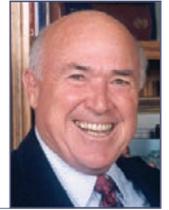


PAUL: APOSTLE OF FAITH



SIMPLY TEACHING THE WORD SIMPLY—PASTOR CHUCK SMITH

This article was edited by permission and taken from the book Faith by the late Pastor Chuck Smith of CC Costa Mesa, CA.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. ROMANS 5:1-2a

That is the Gospel of grace as championed by the apostle Paul. Regardless of who you are or what you have done, when you come to Jesus Christ and through faith ask Him to be your Lord and forgive your sins, you receive the gift of eternal life.

Paul's Unique Background

Paul grew up in the city of Tarsus, born a Roman citizen. He knew what it meant to be both a Jew and a Greek. At age 14, he was sent to Jerusalem to further his Hebrew education under Gamaliel, a leading Jewish scholar. As a Pharisee, Paul became completely familiar with the Law and the Old Testament Scriptures, effectively talking with both Hebrews and Hellenists.

At first, he persecuted the early Christians; after his conversion, he later described himself as *the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God* (1 Corinthians 15:9b). Paul never got over or tried to hide his violent, blasphemous past.

But God had a plan for Paul. *[Saul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake* (Acts 9:15b-16). Paul was to have a three-fold ministry: to preach the gospel to Gentiles, to kings, and to the children of Israel.

God has a purpose for each of us. He begins early in our lives, preparing us for the work He has ordained for us to accomplish for Him. He loves to use our unique backgrounds for His glory.

Solitude and Revelation

Immediately after his conversion, Paul began preaching that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul traveled to Arabia where the Lord readjusted his understanding of the Scriptures—that he didn't have to work to be righteous, but only believe in the sufficiency of Christ's work on his behalf. After time with the Lord in the desert, Paul returned to Damascus and then fled to Jerusalem. But the believers there still feared him, not believing his conversion. Paul spent perhaps ten years making tents in Tarsus.

So often, when a person comes to Jesus Christ, they think they need to immediately enter the ministry. But it interests me that although Paul had all those years of school-

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ing in the Scriptures, his real ministry of missionary journeys to the Gentiles didn't begin until 14 years after his conversion.

Church Growth

As Paul remained in Tarsus, a Gentile church in Antioch began growing by leaps and bounds. Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch, realizing that Paul had the ideal background to help the Gentiles coming to faith in Christ. How grateful we are for Paul's solid stand on the grace of God and salvation through faith! Had Paul not made such a strong stand and declared with such clarity this glorious Gospel of grace, then Christianity may have become nothing more than a Jewish sect. As Gentile believers, we are heavily indebted to the apostle Paul. So much of our church doctrine is based on the letters of Paul and on his clear and simple doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

The church at Jerusalem completely endorsed Paul's ministry and theology of grace through faith. They declared that the Gospel didn't change depending on the audience. Paul would later write, *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all* (Ephesians 4:4-6).

The Holy Spirit worked through him in his ministry to the Gentiles, just as He did through Peter to the Jews, with miracles, wonders, and signs. Often, we feel that everyone must be the same. Take the matter of worship: Some have worship teams, others have choirs. But guitars aren't holier than organs, and robes aren't holier than jeans. What interests God is the heart. God sees you clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. If we think we can improve upon that, we are sadly mistaken.

By Faith, Not Works

I grew up in a church which made me think I was righteous because I didn't smoke, drink, go to shows, dance, and other things the church declared to be unrighteous and unholy. I'm glad that I signed the pledge, "I will not smoke and drink." The problem was, I thought it made me more righteous than the guys who smoked cigarettes.

The righteous standing that I enjoy before God is through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and not the works I have done or don't do. God declares me righteous because of my faith in the finished work of Jesus, who was crucified on the tree to redeem me from the curse of the law.

What peace we gain from knowing that God accepts us solely because of our faith in Jesus Christ. It's a beautiful thing—and I am so glad that God used Paul the apostle to declare this truth. 🙌