

PAUL'S APPROVED LIFE

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In Philippians 3:17, the divinely inspired Apostle Paul wrote, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example." Paul's life is given to us in more detail as an example of a Christian than any other person in the New Testament. We especially have his example of enduring sufferings for righteousness' sake. At the time of his conversion, Jesus Christ said of the life Paul was going to live as a Christian, "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:16).

A life approved of God

Paul said of himself and Timothy (2 Cor 1:1) that they were "in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor 6:4-10). Paul's behavior in the world was "in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom" (2 Cor 1:12). He was not corrupting the word of God but spoke it with sincerity (2 Cor 2:17). He had "renounced the hidden things of dishonesty" and was "not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor 4:2). He was laboring to be accepted of God (2 Cor 5:9), and was "giving no offense in anything" (2 Cor 6:3). All of these good things that Paul did approved him as God's faithful servant.

Paul's infirmities

The dishonor, evil reports, and all the sufferings Paul was subject to was undeserved. He was suffering for righteousness' sake. As for all the things he suffered in his life for following Christ, Paul said, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor 12:10). Second Corinthians 11:24-32 reminds us of many of Paul's infirmities: "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a

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(continued)

night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.”

The consolations of Christ

But as these “sufferings of Christ” abounded in Paul, so did the consolation of Christ (2 Cor 1:5). “And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us” (2 Cor 1:6-10). When reminding Timothy of the things he had suffered going back to the time they met, Paul said, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12). We too must learn to trust fully in God and not in ourselves at all. And as Paul learned the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, he did so with the hope of one day growing to spiritual completion and being able to attain unto the resurrection of the dead (Php 3:10-13). He pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Php 3:14). This is the very same race we have been called to run (Heb 12:1-2). This is why we are commanded to follow Paul as he followed Christ (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1).