

For Such a Time As This: The Apostle¹ Paul



SABBATH—JUNE 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 9:1–9; Acts 22:3–5, 25–29; Romans 7:19–25; Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5; 2 Peter 1:3–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “Because I belong to Christ Jesus, I can take pride in my work for God” (Romans 15:17, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: The apostle Paul had a powerful influence² on the world in his time. He spread Christianity far beyond Israel and the Jewish people. Paul's life and ministry are models (examples) for our mission today.

THE IDEA THAT THE GOOD NEWS also was good news for the Gentiles (non-Jews) shocked many Jews who had grown up with a different understanding. But God's salvation³ was for the entire world, not just for Jewish people.

The apostle Paul was a key leader in acting on this teaching. Paul's background, personality, and calling from God made him the right person at the right time for this new period of mission to all people.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church also received a calling from God. During the late nineteenth century it began its mission work outside North America. This step helped start today's international (worldwide) Adventist mission work in more than 200 countries.

1. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus returned to heaven.

2. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

3. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life.

SUNDAY—JUNE 29**PAUL'S BACKGROUND
(Acts 22:3–5, 25–29)**

Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul are the two most influential⁴ persons in the New Testament. Paul took the good news about Jesus to much of the world in his time.

Paul was born in Tarsus, then the capital of Cilicia. It was a Roman area, which is now present-day Turkey. This area was well-known for its goats'-hair cloth. The goats'-hair cloth was widely used for tent making, Paul's trade (Acts 18:3).



Paul was born in Tarsus, the chief city of Cilicia, in what is now Turkey.

What do the verses in Acts 22:3–5, 25–29; Romans 11:1; and Philippians 3:5 tell us about Paul? How do they help us understand why he was such a good witness at this time in history?

Roman citizenship by birth was highly prized. In Paul's day, a person could buy Roman citizenship for 500 *drachmas*.⁵ This was close to two years' wages for the average worker. Roman citizenship came with certain rights. These rights included safety from whipping and from being put to death without a trial (read Acts 22:23–29), the right to vote, make contracts, have a legal marriage, and freedom from paying taxes.

But Paul was also a Jew, one with a rich spiritual (godly) history (Acts 22:3). Paul came from the tribe of Benjamin. He was raised as a Pharisee. He studied under the great Gamaliel (verse 3), one of the leading Jewish teachers of the time. We learn from Paul's letter to the Galatians that he "held firmly to the teachings passed down by my people" (Galatians 1:14, NIV). Paul thought he was upholding these teachings by punishing those who became followers of Jesus.

Both an overly ambitious Jew and a Roman citizen, Paul was soon to become the greatest apostle the world had ever known.

What parts of your own life (nationality,⁶ education, upbringing, and so on) can be of special use in witnessing? How can you take advantage of⁷ your background to better witness for the Lord?

4. influential—having a good or positive effect on someone or something.

5. *drachmas*—ancient (old-time) Greek silver coins.

6. nationality—belonging to a certain nation by being born there or by becoming a citizen of that country.

7. take advantage of—to make use of someone or something for one's own gain.

MONDAY—JUNE 30**PAUL: HIS CONVERSION
(CHANGE OF HEART) AND
CALLING (Acts 9:1–9)**

The apostle Paul was not always the apostle Paul but Saul of Tarsus, an enemy of the early church. He then had an experience that would change not only his own life but history itself.

Read Acts 9:1–9, Paul’s conversion (born-again) experience. What happened to him that changed him so greatly? How hard must it have been for him to accept that he had been so terribly wrong about Jesus?

Paul did not need any deep religious explanation before giving himself up to Jesus. Right then and there Paul gave himself to the Lord. He said, “ ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ ” (Acts 9:6, NKJV). The great enemy of Jesus was now God’s humbled and broken servant.

After Paul’s conversion (born-again experience), he met with Peter, James, and John, the “pillars” (leaders) among the apostles. They agreed that Paul’s special duty was to go as an apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews) (Galatians 2:7–9).

Read Acts 13:47 and Isaiah 49:5, 6. What role (part) do Paul and Barnabas have that Jesus also had (Luke 2:30–32)?

Paul saw himself as a special messenger to reach the Gentiles. But he also shared the good news with Jewish people. In the same way, other apostles such as Peter preached mostly to Jews. But God also used them to witness to Gentiles. In fact, Peter was the first apostle to reach out to Gentiles (read Acts 10).

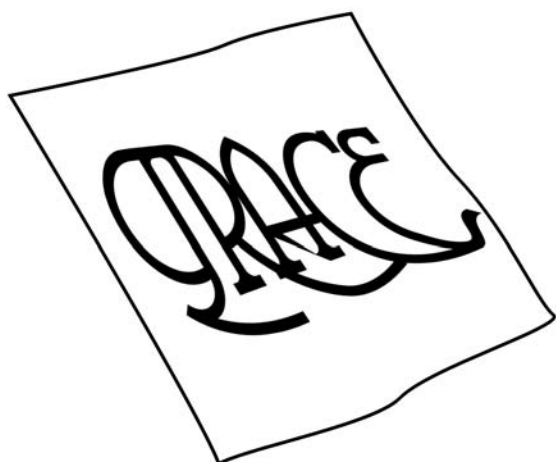
A few of us have had the same kind of powerful conversion experience that Paul had. But we all need conversion. What has your own conversion experience been? Most important, what have you learned from your conversion that could help you lead others toward having their own too?

TUESDAY—JULY 1**PAUL: A MAN WHO FELT WHAT
WE FEEL (Romans 7:24)**

We know Paul as a great apostle to the Gentiles and as a powerful leader who spread Christianity all over the world. So, we may think of him as some kind of superhuman being, a perfect saint and messenger of the faith.

But that is not the picture given in the New Testament. The Bible puts us all under sin and paints us all as sinners in need of God’s grace.⁸ The apostle Paul is not any different from the rest of us.

8. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.



The Bible paints us all as sinners in need of God's grace.

At times Paul seems overly ambitious and almost aggressive (bold; demanding). He often fought for his rights. When he and Silas were in jail, he demanded his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:35–40). Later, when in the court of King Agrippa, Paul appealed to Caesar—which was one of his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 25:11, 12). If Paul had been patient and not fought for his rights, he later might have been freed (Acts 26:32).

What can we learn about Paul from Acts 15:37–39; Romans 7:19–25; 1 Corinthians 9:27; and 2 Corinthians 12:7?

It is a comfort to know that such a giant of faith as the apostle Paul was not perfect. He sometimes made mistakes. Paul needed Jesus' grace and forgiveness in his life, just as we do.

Paul's writings show that he knew very well his own sinfulness. This understanding of his own weaknesses and faults helped make Paul such a powerful teacher of God's saving grace.

What does Romans 7:24 tell us about Paul's self-understanding? What hope and comfort can you learn from these words?

Paul was not perfect, but God used him anyway. We know our faults (sins) and continue to claim God's promises for victory (overcoming sin). Why is it important that we not let our faults discourage us from working for the Lord?

WEDNESDAY—JULY 2

LIFE AND SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST (1 Corinthians 2:2)

Several important themes (topics; subjects) sparked the apostle Paul's life and mission. At the top of the list was the story of Jesus crucified (put to death on the cross). This event was the reason for everything Paul taught and did. He wrote to the Corinthians, "I made up my mind to pay attention to only one thing while I was with you. That one thing was Jesus Christ and his death on the cross" (1 Corinthians 2:2, NIV). To the Galatians Paul wrote, "I never want to brag about anything except the cross of our Lord

Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14, NIV). These verses show that for Paul the cross of Christ and His resurrection (return to life), too, were the most important themes of his faith.



For Paul the cross of Christ was the reason for all he taught and wrote.

Throughout his writings, Paul describes in many different ways the great things Jesus did through the Cross to save all people.

What do Romans 5:10; Romans 6:18; Romans 7:2–4; Romans 8:15–17; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Timothy 2:6; and 1 Peter 1:18, 19 tell us about what Christ has done for us?

Paul uses many different examples of what Christ has done for us. This is because no single example fully can explain what was done for us at the Cross.

How important is the Cross to your own faith? How focused are you on the Cross? Why is it important to keep the Cross at the center of all our witnessing?

THURSDAY—JULY 3

THEMES OF HOPE (1 Timothy 6:11)

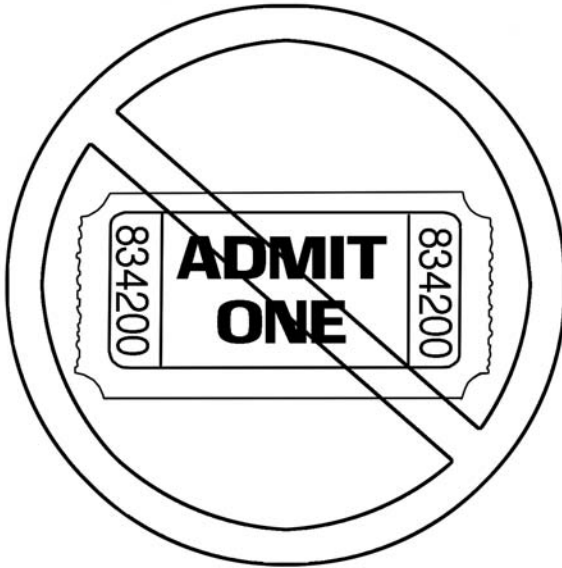
In yesterday’s study, we learned how Christ’s death on the cross was the key (important) theme (subject; topic) in Paul’s life and teachings. Today we will touch briefly on some of Paul’s important themes.

One such theme is living a godly life, or sanctification.⁹ Paul makes it very clear throughout his writings that salvation is free. It is a gift we cannot earn or deserve (Romans 5:15; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8). But salvation does not free us to do as we did before we met Jesus. In answer to His grace, we must live as Jesus asks us to live.

Paul writes to Timothy: “Try hard to do what is right and godly. Have faith, love and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11, NIV). We do not do what is right so Jesus will save us. We do what is right because we have been saved. Paul says, we were “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Ephesians 2:10, NIV).

We do not obey God so that He will love us, accept us, or give us a ticket to heaven. When we accept Jesus’ gift of salvation, we are accepted completely and without “strings” attached. We obey God because His powerful love leads us to good works. We obey Him because His love drives us (read 2 Corinthians 5:14).

9. sanctification—becoming like Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus living in us so that we develop His character (holiness); Jesus’ work of making us holy.



We do not obey God to get a ticket to heaven. We obey Him because He loves us.

What reasons does Peter give in 2 Peter 1:3–8 for living a godly life? What other reasons can you add?

Paul wrote that he did not want us to “be ignorant [having no knowledge]” about what happens when people die (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Why is it important to understand the truth about life after death?

Paul’s key themes are all connected. Through Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection (return to life from death), He won the victory over death. Jesus will return to this earth to bring His gift of everlasting life to His faithful children (read verses 13–18) whom He raises from the dead. These followers of Jesus have shown their love for Him in the way they have lived their

lives (read Ephesians 4:20–32).

What is the one hope of Christianity that means the most to you? Of all the promises we have, which one offers you the greatest hope? Why? Write out your answer and bring it to class on Sabbath.

FRIDAY—JULY 4

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “From Persecutor¹⁰ to Disciple [Follower],” pages 112–122, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“The belief of a lie did not make Paul a kind, tender, merciful man. He was very angry against the truth about Jesus. Paul went through the country, arresting Christ’s followers and putting them into prison.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pages 214, 215.

“The apostle Paul had all the honors and rights of a Roman citizen. He also had received a good Hebrew education. Paul had learned at the feet of Gamaliel. But all his learning did not help him to reach the highest standard. With this study of science and of other knowledge, Paul was in the dark until Christ was shown to him. Paul later understood that to know Jesus Christ as His Savior was for his present and eternal [forever] good. He understood that reaching a high standard was necessary.”—Adapted from

10. persecutor—a person who attacks God’s people.

Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 18, 1899.

“There is one great central [important] truth to remember while studying the Holy Bible—Christ and Him crucified [put to death on the cross]. Every other truth is connected to this belief. It is only in the light of the Cross that we can understand the high order of the law of God. The soul stained by sin can be given life only through the work done upon the cross by Jesus.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 1084.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ What beliefs are most important to you? How do they influence (change)

the way you live? How do you answer those who hold different beliefs?

❷ How important is the Cross in your own local church? What could you do, as a person or a group, to help make the Cross important to your church and its outreach to the local community?

❸ In class, share your answers to Thursday’s final question.

SUMMARY: Paul’s life shows that there is no limit to what God can do through us weak humans (people). Paul’s special background and gifts helped him spread the good news about Jesus to a completely new mission field.