

Introduction The Apostle Paul

Paul towers as one of the all-time giants of Christianity. Before his famous encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road, Saul of Tarsus despised any challenge to the Pharisees' traditions. When we first meet him in scripture, he is a "young man" (Acts 7:58) so thoroughly averse to Christ and so hostile to the faith of Jesus' followers that he presides over the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Giving his testimony years later, Paul confessed;

"Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."

(Acts 26:10-11)

The Apostle Paul, (or more precisely Saul of Tarsus, as he was known in those days) who started as one of Christianity's most zealous enemies, was hand-picked by Jesus Christ to become the gospel's most ardent messenger. Paul traveled tirelessly through the ancient world, taking the message of salvation to the Gentiles. No one did more than Paul to spread the gospel across the face of the Roman Empire. Luke carefully chronicled Paul's three missionary journeys in the book of Acts. Beginning in Acts 13 through the end of the book, Paul becomes the central figure. And Luke's record of Paul's ministry is breathtaking. Paul's influence was profound wherever he setfoot. He preached the gospel, planted churches, and left new believers in his wake no matter where he went—from the land of Israel, throughout Asia Minor, across Greece, through Malta, Sicily, and finally Rome. And while doing all that, Paul wrote more New Testament epistles than

any other author. In an age long before modern conveniences made travel and communication relatively easy, Paul's accomplishments were extraordinary.

Of the 27 books in the New Testament, Paul is credited as the author of 13 of them. While he was proud of his Jewish heritage, Paul saw that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well. Paul was martyred for his faith in Christ by the Romans, about 64. A.D.

The Gospel According to Paul- The Personification of Jesus Christ-likeness

Few shared the good news of the Savior and His Authentic Church or the Ekklesia better than the Apostle Paul. Paul says in **2 Corinthian 5:17**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”

In the Pauline letter Jesus is Personified which brought inanimate things to life in Christ. In Christ, Paul's favorite words, gives deeper meaning to literary texts.

Of all the apostles, Paul was the one intent on guarding the purity, accuracy, and clarity of the gospel message. Paul believed in the absolute. Paul believed in right and wrong. Paul believed a fact was a fact and there was no alternate fact according to Paul's Theology. Saul's mentor, Gamaliel, was by all accounts the most prestigious and influential rabbi in the early first-century Jerusalem, and taught Paul well. Gamaliel was the grandson of the legendary Hillel the Elder-one of the most learned and quoted rabbis ever. Acts 5:34 tells us Gamaliel “was held in respect by all people.” He clearly had tremendous influence among the Sanhedrin (vv. 34-40). The fact that

the Apostle Paul was trained at his feet makes his academic credentials impressive by any measure.

After his famous encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road, Paul was a completely different kind of man. He spurned the pretense of superiority. He abominated the notion that human wisdom might add anything of value to the preaching of the gospel. He emphatically opposed any suggestion that eloquence and erudition could enhance the native power of the gospel. He therefore took great pains not to put any stress on his own intellectual and academic achievements, lest he unwittingly undermine the simplicity of the gospel message. To the church at Corinth, he wrote,

“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”. **2 Corinthians 2:1-5**

His great spiritual marks obtained revelation, learned and understood the sovereignty of the Most High. Christ's humanity gave him reasons to identify and respect His lordship. The person and works of the Holy Spirit moved on his inner witness causing him to look at sin as missing the mark and embracing the church's message that all can be forgiven and be uplifted by faith. Heaven's plan to solve the separation caused by the first Adam was to send the second Adam to be raised His creation from dust to divinity. Saul who himself encountered the Greatest heaven

had to offer through the ugly event of the Hill of the Skull became Paul a crusader of the faith. His unique expressions of the wisdom of God, which is given to humankind and the appropriateness in respect to the power of God that is dispensed to the called-out ones of the Almighty, cause goose bumps to go down our spiritual spines.

Indeed becoming Christ-like, the saving of souls and building of the Kingdom of the King constitute Paul's primary purpose. Yes, the good news of Christ that saves sinners and the good news of Christ that meets the needs of lost humanity now can celebrate being justified and sanctified. The sacred act of pitching the gospel tent in the world and in the hearts of those who would receive Him is not ashamed of this truth. We who were dead to sin can now be alive unto God, dead to the law so we can rejoice in the truth of our marriage to Christ. And that's a fact. We who were walking around dead to the flesh are presently full of the presence of the Holy Spirit. And that's a fact. Detailing what can be gleaned from the good news of Christ that empowers sinners to walk in the teaching through the life of the Church. The called-out ones are given the guidance and wherewithal to overcome schisms and problems, and that's a fact.

In these series of lessons we will be shining a spotlight on upon five distinct and enlightening scripture lessons that highlight the phrase "But Now (in fact)." If ever we witness the gospel of Paul, the personification of Jesus, they shine forth like the sun in these messages from Paul. Three of these messages come from the book of Romans. Rome was the greatest city in the ancient world, the capital of the greatest Empire the world had ever seen. Paul had never been there, and he did not know if he ever would be there, but in writing to such a church in such a city, it was necessary that he should set down absolute, that a fact is a fact, and there was no alternative fact. It was only fitting that he should set down the very Centre and core of his belief.

He wanted them to know that beyond the shadow of doubt when it came to salvation Jesus made it happen, and that's a fact. Paul had too seen too often what harm and trouble could be caused by wrong ideas, twisted notion, misguided conceptions of Christian faith and belief. He therefore wished to send the church in the city, which was the Centre of the world, a letter that would so build us the structure of their faith that, if infection should ever come to them, they might have in the true word of Christian doctrine a powerful and effective defense. They could stand on the fact of the Word of God. Romans is Paul's most ordered and comprehensive exposition of gospel doctrines. In the three messages Paul deals with the fact of Righteousness, of Sin, and The Law.

The two other messages come from 1 Corinthians and deal with Love and the Resurrection. Virtually every one of Paul's New testament epistles defends and clarifies some crucial point of doctrine germane to the gospel message. In 1 Corinthians he defends the gospel against various corruptions that were being smuggled in under either the guise of human wisdom or a cloak of carnal chaos.

In closing, this phrase "but now" (in fact) sheds illumination upon Christ and the Cross-by affirming the fact of the good news of the Savior. Each of these key texts has a unique emphasis highlighting some essential aspect of the good news.