvation. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” 2 Cor. 5:17.

Two men were on the 81st floor of tower #2 of the World Trade Center, desperately trying to avoid the fate that was claiming so many that day of 9/11.

Stanley Praisnath, an assistant vice president for Fuji Bank Limited, found himself trapped after the United Airlines plane crashed into his building. He was buried up to his neck in debris, isolated behind collapsed walls, while a wing of the airliner burned nearby.

Knowing the desperation of his situation, he began to pray to the Lord, asking him to please send someone to help. While praying, he saw a beam from a flashlight and heard someone on the other side of the debris. Praitnath yelled to draw his attention, but the other person could not get through to him.

Praitnath then cried out to the person on the other side and asked him if he knew Jesus, and if he could pray together for God to help. The two men joined in prayer still separated from each other amid the wreckage.

After they prayed, Praitnath was gripped with the knowledge that he could kick through the wall separating them. As he began to break a small hole through the wall, Brian Clark reached through and pulled Stanley to freedom, and together they began the long descent to the street, escaping the building just minutes before it collapsed.

Jesus is in the business of rescuing lost sinners from a world headed for disaster. He is reaching out His hand to pluck you from the burning. Will you take His hand and allow Him to lead you to safety?