***Paul, the Author - PH05-01

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 1:1***

We are studying Philippians 1:1. We find in this verse that the author of this book is the apostle Paul. Our subject is Paul, the author. There is much value in knowing about the author of any writing. People tend to believe what is in print. For this reason, it is important to know something about the nature and the reliability of the author. Many a wife has had a debate with her husband over some issue--some point of view that her husband has presented, and that she has objected to and had a difference of opinion. Then she picked up something in writing where some authority said exactly the same thing that her husband said, and then she believes it because it is in print. We have to know something about the person who writes an article in order to know the reliability of the information we're reading.

**The Apostle Paul**

Paul is a man of God, but Paul is not a celebrity. It is important for us to remember that the apostle Paul had an old sin nature, so he made his spiritual mistakes. We will not be dwelling upon those, but when he did make his mistakes, he had to get up out of the dust like anyone else. He had to make confession of sin and get moving again. However, the apostle Paul, while he is not a celebrity, does make a very important statement concerning his life which does tell us something about himself, and about what God can do with us. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul says, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all. Yet, not I, but the grace of God which was with me." The apostle Paul was not deluded about himself. He did not speak more highly of himself than he ought to think. He did not call himself a good man, for he realized, as Jesus pointed out to the rich young ruler, there is none good except God because only God does not have an old sin nature. There are no personalities and consequently no celebrities in the Christian life.

However, the apostle Paul, at the same time, did realize that God can take creatures of sin (non-celebrities, such as ourselves) and His grace can do something very magnificent with your life. That's what he did with Paul, and that's what He will do with each of us. Knowing something about the apostle will make the book of Philippians more significant to us. So let's take a look at Paul the author.

**Paul's Religion**

As most of you know, Paul was very religious. His religious devotion was beyond question. He was born in a city called Tarsus which was in the Roman province of Cilicia which was located in the southeastern part of Asia Minor. He probably was born somewhere between the years 1 A.D. and 10 A.D., more in the direction of 10 A.D. Acts 22:3 tells us about his birthplace when it says, "Verily I am a man who was a Jew born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law the fathers, and was zealous toward God as you all are this day."

The city of Tarsus was on a ... river which was ten miles from the Mediterranean Sea. Cleopatra sailed up this river on her magnificent barge right into the city of Tarsus on one occasion to meet Antony. Alexander the Great was impressed by this river, and coming upon it in an overheated condition, he jumped in for a swim and was so chilled that he almost died on this occasion as the result of it. Tarsus was actually the capital of Cilicia. It was at the crossroads of the ancient trade routes of the east and west. In other words, it was the center in that part of the world of commercial and political power. Tarsus as a Roman Town had the title of metropolis, and was a free city, consequently, in the Roman Empire, which noted certain privileges for the citizens, and it had a strong Jewish colony.

The Tarsians were particularly noted for their love of learning and of philosophy. It was a city in a zeal for education, and actually surpassed places like Athens and Alexandria, although Tarsus as a university was perhaps rated number three in order of these cities Athens and Alexandria. It was simply that the Tarsians were more zealous. Furthermore, the students came by and large from the province itself. They were the provincial students whereas other schools were frequently filled with students from outside the territory and filled with foreigners. The students from the university of Tarsus would often go abroad to complete their education. These students were particularly noted for their fluency and ease of speaking.

Paul was very proud of his relationship to the city of Tarsus. In Acts 21:39, he refers to Tarsus and to himself as a citizen of no mean city. Paul said, "I am a man who is a Jew of Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city." In other words, he was a patriot, and he had a fondness for his hometown. Paul's father was a Roman citizen, and consequently, Paul was freeborn. Acts 22:28 tells about that: "The chief captain answered, 'With a great sum obtain I this freedom;'" that is, citizenship. Paul said, "But I was freeborn." He was born free because his father was a citizen. This was very important to Paul and his missionary enterprises. This stood him in good stead many many times.

So what we are saying is when you look at the apostle Paul in Scripture, and when you look at the author of Philippians, remember that he is not some poor backward country boy who happened to get elected to Congress and became a Senator. Paul was strictly a big city kid. He came from a great metropolitan area, and all of his life was spent in cities. This may be the reason that in his writings there is so little reference to the beauties of nature. He does not refer to the inspirational aspects of nature. He reflects the fact that he is a city-bred man. He was very proud of this background. Of course, this amply prepared him to be the cosmopolitan that he needed to be as he moved about the New Testament world relating Christianity to that Greek and Roman culture.

However, Paul left Tarsus at an early age, and was reared in Jerusalem. Acts 22:3 tells us that he was brought up in Jerusalem, and that he was a student at the feet of one of the great rabbis of the times, a man named Gamaliel. It was in Tarsus that Paul learned to speak the Koine Greek with the ease and swing which is really unique among New Testament writers. Paul's use of the Koine is distinctive, and the place he picked it up was ... at the crossroads of political and commercial activity in Tarsus. He also knew Hebrew and Aramaic which, of course, he would have learned at home from his parents.

Paul, like all Jewish boys, had to learn a trade, and this was often learned from the father. This is not a bad idea for our sons today. While we may amply educate them, it is not a bad idea also to guide your son toward some kind of a trade; some kind of a craft; or, something that he may perform in another way in the form of employment. In the case of Paul, he learned his father's trade. His father was a tent maker, and Tarsus was a place which was famed for its weaving and its cloth-making, and it was very natural that he should fall into that same pattern. So Acts 18:3 tells us that he fell in with his friends Priscilla and Aquila. Verse 3 says, "And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them and worked, for by their occupation they were tent makers.

Well, the religions of the world, of course, met in a cosmopolitan place like Tarsus, and it was there that Paul received his insights concerning heathenism and the nature of the world that he was going to be dealing with relative to the gospel. He was schooled, in other words, at Tarsus for his future role as the great apostle to the gentiles. He was schooled in social, political, intellectual, moral, and religious matters that he constantly draws upon in the writing of his books and in his teachings.

Let's look a little bit at his religious training. He studied, as we have indicated, Judaism in Jerusalem under the famed Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Paul was a youth who responded to spiritual instruction. In Acts 26:4-5, we read, "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among my own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; who knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers," and so on. Paul was a young man who was zealous for the instruction he received.

A lot of youngsters go off today and they have the advantage of being informed about God. They have the advantage of being informed of what life is all about. There is a quality within a youngster that some of them turn against it. They ignore it. Some of them have to go out and put a lot of scars on their life and get their brains beaten in good. Then finally, they wake up one day and they say to themselves, "You know, like the prodigal, everything that my parents taught me and everything I heard from the pastor-teacher in church is the truth. This is the way life really is. This is the thing that works. Then they finally get with it. It is great to grow up where you are not treated like a dumb animal in spiritual things where somebody has informed you concerning divine viewpoint, and it is a great thing to grow up and to respond to it, and all along the line to be positive to the Word of God.

That's the kind of a boy the apostle Paul was. He was not one of these Fandango characters who had to prove himself independent of his parents; who had to prove himself that he couldn't listen to his teachers; and, who had to prove that he was a man when he knew nothing. Paul was a responsive zealous youth to the instruction which he received. It is interesting that when God went for a man that was going to write at least 13 of the New Testament epistles (which was a major responsibility in itself), and was going to be the key to opening the gospel in the grace age to the gentile world, that He went to a boy who, from his youth, was responsive in spiritual things. He did not go to some kid who had been a rebel resister all of his days, and finally decided to come around to spiritual things.

It is for this reason that we resent making celebrities out of somebody who happens to be a resistant no-good type of kid. And finally he gets saved, or finally he gets on the ball spiritually, and then we make a great thing of him. We set him up to speak and to give his testimony and tell how great it is. Here's some kid who's sitting there. Maybe he doesn't reflect all the personality. He's not very vocal, but he has always been responsive to the Word of God, and that kid we pass by because we want to make something over a rebel. That's human viewpoint.

When God wanted a man to carry the responsibilities that Paul had to carry, He found Himself a boy who was a winner from the beginning. God doesn't necessarily delight in taking losers and making them over into useful instruments, though He does. So I commend to you youngsters, as you hear about Paul this morning, to remember that he was once your age, and that he was once with all of the opportunities that you have in spiritual insights. As a matter of fact, he didn't have all that you have, and it sent him chasing rabbits after religion for a while before he got straightened out by the Lord. But he was that kind of responsive person that determined and made it inevitable that his life was going to be happy and blessed and used of God.

So Paul studied Judaism in Jerusalem. He was a responsive youth. He was proud of his Jewish lineage. In 2 Corinthians 11:22, Paul says, "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I." In Philippians 3:5-6, the apostle Paul says, "Circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel; of the tribe of Benjamin; an Hebrew of the Hebrew; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." He kept all of the rules. Now Paul was always proud of the fact that he was a Jew. You will find this constantly in Paul's writings and in the background of what he does. He never got over the gratefulness for the heritage that he had as a Jew, and for the insight that that gave him concerning the true and living God. He was very much concerned for the Jewish people. On one occasion he went so far as to say that he'd give up his own salvation if he could see all the Jews enter heaven and respond to Christ.

So he took his training and instruction in the Word of God seriously. When he lived in Tarsus, his family preserved their Jewish traditions, and no doubt Paul attended the synagogue. In other words, the apostle Paul took his signals concerning his ideals from life not from the other dumb kids that he ran around with, no matter how impressive they may have been to him. He took his signals from the rabbis who were teaching him. Consequently, he was head and shoulders above his contemporaries. In Galatians 1:13, Paul says, "For you have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion; how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God and wasted it, and profited in the Jews religion above many of my equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers." The apostle Paul was a responsive youth to his teaching and to the instruction which he received. He was not a rebel. He did not take his ideals from the other youth who didn't know any more than he did. Paul himself lived and was reared as a strict Pharisee (Acts 23:6, Acts 26:5).

It was not bad to be a Pharisee. The things for which the Pharisees stood would be comparable in our day to what we say the fundamentalists stand for. They were the Biblicists. They stood for the literal Scripture. They stood for such things as the resurrection from the dead which the liberal Sadducees rejected. The problem with the Pharisees was that they lost the quality of the realities of the Word of God; they had swung over into religion; and, they had converted Judaism simply into a religious system of doing things to gain the favor of God. However, as a Pharisee, Paul was in a very commendable tradition. His Roman citizenship and his Greek culture never overshadowed his heritage as a Jew.

Paul had a sincere conviction that Judaism was the truth and that Christianity was heresy. He expressed this conviction, as you remember, in the most intense kind of persecution of Christians. In 1 Timothy 1:13, he speaks of himself as "One who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Paul, not knowing the truth, looked upon Jesus Christ as a false Messiah. Every Christian that Paul met, Paul viewed as a blasphemer who was saying that Christ was the Messiah. Therefore, Paul felt he was serving the cause of God in the most intense kind of way to seek out; to bring under persecution; and, to condemn to death those who were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. He actually thought, because of his religion expressing itself in these good works, that he was serving God.

However, you remember this is what the Lord said in John 16:2 that the time would come when they would cast the believers out of the synagogue, and that they would actually feel that they were doing God a service by taking the life of the believers. In Act 7:58, we read that Paul was the man at whose feet the men who executed Stephen laid their coats. They laid their garments at the foot of this same Paul while they took the life of Stephen, and Paul stood there and watched Stephen crushed to death with those huge rocks.

Now the reason for the insanity of religion that expressed itself in the murder of Christians is explained to us in John 16:3: "And these things will they do unto you because they have not known the Father nor Me." The reason that religion goes in this insane expression is because people are negative to the Word of God. They are negative to doctrine. Yet, there are many Christians today who also are seeking to serve God by silencing the voices and the churches which stress doctrine, and which refuse to dignify the lusts of the old sin nature. Christians will forgive you many many things as long as you permit them to dignify the lust patterns of their old sin nature. They will forgive you many things as long as you do not press upon them that God speaks authoritatively through doctrine. However, if you will not be silent on that, then they will feel that they are serving God in order to silence you.

*Religion and faith are not the same thing.* Religion is a ritual, but Christianity is a relationship by faith in Jesus Christ. In Philippians 3:4, Paul says, "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh (that is, my natural physical heritage as a Jew). If any other man thinks that he had reason for which he might trust in the flesh, I more; circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel; of the tribe of Benjamin; an Hebrew of the Hebrew; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church;" and, so on. Touching the righteousness which is of the law, he was blameless. However, he goes on in verse 7 and says, "What things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ." All of these things were the performance of his religion, and he said that every bit of that was nothing. "Every bit of that was loss to me." Paul needed the doctrine of salvation by grace through Christ Jesus, and then he needed a positive response to that truth if he was ever going to serve God truly.

So here was a magnificent youngster. He was a boy who would listen to his rabbi. He was a boy who responded to the religious instruction he was given. He was a boy who did not listen to his contemporaries, but esteemed his teachers and his parents above the kids in the neighborhood that he ran around with. He was a boy who was head and shoulders in response above others. It's pretty hard to be yourself when the other kids are opposing and badmouthing your spiritual leaders. It's pretty hard to stand among them and to call them down and to reject what they're saying when they're being critical. It's pretty hard to stand against your own peers, but that's what the apostle Paul did. However, with all of his zeal and with all of his devotion that expressed itself in the persecution of Christians, all he had was religion.

**The Doctrine of Religion**

So at this point, let's summarize the doctrine of religion in about 13 points.

1. *There is a big difference between religion and Christianity.* Now get this straight. It is religion which is destroying people today. If you don't know the difference between religion and Christianity, this is the time to get it straight. Religion is man seeking to gain the approval of God by human works (Romans 4:4, Romans 11:6). Religion will seek to gain approval with God and to build points with God: first, in reference to salvation; and, then in reference to spirituality. People who are trying to be spiritual through religion are the legalists who are running around and believing that they can be spiritual through what they do and don't do.

There are some seminary students who haven't learned this. I can tell you this because I've had them tell me directly and personally that they don't believe that simply confessing your sins brings you into a state of spirituality, and then opens the door for communication from God the Holy Spirit. So you ask them, "Well, what does spiritual mean then?" They'll say, "Well, it means loving the brethren. It means being kind. It means helping little old ladies across the street instead of running them over with your tire tracks. It means helping the poor; the needy; the dumb; the blind; and, on and on." They don't realize that what they are doing is mouthing off the do-goodism of religion right there on the spot.

I'm not kidding you. It is not easy, even for people who should know better, to distinguish between what is religion and what is a relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot come to salvation by your works, nor can you become spiritual through something that you do. However, all of these good things will flow from your genuine spirituality which is the status of having sins confessed and being filled with the Spirit.

1. Christianity is God doing something for man through His grace, and God is given the credit entirely (Titus 3:5, Ephesians 2:8-9). This again applies in salvation. Christianity is accepting the provision of eternal life that Christ has made possible under grace. Spirituality is not dependent on who and what you are. It is not dependent on what you do. You need not kid yourself into thinking that as long as you have an old sin nature, you are something fine, because you are not. You even think that because you might be a little better than somebody else (you don't have someone else's unrighteousness), that you are something special and spiritual because of that. If you are spiritual, it's because Christ has paid for your sins, and your confession of your known sins will remove the barrier between you and the Father in your temporal fellowship. Christianity is God doing something for man through His grace, and God gets all the credit because only God is involved in salvation and in spirituality.
2. Religion is a universal phenomenon found among all nations in all stages of development:
	* All religions believe in the existence of some spiritual powers, good or bad, which are superior to man and able to affect his present and future life. No matter what their religion is, they believe there is a power out there, and somehow that power can affect your life now and out in eternity.
	* All believe in a difference between right and wrong even though each is not clearly defined. All religions think that some things are right and some things are wrong, though it's not clear exactly which are which. They change from time to time.
	* All believe that there is an afterlife of some sort with happiness or misery in that life in some measure dependent upon conduct or the observance of ritual in this life. All religions believe that somehow what you do here is going to affect and determine your happiness or your misery when you leave this life.
3. Religion is the satanic counterfeit of a genuine relationship with God. Satan is behind religion. That's where it comes from. Satan wants to be like God, and he is frustrated that he can never match the essence of God. Therefore, he tries to be like God through the promotion of religion. He gets hold of your emotions; he gets you operating in religion; and, you're serving his end (Isaiah 14, 2 Thessalonians 2, Revelation 13).
4. Religion expresses itself in dignified or improved rituals by means of emotional domination of the soul. Thus, you have this exemplified in the Pharisees, in their rituals which have no meaning and no reality to them. Or you have this in the emotional frenzy of heathenism during some religious rights to appease the gods. Religion is a ritual while Christianity is a relationship. The ritual may be dignified; it may be in a great cathedral; or, it may be with incense burning, candles, great choirs, and stained glass windows, but it is nothing but ritual. Ritual without the content of the realities of a personal relationship to Jesus Christ is pure religion, and that is Satan's production.
5. Religion is the greatest opposition to God's view that exists today. Nothing destroys divine viewpoint with people like the practice of religion.
6. Human good production is the basis for religion (Romans 2, Matthew 23). Human good production is the do-goodism that absorbs our society. Religion seeks to solve the social problems of man by man's efforts and by his own devices. Do-goodism is satanic in nature, and it's basically, therefore, a worship of nature. The human good which comes from the old sin nature is stimulated by Satan. So when you are responding with your human good, you are in effect serving Satan's goals.
7. Religion appeals to the lust pattern of the old sin nature, and to the emotions disoriented by the old sin nature. What this means is that there is little connection between religion and personal morality. You will find that people will function as very very active religious people, and yet they will do things that the Word of God morally condemns as being out of line. And you will wonder, "Why is there no connection?" Well, the reason is because on the one hand there is religion, but there is no connection in the life of the person. That's how religion acts. Religion disassociates itself from the expression of morality.

When I was in Guatemala, I found that if you were in an automobile accident, that the procedure is to immediately throw in jail everybody who's involved--the person that gets hit, and the person who did the hitting. The way they drive made you think that you were a candidate for that at any minute, because none of the brakes work, but all the horns are good. So I said to one of the missionaries, "Boy, that's really tough. It almost makes you wonder if somebody should hit us here in these cars, that your first inclination is to get out and beat it." He said, "That's right. As a matter of fact, one of our missionary kids just did that on one occasion until he could get with a Christian family and get it straightened out. Otherwise, you get thrown in jail, and you're hung there because you are considered guilty until you prove yourself innocent." That's just the opposite of our American concept. We're innocent until proven guilty.

I said, "Why is that?" He said, "It's because of the heritage of religion in Latin American countries. Even the government officials are willing to admit to themselves that as the result of their religious heritage, their citizens will lie; they will deceive; and, they will do anything they can to avoid executing justice or paying for what they did. If they do not throw them in jail, and physically hold them until their families or somebody has provided the cost of what they did, they know that they'll have a very difficult time ever seeing them back again. So, they say they operate on the fact that religion is one thing, but the morality of the people is another thing. They don't operate on what the religion teaches. Rather, they operate on what they know the people will do according to their morals."

Now that's what we mean. This is characteristic of religion--this disassociation from morality. Religion has often hallowed gross immorality, and even insisted on it as part of the worship ritual. It's not only that there is a disassociation between religion and morality. As you know, very often in pagan religions, the most immoral practices (and this was common in New Testament times) are done in the name of worshiping God.

1. Religion is the greatest persecutor and murderer of human life. Thus, we have the human sacrifices to the gods, whereas Christianity preserves life and freedom as sacred things. For this reason, we pursue the separation of church and state as essential, whereas religion seeks to unite church and state. This is because religion destroys personal freedom, and it is a murderer of physical life. How many people have died agonizing deaths in the name of religion and in the name of serving God?
2. Religion is money-minded. It seeks pledges; it issues duns (statements of what you owe); and, it controls people through granting financial favor. Religion is always promoting the dough.
3. Religion is a mass solution while Christianity is a personal solution. Religion is the worst thing in the world. Consider Christ in Matthew 23. Christianity is the best thing in the world (Jude 24).
4. Nothing Satan has ever done has been so successful in blinding men's minds to spiritual truth as has religion (Revelation 13:5-17, Mark 13:22).
5. Religion, over a period of time, has a tendency to degenerate and become corrupt in practice.

So this is what the apostle Paul had--religion with all that it connotes.

**Paul's Conversion**

You are all acquainted with his conversion. We ought to touch upon that for a little bit. You remember that he was going from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute the Christians. We read about this in Acts 9:3-8. At that very moment, he was very elated over the fact that he had been so effective in the persecution of Christians. He had found them; he had brought them into court; and, they had been executed (Acts 8:3). There was no doubt whatsoever in Paul's mind that Judaism was true; that Christianity was a heresy; and, that he was treating the Christians the way they deserved to be treated (Acts 26:9-12). In other words, his religion made him very sincere. He believed the Christians were guilty of heresy, and he was ready to condemn them.

Then Paul had the terrible experience of realizing that his religion was not shared by God, for he saw Jesus Christ actually in heaven; called Him Lord; and, at that moment recognized that he was indeed the Messiah, that the Christians were right, and he trusted him as Savior. Now the difference was made in Paul because he got sound doctrine. This is what Paul needed. He needed sound doctrine on the gospel. Please notice that nobody went up and said to him, "Paul, Jesus loves you." There was no heaven that opened and no thundering voice that said, "Paul, Jesus loves you." There was nobody running up and down the streets. The Christians were not galloping by on horses and yelling, "Paul, Jesus loves you. I do too, by the way."

Now if you are the type that wants to run around doing that, well and good. We don't criticize you for that. However, just be careful that you don't pick up the mistaken notion that that's the content of witnessing. The thing that leads people to eternal life is right information and positive volition to that information. Paul had the right information, but he was negative. Then heaven opened, and the Lord Jesus Christ said to him, "You cannot kick against the goads, Paul. You cannot resist me." Then Paul realized that Christ was who He claimed to be, and he believed Him. The information was again given to him, and this time he went positive. That's how a person is saved, and nobody is ever saved any other way.

Now I grant you that Christians should be concerned; they should be courteous; and, they should have the best manners of anybody in the world. They should treat people accordingly, and they should seek to win a hearing. For indeed, this is what the apostle Paul did. You well know that he said, "If I come up to somebody and I find he's a Jew, I talk to him from that frame of reference. If I find you're a Greek, I treat you in your Hellenist background, and I talk to you from that frame of reference. I become all things to all men that I may reach some for Christ." He used good Christian education techniques to that extent, of adapting himself to the situation of whom he was speaking to. He didn't try to tell somebody something that they had no background or frame of reference for receiving or understanding. He picked that person up at the point where he was now.

Paul was saved like all the rest of us are saved--when somebody gives us the right information, and we have a choice to believe it or not. You can never be saved until somebody does give you that right information on the gospel. That's the thing that's important. That's the thing you have to get across to people. Whatever else you may surround it with, that's the key. When you've given them that, that's what God uses. He's not using your friendliness; He's not using your smiles; and, He's not using anything else. Just remember that there are some people who are not the smiling kind. There are some people who are not the "Hail fellow well met" kind. And you drive them out of being witnesses because you scare them into thinking that if they're not that type, God has no use for them, and their voice is not meaningful. That is not so.

Paul realized that Christ was who He claimed to be. He no longer had any taste for his own religion (Acts 22:10). All of his pride of power and his lust for vengeance and arrogance was gone. He recovered his sight through Ananias. The Jewish community was shocked when they heard him praising Christ and testifying, and they were afraid of him. However, Paul, because of the threat to his life, left Damascus. He spent three years in Arabia learning Christian doctrine, and he returned to Damascus after this three-year stay away from Damascus.

Now he was a man who was now well-versed in doctrine; who had built a spiritual maturity structure in his soul as the result of the instruction that Jesus Christ had given to him directly; and, who had received the full blossom revelation concerning the church age and the relationship of the church to Israel. When he came back, he was received cautiously by the Christians, and he was warned by the Lord to get out of Damascus. He went to Jerusalem and was able to stay there about 15 days and again was warned by God to get out of Jerusalem and that his life was in danger because of his former associates who were out to get him. He who was once the persecutor was now preaching this Christ.

So Paul returned to Tarsus. When he got back to Tarsus, you can imagine what a family scene that was. Here was their brilliant responsive boy who was now a young well-educated and well-experienced Pharisee coming home. He had been the pride and hope of the family maybe to be a great rabbi like Gamaliel. Instead, he comes home a Christian. Well, no doubt the family rejected him; they ran a funeral service for him; and, they ousted him in disgrace. There were probably few other Christians in Tarsus, but we find from the Scriptures (Acts 9:30, Galatians 1:21 teach us) that for a period of about eight years, Paul remained in Tarsus and carried on a ministry through Syria and Cilicia, establishing outposts of churches and works of the Lord. Paul was called to a life plan that included a great deal of sacrifice. We read about this in Acts 9:15-16 and Acts 26:16-19. The Lord said, "I'm calling you, and I'm calling you to a great deal of sacrifice." For the apostle Paul, life had no meaning outside of this tailor-made plan for his life.

The plan was told him right then. When he was still blind, God said, "I'm going to use you among gentiles; you are going to represent me before kings; and, you are going to suffer like a dog at the hands of Christians and at the hands of unbelievers for My name's sake. I have a plan for you." You would think that all of the Christians would have jumped up and said, "Yeah, he really is a Christian; he really is a believer; and, we can really trust him." They were cagey of him at first. Barnabas vouched for him and said, "He's for real." He went to Jerusalem where Peter met with him. Peter vouched for him and said, "He's for real." And you would have thought that the believers would have said, "Great, we'll have a big mass meeting, and we'll feature Paul the persecutor as the speaker. Come out tonight and hear Paul the persecutor speaking."

It's too bad about those poor dumb New Testament Christians. You and I would do that, wouldn't we? We're sharp. We're television stars. We know this showbiz stuff. We're showbiz people. We know about this sort of thing. We understand this thing, and we know how to put on a big display and help the Lord to really capitalize on His converts. However, it is interesting that God didn't know any better than to take Paul; authenticate him to the believers in Damascus (the gentile believers' center up at Antioch); authenticate him to the believers in Jerusalem (the Jewish center); and, then send him back to Tarsus and let him sit there for eight to ten years. And all of this was after having sat out in the Damascus area and the Arabian area of the Arabian Desert for three years, learning doctrine. Then he spent eight or ten years of learning doctrine in practice before God ever sent Barnabas, and said, "Okay Barnabas, it is now time to begin the great missionary tours to the gentile world. I want you to go up to Tarsus and bring Paul down here to Antioch."

Then Paul spent another whole year in Antioch teaching Bible doctrine; exercising his gift of teaching; and, getting the feel of operating and working with the gentile world. A year later, they finally said, "Okay." God the Holy Spirit then tapped them on the shoulder, and out went Barnabas and Paul. Don't you fall into that trap of being impressed by some character who's been a resister of the Word of God. Finally, in the grace of God, he is brought to the light; receives Christ as his Savior; and, next week some religious organization is capitalizing on him by running a meeting to have him give you this testimony as if he had something to say. He doesn't have anything to say. Until he sits down and spends a couple of years learning doctrine, he has very little to say except in the way of a private personal witness on his own.

This is also true of us. Unless somebody informs us and unless somebody gives us the information, we will only muddle through. He became the great missionary to the gentiles. He became the great recorder of divine revelation concerning the church in the age of grace. We are going to be entering now into the book of Philippians, one of the greatest of the books that he wrote, and this is the man who is the author of it all.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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