

Chapter 3

PAUL MARVELED

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-7)

In our studies thus far we have had the opportunity to know *Saul*, who was also called *Paul*, a man whose life had two separate and distinct roles. *Paul* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name *Saul*, and for the most part, we have used the name *Saul* to refer to the apostle before his salvation and *Paul* to refer to him after his salvation (even though the Scriptures do not make this distinction). Even so, using this distinction, the differences between Saul and Paul are the differences between a legalistic, self-righteous, self-serving Pharisee and an apostle, who was called and redeemed of the Lord, a man who considered himself to be a bond servant of Jesus Christ. The metamorphosis of thought, direction, purpose and manner of life which is seen in Paul can only be explained by the grace of God through the operation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Consequently Saul's past life as a Pharisee emphasizes to us the futility of man's religious efforts, such as attempts at law keeping, ritual and good works, for acceptance with God. It also emphasizes that zeal for God without a knowledge of God, which is centered in the truth of the Scriptures, is a futile road. There are many who have fallen into this trap. They, like Saul, are zealous for their religions, but their zeal is misdirected. Many claim a foundation in the Bible for their beliefs, but their beliefs are not according to the Scriptures, *rightly divided*.

The religious of this world are trying to establish their righteousness by religious rituals and self-determined good works, while the irreligious perceive themselves to be as morally good as the religious, but without the need for these things. Interestingly, both the religious and the irreligious have a common source for the deception that keeps each of them from accepting the gospel of the grace of God by faith in Jesus Christ. As we have noted before, Solomon, the son of David, has given us an important key to understanding these different aspects of the *mystery of iniquity*. In Proverbs he wrote, *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death* (Proverbs 14:12).

The Lord Jesus said essentially the same thing when He said that the false prophet is known by his fruit. The fruit of the false prophet cannot be discovered by his manner of life. It is discovered in the source of his sense of righteousness. Thus our Lord said:

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. (Matthew 12:33-35)

With this, our Lord has directed us to the fact that there is but one source for good and one

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source for evil in this world. These sources were represented to us in the fall of Adam in the garden of Eden. Since then, apart from the revelation of God in the Word of God, all of man's concepts for good and his religious beliefs have had their source in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This, then, was the source of the *other gospel* of the Judaizers. It was also the source of Saul's zeal for the traditions of the elders and his willingness to suborn witnesses against Stephen. This, too, was the source of the self-righteousness of Simon the Pharisee, who found fault with the Lord Jesus Christ for allowing the woman, *who was a sinner*, to wash His feet. Further it was the source of the Pharisee's pride, who in the temple boasted of his deportment: he was not an extortioner; he was not an adulterer; he was not unjust; yet Jesus said, he went down to his house condemned; while the Publican, who may have been all of the things the Pharisee boasted he was not, was justified before God by faith in Jesus Christ. Thus their fruits revealed the source of their righteousness.

Paul wrote to the church at Rome of Israel's ignorance of God's righteousness and of her desire to establish her own righteousness, to show the church the vanity of attempting to establish one's own righteousness before God. Thus he said:

... Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; as it is written, Behold I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed. (Romans 9:31-33)

Israel's ignorance, as well as the ignorance of the unsaved world, is revealed in their desire to establish their own righteousness. Thus it takes the preaching of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit to remove this shroud of darkness. This was necessary for Saul of

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Tarsus, and it is necessary for each one who will enter the kingdom of God. Saul did not understand this, neither did the Jews, nor does mankind in general; but we, as believers, have come to understand it. The Jews, like their forefathers (as we have seen in the above text in Romans), actually believed they could establish their own righteousness before God. In this regard, the Jews are no different than the rest of mankind.

Before Saul could be brought to salvation, he had to find out what he was really like. Otherwise he never would have acknowledged his need of a Savior. Once he was brought to salvation by grace through faith, the grace of God became very precious to Saul. Once he was brought to salvation, he clearly saw the depravity and evil of his past life. He was no longer blinded by the religious traditions of the fathers and his self-righteous efforts.

It was this clear sense of the vanity of his former self that was at the core of Paul's expression of awe over the Galatians' departure from grace to *another gospel*. They needed the perspective Paul had as a result of the in-working of the Spirit of God by the Word of God. From his salvation on, each reminder of the evil he had done against the Lord magnified God's grace and mercy to him.

In Jerusalem, before his salvation, Saul had been associated with the synagogue of the Libertines. This synagogue was comprised of Jews who were freeborn Roman citizens. They had come to Jerusalem from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. These Jews and Saul had disputed with Stephen:

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false

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witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. Then said the high priest, Are these things so? (Acts 6:10-7:1)

Stephen answered the high priest and the council and those Jews who were assembled with them by preaching the truth of the Word of God. His message was a historical narrative which recalled some of Israel's relationships with God. He showed their propensity to emphasize the works of their own hands; to reject the truth; to worship falsely; to think that God dwells in temples made with hands, etc. Then Stephen said:

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. (Acts 7:51-54)

Stephen's address to the council was historical, powerful and convicting, but it did not change the minds of those who heard it. In their self-righteousness, it incited them to rage. They railed on Stephen and demanded his death.

The procedures of the council are not described in Scripture. Even so it was customary, in matters that required the vote of the council, for a voting urn to be passed to each member of the council. So, in the matter of Stephen's death, when the urn came to Saul, he cast his vote into the urn with the votes of the other members of the council. Late in his ministry, Paul testified to Herod Agrippa II of these things:

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put

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to death, I gave my voice against them. (Acts 26:9-10)

This portion of Scripture reveals more than is apparent on the surface. The Greek word translated *voice* in this text is *psēphos*. It means *a small stone, a pebble*. It refers to the practice of voting with stones. A white stone was dropped into the voting urn to signify a vote for acquittal, and a black stone was dropped to signify a vote for condemnation.

Saul's vote in the council is probably the (singular) ... *thing I also did in Jerusalem* in the above verse. Saul's vote, then, reveals he was a member of the Sanhedrin. Saul was also a man of wealth. He had the privileges of wealth. Even though he was born in Tarsus, he was brought to Jerusalem as an infant and *was circumcised on the eighth day*, according to the Law of Moses.

Apparently Saul grew up in Jerusalem and was trained from his youth by Gamaliel, a noted Rabbi and theologian. Paul's statement in Galatians, that he had *profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation*, tells us he was young when he became a ruler in Israel. There is a very good possibility Saul was *the rich young ruler*. If Saul were the rich young ruler, he not only gave his vote against Stephen, he also gave his vote against the Lord Jesus Christ at His trial before the council on the preparation day of the Passover.

This might lead us to think -- How could God save such a one as that? But Saul was no different than we are. He may have given his vote against the Lord Jesus Christ, but so did we -- not directly, but indirectly. It was our sins and those of the whole world that put Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Through His great love with which he loved us, Jesus willingly stood in our stead and bore our judgment that we might be justified freely by His grace.

Returning to Stephen, we have seen the power of his message before the council. It clearly

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disclosed Israel's guilt and failures before God. It clearly revealed their need for the grace of God. Even so it did not appear, for the time, to accomplish anything but rage against Stephen.

Stephen concluded his remarks to the council by saying:

... Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:56-60)

Afterwards Stephen's words and Saul's vote against him continued to goad Saul. The Lord spoke of this at their meeting on the road to Damascus when He said, ... *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*. Even so, at the time of Stephen's trial, Saul's zeal for Judaism and his desire to please his peers had hardened him against the truth of the Word of God.

In those days, the stoning of an offender worthy of death required the witnesses against the offender to cast the first stones. This was Jewish civil law (see Deuteronomy 17:7). This practice can be seen in the Lord's statement to the Jews who witnessed against the woman taken in adultery -- *Let him who is without sin cast the first stone*. When the Scriptures tell us the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul, this probably means Saul was Stephen's chief accuser. We know he, with the others from the synagogue of the Libertines, suborned these witnesses against Stephen.

Imagine then the conviction Saul felt when the Lord said, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* We know, *he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* We know the Lord told him to go into the city, and he would be told what to do. We know Saul was blinded

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by the glory of the Lord's presence and had to be led into the city by his companions. We know Saul prayed and fasted for three days before the Lord sent Ananias to minister to him. We know, despite all the evil Saul had done, God saved him by His grace.

Thus one who was *ungodly, a sinner, and the enemy of God* became the recipient of the grace of God. For the first time Saul knew what it meant to be *accepted in the Beloved*. Consequently Saul was at peace with God through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only that, God granted him *the peace of God that passeth all understanding* as he grew in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is incomprehensible to the natural mind. Nevertheless what God did for Saul, He has done for each one who has been brought to faith by the quickening power of the Spirit of God and the Word of God. No matter our past, we, too, were *ungodly, sinners and enemies of God*. This is the condition of the entire unsaved world, and it can only be changed by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Imagine then the consternation of the apostle Paul (having been cleansed from all the evil he had done, by the grace of God) when he learned that many of those who had professed faith in Jesus Christ through his ministry had been corrupted with the errors of *another gospel*. This indeed is a marvel -- that anyone, with even a meager understanding of the grace of God, could desire to be under the bondage of law and ritual. The Galatians did not do this ignorantly. Paul had faithfully proclaimed the fundamental truths of the gospel to them. He had clearly presented Jesus Christ to them in His Person and in His work. In Galatia, many Jews, who had found themselves condemned by the law, had received the gospel of the grace of God with joy. Likewise, the Gentiles, who had been condemned by their pagan idolatry, had also received the

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truth of the saving grace of God through the ministries of Paul and Barnabas. Together, these Jews and Gentiles had rejoiced in God's marvelous grace.

Even so, after Paul's departure, *grievous wolves entered in, not sparing the flock*. These were the Judaizers. They were professing Christians out of the sect of the Pharisees. They claimed the authority of Moses and the church at Jerusalem to support their false doctrines. They, like Saul before his salvation, had a *zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*. Thus they taught the people -- *Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*. It is difficult to understand how such teachings could sway the Galatians if they had truly been saved. Even so the Devil is a cunning adversary. He knows just exactly what is necessary to misdirect some of the sheep. After Paul and Barnabas left the newly established churches of Galatia, the Devil brought the Judaizers into the region.

If there is one thing, more than another, that can minimize the grace of God in the mind of a believer, it is pride of performance wrought by a change of lifestyle. There is certainly nothing wrong with an improvement in one's lifestyle. In fact, these changes should be welcomed and expected in the life of a believer. Peter testified to this. He said that we, as believers, do not run to the same excess of riot that we formerly ran to; but it is possible for a few victories in human conduct to mislead a believer into an attitude of self-righteousness, if he does not keep a proper perspective concerning these changes. Self-righteousness is never the work of the Spirit of God. Self-righteousness is a work of the flesh. Self-righteousness begets an attitude consistent with the Pharisee in the temple, who prayed, *God I thank you that I am not like other men*. Self-righteousness is self-absorption. It is concerned with one's own person and work rather than the

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Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Self-righteousness, wrought by a rigorous religious life, is self-justifying. It usually accuses others and excuses itself. This is seen in Simon the Pharisee, who judged the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. The woman's actions were motivated by love and a sense of thanksgiving, but Simon viewed them as the actions of a *sinner*.

He diminished the Lord Jesus for having anything to do with her. Thus, we read:

... a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. (Luke 7:37-50)

Whether Simon was a believer or not, it is doubtful. Even so the parable tells us his debt was less than the woman's. This simply means, in terms of the *royal law* (the six commandments relating to man's relationship with man), she was more overtly a sinner than Simon was. Simon's problem was that he did not have an accurate view of himself before God. He saw himself

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justified and the woman condemned, but in reality, they were both condemned.

Consequently the two debtors reveal two aspects of the nation of Israel in her relationship with God. On the one hand, Simon speaks to us of formalized religion in Israel. It knew nothing of God's mercy and grace but was steeped in its own self-righteousness. This is clearly seen in Simon's reaction to the behavior of the woman. In his mind, Jesus could not be a prophet of God because the Lord was kind and merciful towards a woman who was a sinner. On the other hand, the woman speaks of those in Israel who were not involved in the sham pretenses of organized religion. They recognized that they were condemned by the law and simply waited for the promise of God to Abraham -- *that of his seed, all of the families of the earth would be blessed*. The woman was drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ because of the promise of God. She knew she had no righteousness of her own but waited for the Righteousness of God. She trusted in the Lord Jesus -- that He was the *Seed* promised to Abraham which would bless her. This was the reason she adored the Lord Jesus. Her adoration was simply an expression of her faith -- that she was saved by grace through faith, apart from the deeds of the law.

Saul was like Simon the Pharisee before Saul's salvation. He would have condemned the woman for her actions, but after his salvation, ironically, Saul saw himself to be like the woman -- *his sins, which were many, were forgiven*. The realization of the forgiveness of his sins caused Saul to love much. Consequently he told the Corinthian church in his second letter to them that the constraining factor in the life of a believer is not law and judgment, but the love of God -- manifested in His grace in the offering of Jesus Christ in our stead. He also told them that all that can be wrought by law is condemnation and death. An understanding that the believer is dead to

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the law and alive unto God by faith in Jesus Christ produces the works unto which a believer was saved, by reciprocal love towards God.

Consequently Paul marveled how the Galatian's could turn from the grace of God, which gave them acceptance with God by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the vanity of ritual and law, which could only magnify their failures before God. They failed to see that the law was a ministry of death and condemnation and had no power, in and of itself, to justify sinners.

We must not be too hard on the Galatians, because the same heresy that plagued them, plagues the churches of today. If we examine the doctrines of the major denominations under the canopy of Christianity, we find that the majority of the churches believe in baptismal regeneration for salvation and a striving to maintain salvation through the laws of the church and of Moses, or as some would put it -- *To live according to the golden rule, by doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.* So, with Paul, we also marvel how Christianity could turn from the truth of salvation by grace to the precepts of ritual and law.