

Review: God Uses and Empowers Paul, an Imperfect Man Page 1 of 5

The purpose of this lesson is to review Paul's life and note that God does not look for the wise, for the charismatic in terms of this world's view but for men of varied personalities and weaknesses to empower them with His Holy Spirit to convey the Gospel. The Apostles, by in large, were not a choice of the elite – rather a rag-tag group who had one qualification in common – they followed Jesus Christ.¹ Many followed the Lord when it was titillating to do so. But when the majority of those so-called followers found who Jesus Christ actually was and what His message was they left.

⁶⁴ But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. ⁶⁶ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. ⁶⁷ Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? ⁶⁸ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. John 6:64-69 (King James Version)

Here are the eternal qualifications for being an instrument in the Lord's hand: to have implicit faith in Him that He is the Christ – the Son of God and to believe that Jesus Christ and He alone have the words of eternal life – the sole progenitor of the Gospel. Let's take a look at another man whose life we are studying through his epistles – Paul.

Saul the Educated, the Murderer, the Physically Weak.

Little is known of Saul before his conversion. His father was a pharisee² and so he followed his father. It was customary for all Jewish boys to learn a trade – Saul was a tentmaker.³ His family was an influential one. His father was a Roman citizen and so he also enjoyed that status.⁴ At the age of 13 he went to Jerusalem where he studied at the foot of Gamaliel, a distinguished teacher of the law. It seemed that the course of Saul's life was set – that of being an influential teacher of the law. Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel, a pharisee and respected doctor of the law. It was Hillel who made several important contributions to the interpretation of the law as found later in the Talmud. All this to say that Saul had a great future in his Jewish nation.

¹ Or rather, the "pop Christ" where Christ was mostly a figment of these people's imagination of who they *expected* Christ to be like.

² [Acts 23:6](#)

³ [Acts 18:3](#)

⁴ [Acts 22:25-28](#)

Saul's Course Was Dramatically Changed by the Power of the Gospel.

¹⁴ For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: ¹⁵ Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) ¹⁶ In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Romans 2:14-16 (King James Version, my underline)

Saul was converted by the power of the Gospel. He identified with this power of the Gospel that he called "my gospel." Most unusual. Some suggest that Saul was sovereignly saved by the Lord Jesus so that he could be the apostle to the gentiles. We do not know what went on in the heart of Saul *before* his conversion – we do know that in this case the Gospel was preached to Saul by none other than Jesus Himself. Please recall from previous lessons that the martyrdom of Stephen and the events that lead up to Stephen's death Stephen's testimony probably had an indelible impression on Saul. During Stephen's trial, his face shone like an angle's.

"...When Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin and heard the false charges, tying him up with Jesus in suffering of injustice his face lighted with a supernatural effulgence which impressed all the members of the council, 'as it had been the face of an angel.' This was a part of the report Paul must have narrated to Luke, of the experience he had that memorable day, as a member of the Sanhedrin. Saul would never be able to forget that look, try as he might!..."⁵

History is filled with accounts of men who were diametrically opposed to the Gospel right up to the moment of conversion – why should we change the mode of conversion with Saul? Saul heard the Gospel and he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ – period.

It was during Saul's personal ascent to influence that he came in contact with a group of Jews who had recently become involved with the new established followers of Christ – Christians. His first real contact was during the murder of Stephen a prominent member of the Jerusalem church.⁶ Our passage in Romans gives powerful testimony of the ability of the Gospel of Christi to completely change a life from sin to a life of glorifying the Lord.

He met the Lord on the way to Damascus where he was determined to root out these believers in Jesus Christ – even to the point of having them executed. But he was stopped in his intent to harm the church by the Lord Himself ([Acts 9:1-22](#)).

Paul becomes the Apostle to the Gentiles.

⁵ Shepard [The Life and Letters of St. Paul](#), page 55.

⁶ [Acts 7:58-59](#)

⁴³ Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. ⁴⁴ And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. ⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. ⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. Acts 13:43-48 (King James Version)

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. Acts 28:28 (King James Version)

Here is the remarkable account where Paul was finally convinced that the time for the Lord's commission to himself was to be totally committed to. Up until now, Paul was hopefully preaching the Gospel to the Jew *and* the Gentile.⁷ From this moment on, we have a remarkable account of the world-wide missionary effort of Paul.

Paul's Weaknesses Became an Occasion for

Complete Dedication to the Preaching of the Gospel.

Paul had some sort of physical weakness – (debilitating medical condition). We do not know what this weakness was. Some say it was his eyesight, some say it was some sort of chronic malarial problem.

⁷ **And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. ⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. ⁹ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's**

⁷ This sentiment is found in [Romans 1:16; 2:10](#)

sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
(King James Version)

This is an important lesson to us all. We do not know what the occasion was for this vision – some say that it was during his stoning – while he was near death. It really is not up to us to speculate. May we accept that all scripture is profitable for our instruction, challenge and edification? If so, then we can say no matter what our perceived weaknesses are – we can still be powerful instruments in the Lord's hands. In fact, it is to be *in our weakness* that the Lord will be most effective.

¹ And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. ² For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. ⁴ And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: ⁵ That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. ⁶ Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: ⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: ⁸ Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. ¹⁰ But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 1 Corinthians 2:1-10 (King James Version)

This is the exciting conclusion of the matter. We must take careful stock of our lives and consider that it is NOT ABOUT US. It is about the Lord choosing us for service unto Him. Finally, I'd like to make the following points.

- No member of the body of Christ should consider himself sidelined because he does not have the power of preaching or some other publically display "talent."
- No member of the body of Christ should consider himself non-gifted and therefore exempt from effective service in both the effective communication of the Gospel and effective discipling others toward maturity in Christ.
- No church should consider herself exempt from the discover and exploitation of every spiritual figt that God has placed in the local church for effective service unto Himself (1 Cor 12:18-20).

Some additional final thoughts.

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- We need to recognize the principle that effectiveness in preaching the Gospel and the discipling of others rests not in our own innate abilities but rather in our giftedness from God and the Power that God has invested in the preaching of the Gospel.⁸
- We need to adopt the policy of looking for giftedness among the members of the church. It was not the policy of the early church to seek men who were gifted from universities or para-church organizations such as special schools that taught skills related to church leadership including pastoral skills. That practice came along after the local church ceased to fulfil her obligation to make disciples. That would include the training of gifted men to pastoral service.⁹
- We need to commit ourselves as a church to discipling church members into leadership roles including the preaching of the Gospel and the exhortation of the brethren both in one-on-one relationships and in the teaching and preaching roles.
- We need to commit ourselves as a church to a willingness to pursue actively the discovery and exploitation of spiritual gifts among the body before seeking utilization of gifts on a professional basis.
- We should prayerfully consider putting in place the means to train men in our church for Christian service - I urge the local church to take back from the para-church organizations our responsibility to train young men (and women) to serve our Lord effectively.
- Effective discipleship involves some confrontation (make that accountability) and, certainly, some personal involvement with promising men of giftedness - the body of Christ needs to face up to that responsibility even though it means that there might be some uncomfortable moments in the discipleship experience. It may be that someone might think that he has a spiritual gift, but does not - discipleship includes a "coming alongside" (gk = parakaleo) that person in an encouragement role in a mutual search for his gift. Other men or women might think they have been excluded from effective ministry because they don't know their spiritual gift - they should not be left in the "cracks" of the floor of Christian ministry.
- Finally, if we cannot exploit our gifted men within our church then we should commend them to service elsewhere in His service - let's call it networking God's gifted men for effective service.

⁸ [1 Cor. 1:17 - 19](#)

⁹ [Matthew 28:19-20](#)