

Lessons From Apostle Paul

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Today I would like to talk about Paul's life. There is so much we can learn from him, so much that we can relate to today. I am always inspired by what Paul did and his tremendous revelation. I find it incredible how much of the New Testament was written by him. He had such a depth of intimacy with the Lord that comes through all his writings. We see the awesome anointing on his life, as well as his heart for the lost and hurting and how he was willing to give everything so that the will of the Lord be done.

Paul was able to run his race and finish his course as II Timothy 4:7-8 says, because he learned some secrets that you and I would do well to learn. Let's look at a couple of them.

Paul had a past.

We all have a past. In Acts 8:3 and 9:1-2 we see that Paul's past was pretty bad. He eagerly went about condemning and accusing Christians, causing them to be persecuted, arrested and later we see some were even killed. He thought he was doing God a favor. He thought he was on the road to fulfilling the will of God, until he met the Lord on the road to Damascus in Acts chapter 9. How many times has the Lord had to change or rearrange our thinking?

How does this relate to you and I? We all have a past. How many times have you known someone who let the life that they lived before they knew the Lord, hinder them from doing what the Lord wanted them to do? Many of us who were saved at a young age might think, "Well I didn't really have much of a past before the Lord." And although this may be true, even our past in Christ can become a hindrance to us if we don't put things in proper perspective. For example: there are so many Christians who set themselves up for failure because they do not know what Paul knew. He said in Philippians 3:13-14, "Brethren, I count not myself to apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Paul did not let his past mistakes or failures determine his future. Even as a

Christian, we have made mistakes and had faith failures and lost battles. We don't arrive in the Lord, we grow in the Lord. Hopefully today you are a stronger person and a more balanced person than you were a year ago.

Please meditate and think about the following statement. "The Word of God – the promises in the Word of God are more true – more reliable than your past experiences." If you can get a hold of that it will set you free. Our past does not equal our future. I have said this so many times, but it is a fact. I have had strongholds in my life that I thought I could never change. Let me elaborate on one of them. I started smoking as a young girl and smoked through my teenage years. I knew it did not please the Lord and I wanted to quit very badly, but I was horribly addicted and could not seem to break the addiction no matter what I did. I prayed, I fasted, I cried out to God, but it didn't seem to help. I kept remembering my past inability to quit and it hindered me. What I did not realize was that the Word of God was more powerful than the addiction. The Word of God says that when we cry out to God, He hears us. God had heard my prayer and began moving me into a position that I could receive from Him in this situation.

I went to a service at church and I will never forget the sermon. The man of God ministered on the scripture from Colossians 1:27 "Christ in us the hope of glory." I then had a vision from the Lord – in the vision I saw that whatever I did in my body, I subjected the Lord to it since He lives in me. I left the meeting that night, free. The addiction was broken and any desire for cigarettes was completely gone and I have been free ever since. I learned from this experience that just because something didn't change yesterday, doesn't mean it won't change today and that the Lord is faithful to perform His Word. So like Paul said, "I forget those things that lie behind," we should see every day as a new opportunity to be more in Christ than we were yesterday. So what was the secret that Paul learned? Paul learned to forget the past, to put it in its proper perspective and not let it hinder him.

Thankfulness - gratitude

One of the second things that we see in Paul's life is that he was thankful. Paul had so many opportunities to feel sorry for his self, to murmur or complain, but he chose not to. All through his writings you see thankfulness. Paul, more than most, had reasons to murmur and complain, but I could not find one place where he did.

My husband's friend Bob, in Texas, has said many times "The least expressed human emotion is gratitude." Although this is funny, unfortunately we see that is often true. Let's look at Paul's experiences for a few moments. In Acts 14:18-19 we see the people of Lystra so excited to hear what Paul is preaching, that he had to restrain them from making sacrifices to him – in the very next verse we see the religious spirits rise up

among the people of Lystra and the next thing Paul knows, they are stoning him and leaving him for dead.

In Acts 16:23, we see that Paul was beaten and thrown into prison because he cast the devil out of a woman. We could go on and on about Paul's hardships, but I think II Corinthians 11:24-28 says it all, "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 night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeying often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of 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: Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." Boy, there's an opportunity to murmur. Can you hear Paul saying, "God why did you allow this to happen?" Not Paul.

Murmuring and complaining is one of the most disrespectful things that we can do. Look at Numbers 11:1 and 14:27-29 and you will get a picture of how God feels about murmuring. When we murmur and complain, it limits God's ability to work in that situation. Philippians 4:6 tells us, "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." So what was it Paul knew that we need to know? He knew that murmuring works against the will of God being done and a thankful heart works with God to produce results.

Paul was willing to give everything.

One last area of Paul's life that I would like to mention is the fact that Paul was not afraid to give God everything. Paul knew that he could not out give God. Today when we think about giving most of the time it is in the financial area and this is important but the Lord is even more interested in us giving of ourselves. The more we give up our lives to the Lord the more He will be able to make our lives a beautiful thing – a vessel that He can flow through to a lost, hurting, dying world. Paul held back nothing; He poured himself out for the plans and purposes of God. Acts 20:20-27 tells us, "how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this

day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

Let's forget the past. Forget the failures, forget the disappointments. Let's wake up each new day with a thankful heart and know that there is nothing impossible with God and that He is able to finish the work that He began in us. Don't hold back anything from the Lord. There is nothing in your life that will not be better when He is Lord over it. If we make this our daily habit it won't be long before you begin to walk in a greater excitement and faith about the will of God coming to pass in your life and through your life. Be a vessel the Holy Spirit can pour Himself out of.

May the Lord bless you and your work for the Kingdom of God!