

An Interview with the Apostle Paul

by Bryan Gibson

Question: At one time you were very active in persecuting Christians. What made you decide to become a Christian?

Paul: When the Lord appeared to me on the road to Damascus, I could no longer ignore the evidence. I knew then that the Jesus whom I was persecuting was the Christ, the Son of God. It was time to serve Him, not fight against Him (Acts 9, 22, 26).

Question: Today, we are hearing different answers to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” What did you do to become a Christian?

Paul: Of course, it started with my belief in Him. Once I knew that He was the Christ and My Savior, I knew I couldn’t keep doing what I was doing. I had to repent. I acknowledged or confessed my faith in Jesus, and when Ananias told me to be baptized and wash away my sins, I did that immediately (Acts 9, 22, 26). This is what I did to be saved, and it is exactly what the Lord charged me to teach others.

Question: Before you became a Christian, you made quite a name for yourself, advancing greatly in Judaism (Galatians 1:14). How do you feel about all that now?

Paul: Compared to the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, everything else is rubbish. I wouldn’t trade what I have now for anything else in the world (Philippians 3:7-11). In fact, I wish every one could be what I am, and have what I have (Acts 26:29).

Question: You must be very thankful for the grace of God, seeing that you describe yourself as the “chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Paul: Yes, I am eternally grateful—not only for His grace, but also for His love, His mercy, and His longsuffering. Before I became a Christian, I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man, so it is indeed by the grace of God that I am what I am (1 Timothy 1:12-16; 1 Corinthians 15:9-10). If you think you’ve done too many bad things for God to accept you, if you think that somehow you are beyond God’s grace, think again. If I can be saved, then you can, too!

Question: What are some of the benefits you’ve found in being a Christian?

Paul: It’s hard to know where to start—there are so many. Forgiveness of sins, the hope of eternal life, joy, peace, contentment, fellowship with God and with His people. Did I mention prayer? I couldn’t make it without help from God (Acts 26:22; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10), and I can receive that help any time I ask (Ephesians 2:18; 3:12; Philippians 4:6-7). Let me put it this way: If God is for me, who can be against me? (Romans 8:31).

Question: Do you have any instruction for preachers today?

Paul: Be diligent in your study of God’s word (2 Timothy 2:15). Give yourself entirely to it (1 Timothy 4:13, 15). Preach the word, not yourself, and not the wisdom of man (2 Timothy

4:2; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 4:5). Be humble; be patient and gentle with others (2 Timothy 2:24-26; 4:2), but be bold in proclaiming the truth (Ephesians 6:19). Live what you preach (1 Timothy 4:12, 16). A lot more needs to be said, so if you want to know more, be sure to read my two epistles to Timothy and the one to Titus.

Question: If you had to sum up your life as a Christian, how would you do it?

Paul: Here are three statements from my writings that will help answer that question:

“For to me, to live is Christ...” (Philippians 1:21).

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

“I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me...I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

Question: Would you comment on the very popular doctrine, once saved, always saved?

Paul: That doctrine certainly didn't come from me or any of the other apostles; and if it didn't come from us, it didn't come from Jesus, because we are His spokesmen. Christians can fall from grace (Galatians 5:4; 1 Corinthians 10:12), and that includes ME! One of my fears was that I would do all this preaching to others and then be lost myself (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Question: Are you pleased with the fact that we now have many different denominations teaching many different doctrines?

Paul: How could I be pleased with something like that? There is only one church or body, composed of all faithful followers of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:16; 4:4; Colossians 1:18; 2 Timothy 2:19). Now, if you're talking about local churches, there are of course many, but they should be teaching and practicing the same doctrine. When I traveled to different churches, I always taught the same thing in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17). I then warned those churches not to teach or practice anything different than what I and other inspired men had taught them (Galatians 1:6-9). When divisions began to develop in Corinth, here is what I wrote to them: “Now I plead with your brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Question: Could you tell us some people who have meant a lot to you in your lifetime?

Paul: I couldn't possibly name them all, but I will mention a few. **Barnabas, Silas, and Luke**—companions of mine at various times on my preaching journeys; **John Mark**, who left us on our first preaching journey (Acts 13:13), but later became very useful to me in my ministry (Colossians 4:10-11; 2 Timothy 4:11); **Phoebe**, a servant of the church at Cenchrae, who helped many people, including me (Romans 16:1-2); **Aquila and Priscilla**, who among other

things, risked their necks for me (Romans 16:3-4); **Timothy**, who was like a son to me, and who had a genuine concern for others (Philippians 2:19-22); **Titus**, who brought me great comfort when I was downcast (2 Corinthians 7:6-7); **Epaphroditus**, who ministered to me while I was in prison (Philippians 2:25-30); and **Onesiphorus**, who often refreshed me by the many different ways he ministered to me (2 Timothy 1:16-18). I thank God for these brethren, and for many more just like them. What a fellowship we have in the Lord!

Question: In part one of this interview, you talked about the blessings of being a Christian. Surely there have been some hardships, too.

Paul: Oh, without question. You'll find a long list of my hardships in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. But you won't hear me complaining, and I'll tell you why. First, when you do anything for Christ's sake, you should rejoice, not complain (Philippians 1:29). Secondly, much of what I suffered was for the good of others (2 Timothy 2:10), so how could I grumble about that? Thirdly, these hardships actually helped me—they made me stronger spiritually (Romans 5:3-4). Fourthly, in comparison to eternity, these hardships last for only a moment (2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 1:6). And finally, while some may consider my hardships severe, I consider them light—light when compared to the eternal weight of glory. When I think about the glory ahead, these hardships just don't seem like a big deal at all (Romans 8:18).