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STUDY GUIDE

Paul To Live Is Christ



To me, to live is Christ. . . . PHILIPPIANS 1:21



Paul To Live Is Christ

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by

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Introduction

Paul was dedicated to serving God with all he could muster. He grew up as a Jew in the Roman Empire during the first-century A.D., and he became a blue-ribbon member of a powerful group called the Pharisees. In those days the Pharisees were among the most respected people in all Jewish society. They were scholars, teachers, and rulers of the people of God.

There was a major problem with the Pharisees, though. They refused to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. That meant there was also a problem with Paul, who aimed to be a Pharisee among Pharisees. Paul grew to hate believers in Jesus so much that he wanted to destroy them. He put all his energy and determination into destroying those people and the church of Jesus Christ.

But Paul found that his hatred and hard work were no match for the love of God. One day Jesus showed Paul that he really is the Son of God—and Paul was never the same again. In fact, Paul became one of the most extraordinary Christian examples the world has ever seen.

The book of Acts records most of the biblical account of Paul's life; that book was written by Luke, who accompanied Paul in some of his travels. Other pieces of Paul's story come out in letters that he wrote, many of which are included in the New Testament.

As you study these lessons about Paul, you'll notice that he really was a remarkable example: a dedicated follower, a faithful witness, a church planter, a missionary to people of all nations. Though persecuted and in prison, Paul even brought the good news of Jesus to kings and queens and their palace workers!

But let's not stop there. Paul himself would want to make sure that whatever we learned from his example would point us straight to Jesus and his love.



The Person God Uses

Lesson 1

Acts 7:57b-60

^{57b}They all rushed at [Stephen],
⁵⁸dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul [Paul].

⁵⁹While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 8:1-3

¹And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ²Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 9:1-2

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

1 Timothy 1:12-16

¹²I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

¹⁶But for that very reason I was

shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Philippians 3:4b-11

^{4b}If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised 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; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

⁷But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and 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 and is by faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Questions

1. Have you ever heard of the apostle (or saint) Paul? If so, what do you know about him, and how would you compare yourself to him?
2. Acts 7:57b-60; 8:1-3; 9:1-2
 - a. How would you describe the character of Paul (Saul) at this time of his life?
 - b. Have you ever reacted strongly to something only to find out later that you were wrong? What happened in that situation?
3. 1 Timothy 1:12-16
 - a. How does Paul view his former self in this letter to Timothy?
 - b. How did Paul receive God’s grace and love?
 - c. What was God’s purpose in showing mercy to Paul (v. 16)?
4. Philippians 3:4b-11
 - a. What did Paul put his confidence in before becoming a Christ-follower?
 - b. When Paul says he now counts all these things as a loss, what is he comparing them to? Why?
 - c. What two sources of righteousness does Paul mention? Is it possible to earn our own righteousness? Explain.

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afterWord

Who Was Paul?

From the Bible and other sources we know a few details about Paul, but not much. We know that Paul was single (some feel he hinted that he wouldn't mind being married but realized it would have been difficult, considering his calling). He was well educated under Gamaliel, one of the most influential rabbis of his day.

Paul was a Roman citizen by birth, so he may have come from a family of wealth or influence. He was born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia (modern-day Turkey). He also had a nephew who lived in Jerusalem. Paul suffered from some sort of illness, possibly with his sight, which he refers to as his "thorn in the flesh." Though he was a good thinker, he claimed that he was not a very gifted speaker.

One of the most personal glimpses we get of Paul is found in Romans 7. There he talks of his struggle with sin, describing it as a battle that wages war inside him.

What is a Pharisee?

Paul identifies himself as a "Pharisee" in Philippians 3:5. The Pharisees were an elitist group of Jewish religious leaders in Palestine during the New Testament period. The origin of this sect is probably connected with the development of the Hasidim ("faithful ones"), a group of traditionalist Jews who did not want the surrounding Greek culture to influence Jewish society. The Hasidim developed in the second century B.C. after a Jewish revolt freed the people from their Greek oppressors for about 70 years.

By the time of Jesus' ministry (around A.D. 30), the Pharisees had become a part of the Jewish ruling council (John 3:1), which governed the Jewish people in all religious

matters while under the rule of the Roman Empire. Rome had seized power in 93 B.C.

Having high morals and a strong desire to obey God's law, the Pharisees were highly respected citizens in their day. But Jesus often criticized them for paying more attention to rules than to the heart of the law: love for God and love for neighbors. For example, the fourth commandment stated, "On [the Sabbath] you shall not do any work" (Ex. 20:10). In reaction to this, the Pharisees and teachers of the law had come up with more than 1,500 rules on Sabbath-keeping that went far beyond God's command. One of these even stated that on the Sabbath a Pharisee could not rescue someone who was drowning!

The Pharisees and other rulers refused to listen to Jesus because he didn't fit their idea of the Messiah who had come to deliver God's people. Eventually they plotted to kill Jesus because he claimed (truthfully) to be the Son of God.

We find out in the book of Acts that eventually a number of Pharisees became followers of Jesus (Acts 15:5), but they still wanted people from other nations (Gentiles) to follow the law of Moses. Paul opposed these "Judaizers," and they often made trouble for him in his work with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-14; 5:6-15).

—compiled from the *NIV Study Bible* (Zondervan, 1985); *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Baker Book House, 1988); and www.wikipedia.org

A Person God Used

Most of us wouldn't recognize the name of Edward Kimball. He was a Sunday school teacher in Boston who wanted to help a teenage boy of 17 who attended his class. The boy's uncle had said he could work in his shoe shop if he attended the Mount Vernon Congregational Church, where Kimball taught Sunday school.

One day in April 1855, Kimball went to the shoe shop and told the teenager about the love of Christ and the way of salvation. God worked through Kimball, and

the teenager, Dwight L. Moody, received Christ into his heart.

Moody went on to become one of the best-known evangelists of the 19th century, leading thousands of people to faith in Christ throughout the United States and Great Britain. He also had great influence on the modern-day Sunday school and evangelistic mission movements.

—compiled from www.moodyministries.net, www.biblebelievers.com, and www.wikipedia.org

Like Andrew

We don't hear much more about Andrew except that he brought people to Jesus, including his brother, Simon Peter (John 1:41-42; 12:22). And Simon Peter went on to be one of the greatest influences in the history of Christianity. We cannot all be Simon Peters, but we can all do what Andrew did—we can bring someone to Jesus.

Albert McMakin was a twenty-four-year-old who had come to faith in Christ. He was so full of enthusiasm that he filled a truck with people and took them to a meeting to hear about Jesus. There was a good-looking farmer's son whom he especially wanted to bring to a meeting, but this young man was hard to persuade. He was busy falling in and out of love with different girls and did not seem to be attracted to Christianity. Eventually, Albert McMakin managed to persuade him to come by asking him to drive the truck. When they arrived, Albert's guest decided to go in to the meeting. He was spellbound and began to have thoughts he had never known before. He went back again and again until one night he went forward and gave his life to Jesus Christ. That man, the driver of the truck, was Billy Graham. The year was 1934. Since then Billy Graham has led thousands to faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot all be like Billy Graham, but we can all be like Albert McMakin—we can all bring our friends to Jesus.

—Nicky Gumbel, *Alpha: Questions of Life* (Cook Communications, 2006), pp. 180-181. Used with permission.