

Parson to Person

1 Corinthians 1 (Part 1)

Paul and His Calling

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God...” (1 Corinthians 1:1a NKJV).

Paul the Apostle

Those with a basic understanding of Christianity have some knowledge of the man known as Paul the apostle. Some know of his pre-Christian Judaic period—when he, as a devout Jew, went by his Jewish/Hebrew name: Saul of Tarsus.

Paul’s zeal for the God of Israel was well known among the Jews—as is documented in the Scriptures. He was a Pharisee, believed to be a member of the Sanhedrin (the seventy-member “board” of Jewish officials), “*blameless*” in his efforts to keep the law, but violently motivated in his denial of Jesus—and to the silencing of Jesus’ disciples.

In Acts we read that Paul was consenting to the martyrdom of Stephen and working to persecute Christians wherever he could find them (see Acts 8:1–3). However, after seeking and obtaining permission/commission of the Chief Priests, he left Jerusalem in order to find, bind, imprison, and martyr Christians. Fortunately, Paul was stopped en route by the Lord Jesus Himself. There on his journey, Saul was made aware of Jesus’ divinity, the fact that He was the Messiah, and was henceforth bound to Him as a servant—through the sovereign will and purposes of God (see Acts 9:1–22).

Paul the Zealot

As a Jew, Paul was a zealot—fervent in spirit before God. However, he lacked the essential personal revelation of Jesus that every man, woman, and child requires for salvation. Lost in religious zeal, Paul came short of the saving life of Jesus. (This requires a categorical discussion on the dispensational change from the Old Covenant to the Church Age.) Therefore, the Lord, in His great mercy, made Himself known to Paul—and saved him by His grace.

Paul the Jew

Paul's transition from the Law to faith did not and does not suggest he ceased being a Jew. No, to the contrary! Paul was stopped on the road to Damascus by the very Hope of Israel.

Jesus, as Messiah of the Jews, having made Himself known to Paul only matured/completed Paul in his very Jewish faith. To this end Paul communicated with the Philippians: *“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the*

righteousness which is from God by faith” (Philippians 3:3–9). (See also Galatians 1:11–14) Therefore, Paul (Saul) began a new journey as a Jew who had found his Messiah—or shall we say, he was a Jew who was found by the Lord. Saul had become a Christian.

Paul, as Apostle—a Specific Calling

Paul’s calling was to apostleship. His salvation was a gift. The supernatural intervention Paul experienced on the road to Damascus provided Paul the necessary information leading to his repentance. The message he would later receive (see Acts 9:10–19 also referenced above, Galatians 1:15–17 and then Acts 13:1–3) led to his specific calling. It is essential that we make this distinction. Salvation and Paul’s apostolic calling—or any work Paul would accomplish—are not one and the same. Jesus did say, *“he is a chosen vessel of Mine.”* However, Paul’s election to service and the salvation provided him were and are distinct. My friends, this is important enough to say again—faith in Jesus was essential to Paul’s calling, but Paul’s calling was not the means of his salvation. The salvation God provides must be distinguished from the work God saves us to perform.

Paul, an Apostle to the Gentiles

The apostleship to which Paul was called was specific. He was called as an apostle in order to take the Gospel to the world—both Jew and Gentile. However, Jesus made it clear that his primary mission was to Gentiles. Remember, Jesus said, *“he is a chosen vessel of Mine”* but also added, *“to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel”* (Acts 9:15).

Paul wrote the Romans saying, *“I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,*

if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh [the Jews] and save some of them” (Romans 11:13–14), and to Timothy he wrote, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Timothy 1:8–12).

Through the Will of God

Were it not for the grace and mercy of God, no man, woman, or child would be saved. Paul himself made this abundantly clear when he wrote the Ephesians saying, *“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, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.*

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to

abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:3–14).

Paul’s salvation—and ours—was and is “*through the will of God,*” “*according to the good pleasure of His will,*” and “*according to the riches of His grace.*” This salvation God “*purposed in Himself,*” to and for “*the praise of the glory of His grace.*” Therefore, He who “*works all things according to the counsel of His will,*” “*sealed [Paul, and all those who have believed] with the Holy Spirit of promise,*” and has provided us all “*the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*” Yes, indeed, “*Paul, [was] called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:1a). Not as a “Plan B”—but for anyone He calls. You, my friends, have been called both to Jesus and to a specific purpose—in Him!

Hallelujah, What a Savior!

I love you all,

Pastor Paul