



Independence Church Of Christ

Sharing The Freedom That Is In Christ

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Lesson For March 29th, 2020

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Scripture Reference:

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do His work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve Him, ¹³ even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted His people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all. ¹⁶ But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of His great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in Him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen One who never dies; He alone is God. Amen.
- 1st Timothy 1:12-17

The Apostle Paul – A Biography

Paul the Apostle, originally named **Saul of Tarsus** (born around 5 AD), was born and raised in Tarsus in Cilicia [now under the control of Turkey]. He died in approximately 62–64 AD in Rome [Italy]. He was one of the leaders of the first generation of Christians and is often considered to be the most important person after Jesus in the history of Christianity. In his own day, although he was a major figure within the very small Christian movement, he also had many enemies and detractors, and his contemporaries probably did not accord him as much respect as they gave Peter and James. Paul was compelled to struggle, therefore, to establish his own worth and authority. His surviving letters,

however, have had enormous influence on subsequent Christianity and has secured his place as one of the greatest religious leaders of all time.

In his childhood and youth, Paul learned how to “work with [his] own hands” (1st Corinthians 4:12). His trade, tent making, which he continued to practice after his conversion to Christianity, helps to explain important aspects of his apostleship. He could travel with a few leather-working tools and set up shop anywhere. It is doubtful that his family was wealthy or aristocratic, but, since he found it noteworthy that he sometimes worked with his own hands, it may be assumed that he was not a common laborer. His letters are written in *Koine*, or “common” Greek, rather than in the elegant literary Greek of his wealthy contemporary, the Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, and this too argues against the view that Paul was an aristocrat. Moreover, he knew how to dictate, and he could write with his own hand in large letters (Galatians 6:11), though not in the small, neat letters of the professional scribe.

Until about the midpoint of his life, Paul was a member of the Pharisees, a religious party that emerged during the later Second Temple period. What little is known about Paul the Pharisee reflects the character of the Pharisaic movement. Pharisees believed in life after death, which was one of Paul’s deepest convictions. They accepted nonbiblical “traditions” as being about as important as the written Bible; Paul refers to his expertise in “traditions” in Galatians 1:14. Pharisees were very careful students of the Hebrew Bible and Paul was able to quote extensively from the Greek translation. It was fairly easy for a bright, ambitious young boy to memorize the Bible, and it would have been very difficult and expensive for Paul as an adult to carry around dozens of bulky scrolls. By his own account, Paul was the best Jew and the best Pharisee of his generation (Philippians 3:4–6; Galatians 1:13–14), though he claimed to be the least of the apostles of Christ (2nd Corinthians 11:22–3; 1st Corinthians 15:9–10) and attributed his successes to the grace of God. Prior to his becoming a Christian, he had the privilege and prestige of studying at the feet of Gamaliel, eventually becoming a member of the Sanhedrin (a Jewish ruling council) and rising to become the third in line to ascend as the leader of the Sanhedrin.

THE HIGHS OF PAUL’S LIFE

Paul was proud of his Jewish heritage, but not arrogant or unduly boastful about it. Throughout his ministry, Paul often had to validate his standing in the Jewish community and his strictness of faith among those who thought of themselves as *leaders* among the Jewish adherents. Let’s let Paul describe his *top billing* among those who claimed to be of the Jewish faith.

Then Paul said, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully

trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. – Acts 22:3 (NLT)

³ For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, ⁴ though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! ⁵ I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin — a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. ⁶ I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. – Philippians 3:3-6 (NLT)

It is a fairly bold, if not brash, statement for someone to claim *I obeyed the law without fault*. But that is what Paul claimed. We don't know exactly what he meant by that statement, but we do know that he was extremely religious from his youth and felt a closeness to God that few in this world enjoy. So, how does someone that close to God begin to feel that he is *the worst of sinners*? How does someone go through all that Paul did after becoming a Christian and not feel that God had abandoned him or was punishing him in this lifetime? Let's hear some of his testimony about his trials and tribulations?

THE LOWS OF PAUL'S LIFE

²³ Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served Him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. ²⁴ Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. ²⁶ I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. ²⁷ I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. ²⁸ Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger? – 2nd Corinthians 11:23-29 (NLT)

Paul was rejected by his Jewish friends, Jewish Christians, and many Gentile Christians (and many non-Christian leaders) who were heavily influenced by Jewish antagonists. Much of, if not all, of his hard times came after he became a Christian. But Paul never once bemoaned his circumstances or blamed (challenged) God as to why he was chosen

to suffer so much. Through many scriptures he spoke of his sufferings but always gave glory to God for the privilege of suffering for *the cause*. Here is an example:

That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. - 2nd Corinthians 12:10 (NLT)

WHAT IS IN PAUL'S LIFE THAT WE CAN TAKE AS A LESSON FOR US?

We are in a time of suffering. Everything worldwide has shut down in ways we could not have imagined just 4 short weeks ago. Many are hurting, physically from the virus, financially from the economic fallout, emotionally from the ban on public gatherings and the demand for social distancing, and spiritually from the lack of edification and mutual support that comes from Christian fellowship that is now forbidden. Satan's hand is surely seen in the details. But God is greater. God will bring good from the calamity that has befallen us. We were not made for this world. That should be more than evident as we view everything around us in the context of this virus. We are traveling on a journey of faith to the Celestial City and we find ourselves going through a dark and bleak valley. But God is there with us. *For when we are weak, then we are strong* by His power and grace and love.

We must enter this period with a call for the world to come to their knees in repentance and beg God to heal our land and our hearts of all that has been done to offend Him. We must see the better side of the chaos. It cannot be a bad thing that the bars and clubs and strip joints and gambling halls and godless other entertainment venues are shutdown. It cannot be a bad thing that people are learning again to communicate with themselves in meditative silence and in prayer to God. It cannot be a bad thing that people are reevaluating their priorities and realizing that life does not consist in the abundance of things (Luke 12:15). Here is how the Apostle Paul put it:

⁷ I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸ Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹ and become one with Him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with Himself depends on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead. I want to suffer with Him, sharing in His death, ¹¹ so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

Pressing toward the Goal

¹² I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. ¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. - Philippians 3:7-14 (NLT)

Whether in Good Times or Bad Times, it is always God's Time. Our lives must be lived in reverence to Him regardless of our circumstances.

¹¹ ... for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. - Philippians 4:11-13 (NLT)

We as Christians need to be leading the way in how to deal with hard times... these hard times especially. The world is going to struggle with loneliness, depression, and depletion of personal resources. The way we live can shine a light on the hope we embrace. And that light can illuminate the hearts of mankind to what is possible in Christ Jesus.

²⁷ Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. ... know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. ²⁸ Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God Himself. ²⁹ For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for Him. ³⁰ We are in this struggle together. - Philippians 1:27-30 (NLT)

May God be with you during our national shutdown and through this pandemic. May the strength that is in Christ carry us all through to the end and on to the time of entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. May God bless us all.

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