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# The religious development of Paul in preparation for the Damascus experience

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

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Thesis

THE RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF PAUL

in preparation

FOR THE DAMASCUS EXPERIENCE

Submitted by

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THE RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF PAUL AS A PREPARATION  
FOR  
THE DAMASCUS EXPERIENCE

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

## PART I

### INTRODUCTION

Every disciple who accepted Christianity made a transition from an old into a new life. To this extent there is nothing peculiar in the experience of Paul. However, his adoption of Christianity was distinguished from that of the other apostles by the fact that, in embracing it, he made a transition not merely from the old into the new but from the persecutor into the partisan: "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am."<sup>1</sup>

The record of a life's development can only begin at the point where that life has begun. To trace the spiritual development of Paul during that time of his life preceding the Damascus experience must thus go back to his initial experience. This is quite a difficult task for "volumes have been written on his outward life, pages have been expended on his missionary journeys, sermons have been multiplied on the lessons of his perils and his trials, but the history of the man himself, the record of his inward experience, the study of his spiritual development has as yet occupied little attention."<sup>2</sup> No eternal circumstances,

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<sup>1</sup>I Cor. XV 9, 10

<sup>2</sup>Matheson: Spiritual Development p. 3

however striking, could be adequate in themselves to explain his transition from the old life into the new.

It is the leading thought of the New Testament, and it is an outstanding thought in the writings of Paul, that the life of the Christian Founder is repeated in the lives of His followers, that the stages of each Christian's experience are designed to be a reproduction of those stages by which the Son of God passed from Bethlehem to Calvary. Paul has himself declared that the process of Christian development is a process whereby the follower of Christ is "transformed into the same image from glory to glory."<sup>1</sup> Thus it is not only a transformation into the image of the Master, but into that progressive form in which the image of the Master unfolded itself. The Christian is to ascend by the steps of the same ladder on which the life of the Son of God climbed to its goal. "He, too, is to have his childhood, his youth, and his manhood; his period of subjection to outward authority; his time of temptation in the wilderness; his experience of burden bearing in the haunts of the great city. He is to have his time of growth and his age of maturity, his season of inquiry in the temple of truth."<sup>2</sup>

Paul tells us of a stage in which Christ is being formed within the soul.<sup>3</sup> At a certain time religious

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<sup>1</sup> II Cor. 3:18

<sup>2</sup> Matheson: Spiritual Development p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Gal. 4:19

life is like the beginning of all other life, so much under the dominion of the sense that it can only be fed by the sensuous.<sup>1</sup> He tells us that the manifestations of each Christian period must be proportionate to the capacities of that period - "that the child must speak as a child, understand as a child, think as a child."<sup>2</sup> Also he tells us that the goal of Christian manhood is only to be reached in that day when the soul shall have completed its stages of rooting and grounding, and shall have attained the stature of universal love.<sup>3</sup> When he lays such stress on the progressive nature of the Divine life we should not for a moment believe him to be exempt from that progress. His letters are a revelation of himself - he pours out his soul to us through the vehicle of words.

The words, "It is hard for thee to kick against the goads"<sup>4</sup> carry us back to something behind the light. Through them we learn that there had been a previous struggle in his heart: "that the very vehemence of his opposition to Christianity had part of its foundation in a desire to stifle thought. They tell us that the outward light had set fire to already existing material, had kindled into a blaze the accumulated product of years, and had affected its seemingly

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<sup>1</sup> I Cor. III 1, 2

<sup>2</sup> I Cor. 13:11

<sup>3</sup> Ephes. III:17

<sup>4</sup> Acts 9:5

sudden transformation by its contact with elements that had long and silently been gathering in the soul."<sup>1</sup>

From Paul's testimony<sup>2</sup> we derive the fact that he was not prepared to give an ultimate point of transition. To him it seems that in one sense he has always been a Christian. He felt as if God had set him apart even from his birth and had caused him from the very first hour of his being to be surrounded with influences which had made it possible for him at some time to see a light from heaven. It is true in the spiritual experience of Paul that there was a moment of realization. "The sun has actually risen before the eye perceives its rising, but the eye can detect the time when it does perceive its rising. So it is in the spiritual world. No man can point to the precise moment of transition between the old life and the new, but every man may photograph the moment when the new life was first realized by him as a part of his being."<sup>3</sup>

A change was taking place in the history reaching down to his innermost soul during those days before the Damascus experience. His old hopes were bankrupt. Peace he sought but found it not. His days and nights were marked by incessant struggle. Though he longed to be reconciled to God, he knew not how. Just what entered into his life previous

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<sup>1</sup>Matheson: Spiritual Development p. 47

<sup>2</sup>Gal. 1:15,16

<sup>3</sup>Matheson: Spiritual Development p. 48

to this experience that would thus prepare him for his later life will be considered in the following pages. As he was having this great inward battle, his environment was doing much to influence his life for even "the greatest is the child of the past and the product of the age."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander: The Ethics of St. Paul p. 58

PART II

THE JEWISH HERITAGE OF PAUL

## PART II

### THE JEWISH HERITAGE OF PAUL

In the beginning it is necessary to consider the Jewish faith which was of great importance in shaping and directing the religious development of Paul. From childhood, the Jew in Paul was fundamental. He was Hebrew by nationality and education, Israelite by birth and creed. Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, he had a certain pride in the place of his nativity; yet it was not for the Cilician town but for the land of his fathers that his heart flowed. A citizen of Tarsus, he nevertheless felt as did so many of the Jews of the Dispersion, that he was an alien in a strange land. His father was probably one of those numerous Jews who had wandered from the Holy Land in pursuit of trade and had settled in one of the many centers of commerce on the Mediterranean Sea. The Jews did not readily fall in line with those among whom they dwelt, but remained in dress, food, and faith a peculiar people. The family celebration of the Passover, the constant household instruction, the regular meeting of Synagogue - all tended to keep alive the national feeling and to induce the more devout to revisit frequently the ancestral center of religious life and worship. To this class the father of the apostle evidently

belonged, for Paul calls himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and he was brought up, as he tells us, in the strictest sect of his people.

While the moral character of the Jewish dispensation is unmistakably marked, there is no ethical system strictly so called in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Ethical ideas underlie the histories, prophecies, and legislation: they are not systematically deduced, but tacitly assumed as premises. Life for the Hebrew was shaped mainly by the prevalent conception of God and the peculiar relation in which His own people stood to Him. A simple ethic, as was natural among a primitive people, sufficed. Questions with which Greek speculation busied - as to the chief good, the nature of virtue or happiness - had no place in early Jewish literature. The God worshiped of the Hebrews was the supreme source and author of the moral law, and throughout all the development of their history, morality for the Jewish people was embodied in the Divine Will. "His conception of the supreme authority of the one true God; his idea of omnipotence and over-ruling providence, of predestination and elective grace; his view of two opposed powers, a divine and a satanic, the contrast of two worlds, a present earthly and a future heavenly; the notion of the universality of evil, of inherited sin through

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<sup>1</sup>Hastings Bible Dictionary, Art, "Paul"

Adam's disobedience, and the consequent belief in the inherent weakness and inability of man: these are among the elements underlying his ethical teaching which the apostle Paul brought over from his Jewish upbringing and education."<sup>1</sup>

The Jews were spreading like leaven through the empire their religious teaching which was of the highest type. Within the Mediterranean world more than a hundred and fifty Jewish congregations existed. In their Greek roles they possessed a center of religious power which attracted congregations Sabbath by Sabbath. Even pagans often assembled to pray and listen. By the sacred writings of the Old Testament, in the Greek translations of the Seventy Interpreters, the pious Jew of the Dispersion, who had become outwardly a Hellenist, and in general no longer understood the Semetic original, was brought ever into new contact with the traditions which told of the fortunes of his fathers and the provinces by which they were guided. He was also constantly reminded of the religious experiences and hopes of the prophetic men whose giant figures loomed so large in the religious history of the Mediterranean world during the thousand years before Christ.

Every Jew of a certain age contributed his tax yearly for Jerusalem, and everyone who could possibly afford it went on a pilgrimage to the Holy City.<sup>2</sup> There in

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander: The Ethics of St. Paul p. 38

<sup>2</sup>Lowstuter: Paul, the Campaigner for Christ p. 18

the city of the Temple the Jew in spite of the foreign domination of the Romans felt proud and privileged in the possession of great special rights. Warning inscriptions carved on stone in Greek and other languages, one of which has been preserved to the present day, forbade everyone who was not a Jew to enter the sacred precinct of the Temple upon pain of death. At this seat of grace, where the sacred fire of the altar of burnt offering never went out, the yearning of the pilgrims was fulfilled. Here they heard the choirs of singing men and the rushing sound of the harps; here sat world-famed teachers of the law and gave of their best; here it was possible for one present in the sanctuary on the Great Day of Atonement to participate, however faintly, in the most solemn act of worship of the whole year. And here everyone breathed the glowing atmosphere of the most ardent national hopes of a Messiah.

Thus the Jewish faith permeated the very life of Paul. Its pure worship, high ethical ideals, exalted moral precepts, and noble conception of God were the finest men had ever known. Even though other peoples had sensed the truth of one God; no other had offered the world a God of such sublime character and beauty. The prophets had refined the conception of worship and religion as no other religious teachers had.

Paul felt a keen loyalty to Judaism and was proud of the fact that he was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews."<sup>1</sup> As a boy we may suppose that his conscience was already active as he sought to live free from offense towards God and man.

The influence of his home did much to fashion his religious life. The friendly atmosphere there imprinted its pictures on his mind; all that he saw in the streets, his games and his intercourse with his playmates helped silently to mould his character. Of his father's house we can say only one thing. Trained as he was in the severe Pharasaic discipline,<sup>2</sup> the time of his childhood was probably a hard and certainly a serious one. For his tender, delicate conscience, for his strong, resolute will, he was probably indebted to his father's strict education. Such a youth is, in the case of richly dowered strong natures, the earnest of a manhood that accomplishes great things.

Whether his father was born a Roman citizen or made one for some deed of valor or for money we do not know. Ramsay has shown that there had been a body of Jews settled in Tarsus since 171 B.C. It was only possible for individual Jews to become Roman citizens in a Greek city like Tarsus by being enrolled in "a tribe" set apart for them, in which they could control the religious rights and identify

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<sup>1</sup>Phil. 3:5

<sup>2</sup>Phil. 3:3 ; Acts 23:6

them with the service of the synagogue. If this is true, and Ramsay proves it, Saul's father was enrolled in this "city tribe" of Jewish citizens in Tarsus for his high standing in the Jewish community, unless indeed his grandfather had been a citizen also. We do not know how long the family had been in Tarsus. We have every reason to believe that Paul was proud of his father.

The mother shrinks still further into the background but we know she must have been a woman of force to have reared such a son. We catch a glimpse of her also when Paul says: "I thank God whom I serve for my forefathers."<sup>1</sup> She is in that pious line. When Paul reminds Timothy of whom he had learned the Holy Scriptures even from a babe<sup>2</sup> he was echoing his own experience in the home in Tarsus. This Jewish matron must not be overlooked when we study the influences that moulded Paul. She made the home where he grew and whose stamp he always bore.

When we ask for the other members of that family group we can only bring up the picture of the sister whose son did Paul such a good turn in Jerusalem in the time of storm.<sup>3</sup> This nephew was worthy of his uncle, and that is enough to say for his shrewdness and courage. There may have

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<sup>1</sup> II Tim. 1:3

<sup>2</sup> I Tim. 3:14f

<sup>3</sup> Acts 23:16

been other sisters and even brothers. We simply do not know. The curtain refuses to rise on this point. But we have caught some conception of the home in the city of which Paul was proud.

Since Paul's home was that of a zealous Pharisee, we may infer that he was most carefully instructed in the Scriptures from earliest youth.<sup>1</sup> What Josephus says of the training of all Jewish children, though manifestly somewhat exaggerated, may well have been applicable in a good degree to Paul. He says that the Jews learned the law as soon as they became sensible of anything, and had it engravened on their souls so that they could tell the whole of it more easily than they could tell their own name.

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<sup>1</sup>II Tim. 3:15

PART III

THE INFLUENCES OF THE SCHOOL

### PART III

#### THE INFLUENCES OF THE SCHOOL

In Tarsus Paul's soul was filled with influences which made the man capable of becoming the apostle of the whole Roman empire, of becoming a Jew unto the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup> Strabo tells us that at this period the city was a distinguished seat of learning, ranking with Alexandria and Athens. It was specially the stronghold of Stoic thought, and at least five of the most eminent teachers of that philosophy were professors in the university. It would be impossible to say whether Paul actually attended the lectures of these men. Yet the probability is that he did not. It is easy and very misleading to ascribe to the apostle width of learning and acquaintance with Greek literature and philosophy which find no confirmation in his writings. Thus we can conjecture what his school life there in Tarsus may have been. It seems probably that schools in connection with the synagogues date back as far as the earlier part of the Christian century and if Paul did attend one his study would have been of the law, probably in Greek.

Even though the language of instruction was Greek and the Greek version of the Scriptures was his Bible, he learned to read the Old Testament in Hebrew. His first lessons probably consisted in memorizing sections of the Law and the Prophets, both in Greek and in Hebrew. Before

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<sup>1</sup>Weinel: St. Paul, The Man and His Work p. 19

leaving Tarsus he was able to read many parts of the Hebrew Scriptures and be familiar with sections of interpretations of famous Jewish Rabbis. Either during these years or later he learned the trade of tent making. There is no reason to suppose that his father was especially poor. Every Jewish boy was taught a trade as it was a man's duty to teach his son one. If he was anxious to become a teacher it was especially important to have some way of earning a living, for teachers were paid even less in that day than now.

Whatever training Paul may have had in Tarsus, his education proper was received in Jerusalem "at the feet of Gamaliel",<sup>1</sup> one of the most popular and best read Rabbis of the day.<sup>2</sup> The decision that he was to go to college may have been due to his father's strong religious view, or his mother's pious ambition, or his own predilections. It was resolved that he should become a Rabbi - that is, a minister, a teacher, and a lawyer all in one. Thus he was sent to Jerusalem. To every Jewish child with a religious disposition this was the center of all things; the footsteps of prophets and kings echoed in its streets; memories sacred and sublime clung to its walls and buildings; and it shone in the glamour of illimitable hopes.

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 22:3

<sup>2</sup>Lowstuter: Paul Campaigner for Christ p. 31

Just when he was sent to Jerusalem cannot be definitely stated; presumably, when he was about thirteen, for shortly after this it was definitely fixed by law that a Jewish boy should become a "son of the Law" at that age. Later in his writings he implied plainly that he had come there when only a boy and had spent most of his time there and that many in the city could testify as to his rearing and what kind of a man he was. It chanced that at this time the college there was presided over by one of the most noted teachers the Jews had ever possessed. This was Gamaliel, one of the great Hebrew scholars of his time. With him Paul studied with passionate devotion the literature, the Law, and the hopes of Israel. He has told us what the results of this study were. He became not only a Pharisee - that is, a Separatist or a Puritan of the times - but one of the strictest sect of the Pharisees, exceedingly scrupulous in belief and in practice. He was orthodox of the orthodox. We can therefore tell a little what his beliefs were; for we know what their beliefs were.

We are told that there were two schools of instruction competing with each other for first place in Jerusalem at that time. From our modern point of view both were narrow and provincial, but one put more emphasis upon the

petty details of the law, while the other was capable of larger interpretation. When a Gentile came to Shammai and promised to be a pupil, if he would summarize the whole law while standing on one foot, Shammai sent him off in disgust. When Hillel was confronted with the same proposition his answer was ready, "Do not do to your neighbor anything which you would not like to have him do to you."

Gamaliel, who was probably the grandson of Hillel, went so far as to make references to Greek works in his interpretations. His broad-mindedness is reflected in an interesting scene in the book of Acts.<sup>1</sup> Gamaliel, "a doctor of the law had in honor of all the people", rose up in the counsel when the Jewish leaders were about to deal violently with the Christian apostles. "Refrain from these men and let them alone", he advised, "for if this work be of men it will be overthrown; but if it is of God ye shall not be able to overthrow them." Yet Gamaliel dealt sharply with those who opposed him. Many tales are told to illustrate the fact that Gamaliel could never be vanquished in any argument nor changed in his opinion.

In the book of Acts he appears as a man of courage, and yet conciliatory; a man of somewhat liberal mind

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 5:34

and the most influential person in the Sanhedrin.<sup>1</sup> He was called by his contemporaries the Beauty of the Law and is still remembered among the Jews as the Great Rabbi. He was a man of lofty character and enlightened mind, a Pharisee strongly attached to the traditions of the fathers, yet not intolerant or hostile to Greek culture, as some of the narrower Pharisees were. The influence of such a man on an open mind like Paul's must have been very great.

As Gamaliel was a famous teacher, it is probable that the number of pupils gathered before him was great. And so Paul may have been one of several hundred students who waited upon his instruction. The Rabbis met their pupils in the courts of the Temple<sup>2</sup> and the teacher occupied a high seat, while his pupils sat on the floor in front of him. The course of instruction which they had to undergo was lengthened and peculiar. It consisted entirely of the study of the Scriptures and the comments of the sages and the masters upon them. As the teacher repeated again and again an explanation of a passage of Scripture the scholars were required to commit it to memory. By this method of instruction the imagination was suffocated and the memory strengthened. The ideal of the student was to "be like

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 5:34-40

<sup>2</sup>Luke 2:46; 22:1

a well plastered cistern, which loses no drop of the water which is put into it." How long this course of study usually continued in the case of those who aspired to be teachers cannot be definitely stated. Sometimes, at least, it required twelve years to complete the course. A student was not qualified to teach as the head of the school until he was forty years old and knew the entire traditional law.

The power of the Rabbi over his pupils was great, and the honor which he demanded was higher than that which was shown to the parents. The pupil might not stand in the presence of the teacher except at the time of morning and evening prayer. The Rabbi regards himself as a mediator between God and men, who made known the divine will and helped man to keep it. The combined honor and power of king, priest, and prophet were supposed to belong to the Scribes. In Gamaliel Paul found an instructor who combined a tendency to broadmindedness with an unflinching courage of conviction. What his day dreams were we do not know but he doubtless sympathized with the desires of his parents that he should become a Jewish Rabbi, perhaps another Gamaliel. As a Jew no higher glory was open to him than this, since the prophetic voice had ceased from Israel and the kingly sceptre was no longer in Jewish hands.

To understand the law was the supreme object of Paul's studies during the days of his education while to obey this law was the supreme object of his life. But that part of the law which most interested Paul was that which interested the majority of people the least, - the Levitical or ceremonial part. The argument for the supremacy of this portion of the law was very short and simple, and is not difficult to understand. The moral law - so argued the Pharisees - related to man's duty to his fellow man; the ceremonial law related to man's duty to his God. Justice, mercy, kindness, were obligations due by man to his fellow-man; but to offer the appointed sacrifices, to observe the appointed fasts, to attend the sacred feasts, to obey the Sabbath regulations, to fulfil the required ritual in worship, to perform the ceremonial ablutions, was doing man's duty to God. It was a great deal more important to do one's duty to God than to do one's duty to his fellow-men. Therefore, it was far more important that he should offer the right sacrifice, pay the right tithes, comply scrupulously with the Sabbath and festal regulations, and observe the laws respecting cleanliness and uncleanness, than that he should do justly or love mercy. The declaration of the prophet<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Micah 6:8

that he do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God was all that God required, had long ceased to be orthodox teaching.

To him ritual was the heart of the law.

Religion was obedience to ritual. He practiced what he believed, "As touching the law", he said, "I am blameless." He fasted twice a week: on the fifth day, because on that day Moses had gone up into the mount; on the second day, because on that day Moses had come down again. His year was full of fastings. He celebrated in fasts almost every calamity in the national history; the overthrow of Jerusalem, of Nebuchadnezzar, the burning of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, the murder of Gedaliah by Ishmael, and the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. He was scrupulous about the Sabbath. We are told that he would carry no bundles on the Sabbath day; would not walk any considerable distance and never under any circumstances, for pleasure or recreation. He was conscientious about the Jewish feasts as well and was always at the synagogue when the Sabbath day came round. Whenever he returned from a walk the first thing he did was to get the ewer and basin of water that stood in every Jewish household, and to wash at least his hands. He might have touched a Gentile, then he would have been unclean; and had he eaten with unclean hands the uncleanness would have entered into him and degraded him.

And yet he was not satisfied; for he had an ethical nature. He half consciously believed that there was something more in righteousness than hand washing, Sabbath observance, synagogue attendance, tithe paying, and fasting. He believed in justice and mercy, in temperance and righteousness; and although, as touching the ceremonial law, he was able to be blameless, yet his ethical ideal always transcended his practice, and he never attained it. There were three fundamental facts in the Jewish law which deeply impressed him; first: the Jewish law stood preeminently for an emphasis upon purity and justice and righteousness. In taking this stand their ethical ideals were head and shoulders above any other religion of the empire. Second: the Jewish religion was reaching out into all the centers of the empire. The Pharisees had already undertaken a worldwide propaganda. At Jerusalem Paul would see evidences of this international and cosmopolitan character of Judaism. At Passover time he would notice merchants and scholars from Greece or from Alexandria worshipping beside peasants from Galilee or tent makers from Ephesus. Third: Paul's education gave him a firm conviction of the truth of monotheism. No other religion preached so effectively the doctrine that God is One, that he created the universe and holds it in the

hollow of his hand. The Jewish religion was a standing protest against the already crumbling polytheism of the nation.

PART IV  
RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

## PART IV

### RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

In his Jewish career Paul's soul was fired with these three ideas; ethical purity, the world-wide destiny of the worship of Jehovah, and its displacement of all other religions. The first led him later to despair of perfectly keeping the law; the second caused him to be deeply moved by the Hellenistic message of Stephen; the third prompted him to persecute Christians. With the study of the law he studied Israel's hopes. Through the long vista of the centuries the literature of Israel had been bound together by a golden thread of promise. These prophecies and promises he studied and what he thought about them was something like this: he believed that a Messiah would suddenly appear in power and great glory; that he would put himself at the head of Israel; that all the enemies of Israel would mass themselves against him; that he would either destroy them or would subjugate them. Then, when they had been subjugated or destroyed Jerusalem would be renovated; the dispersed of Israel from all lands would be gathered together in the Holy Land, and Jerusalem would become the imperial city of the world. The saints who had died and were dwelling in the

shadowy underworld would emerge, and with the children of the dispersion, assemble in Palestine. Wars and famine, blindness and disease would cease and the reign of peace and the glory of the kingdom of God would be ushered in, and Israel would be the world power and Jerusalem the imperial city of the world.

Since the law was everything to Paul, it opened for him the gate of heaven and showed him the moral ideal for the man whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night; who is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."<sup>1</sup> The altar had long ceased to be considered a means of propitiating Jehovah's favor by the fat of sacrifice or of securing His pleasure by "sweet savors", or of insuring a man's bodily and spiritual sanctification by the sprinkling of the sacred blood. The sacrifices had for long been nothing more than a portion of the law, carried out because Jehovah had commanded them. Even prayer, the oldest yet ever new approach to God, had in Judaism to suffer itself to be almost entirely relegated within the limits of what was ordained in the law. Its duration and its contents were subjected to the most rigid prescription, and so it had become merely a pious

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<sup>1</sup>Psalms 1:3

function required by God, for which you expected your reward before God and men just as you did for fasting and almsgiving.

Paul's lofty soul lived in the great hopes of his people with a more glowing flame. He strove after the great things to be awaited more ardently than the meaner souls who can more or less be filled with the joys and sorrows of this world. His fight for spiritual purity was closer and intenser than theirs, but his hope of glory and eternal bliss, of triumphing of his nation and the casting down of the heathen and all other adversaries to be God's footstool, was more fervent and more jubilant too. Whole-hearted everywhere, he threw himself body and soul into everything that appeared to him to be right. This furnished ever new grounds for delight in his people, and for grateful love to the God of his fathers. Truly he was a religious enthusiast in the best sense of the word.

His being was entirely permeated with religious ardor. His Pharisaic discipline, the heritage of his race and his home training intensified his religious interest. A positive genius had ~~be~~ for religion and the things of the spirit. Not only was he fascinated by them in his student days and in his "exceeding zeal for traditions of his fathers"<sup>1</sup> but also in the blameless years of his young manhood.<sup>2</sup> Before

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<sup>1</sup>Gal. 1:14

<sup>2</sup>Phil. 3:6

and above everything else he has a religious character; his instruction deals with God and the inner life. He has been called a "man of one book" and that book the Bible. Fanatical on the subject<sup>1</sup> Festus has termed him. His whole soul was fired with religious enthusiasm; his whole life absorbed in religious activity.

In his work as a persecutor Paul was thoroughly whole-hearted and whole-souled. His work was the natural expression of his real character and the outgrowth of his convictions and of his most inner life. He was just as conscientious as he was enthusiastic. When he gave himself to a cause he enlisted with all of his powers. He went into things with all the length, breadth, depth, and height of his passionate being. His whole soul was fired with religious enthusiasm; his whole life absorbed in religious activity. He set himself to wipe out this false religion nurtured in the very heart of Israel. He persecuted its adherents to the limit. He fought even unto blood for the glory of God. Even as a Christian he "delivered the fornicator unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved."<sup>2</sup> As an apostle he did all in his power to overthrow all who should "preach another gospel", even were it an angel from heaven!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lowstuter: Paul - Campaigner for Christ p. 44

<sup>2</sup>I Cor. 5:5

<sup>3</sup>Gal. 1:8

From all the indications of Acts and of the epistles, he was easily the leader of the opposition against the Christians and he made a terrible record in his bloody work. His aim was radical and comprehensive. He purposed to wipe the entire sect of Christians out of existence. He had the Sanhedrin back of him though it does not seem likely that Gamaliel favored his bloody plan. If he did, his thought must have undergone a change since the day when he secured the release of Peter and the other apostles.<sup>1</sup> The sanhedrin as a whole, plainly supported him<sup>2</sup> and the procurator seems not to have cared to exercise his veto power to save the lives of believers in Jesus.

In proceeding against the disciples, Paul sought first to make them blaspheme Jesus and renounce their loyalty to Him. If he failed in this, he caused them to be put to death. Many persons were imprisoned, and many put to death, both men and women.<sup>3</sup> Throughout Judea<sup>4</sup> Paul went and even outside of Palestine. He told Agrippa that he persecuted Christians unto foreign cities, which implies that he made journeys to other foreign cities besides Damascus.<sup>5</sup> Of these journeys we have no knowledge. An illustration of how widely Paul was known and feared is found in the fact that before he went to Damascus, Ananias, who lived in that

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 5:34-40

<sup>2</sup>Acts 9:2; 22:5; 26:10

<sup>3</sup>Acts 26:10

<sup>4</sup>Gal. 1:22,23

<sup>5</sup>Acts 26:11

city, had heard from many what evil Paul had done in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> How long Paul was occupied in this work of persecution can only be surmised. Some months at least would be required for a thorough search after believers in Jerusalem and Judea, and the persecutions to foreign cities would, at the lowest estimate of the extent of this vague expression, require some months.

The success of Paul was unmistakably very great. Luke speaks of it as a "great persecution", a ravaging of the Church", which left no disciple in Jerusalem save the apostles<sup>2</sup> who may have been hiding, and with this testimony agree the statements of Paul's letters. He says that he persecuted the Church beyond measure, and that he made havoc of the faith.<sup>3</sup> "If the infant church could have been annihilated by man, it would have been accomplished by the consuming zeal and rigor and perseverance of Paul."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 9:13,21

<sup>2</sup>Acts 8:1,3

<sup>3</sup>Gal. 1:23

<sup>4</sup>Gilbert: The Students Life of Paul  
p. 26

PART V

CONTACT WITH CHRISTIANS

## PART V

### CONTACT WITH CHRISTIANS

During this time Christianity was doing all in its power to survive in Jerusalem. Paul learned about Jesus from its enemies. This new sect of the Nazarenes were proclaiming Him as the Messiah. He was claimed to heal men's diseases and to feed their hunger. By appealing to their prejudices and their passions he had increased the horde that followed him. The men of high station, the Scribes, the theologians, the priests, the members of the Sanhedrin who had descended direct from the seventy whom Moses by the direction of God embued with authority - these he had denounced as liars, robbers, and hypocrits; he had called them the generation of serpents; he had told them that they could not escape the damnation of hell. Not only had he denounced the law makers but he had broken the law again and again. He had set the Sabbath at naught and told men to carry their bundles on that day. He had discarded the sacrificial system, venerable with centuries of use, and blasphemously assumed to forgive men their sins without that sacrifice by which and through which forgiveness could alone be won from a just Jehovah. He had declared that the expectation of the Messiah who would make Jerusalem the queen city and Palestine the

dominant nation of the world was a delusion; that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and of the Temple not one stone would be left upon another. God placed the stamp of approval on men by their prosperity and victory; he placed the stamp of disapproval on men by their suffering and defeat; and this man had suffered the most galling and ignominious defeat. The law declared "that he that is hanged is accursed of God", and this man had been crucified and thereby thrice accursed; the curse of God as well as the condemnation of the nation was upon him. The Sanhedrin had condemned him for blasphemy; the Roman government had condemned him for treason, - for he was a disturber of the peace as well as a renouncer of religion; God had condemned him by his providence. His death should have put an end to this strange superstition but it did not. His followers had now started the story that he had risen from the dead, and worst of all, men were believing it, and this strange and ignominious sect was growing in numbers.

Paul had been eagerly expecting the Messiah; in school and at home. He had heard and learned much about His coming but these teachings had not told of such a Messiah. For quite a different kind of a Messiah, they looked for, "one who should come in glory and power to redeem Israel, drive out the hated Roman and bring fulfilment to their dreams of

the divine promises. Salvation was of the Jews and through their sacred Law alone they hoped to secure it. Now to be told that the Messiah had already come, manifest in the flesh, that he had been rejected by his own chosen people and shamefully crucified outside the holy city by a Roman governor; to be told that salvation was to be sought not through the Law but through this crucified Messiah was more than the devout soul of Paul could endure."<sup>1</sup>

Paul burst out into vehement and indignant protest. To him this was making a farce of the holy of holies. Were the great hopes of his people to become a by-word? Were these Christians to go on proclaiming as Messiah a criminal whom the hated Roman had nailed to the cross? The fact that the law attached a curse to one hanged<sup>2</sup> certainly added strength to the argument; yet the worst of all was the shock to the soul, and this Paul could not overcome.

Through his friends, as well as through his own actual work of persecution, he could not avoid learning many things about Jesus and what the Christians were teaching about him. Absurd it would have been to accuse men and women, also scourge and imprison them without knowing what they were accused of. No, Paul had reasons to engage in such a crusade.

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<sup>1</sup>Lowstuter: Paul - Campaigner for Christ p. 45

<sup>2</sup>Deut. 21:27

During the trial or hearing of the Christians he was compelled, repeatedly, to hear the Christian teachings concerning their Master. His attempt to make them recant their faith in Jesus, proves beyond question that he knew their claims in regard to Jesus.

Due to the fact that his experience as inquisitor extended over considerable time, he was not only given ample opportunity to hear about Jesus but also to watch the Christians and see what their faith was doing for them. "Then daily life was marked with a new power and character; it was filled with gentleness, brotherly love, and a strangely new devotion to others. When the persecutors applied the acid test to their faith what steadfastness, what loyalty, was revealed! Had they yielded to persecution and blasphemed, the story would be different; but they did not. The new faith took such hold on men that they would suffer for it. And how they suffered! not reviling when reviled, but with a patience and forbearance toward their persecutors, yea, a readiness to forgive that was not taught in the schools of the rabbis. They knew a poise and peace that triumphed over fear and suffering; they seemed possessed of God's very presence and power. Finally, Paul saw one put to death, stood by and kept the martyr's clothes, consenting to his death.<sup>1,2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 7:58; 8:1

<sup>2</sup>Lowstuter: Paul, Campaigner for Christ p. 51

This was a man who arose in the church in whom these aggressive tendencies embodied themselves known as Stephen, who went from synagogue to synagogue preaching the Messiahship of Jesus and announcing the advent of freedom from the yoke of the law. Champions of Jewish orthodoxy encountered him but were not able to withstand his eloquence and holy zeal. Foiled in argument, they grasped at other weapons stirring up the authorities and the populace to murderous fanaticism. One of the synagogues in which these controversies took place was that of the Cilicians, the countrymen of Paul. Whether the latter was actually a member of the court we do not know, but he was present when Stephen was put on trial. Stephen, who had become a proselyte to Judaism and then a convert to Christianity, began his speech where the Rabbis generally began theirs. In conclusion he stated, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised! You call us Greeks uncircumcised, you are the uncircumcised; you have always resisted God; you have always fought against him; you have always persecuted the prophets; you have always repudiated his law; it is no strange thing that when the Messiah came you crucified him; it was like you in your whole history, from the beginning to the end." Upon those words the Court became a mob, the people rushed upon him, and without waiting for judgment seized him and carried

him from the room. When the witnesses who were about to cast the first stones at him were stripping for their work, they laid down their garments at his feet. "There, on the margin on that wild scene, in the field of judicial murder, we see the figure of Paul, standing a little apart and sharply outlined against the mass of persecutors, unknown to fame - the pile of many colored robes at his feet, and his eyes bent upon the holy martyr who was kneeling and praying: 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'<sup>1</sup> Shortly after this incident we find Paul in the Sanhedrin giving his vote against the Christians. He had been entrusted with the work of utterly uprooting Christianity which the authorities now resolved upon. Believing this to be God's work he accepted their proposal.

Even though Paul continued to persecute Christians he never forgot the triumphant death of Stephen. It revealed to his soul what Jesus meant to men. He could not be unaffected by such testimony. Immediately he began comparing the Christians with himself. In their experience, they had a power, a peace, a content, an evidence of God which he had sought for in vain. He could not keep himself from wondering about the source of their power and peace. Could it be possible that the new faith of the crucified

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson: The Life of Paul p. 47

Christ could unite men with God as the faith of his fathers failed to do? At least Paul was compelled to recognize the great power of the Crucified in the allegiance of the disciples.

PART VI  
SEEKER AFTER GOD

## PART VI

### SEEKER AFTER GOD

Even though the passion of Paul's soul was to win God's favor, somehow peace was not his to enjoy. The quest of his life had been to find God and gain favor. Had he failed in that which he most desired to do? "All the fine sentiment of the old Hebrew prophets and poets who longed for and cried out after God, who searched heaven and earth to find him that they might come near unto him, found ready response"<sup>1</sup> in his heart. He had been instructed that there were two grounds on which he might base his claim to God's favor and hope to win salvation. "The first was that he belonged to the chosen people; was a son of Abraham, to whom Jehovah had given the promises so precious to his people."<sup>2</sup> The second was through the keeping of the Mosaic Law."<sup>3</sup> Both had been thoroughly tried but neither had taught him the way to God nor a way to escape from sin and the wrath of God. "Thorough Jew that he was and bigoted Pharisee he had not been able to hide from himself the fact that in his own personal experience Abrahamic descent, that is, the mere fact of physical descent, was not sufficient to assure him of Jehovah's favor nor to lift from his stricken soul the sense of guilt."<sup>4</sup> The conviction reigned in his soul

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<sup>1</sup> Lowstuter: Paul, the Campaigner for Christ p. 52

<sup>2</sup> John 8:31; Rom. 4:11; Gal. 3:16-18

<sup>3</sup> Lowstuter: Paul, the Campaigner for Christ p. 52

<sup>4</sup> Lowstuter: Paul, the Campaigner for Christ p. 52

and he could not quiet his disturbed conscience and troubled spirit by soothing reminder of Abrahamic parentage. His pure ancestry was not giving such complete trust as the Crucified was doing for the Christians. Their peace he did not know.

The Christians kept telling him that there was another way of salvation; their Lord could save. Their daily lives and their conduct under persecution showed that they had something in their lives that he did not have and that religion could not, at least had not, given him. Too honest was he to close his eyes to the difference.

Trust in the law would not realize what he had been led to believe it would do. In spite of the blessing which he derived from it, Paul and the law could not remain at peace with each other. One of them had to be the undoing of the other. For when the law in any form meets with a nature so sincere, so energetic, so powerful, a terrible conflict ensues. Nothing better can be conceived for feeble, crippled, half developed natures than a religion of law. It has been stated that the religion of the law offered to such a thousand minor indulgences encouraged a naive belief that they were doing great things for God, diverted attention from the inner spiritual life and thus afforded satisfaction and

and comfort - just what people wanted. According to the promise, the hope of a glorious kingdom was the portion of a holy and just people. Yet the people as a whole were never able really to fulfill the law. The people as a whole were lost and remained lost. A heart full of love for his nation as Paul's was suffered keenly this thought. It rent his very heart that his kinsmen according to the flesh were not able to keep the law.

Everyone of Paul's associates understood that the commandment could not be kept, but they did not own it to themselves. The elder behaved in the presence of younger men as if it could be kept: one believed it on the strength of another and did not acknowledge the impossibility to himself. They blinded themselves to their own sin by comparing themselves with other just men as Enoch, Noah, and Daniel. They hoped God would allow the good works of the saints to cover their own deficiencies, and they did not forget occasionally to beg for mercy - yet, on the whole, they kept up the lie and went on as if all were well.

Under the law, religion became a "series of minute legal prescriptions and pious observances."<sup>1</sup> Purely mechanical was its character for ritual, ceremony, the paying of tithes and other such obligations comprised the whole of

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<sup>1</sup> Lowstuter: Paul, the Campaigner for Christ p. 53

religion. Upon a strictly legalistic basis rested man's relation to God. "It was as though God said - conform to the requirements of the legal code, attend as many services, say so many prayers, keep so many fasts, make so many offerings, perform so many acts of devotion, and, in payment for the same, you may expect salvation; you have earned or bought your salvation."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of his earnest endeavor to keep the law, his vigorous observance of it, his willing sacrifice for it, it pronounced judgment on him, quickened his sense of guilt and condemned him. It not only provoked him to sin by its endless restrictions and prohibitions but it failed him as a savior for it could only set ideals and write commandments. It told men what they ought to do but gave no power to realize or obey the same.

At the price of tremendous inward conflicts Paul had an experience quite different from that of the Psalmist: he was not a tree planted by rivers of waters; his soul did not dwell in peace and quietness - no, he had to face the terrible thing: the law, holy, just, and good, was changed for him into a demonical temptation to sin. Heavier and heavier did the curse of the law become to him, the more he studied and the more exactly he tried to keep the commandment. What struggles

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<sup>1</sup> Lowstuter: Paul, the Campaigner for Christ p. 53

must have raged through his conscience, until, conquered at last, he broke out in the despairing cry: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. For to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. So now it is no more I that doeth, but sin which dwelleth in me!"<sup>1</sup> Terrible hours of anguish for the faithful Pharisee till at last he cried: "It is all in vain! Thou too art lost."

So he pronounced sentence of death upon himself. None of the paltry consolations that others cling to, could help him here. He was too strong, too proud, too loyal for such. He pleaded guilty. For him the holy law of the fathers had become a law of sin and death. In such a dark hour he hated himself, his body, his flesh - hated them mortally and agonized fear of everlasting damnation. And so he sent his cry for help up to heaven, a clear call amidst the rush and noise of men, a cry of despair: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"<sup>2</sup> And his cry of despair was heard for he still longed to be reconciled to the real God. His sincere discontent and despair made him the more ready for the Damascus experience.

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<sup>1</sup>Rom. 7

<sup>2</sup>Rom. 7

CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

Thus, from birth until the Damascus experience Paul's life was in the process of a great religious development. The faith of his fathers was impressed upon his mind during his early years. As his religious training was continued he had a positive genius for religion and the things of the spirit. They fascinated him and laid his being under tribute. This showed itself in his work as a religious enthusiast. Religion was the supreme desire of his heart. It was the deepest thing in him and the all controlling power.

"With some men, religion is a thing apart, with Paul it was his whole existence. Some men are religious only on the great festival days of the church. Others are religious only in the emergencies of life - the hours of physical danger, or serious illness, or approaching death. Paul lived in the atmosphere of religion every hour of the day."<sup>1</sup>

Through his work as a persecutor of the Christians he was whole hearted and conscientious. He did all he could to win the favor of God. Upon learning about Jesus he still exerted his utmost power in the great Jewish religion though he was amazed at the Christian faith. All of the time he was persecuting them his active mind was not only given a great opportunity to hear about Jesus but also to watch the Christians and see what

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<sup>1</sup>Jefferson: The Character of Paul p. 339

their faith was doing for them. He could not avoid comparing them with himself. In vain he had been seeking for a peace, a content, an evidence of God which they seemed to have in their experience.

Finally he began to realize that the Law did not save. In it man's relation to God rested upon a business instead of a pure religious basis. Even though he had endeavored to keep the Law there came to him no sense of satisfaction, no confidence toward God and no assurance of acceptance for pardon. The Law set ideals and made commandments but it gave no power to realize and obey the same. As the realization of the failure of the Law permeated his being there crept into his life a sense of despair. He needed a helper and a deliverer.<sup>1</sup> Thus he was ready for the Damascus experience - a time when he would change his life from the old into the new. He was willing to shift his loyalties from a Law which had no power in itself to a God who would save and bring peace to a restless soul longing for a Savior.

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<sup>1</sup>Rom. 7:24

SUMMARY

## SUMMARY

To trace the spiritual development of Paul during that time of his life preceding the Damascus experience it is necessary to study his life during those years which intervened. No external circumstances however striking could adequately explain his transition from the old life into the new. As he was having an inward battle his environment was doing much to influence his life and thus prepare him for the Damascus experience.

The Jewish faith was fundamental in Paul's life. Its pure worship, high ethical ideals, exalted moral precepts, and noble conception of God was the finest men had ever known. As a boy, his conscience was active as he sought to live free from offense towards God and men.

His youth was spent in his father's house where he was trained in the severe Pharasaic discipline. From his earliest days we may infer that he was most carefully instructed in the Scriptures.

During those days in Tarsus Paul was probably taught to memorize sections of the Law and the Prophets, both in Greek and in Hebrew. Probably before leaving the city he was able to read many parts of the Hebrew Scriptures and be familiar with sections of interpretations of famous Jewish Rabbis.

His education proper began in Jerusalem with Gamaliel. With him Paul studied with passionate devotion the literature, the Law, and the hopes of Israel. The course of instruction consisted entirely of the study of the Scriptures and the comment of the sages and the masters upon them. As the teacher repeated again and again an explanation of a passage of Scripture the scholars were required to commit it to memory. Thus the imagination was suffocated and the memory strengthened.

The Law was everything to Paul. Whole hearted everywhere he threw himself body and soul into everything that appeared to him to be right. He was truly a religious enthusiast in the best sense of the word. His being was completely permeated with religious ardor. His whole soul was fired with religious enthusiasm, his whole life absorbed in religious activity. Paul's work as a persecutor was the natural expression of his real character and the outgrowth of his convictions and of his most inner life. He persecuted the adherents of Christianity to the limit and fought thus for the glory of God.

Paul learned about Jesus through His enemies. He attempted to make the Christians recant their faith in Him. As he persecuted them for their faith he was given an opportunity to see what it had done for them. It revealed to his soul what Jesus meant to men. He had sought peace and found it not.

In their life they had a peace with God which he had not been able to find.

The quest of his life had been to find God and gain favor. Had he failed in that which he had most desired to do? His conscience became most disturbed and his spirit most troubled. Trust in the law would not realize what he had been led to believe it would do. It quickened his sense of guilt and condemned him in spite of his endeavor to keep it, his vigorous observance of it and his willing sacrifice for it. Terrible hours of anguish Paul experienced. Finally he pleaded guilty and sent his cry of despair up to heaven. The old life had passed away and he longed to know the real God. Thus his life was prepared for the great Damascus experience.

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