

A FAST Biblical Portrait: Paul

Daring and Earnest Love for People

John Kain, 2010

The apostle Paul had quite the résumé! Born in the Asia Minor city of Tarsus and given the name Saul, he was “an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day” (Philippians 3:5). He described himself as a Pharisee, and at one time he was a persistent persecutor of the church (1 Corinthians 15:9, Galatians 1:13). In fact, when we first meet Paul in the New Testament, we see him watching the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:57-8:3). But that was before God got a hold of Paul!

When Paul was traveling the road to Damascus, something happened that caused his role as persecutor of Christians to change dramatically. The risen Jesus appeared, and the blinded Paul accepted him as his Savior and Lord. The life of this Jewish zealot and Roman citizen—another important item on Paul’s résumé—changed radically.

Paul’s Approach to Ministry

Paul’s love for Jesus and for people Jesus had come to save was evident in his approach to ministry. Paul supported himself financially during his travels and while he was preaching, a fact he alluded to a number of times (e.g., 1 Corinthians 9:13-15). According to Acts 18:3, he worked as a tentmaker.

In general, Paul did not perform his outreach duties alone. Instead, he modeled team ministry as he traveled with other leaders. When he established churches, he left teams of local elders in charge rather than a single pastor. Paul also wrote many letters to encourage local churches and expand upon his teachings.

Motives of Truth, Love and Urgency

In spite of strong opposition, Paul boldly shared the teachings of Jesus Christ and the message that faith in him was the way to relationship with God. Paul was motivated by his passionate belief that this message is absolutely and unquestionably true, his sincere love for people, and the sense that Jesus could return at any moment (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13).

Motivated by his love for Jesus Christ and unsaved people, Paul responded to God’s lead and poured his life into sharing the gospel during three major missionary journeys (Acts 13 - 21). Paul and his fellow mission teammates sought to make solid connections with people, sharing not only

the message of God's saving grace but other aspects of life as well (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Throughout his ministry and his writings, Paul emphasized the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life, often contrasting life in the Spirit with life in the flesh (Ephesians 6:12). He was possibly beheaded in Rome about A.D. 67. For quite some time, Paul had been ready to leave this world whenever God called him heavenward. His impassioned love for God's truth and for people still living in ignorance of Jesus impacted Paul's life, but it also prepared him for death: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." (Philippians 1:23)