

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtrminc.org Today's Date: July 14, 2019

## Paul, the Example of the Transformative Power of Grace

By Dan Trygg

“I have gratitude to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has empowered me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, <sup>13</sup> ...the one formerly being a blasphemer and a persecutor and arrogant-aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord abounded-exceedingly with faith and *agapē*-love which are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. <sup>16</sup> Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

1 Timothy 1:12-16

**What made the apostle Paul the powerful figure he was for Christ? What changed him from the violent enemy of Christianity to being one of its chief proponents?** What was the driving force that motivated him to cross land and sea to share the gospel? What changed him from a seemingly heartless persecutor and torturer of Christians, to one whose heart yearned for and agonized for those in Christ he heard about, some of whom he had never even met? **It was the overflowing, superabundant grace of God with faith and *agapē*-love that was working within him.**

**We first meet him as Saul, a young man who was present at the stoning of Stephen.** Although he did not directly participate, he was in agreement with his death, and even kept watch over the garments of those who stoned him (Acts 7:58). **Since Saul was from Tarsus in Cilicia, he probably frequented the Synagogue of the Freedmen, who had been arguing unsuccessfully with Stephen, before some of them plotted to falsely accuse him** (Acts 6:9-12). This led to his trial before the Sanhedrin, and the murderous mob that illegally took Stephen's life. **It is not surprising, then, being radicalized by his associations with these other zealots, that Saul should be instrumental in initiating and leading a persecution of the church in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria** (Acts 8:1,3). He would enter private homes, where Christians were meeting, and drag off men and women to prison (Act 8:3). He brought them up on charges before the synagogues, and had them punished. He tried to force them to blaspheme, and cast his vote against them, if they could be found worthy of death (Act 25:10,11). **He was so filled with anger and rage, he even went to foreign cities to capture believers**, and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains (Act 9:1,2). **It was on such a trip to Damascus, with letters from the priests in Jerusalem, giving him authority to imprison Christians there, that he met the risen Christ.**

**While this powerful conversion dramatically changed the direction of Saul's life, like all of us, he had to grow in grace.** We are not privy to what his growth process was like. We know he immediately went off to Arabia by himself for a time, then came back to Damascus, where he boldly preached the gospel, and was confounding the Jews there, by proving that Jesus was the Messiah (Gal. 1:17; Act 9:19-22). **He was so bold and confrontational, he almost got himself killed, both in Damascus, and also in Jerusalem** (Act 9:23-29). It was through the quick thinking and action of the other believers in Damascus and Jerusalem, that Saul escaped two separate plots on his life. The Jerusalem believers sent him back to his home town, Tarsus of Cilicia, where he would be safe, at least for the time being (Act 9:30). **Several silent years went by, where Saul was continuing to grow, but somewhat in obscurity**, it would seem. If the experience Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 12 was an indirect way of referring to his own life, as it would seem to be, then *both* the deep revelations which were “unspeakable”, *and* the “thorn in the flesh” which was given “to keep me from exalting myself”, would have been given to Saul during these “silent years”.

**It would appear that Saul grew in a way that was similar to many of us. At first, it was knowledge. As is often the case, when you know something new, and you are excited about it, you tend to want to talk about it.** I know I went through this phase, a stage where I was motivated to tell everyone what I had discovered, ...even though my own personal walk was still immature. Unfortunately, my *walk* did not yet match my *talk*, ...and in my zeal I often drove people away, or made them angry. Finesse was NOT my strong suit. I was very confrontational and intellectual in my teaching and preaching, at that time. **I was also judgmental of others. I could see their faults better than my own.**

**The next time we see Saul, Barnabus went to Cilicia to find him, to help disciple new converts in Antioch in Syria** (Act 11:20-26). These were Gentiles who knew little of Yahweh's dealing with people in history. Who could be a better teacher of such things than a former Pharisee, a devotee of the scriptures, like Saul? He and Barnabus continued there for the next year, working within this community of new believers. **Apparently, he developed deeper, interactive relationships during this time, and began to see the gifts of the Spirit at work in the body of Christ. He and Barnabus became respected leaders**, and were selected to represent the Antioch church in bringing a gift for the poor in Judea. At the end of this year, **we see them, along with three other “prophets and teachers”, tarrying before the Lord together. As they worshiped, the Holy Spirit directed them to “set apart Barnabus and Saul for the work to which I have called them”** (Act 13:2). **This was the beginning of Saul's first missionary journey.**

**The activation of Saul's gift and service helped him to develop deeper relationships with others in the community of Christians. Note that this opportunity came at the recruitment of *another*, someone else who could see his abilities.** His gift not only "made room for him" (Prov. 18:16), but also gave him purpose and enabled him to become a contributing member of the body of Christ. **Finding like-minded people, and choosing to invest significant time worshiping and seeking the Lord, facilitated a deepening of Saul's relationship with God and others.** My experience here paralleled Saul's as well. I, too, early on found my role in the body of Christ, mostly through the recruitment and encouragement of others. This has helped me develop relationships and invest in others throughout my life journey. Finding like-minded, serious people of faith has been crucial to my own spiritual growth, and many breakthrough experiences came through relationships like these, and through taking time to "tarry before the Lord."

**It was on that first missionary journey, first to Cyprus, and then to Pamphylia, Pisidia and Phrygia (modern-day Turkey), that Saul came into his own. He became known as "Paul" and became the more prominent member of the team.** He was "filled with the Holy Spirit" and God used him in a powerful, miraculous way to shut down the negative influence of a Jewish false teacher and magician. **He became the main speaker, and God began to regularly confirm His word with signs and wonders** (Act 14:3). As we look at his letter written to the churches in this region (Galatians), we can see that **the focus of his thought was upon the theological distinction between salvation by grace through faith, versus the teaching of works** (self-effort) as necessary to be saved, and an emphasis on the difference between living by the flesh (again, self-effort) versus living by responding to the life of the Holy Spirit. In a similar way, theological combat was the focus of my early days, as well, ...contending with theological liberalism. I, too, began to see more activity of God in my life, in the form of answered prayers and effective fruit in my work.

**A noticeable shift in Paul's emphasis developed on his second and third missionary journeys. Instead of just travelling through, preaching and starting home congregations, he *planted himself for extended periods*, first at Corinth (18 months – Acts 18:11), and then at Ephesus (3 years – Acts 19:8,10;20:31).** Based upon his letters to these churches, **it is apparent that he worked hard to foster healthy, interactive body life and the use of spiritual gifts to minister to one another.** He seems to have come to understand and appreciate the power of interactive ministry and the impact of Christian community upon the larger society. By the end of his life, he could write Timothy that the goal of his instruction was *agapē*-love (1 Tim. 1:5). Again, this was certainly true in my experience as well. After 18 years focusing on one-on-one discipleship, I began to recognize the teachings of the scripture about the importance of body life. It has become more and more my passion, and a key element of my strategy for ministry.

**What made Saul, the foremost of sinners, into the apostle Paul, the foremost of the apostles, ...certainly the one with the largest and deepest legacy upon the Christian movement? In his own words, it was because "the grace of our Lord abounded-exceedingly with faith and *agapē*-love which are in Christ Jesus"** (1 Tim. 1:14). Let's take a closer look at this. The initial subject is "grace", which **can mean both the unmerited favor of God, or undeserved empowerment of God.** Both of these definitions are so important to understand. God has favor or good will toward us, *not* because of anything we have done to *earn it*, or to *compel* Him to give this to us, but simply because *He is gracious*. **His grace was expressed through Jesus Christ**, as He was sent to redeem us from bondage to sin, and to free us for an entirely different life. **It is also expressed through the presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which takes the things of Jesus and reveals them to us, so that we can partake of them** (Jn. 16:14). **So it is God's powerful working within us that causes change, growth and fruitfulness.** Note, however, the prepositional phrase, "with faith and *agapē*-love". The particular word for "with" here means that **faith and love are "associated with, in union with, or accompany" this grace.** **Faith is the ability to trust God**, and to "entrust" one's life into His will, and the ***agapē*-love is the willingness to prefer someone else before your own interests.** These qualities, grace, faith and *agapē*-love were super-abundantly, above-and-beyond, filled-to-the-full-and-more experienced by Paul, and are what transformed his life. It is crucial to see, however, that **this same grace, faith and *agapē*-love are in Christ Jesus for YOU, as well!** The well-spring is Christ. He is available to *any* who will come to Him. The grace of acceptance with God is abundantly available to *you*, as well. This is the door of access, of relationship with God, which is abundantly supplied to us in Christ. So is the enabling-power to change, and meet whatever needs *you* may have (Heb. 4:16).

**There is a two-sided reality, even to grace, however. Grace is of no benefit to those who will not accept it, or take it for themselves.** A gift that is offered, but not received, opened and used, is of no benefit to the one it is offered to. **The same is true of faith and *agapē*-love. God's provision in each of these areas is readily, ABUNDANTLY available, but will only be experienced by those to act on this provision.** Paul *acted on* his faith. It took him on adventures he would possibly not have chosen on his own. In this way, it changed his life. Paul *acted on* the *agapē*-love of God made available in Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit. **He loved and served others out of obedience to the Spirit who was in him.** He chose to give himself to benefit others. He was compelled by God's love (2 Cor. 5:14).