

A Closer Look at Paul

“I am verily a man which am 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 of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day” (Acts 22:3).













In taking a closer look at Paul, we find characteristics worthy of reproduction in our lives.

Introducing Paul

Paul was the second most noteworthy figure in the history of Christianity next to Jesus. He is acclaimed as the greatest missionary of all times. He was committed to the Gentiles. He is noted as Christianity’s chief theologian. He wrote one quarter of the New Testament. Nearly two-thirds of the Book of Acts tells his story. His conversion is repeated three times in Acts.

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof 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 Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:4-10).

Paul was a rare breed.

-  Jewish by birth.
-  Roman by citizenship.
-  Born and raised in Tarsus (Acts 21:39). Tarsus was a Roman colony and famous for its university.
-  Taught by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was the most famous and highly respected rabbi of the time.
-  Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6).
-  Strong natural leader.
-  Possessed strong convictions.
-  Zealous of the law.
-  Self-starter and motivated.
-  Tremendous thinker and gifted speaker.
-  Could speak three languages (Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic).
-  Had the finest education and possessed an incredible knowledge of the Scriptures.

Man of Confidence . . . in God

Paul allowed the Holy Ghost to refine his natural abilities. He did not put his confidence in his personal history, abilities, social class, education or whom he knew. He placed his confidence in his God.

“And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

“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” (Romans 7:18).

Man of Vision

Paul had a clear vision and a God-given purpose. He pursued this vision with all of his strength. He accomplished God’s purpose in his life because he clearly heard from God and had confidence in Him.

“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” (Acts 9:15-16).

“Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19).

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

Man of Prayer

“These three words, ‘Behold he prayeth,’ are in themselves a summary of Paul’s life. He here begins his ministry by prayer, and ends it the same way. (See 2 Tim. 4:16.) Paul literally prayed anywhere and everywhere for anything and everything. He prayed for sinners and saints, for potentates and prison guards, for Jews and Gentiles, for leaders and laymen.” (*Wilmington’s Guide to the Bible*, page 378)

Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke depicts Paul as a man of constant prayer. Earlier, in the Book of Luke, he portrayed Jesus in the same way. Paul began his Christian walk blind with three days of prayer and fasting.

Man of Humility

Paul had everything that could be contributed as success, but he knew how to be abased (to be humbled).

“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:12-13).

Man of Patience

He knew how to wait on God for direction. He spent three years in the desert learning from God before he began his actual ministry.

“To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days” (Galatians 1:16-18).

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

Man of Persistence

Paul was zealous before and after his conversion. He did his best with what he knew. He responded to the truth revealed to him and was committed to preaching the gospel. No matter what problems came his way, he continued to do what he was called to do.

Man of Integrity

Paul was a man of integrity.

“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1).

Man of Knowledge

Although Paul was educated, he did not put his confidence in his education. He determined that he would know Jesus Christ. He believed that people were converted, not through eloquent speech, but by the declaration of the gospel, in the power of the Spirit. Paul demonstrated that the true test of intelligence was the ability to make truth simple enough for all to understand.

“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 any thing 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 my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Man with a Plan

Paul was a hard worker and through his planting efforts the future development of Christianity was secured. Paul’s missionary strategy is worthy of consideration and use even in our modern day.

- 📖 Took a partner or team to a major city.
- 📖 Went to the political and economic hub.
- 📖 Reached Jews and Gentiles.
- 📖 Drew a small group of believers.
- 📖 Taught the new believers.
- 📖 Moved on so that they could continue to build the foundation.
- 📖 Left each new church in the hands of the locals.
- 📖 Developed close relationships with the new believers (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8).
- 📖 Charged them with the responsibility to reach out.
- 📖 Revisited the churches that he established.
- 📖 Wrote letters of instruction and encouragement.
- 📖 Sent teachers from time to time to promote maturity.
- 📖 Used the power gifts of the Spirit to assist in evangelism (Acts 19:11-20)
- 📖 Expressed his love and concern through constant prayers. Even when he could not be with his converts and helpers, he prayed for them.
- 📖 Fought to keep the gospel uncluttered and simple (Acts 15:10, 19).

This zealous persecutor became an equally zealous Christian. He was bold and was a man of iron will.

Man of Impact

Paul was able to impact his world through:

- 📖 Being transformed by God.
- 📖 Standing for truth.
- 📖 Preaching.
- 📖 Providing leadership among the churches.
- 📖 Being zealous in evangelism.
- 📖 Establishing churches.
- 📖 Visiting them on a regular basis.
- 📖 Writing.

 Training young men (Timothy and Titus).

Study Questions

1. What three words serve as a summary of Paul's life? _____

2. How does Luke depict Paul in the Book of Acts? _____

3. With Paul's long list of qualifications it would be easy for him to put confidence in himself. However, whom did Paul put his confidence in? How do we know this? _____

4. Provide a Scripture showing Paul as a man of integrity. _____

5. What is the true test of intelligence? _____

6. How much of Acts is written concerning the ministry of Paul? _____

7. How much of the New Testament was written by Paul? _____

8. How many times is Paul's conversion mentioned in Acts? _____

9. How was Paul able to impact the world? _____

10. Write a paragraph about Paul's strategy in establishing churches. _____

