



**A Simplified Look at a  
Complicated Belief**

**Part III**

**The New Testament**

**Session 19**

# UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

## Part 19 – Paul’s Journey of Faith

### Paul’s Background

- Paul was born probably sometime between 1 and 10 AD in the city of Tarsus
- Paul’s parents were pure-blooded Jews from the Tribe of Benjamin
- Saul was also a Roman citizen by birth which means that his parents must also have been citizens
- Outside the city of Rome, only people who had a good social standing could become citizens, and so Saul’s parents were probably quite wealthy.

-Saul's family were Pharisees

-Saul was trained to be a Rabbi, but also learned skills as a tent-maker

-He was a very good student, and became one of the leading young Rabbis

-Saul does not seem to have been in Jerusalem during the public ministry of Jesus. However, he was in Jerusalem by later in 33 AD when the apostles were beginning to preach the good news about Jesus

-His enthusiasm for the Jewish religion caused him to reject the new Christian teaching and become one of its strongest opponents

Saul was one of the official witnesses at the execution of Stephen and was afterwards chosen by the High Priest to be the leading persecutor of the Christians

He carried this mission out with his usual great passion:

*<sup>4</sup> I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, <sup>5</sup> as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished*

**-Acts 22:4-5 NLT**

The Bible does not state if God directly renamed Saul or not

-He was called Paul sometime after his baptism

-Acts 13:9 is the last time Saul is mentioned in the New Testament and the first place where Saul is called Paul

**SUMMARY:** Saul was a very privileged person

- Wealthy background
- Highly educated
- Roman citizen
- Well respected within Judaism

### **Paul's encounter with Christ**

Saul made a special journey to the city of Damascus. The events were as follows:

- As Saul neared the city of Damascus at around midday, a light suddenly flashed around him.
- The voice also said, *"It is hard for you to fight against my will."*



- Saul asked, “Who are you sir?” The voice replied, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting”. It appears that as well as hearing the voice, Saul also saw the risen Jesus (I Corinthians 15:7).
- Jesus gave Saul a special mission to take the Christian message to the Gentile peoples

*16 Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. Tell people that you have seen me, and tell them what I will show you in the future. 17 And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles 18 to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me.'*

**-Acts 26:16-18 NLT**

- Jesus told Saul to go on into the city where he would receive further instructions
- Saul's companions saw the light and heard some noise, but could not understand the words spoken by Jesus.
- In Damascus a Christian called Ananias came to Saul as God had told him to. After speaking to Saul, God used Ananias to restore his sight and then to baptize Paul.

The importance of this encounter in the life of Saul cannot be underestimated.

From this time on his entire priorities changed and his life was transformed. The passion that he previously put into following the Jewish Law and persecuting Christians he now put into knowing Jesus more and serving Him. Paul later wrote about this in **Philippians 3:4-11**. Here he lists all the things he used to be proud of and hoped would make him acceptable to God:

*<sup>4</sup> though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:<sup>5</sup> **circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.**<sup>7</sup> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

**-Philippians 3:4-9 NLT**

(emphasis added)



-He was a true Jew – descended from the tribe of Benjamin and circumcised on the eighth day (verse 5)

-He did his best to obey the Old Testament Law – he was a Pharisee (verse 5)

-He was very enthusiastic for his Jewish faith, even persecuting the church (verse 6)

-If it had been possible to earn a good relationship with God then Paul would have done so (verse 6)

After he became a Christian, however, his priorities changed. Now he realized that:

- Everything he had done was worthless compared to what Christ had done (verse 7)

- Knowing Jesus was the most important thing for him – worth more than everything else (verse 8)

- He knew that he could never earn forgiveness for his sins, but could only be saved by Christ through faith (verse 9)

## Key Questions:

- Is Christianity relevant for educated people as well as uneducated people like Simon Peter?
- Can the message of Jesus really change people's lives?
- Life was now a relationship with Jesus living in the power that raised Him and with hope for the future

## **Key Lesson:**

Becoming a Christian means trusting in Christ alone to forgive your sins and to lead you in your life

As a Christian, obedience to Him becomes more important than culture, education or career

For a Christian the number one priority is to do God's Will. The Christian life is a relationship with the living Christ





## Paul becomes the Apostle to the Gentiles

<sup>15</sup> “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. <sup>16</sup> ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. <sup>17</sup> I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

**-Acts 26:15-18 NLT**

The Kingdom of God would be for all people from all nations

Paul was at the center of the debate among the early Christians about whether the Gentile Christians should obey circumcision and other aspects of the Old Covenant.

The apostles realized that God was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that the Gentiles would be included in the Kingdom of God

*-And Israel will possess what is left of Edom and **all the nations I have called to be mine...*** (Emphasis added) **-Amos 9:12 NLT**

-Paul preached about the Kingdom of God

-He rejoiced that God had called Him to reach the Gentiles

-He worked especially hard to bring Jewish and Gentile Christians together

-He explained the role of the Law

-To show people their sin and need of God's forgiveness

-No one could be made right with God by keeping the Law

-The Law no longer condemns Christians, and we are set free by God's grace and have the Holy Spirit living in us to give us power to change

## Paul's message about Jesus

### a) Preached to intellectuals in Athens...

**Acts 17:16-34** tells us how Paul explained the good news about Jesus to a group of Gentile intellectual scholars.

It may be helpful for us in understanding this message:

- God is unknown to pagan cultures – they worship many gods, but the Creator is unknown to them:

*<sup>23</sup> For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.* **-Acts 17:23 NLT**

- God is the Creator and Lord over heaven and earth – He gives life and all good things

*<sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.* **-Acts 17:25 NLT**

- God created all human beings and has been guiding human history as King over all mankind

*<sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands*

**-Acts 17:26 NLT**

- God is not far from us, and wants people to know Him and worship Him

*<sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out or him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’<sup>29</sup> “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill*

**-Acts 17:27-29 NLT**

- God calls people everywhere to repent – turning from their idols to worship Him

*<sup>30</sup> In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.* **-Acts 17:30 NLT**

- God has set a day when He will judge all people in justice through Jesus

*<sup>31</sup> For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”* **-Acts 17:31 NLT**

- Jesus is the Savior and Judge







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## Paul's message about Jesus

### b) Explained in his letter to the Romans

Romans contains the most complete explanation of the Christian message in the Bible. Paul explains the Good News about Jesus

*<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. <sup>17</sup> For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*     **-Romans 1:16-17 NLT**

Paul was convinced that the message about Jesus was the only way for people to be made right with God and that faith was the only way to receive the gift of life

The book of Romans explains what the message is. We can summarize it by reading selected verses from the book:

## 1. **GOD made us to know Him –**

*<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse*

**-Romans 1:20 NLT**

God created the world and He has made it possible for people to know Him

## 2. WE sinned against God –

*<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse*

**-Romans 3:23 NLT**

Sin has affected all human beings and means that we will die and will face God's judgment.



### 3. GOD sent Jesus to pay the price for our sin –

*<sup>8</sup> But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. <sup>9</sup> And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. <sup>10</sup> For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. <sup>11</sup> So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.*

**-Romans 5:8-11 NLT**

Even though we have sinned, God still loved us and so He made a way for us to come back to Him. He sent Jesus to die for our sins so that we could be forgiven for our sins and have a new relationship with God

#### **4. WE must repent (turn away from our sin) and believe in Jesus – Romans 10:9-10**

*<sup>9</sup> If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*

*<sup>10</sup> For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.*

**-Roman 10:9-10 NLT**

God's forgiveness and eternal life are offered to us as a free gift because of Christ's death, but if we are to receive them (to be saved) we must believe in Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord over our lives

## 5. GOD gives new life to those who believe –

*8 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> And because you belong to him, the power<sup>a</sup> of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. <sup>3</sup> The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. <sup>4</sup> He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.*

**-Romans 8:1-4 NLT**

When a person commits their life to God in faith He forgives them for their sins, destroys the power of sin over them, and gives His Holy Spirit to them so that they can live life the way He wants them to. Christian living means a daily relationship with God in which they follow the Holy Spirit

## **Key Lesson:**

**Becoming a Christian changes a person's life completely.** Paul was transformed by his encounter with the risen Jesus. Instead of being an enemy of the Church he now used his education and gifting to spread the good news about Jesus to the Gentiles. The Christian message is relevant for all people from all cultures and races, and it gives us a new priority in life – to do God's will.

