

# St. Paul's Missionary Approach to the Unchurched

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## The Influence of One Man

“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”—Thus we read in Acts 9:31. And the single event that ushered in this new era of peace, of internal and external growth for the Church, was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus!

Dramatically here is illustrated the *importance of one man* for the weal and the woe of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not likely, even in our wildest flights of fancy, to aspire to or to achieve the far-reaching impact which Paul the Apostle made upon the world. Paul's influence was global, the effect of his ministry, especially through his inspired Epistles, immortal.

But each one of us has received a talent and an assignment, as important within the frame of reference and the sphere of influence into which we have been placed, as was that of St. Paul in his. St. Paul, like us, was primarily a minister of the Gospel! It was he who wrote to the Corinthian Christians concerning himself and every preacher of the Word: “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Cor. 4:1). Men and pastors may differ according to the measure of the gift of Christ given to each one (Eph. 4:7), however in this thing, this virtue of faithfulness to which St. Paul exhorts, they are all alike, just as valuable in God's sight and just as responsible, “Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found *faithful*” (I Cor. 4:1, 2).<sup>1</sup>

To encourage one another mutually to such faithfulness through the inspired *exhortation* and the unparalleled *example* of St. Paul, that is the purpose of this study of *St. Paul's Missionary Approach to the Unchurched*.

While it will be the conscious intention of your essayist to concentrate on St. Paul's missionary approach to the *unchurched*, that is, to those who were not members of the Jewish faith either as born Jews or as “proselytes of the sanctuary” or “proselytes of the gate” (referred to in Acts as “they that fear God”—φοβούμενοι or σεβόμενοι τὸν θεόν), St. Paul's exhortations and examples are not always distinguishable as applying to one, rather than to the other of these classes of people and, therefore, the emphasis will be on his *missionary approach*, rather than on his approach to *only* the unchurched.

Furthermore, while it is to be expected that the Jewish people to whom he preached would have a pronounced advantage over the non-Jews in that they were a people prepared for and actually looking for the coming of the Messiah whom Paul preached, the fact is that, as today, Jewish religion at the time of Christ and St. Paul had degenerated largely into the observance of laws and rituals and had little soteriological content. As is demonstrated in his efforts to preach everywhere first to the Jews in their synagogues, and in the discouraging results he achieved, usually ending in rejection and persecution, he actually had more opposition to overcome among his own people than among the unchurched, who never had heard nor had hardened their hearts against the revelation of God in His Word. Those who could be assumed to be best qualified to judge the validity of his mission, proved, actually, to be a serious obstacle in his preaching—also to the non-Jews.

A study of *St. Paul's Missionary Approach to the Unchurched* will not result in tracing or establishing a rigid system or a set of rules which he observed and which we may then follow, as an OPEN SESAME, a magic door to success. What will evolve, rather, and will be of far greater value for the earnest student and zealous missionary will be to observe the complete freedom from hidebound rules in St. Paul's approach and his

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<sup>1</sup> Italics in all of the Bible quotations are those of the author. – Ed.

remarkable flexibility in adapting himself and his message to all sorts of people and situations, from counseling a runaway slave to return to his master (Philemon 10,11) to bringing a king to exclaim, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). St. Paul is the greatest exponent and teacher of Christian doctrine after Christ, and yet, one will search in vain for a set pattern of dialectic preaching or teaching in his sermons. Although he observes the Law and the rituals, to the circumcising of Timothy (Acts 16:3), yet he can honestly say, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 10:4) and “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (I Cor. 9:22), which is the point that led to Timothy’s circumcision. St. Paul can take a subservient place, “I have made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (I Cor. 9:19), but he can also command such respect, even as a prisoner on a large trireme of 276 souls on the way to Rome that trained mariners follow his counsel. He is at home with the humblest, and not ill at ease before Caesar himself. The simple souls at Corinth hear him reassure them in Christ, “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise... And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom” (I Cor. 1:26 and I Cor. 2:1–4)—and the same man stands on the Areopagus in Athens, where silver-tongued orators of classical antiquity had held forth, and delivers himself of a sermon which is “so unique, so exquisite in its rhetorical style and so admirable in the profundity of its thought, that one can clearly see the master’s touch” (Sabatier). It is obvious that one cannot reduce the method of such a versatile, inspired witness of God to mere rules and systems—nor can this be the purpose of this brief study. The subject itself is too profound and voluminous to permit that.

The purpose of this essay is, rather, to try within the brief period allotted to it, to trace the demonstrable, chief features of St. Paul’s approach to his task of bringing the Gospel to men, especially the unchurched, in such a way that his person, his manner of presentation and the order in which he presented his Message might provide no unnecessary obstacle or deterrent for his hearers. He was fully aware of the fact that the Message in itself was on one count or another a formidable enough hindrance to acceptance and faith without adding things within his control that would make even the approach more difficult.

While all men resist the Message of the total unworthiness and depravity, the antagonism and spiritual death of man by nature, there are more or less prominent varieties of reasons for such objection to the free salvation offered by Christ in the Gospel, as St. Paul presents two of these reasons in I Corinthians 1:23: “We preach Christ crucified, unto the *Jews a stumbling block*, and unto the *Greeks foolishness*.”

Paul who was given the, for his day, unique calling by God Himself, “to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15), was also prepared by the Holy Spirit for the task before he was ever aware of God’s purpose with him. Similarly, everyone of us, called into the work of the ministry of the Word, may be assured that the Lord the Holy Spirit who has called us through the Church into a certain place and circumstances, has also anticipated these circumstances and prepared us for our assignment. Paul writes, “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” (Gal. 1:15). Thus, a study of Paul’s approach to his hearers, the prospects of Salvation through his Message, ought to include also a few words on the preparation of this “chosen vessel unto the Lord.”

### **Paul’s Preparation**

The man who literally “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) was a man of the world, one who from his childhood had learned how to move among men. His was not the simple and uncomplicated development of one who grows up in a family or community where all members are of the same racial background, religious conviction and pursuit. He was destined by the Lord the Holy Spirit to be His ambassador

“before the Gentiles (largely Greeks), and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15), and even the circumstances of his birth and training were made to contribute to that purpose.

He was born at Tarsus, a very important city in the chain of administration and commerce in the Roman Empire (cf. *Dallmann* on Tarsus). “I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city” (Acts 21:39). Thus, on his own statement, we know that he was not merely born there, but born a Roman citizen. The significance of this fact is evident from the contrast Paul makes in his reply to the chief captain at Jerusalem, “Then the chief captain came and said unto him, ‘Tell me, art thou a Roman?’ He said, ‘Yea.’ And the chief captain answered, ‘With a great sum obtained I this freedom.’ *And Paul said, ‘But I was free born’*” (Acts 22:27,28). This citizenship provided Paul during his entire career with certain prerogatives and freedoms that were very important in his work as an ambassador of Christ. Thus, for instance, he escapes the scourging at Jerusalem with a mere reference to his Roman citizenship; saying to the centurion who was about to examine him by scourging, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?” (Acts 22:25). It also gave him the means to escape the vindictive hatred and murder on the part of the Jewish leaders, and to enable him to be transferred to Rome for judgment before Caesar himself, when he was examined before Festus, who “willing to do the Jews a pleasure” suggested that Paul go back to Jerusalem “there to be judged of these things”—and Paul declared, “I appeal unto Caesar!” And Festus had to accede to his request, saying, “Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go” (Acts 25:6–12). Thus Paul’s Roman citizenship became an important tool for the Gospel in that Paul was also permitted for two whole years to be in close and rather favorable contact (living on the ground floor of the Praetorium with his Roman guards, while the Court lived immediately above) with soldiers and officers of the army (which perhaps accounted for the wide spread of the Christian faith in the Roman army and the provinces, patrolled by them), and the servants of the imperial household itself and through them also with many of the women especially of the nobility, not to mention his actual appearance before the emperor himself and his opportunity to witness of Christ before him.

Paul must have been a member of a prominent family at Tarsus, possibly a family of wealth and distinction, perhaps one of a group of Jewish families transplanted there by Antiochus IV (175–164 B.C.) to strengthen his hold on Asia Minor. The fact that his nephew, for instance, had access to immediate information about the conspiracy to kill him at Jerusalem (Acts 23:16), seems to indicate, that he received his information in the house of some prominent Jew who was privy to the highly secret plot to ambush and kill his uncle.

This background of Paul’s *Tarsian* Roman citizenship and family origin certainly played a prominent part in preparing him for the unique service of the Gospel on the more worldly-wise, cosmopolitan level of society and to move without embarrassment also in the cultured circles where he successfully preached the Gospel of the Cross. Not only slaves and humble citizens were among those who sealed their faith with a martyr’s death when they were thrown to the wild beasts in the Roman Coliseum and were put to the torch in the Neronic persecution, but there were also men and matrons, youths and maidens of Roman society and nobility among those whom God had given him as trophies of His grace. This persecution occurred during and immediately following his powerful ministry in the provinces and in the center of the empire itself.

Paul was effective and successful in his God-given task despite definite handicaps of which he speaks. He had been given “a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me” (II Cor. 12:7). Although he, like Job, had been highly blessed by God, had even been “caught up to the third heaven and into Paradise, hearing unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (II Cor. 12:2–4), he, again like Job, was subjected to these buffetings by Satan to keep him humble. While it is well-nigh impossible to determine accurately what this “thorn in the flesh” might have been, it is apparent that it was some physical torment which Paul endured and which despite his repeated prayer, was not removed from him. Ramsay suggests that the malady was “a species of chronic malaria fever.”<sup>2</sup> Whether it was a disfiguring malady causing him and his enemies to speak

<sup>2</sup> “Now, in some constitutions malaria fever tends to recur in very distressing and prostrating paroxysms, whenever one’s energies are taxed for a greater effort. Such an attack is for the time absolutely incapacitating; the sufferer can only lie and feel himself a helpless weakling, when he ought to be at work. He feels a contempt and loathing of self, and believes that others feel equal contempt and loathing” (Ramsay, *St. Paul*, p. 96). The author saw a case of malaria in a man almost exactly like the one whom Ramsay describes at Jadotville in the Congo in 1949.

contemptuously of his appearance, “I who in presence am *base* among you” (II Cor. 10:1) and, as his enemies said, “his letters are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is *weak* and his speech contemptible” (II Cor. 10:10), we do not know; but we do know that the Lord made him effective despite this weakness, in fact, more effective because of it, for it kept him humble<sup>3</sup> and fully aware of the fact that the Lord’s gracious power worked through his Message despite such obstacles, and he learned the more to appreciate the Lord’s reassuring answer to his prayer, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (II Cor. 12:9).

Every man and minister ought to assess himself and his gifts and weaknesses and exploit even those apparently irrelevant assets of the gift of Christ “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:7,12). Nor are we to consider only the so-called “spiritual” gifts as important; all gifts, even the natural talents and innate positive character and personality traits and endowments become spiritual gifts in the reborn child of God, and achieve their real value and God-intended purpose in the plan of the all-wise Creator only when they are exploited to their noblest and fullest potential in the service of Christ and His Gospel. This we shall next observe as a further factor in the preparation and development of St. Paul:

### **Paul’s Personality**

The “natural” traits in St. Paul’s character and personality which later figured so richly in his Gospel ministry are, among others, his clear understanding, his rare ability to express, to present and to defend his convictions, his perseverance in following his goal, his persuasive power as an orator despite what he himself calls his “base” appearance, and his enthusiasm and zeal in inspiring others. All of these appear clearly in St. Luke’s pen picture of his leader and hero, and are traceable in St. Paul’s statements in the Epistles. These were developed to truly genial heights in the Apostle.

So clear was his understanding of the doctrine of the justification of the sinner by the free grace in Christ, so lucid and concise his appreciation of the freedom which Christ has gained for unworthy sinners from the Law, so brilliant his concept of the triumph of life gained for the believer through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he has been credited or faulted, depending on the viewpoint, for having erected and constructed a new theology on the basis of the teaching of Jesus Christ; a theology which, it is falsely claimed, actually militates against the simple teaching of the Master Himself. There is no time nor occasion in this rather cursory study to go into a detailed study of his dialectically clear doctrinal presentations to demonstrate their full agreement with the things which Jesus Himself personally taught during His earthly sojourn, as they are recorded in the pages of the Four Gospels. It would, however, present a challenging topic for some later study of this Conference.

The fact is, however, that the Holy Spirit endowed St. Paul with an unusually brilliant mind. This mind was trained and sharpened not only through the study of the Old Testament under the great Rabbi Gamaliel, a fact which St. Paul mentions with pride, “I was brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3), but also by the thorough schooling which was afforded him at Tarsus in the lore and wisdom of the Greeks, enabling him to quote at will from the classic Greek literature in his conversation and sermon on Areopagus (Mars’ Hill) at Athens, “as certain also of your poets have said, ‘For we are his offspring’ ” (Acts 17:28). But his intellect was truly refined only after the Holy Spirit in his conversion consecrated it to His lofty service, not only to proclaim Christ, but also to receive and to record the Truth of God by inspiration and presentation in concise, written language to constitute a very important, the doctrinal, portion of the Holy Bible of the New Testament.

This gift is never more brilliantly apparent than when he presents and defends the justification of the sinner by the forensic decree of God for the sake of the merits of Jesus Christ in his Epistles. A short sampling

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<sup>3</sup> “Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh” (II Cor. 12:7).

may suffice here. Others may contribute more of these in the discussion of the essay later. Think of the section of Romans 3, beginning with “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (23) and climaxing in verse 28, “Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Think of another incomparably clear presentation of the doctrine of justification, which must be studied most carefully in order to gain the full impact of the profound Truths expressed: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:17–21). How can we begin here to enumerate the golden texts that the Holy Spirit has given to us so lucidly and profoundly through inspiration of the brilliant mind of His “chosen vessel”? Think of the dialectics and profound thinking of the entire Epistle to the Romans.

When St. Paul sets forth and does battle for the “freedom wherewith Christ has made us free” that we “be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1), as he does in Galatians and Romans, his argument and Christ-centered logic reach the brilliance of lightning flash and thunderbolt: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For, if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren; the Gospel 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” (Gal. 1:6–12). On the basis of this admonition, our venerable district president has pointed out the danger of our reverting to a legalistic attitude in our theology in his brief paper, “Are we in Danger of Following Reformed Theology?” Just as one of our worthy past professors, John P. Koehler, years ago arrested and confronted our Synod with his searching treatise: *Gesetzlich Wesen unter uns*. It behooves us to take careful heed; these dangers are much more real than those threatening us from Russia!

The gift God had given Paul for clear thinking and lucid, concise presentation was matched by the gift of language that was lifted to majestic prose and poetic heights in his inspired writings. Again, how can we begin here to do more than select a few of the passages to which our faith thrills every time we read them, even though we are but rendering them in an imperfect translation and not in the pristine beauty of the Greek original? When he presents the doctrine of the resurrection, Paul literally ascends to the heights of exultant verse, “Death is swallowed up in victory... The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (I Cor. 15:54–58).

When he writes about the holy Christian Church to the Ephesians, he fairly sings, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19–22).

One more example of his exalted language which lifts the heart out of the depths and carries it to heavenly heights of faith and confidence, too long and too well known to quote here in its entirety, but so lofty that it remains beautiful into whatever tongue it is translated, is the text of Romans 8:28–39: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God... What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or

distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

How can we pass over the great hymn of love? I Corinthians 13:1: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal...”

To study and assess St. Paul’s missionary approach to the unchurched merely on the record of Acts and the few addresses and sermons there reported, would not be giving a true and complete picture. The material in the Epistles must be brought in to reflect accurately the manner of his approach.

But why should we enumerate and quote the excellencies of St. Paul’s endowment in this study of his missionary approach to the unchurched? Excellencies of perception, presentation and diction which we can never hope to achieve? Only for the sake of inspiring us to let *ourselves* be lifted and carried away in study, in constant awareness and practice to perfect more and more the gift which the Lord the Holy Spirit has also given to each of us in far greater measure than we may imagine. This we can do by making one of the foremost occupations of our lives the study and pleasurable reading of this glorious heritage of divinely inspired literature until its phrases and cadences become fabric and fiber of our own thinking and speaking.

To learn to appreciate and employ “God’s Word in Man’s Language”—is the *most important* part of our missionary approach, whether this is by means of the *spoken* or the *written Word*. We are actually restricted to *this* means of communication to get God’s thoughts across to our mission prospects—God has poured out His own heart in human language.

Our language, therefore, is our most important stock in trade, our only true vehicle, *the* medium for imparting the treasure we have received, which has changed us, and which we are to pass on to our fellow man!

1. How we ought to *study*, then, to use an excellent and accurate language, not necessarily learned, difficult rhetoric, but language which reflects accurately the loftiness and beauty and force of the Message we carry—“in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (I Cor. 2:4).
2. Even though we cannot aspire to St. Paul’s eloquence in our sermons and other addresses,
  - a. We can show interest and appreciation for it by lifting our sermon prose from the drab and commonplace, and imparting to it the color and feeling that ought to come to our speech rather easily, if we are truly filled with our wonderful Message. A preacher asked an actor, “How is it that you have an audience of several thousand every week and I can get only a few hundred people to hear me once a week?” “That’s easy, you recite your fact as though it were fiction, and I act my fiction as though it were fact.” A sad indictment!
  - b. In our public reading of the sacred text of God’s Word, some of the feeling and fervor of its original inspiration by the Holy Spirit ought to carry through. (How wooden and perfunctory is the speaking and reading in some of our churches!) We ought to practice, practice, and practice again, if possible with a tape recorder, since God has given us this gift in our day, to perfect our diction, our enunciation, our emphasis, and never to take for granted that we can read a lesson unprepared. We expect people to sit through an hour every Sunday, where we are the chief actor, our voice the chief medium to transfer an emotional impact to people naturally resistant to the truths we convey. Do we ever ask ourselves, “Are the people with me while I am speaking to them, am I inspiring them?”

We pastors ought to get together, perhaps once a week, as we try to perfect ourselves in other, less worthy accomplishments, to hear and correct one another in speaking and reading. Other professions are constantly taking refresher courses; who is going to correct or check us, if we fall into all kinds of disturbing,

even offensive mannerisms? (Get readings, recordings of famous actors—Charles Laughton, Basil Rathbone, Lawrence Olivier.)

As we have certainly learned from the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments, as well as from the history of the Christian Church, the Holy Spirit makes use of all types of personalities and temperaments and consecrates them to His purpose and service. In the apostolic era He had need of the personality of St. Paul, as He did of all the others who laid the foundations firmly in those early days upon the Chief Cornerstone Jesus Christ. These men were not all born with more perfect endowments than other men, nor did they develop their talents and abilities by their own wills or powers; the Holy Spirit Himself afforded them more than normal and natural abilities, when He called them into spiritual life through faith and fitted them out for the service for which He had destined them and into which He moved the Church to call them.

Every human being is by nature unfit for the Lord's holy work, and his nature must be purged by the regenerating power of the Spirit of God before he is fit for the King's service, especially for the office of bearing the sacred vessels of the Lord, the Word and the Sacraments. However, this miracle of grace must be accomplished, if a mere man is to presume to serve. "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52:11).

In the presence of God's glory and grace in Christ every man must exclaim with Isaiah, "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). And as he did to Isaiah, so the Lord must purge every man of his sin and corrupt nature, before he can say God-pleasingly, "Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8). This is an important and comforting fact for us to remember, as we consider any phase of the work of Saul of Tarsus, who alone by the grace of God became Paul the Apostle. Paul was the first to recognize and acknowledge this. He said, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in *earthen* vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (II Cor. 4:6,7). In his awareness of his unfitness by nature for God's service he exclaimed, "I am the least of the apostles, that am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am" (I Cor. 15:9).

It was ever a source of wonder and amazement to him that God in His unsearchable grace took him who was so unworthy and made something of him to His glory and use. Again and again he mentions this in his letters. In I Timothy 1:12–15 he writes of it at length, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; *of whom I am chief.*"

Paul never forgot his own unworthiness because, despite the purging of the Lord, he never succeeded completely in overcoming his corrupt old nature. He cries out, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:18, 19).

And with this humble and penitent attitude toward himself, his spirit was moved and sustained by the highest motivation:

### **Paul's Motivation**

The overwhelming fact of his life, that he who was so unworthy should have been chosen and so richly endowed for the high office of "ambassador for Christ" (II Cor. 5:20), "steward of the mysteries of God" (I Cor. 4:1), and "steward of the manifold grace of God" (I Peter 4:10), "overseer" of the flock, to "feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28), "a bishop of souls" (I Peter 2:25), "an appointed preacher, and apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles" (II Tim. 1:11)—this fact was ever before him as a veritable miracle which, indeed, it was.

This grace of God, which was given first to him and which he then himself was considered competent and worthy by grace and the indwelling gifts and power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim and appropriate to others, was the greatest motivating force of his life.

The man who would serve the Lord must learn early and late in his ministry this elementary ABC of fitness for the work from his exalted predecessor, preceptor, and prototype, Paul the Apostle. The besetting sin of the ministers of Christ is that their flesh, the polite adulation of their people, and the fatherly position of authority which is usually accorded them are handy tools of Satan to make them forget that they are ministers, that is, galley-slaves of Jesus Christ! Long practice in directing and correcting others is easily apt to develop into spiritual astigmatism, a failure to see one's own faults in proper perspective. Jesus' reference to the mote and the beam is applicable also to us, and perhaps in some areas, especially to us preachers and leaders (Matt. 7:3). How long some congregations groan under the rule of opinionated, headstrong pastors, how much havoc is done to tender plants of faith, especially in mission fields at home and abroad by leaders who have forgotten the warning of the man, Simon bar Jonas, who himself had to learn from bitter, bitter experience how vindictive and arbitrary, how faithless and unspiritual a man may become because of the besetting sin of pride. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (I Peter 5:2,3).

To read these warnings correctly and profitably, it behooves each of us to take the mirror of the ideal pastor described by St. Paul into our hands and to look mercilessly at our own flesh, as St. Paul exhorts, "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

Although St. Paul thus appears to be speaking too disparagingly of himself in view of the wonderful talents he was given and the remarkable successes he achieved as a missionary, he in no wise underestimated these gifts of God. Indeed, he is so bold, as he says in II Corinthians 11:17–12:6, to glory in them, enumerating "the abundance of the revelations" and graces given to him, but not as his own accomplishments, but as the grace of God which was in him.

St. Paul was never apologetic or subservient in his contact and intercourse with his fellow men. As a preacher of the Gospel, a trust that had been given him despite his weakness, he followed his own good counsel, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, and be strong" (I Cor. 16:13). Or, as he wrote to Timothy, his son in the Lord, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus ... thou therefore endure hardness as a soldier of Jesus Christ (II Tim. 2:1,3) ... fight the good fight of faith (I Tim. 6:12) ... let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (I Tim. 4:12).

Still, he was never brash, blunt, overbearing or patronizing in his speech, but most considerate and courteous, so that nothing in his approach to the person whose eternal fate the Lord had laid upon his heart, would repel him. Thus he instructed Timothy, "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (II Tim. 2:24–26).

Without these traits in his new personality in Christ, St. Paul could never have achieved for the Lord what he did; not even with the trait which the Holy Spirit retained from his natural temperament after he had purged it, his dogged perseverance and passionate zeal to achieve, which as an unregenerate Pharisee was a glaring vice and now became a blessed virtue.

This zeal and drive had characterized his persecution of the Church, "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church" (Acts 8:3) and again, Acts 9:1, "And Saul, yet breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord."

After his conversion this zeal was put to such good effect that he wrote to the Corinthian Christians, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). In his letter to the Christians at Rome he wrote, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3). Before King Agrippa he was so carried away by his holy desire to

bring this man to faith, which Festus shouted at him, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning hath made thee mad” (Acts 26:24).

Too much of our witnessing is uninspiring, because we are uninspired; too much of our preaching leaves our hearers cold, because we are cold and appear not to have been seized ourselves by the marvel and miracle of God’s grace done to us; too often our testimony is taken lightly, because apparently we take it so lightly that we dare to step before God and poor sinners in the Lord’s house and before His altar without fear and trembling over our unworthiness and incompetence in view of the magnitude of our assignment and responsibility; too often it is painfully evident that our reading, our praying and our preaching are done perfunctorily and without godly awe, painstaking preparation and prayerful application.

Zeal is not an artificially whipped up, phony frenzy and frothing fulmination; zeal is one part love and one part fear, and one part deep conviction concerning the truth and importance of God’s message: “For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us...” (II Cor. 5:13,14) and again St. Paul says, “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (I Cor. 9:6). This mightiest of all the Apostles, this man endowed with such gifts that the Lycaonians wanted to make sacrifice to him and Barnabas as gods, is yet so full of a sense of unworthiness at Corinth, that he later confesses, “And I was with you in weakness, and fear, and in much trembling” (I Cor. 2:3).

Zeal for Christ is the awe of a David before the omniscience of God, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Ps. 139:6), or the ecstasy of St. Paul who bursts into pure poetry at the thought of the inscrutable omniscience and purpose of the Holy Trinity, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33–36).

Zeal is the bursting forth of the heart quickened by the Holy Spirit; the pouring out of the lips in words of wonderment and worship, as Martin Luther sings of it,

My heart for very joy doth leap,  
My lips no more can silence keep;  
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue  
That sweetest ancient cradle-song:  
(The Lutheran Hymnal, No. 85:14).

Or as the Apostle Paul jubilates, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord” (Rom. 8:28–39).

This is the kind of man St. Paul was, full of warmth, full of the love of God and the love for souls, and carried away with amazement and joy at the glory of his message and the greatness and power of his calling.

This is the lesson we may learn from this man of God as we go about our ministry of Christ either in a parish that boasts a grand church edifice,

“Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault the pealing anthem swells the note of praise.” (Thos. Grey’s Elegy)

or where in a pitiful hut of sticks and thatch, sans altar, sans pulpit, sans pews, sans organ, sans everything—with only the Word in our hands, in our heart and on our lips, we witness the miracle of a soul being “called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light” through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This was the personality and the attitude of the man whose approach to his task of bringing the unchurched to his Savior, to freedom and to life, we have undertaken to study.

### **Paul’s Attitude Toward His Call**

Not only the inner motivation, but the direct and indirect (or the immediate and mediate) call he had received from the Lord for his work were of primary importance to St. Paul, as it must be for every responsible preacher of the Word.

St. Paul was aware of his direct and immediate call into the apostleship to the heathen. He speaks of his conversion and calling repeatedly: Acts 15:7; 22:15–21; 26:16–18, and Galatians 1:15,16. He was one of those rare individuals like the prophets of old and the Apostles of our Lord who received a direct call from the Lord.

But it did not end there. And this is important for you and me who are also ministers of Christ and pastors of a flock by the will of God, but do not have a traceable, immediate call into that ministry directly from the Lord.

Although Paul knew for years that he was “a chosen vessel unto the Lord, to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15); although he further knew, as he stated at Antioch in Pisidia, “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” (Acts 13:47), he nevertheless waited, despite his impatient and energetic temperament, until the Lord had also made the call manifest through the Church at Antioch which formally “fasted and prayed,” and receiving the directive of the Holy Ghost, “laid their hands on” Barnabas and Saul “for the work whereunto I have called them.” And this call and ordination through the Church Saul and Barnabas looked upon as a *divine* call, as Luke records it, “So they, being sent forth by the *Holy Ghost*, departed” (Acts 13:2–4).

For this assignment into the world mission field St. Paul had waited for years, while he worked in comparative obscurity along the coast of the Mediterranean in Cilicia near his home city of Tarsus. When Barnabas called him to help him in the church of Antioch, Paul again willingly marked time in that church as resident pastor for a full year. And when he was asked to carry the offerings of the churches to Jerusalem with Barnabas, very likely also to help distribute the same to the poor of that city, he once more deferred his known life vocation, because the Church (and thus the Holy Spirit) called him otherwise.

Furthermore, he always felt accountable to the Antioch congregation, which had called him as their heathen missionary. At the end of his first and second journeys, he returned to Antioch to give his report, and he intended to do so after his third journey, but was prevented from doing so by his arrest and transfer to Rome for trial. “He returned to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:26,27). Acts 18:22, 23: “he went down to Antioch,” after he had reported also at Jerusalem.

Why all this to-do about St. Paul’s attitude toward his calling? What has this to do with his missionary approach? A great deal. It serves to underscore the truth of his words to the Roman Christians, “And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” (Rom. 10:15).

Let us be entirely clear and certain about this matter of the call, lest we build upon the treacherous sand of our own desire and inclination. The Lord *did* call men into His service *directly* in the days of Holy Scripture, but has clearly placed this function into the hands of the Church!

This is demonstrated very clearly even in the case of St. Paul, who had received several revelations from the Lord that he was destined to be “a chosen vessel unto the Lord, to bear His name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

Not until *the Church* called him as a missionary to the heathen, did he leave the post of duty assigned to him by the Church before, and not until then did he embark on the work for which, as he knew, the Lord had designated and prepared him. And this call under prayer and fasting, and the laying on of the hands of those who represented the Church at Antioch, he and Barnabas and the inspired author of Acts considered a *divine* call (Acts 13:2–4).

What a valuable lesson for our own ministry, and what a comfort and reassurance under trials and difficulties! We may think that we are cut out for this or that office in the church, we may believe we are especially qualified to serve in a much more exalted capacity than the one into which we have been called, but let us learn humility and patience from the Great Apostle.

If the Lord wants to place us into a certain work, He will surely do so at His own good time and through the orderly process that He has established, through a call of the Church. In the meantime, our best preparation for whatever other post of duty the Lord has in mind for us is to exercise patience and faithfulness in the place and duty into which we have been called.

And this involves that, like St. Paul, we never forget that we are responsible to the Church, as he ever felt and discharged a responsibility to the Church at Antioch.

As pastors of an independent congregation or as missionaries of the Church at large, let us remember, the work is *not ours!* The control and responsibility of administration are *not ours!* The tools and gifts are not ours as owners but only as stewards, and the fruit and result are *not ours*, but Christ's. If the Lord graciously grants success to our ministry, then let us remember that when the greatest of all missionaries wrote, "I labored more abundantly than they all," he added in the same breath, "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Cor. 15:10).

And, if the going becomes rough and the Lord withholds the demonstrable success, for which we labored and fervently prayed, and we are discouraged and ready to give up, then the fact that we are the called servants of the Word through the Church and the Spirit will be a strong bastion undergirding our faith, as it ever was for St. Paul, when he wrote, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, *called* to be an apostle and *separated* unto the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1).

### **How Paul Approaches His Assignment**

When Jesus converted and called Paul on the road to Damascus, He gave him almost identically the assignment He had given the Apostles at His Ascension: "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).

The mere thought of one man taking such an assignment for himself seriously must have been a shattering experience, exposing human strength and resourcefulness as totally inadequate in view of the staggering task. Small wonder that St. Paul sought the solitude of the Arabian desert to take stock of himself, the world situation and of the tools at his disposal; and, with these factors evaluated, tried to develop a plan and strategy to accomplish the task. It must have been like the experience of a general planning a very difficult campaign, of a statesman forging major policy.

That St. Paul arrived at the conclusion to which Martin Luther later came in faith and of which he sang is one of the strongest comforts we poor imitators have:

With might of ours can naught be done,  
 Soon were our loss effected,  
 But for us fights the Valiant One,  
 Whom God Himself elected;  
 Ask ye, Who is this?  
 Jesus Christ it is,  
 Of Sabaoth Lord,  
 And there's none other God,

He holds the field forever.

Though devils all the world should fill,  
 All eager to devour us;  
 We tremble not, we fear no ill,  
 They shall not overpower us.  
 This world's prince may still  
 Scowl fierce as he will,  
 He can harm us none,  
 He's judged, the deed is done—  
 One little word can fell him!

St. Paul also spoke this faith, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). He also placed his firm and full confidence in God who had promised that, wielding the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, he would win the day for his Lord, and he unhesitatingly laid aside all other devices and weapons which men might employ to achieve success: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God, for I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:1,2). "For the *preaching* of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God... For it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:18,21). Like a general, Paul enumerates the weapons at his command for the worldwide campaign he is to wage. He enumerates the weapons of defense in order and the one weapon of offense placed into his hands by his Lord, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17).

The study of this most important part of his approach to his mission must await another time and place, for in it we must consider the fact that St. Paul used the Word not only in his oral preaching, but in his inspired literature, his Epistles to the churches, that he "as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly divided the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15), that he carefully indoctrinated his hearers in this Truth, preparing them early for Baptism and the full duties of the Church and that within a short space of time he left a world which had in one way or another been brought in contact with the Gospel of Christ. This study of Paul's sermons and addresses will also be of importance and practical value to us for our own ministry; but this study must wait for another time.