

## **“And Last Of All ...”**

“... as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also. For I am the least of all the apostles that are 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: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:8-10).

Prior to these verses Paul had identified the gospel to consist of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus which had been preached to and received by the Corinthians. Luke’s record of their reception of that message is recorded in this fashion “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). To prove the veracity of the gospel Paul stated that Christ’s death for our sins and His subsequent resurrection both were foretold by Old Testament prophets and to further strengthen the truth of its events he appealed to eyewitnesses who saw the risen Christ. Six witnesses (or groups of them) were cited: the last two being to “all the apostles,” then finally to Paul himself.

Paul regarded it a profound blessing that Christ should reveal Himself to him who had before been an ardent persecutor of God’s people. In his own words Paul was exceedingly mad against the disciples, “persecuting them even to strange cities,” striving to make them blaspheme (Acts 26:11). He cast his vote against them when they were put to death and consented to Stephen’s death by holding the garments of those who stoned him (Acts 26:10; 22:20). When Christ revealed Himself to Paul on the Damascus road and said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4), it must surely have been a startling revelation for him. Then, certainly the sobering truth swept over Paul’s whole being. He was wrong, dreadfully so, and had been guilty of opposing God Himself. Little wonder that despair; fear, and intense sorrow must have overwhelmed him, and despite the fact that Jesus consoled Paul somewhat by telling him a man named Ananias would be directed to him to tell him what things God had in mind for him and what he must do (Acts 9:6; 22:14-16) — all which implied there was in fact something he could do; it did not take away the anguish of his heart. He spent three days and nights without food, praying constantly to God (Acts 9:9-11).

In the revelation Jesus made of Himself to Paul, Jesus told Paul that He had appeared to him to “appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou has seen me and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee” (Acts 26:16). In short, to be an apostle of the risen Savior.

Paul ever felt keenly his unworthiness. In the Corinthian text he classed himself the least of all the apostles, not meet (worthy) to be called such. In his Ephesian epistle he spoke of himself as "less than the least of all the saints" (Eph. 3:8). He was humbled by Christ's selection of him and considered that selection "grace" — unmerited favor — despite the many things he suffered, including his ultimate death: favor he did not deserve.

Such an one as Paul would hardly be convinced that Jesus was raised from the dead. While he states that he did what he did through ignorance and unbelief (1 Tim. 1:13), none are to suppose that Paul had not heard the gospel's message before Ananias came to him in Damascus. He had heard Stephen and obviously rejected the message he preached. He was a man of much learning, unswayed by emotions or friendship. He had concluded Jesus to have been an impostor and believed he ought to do many things contrary to his name. That is why his words, "and last of all, as to a child untimely born, he appeared to me also," are so powerful — such a mighty proof of the resurrection of Christ.

What motive might have induced Paul to have changed from the faith of his fathers to become part of the despised and hated people later to be called "Christians"? To be better off financially? That was not the case for he had to toil, laboring with his own hands to supply not only his needs, but the needs of those with him. To have honor among men? Not that for the Way of Christ was "everywhere spoken against" (Acts 28:28). Put forward any motive you can conceive of and it will be evident that no motive, other than that Paul had become convinced Jesus was the Christ, risen from the dead, could have moved him to embrace Christ as God's own Son, crucified for our sins, risen for our justification, sitting at God's right hand and to surrender what he had in the Jew's religion. Nothing. Paul was humbled by what he had formerly been and done and suffered as few men ever suffered, but one certainty was always with him: Christ had been raised from the dead! And, despite the fact he could never do enough good things to balance the scales with the injury he had done to his Lord, he could, would, and did spend all his remaining years proclaiming to all men the message: Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, risen from the dead.

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