

Evergreen Baptist Church Men's Ministry

Study Guide for Chapter 1 in *Paul: Living for the Call of Christ* "Sincerely Wrong"

For Tuesday, October 7, 2008, and Saturday, October 11, 2008

If you have the study book, read the Introduction (pages 1-5) and Chapter 1 (pages 6-20) and review the study questions on pages 21-23. The following questions are designed to help you prepare for the Men's Meeting, even if you do not have the book.

1. Dr. Getz introduces us to the life of Paul by reflecting on four key lessons he had learned from Paul at important junctures in his own spiritual development. We have all encountered Paul at times in our own spiritual journey to this point. What are the top two to four things that you have learned from Paul's life and/or epistles that have already helped to shape you in your growth in the faith? Why were these such important lessons to you?

2. Throughout the New Testament we have glimpses into Paul's background. Study each of these passages and see what you can determine about Paul's family, childhood, training and young adulthood.

- a. Acts 23:6; 26:4-5; Philippians 3:4-5; Romans 10:2-3
- b. Acts 21:37-22:3, 22-29
- c. Acts 18:3
- d. Acts 23:16

3. From those references, we can conclude that several things must have had a profound influence on Paul's early years. I have gathered information on a few of these for your consideration. After reading each one, explain how it may have impacted the young man's development as evidenced in the record we have of Paul's life and teaching in the New Testament.

- a. Tarsus – Ancient Tarsus was the one of the most important cities of Asia Minor. Located in what is today southern Turkey, it straddled the Cydnus River, about 10 miles north of the Mediterranean. To the north lie the Taurus Mountains which isolate it from central Turkey but a major trade road was built through them at the pass called the Cilician

Gates. Tarsus is located in a fertile agricultural area. Copper, zinc, chromium, and coal are mined in the region. Its excellent harbor, fertile soil and location on the main trade routes between central Turkey and Syria contributed to its wealth and greatness. It was a major linen and lumbering center during the time of the Greeks when it was a self-governing city-state, and before that it was the seat of the provincial governor during the time of the Persians. It reached the height of its prosperity and cultural achievement under Roman rule. During the time of Pompey (67 B.C.), Tarsus was made capital over the Roman province of Cilicia, and its residents, including the Jews there, began to receive Roman citizenship. Antony, who controlled the eastern provinces, declared it a free city in 42 B.C. Tarsus continued to receive special privileges under Augustus, who exempted the city from imperial taxation because Athenodorus, his teacher and friend, was a Tarsian. Tarsus grew into a major cultural and intellectual center. Its great schools were said to rival those in Athens and Alexandria. Stoic philosophers like Athenodorus, Zeno, Antipater, and Nestor lived in the city in the first century A.D. In Paul's day, Tarsus was 2,000 years old and a big, cosmopolitan city of about 500,000 with a mixture of many cultures and religions. Worship of the Persian god Mithras was prominent among them. Tarsus, it seems, was peculiarly successful in producing an amalgamated society in which the Oriental and Occidental spirits united and attained a higher plane of thought and action. Tarsus was also well-known for making a certain type of felt cloth from the wool of the shaggy black goats native to the region. This cloth was used to make tents which were in great demand for the Roman army.

- b. Gamaliel – The son of rabbi Simeon, and grandson of the famous rabbi Hillel. He was a Pharisee, and therefore the opponent of the party of the Sadducees. He was noted for his learning, and was president of the Sanhedrim during the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. He died about eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem. He was the spiritual advisor to King Herod Agrippa I and his wife. The high place accorded him in Jewish tradition is attested to in the Talmud by the fact that the title of “Rabban,” which is higher even than Rabbi or Master, was first bestowed upon him. In the Mishna he is spoken of as the author of certain legal ordinances affecting the welfare of the community and regarding certain issues concerning remarriage and other religious ordinances. Rabbi Gamaliel I holds a reputation as one of the greatest teachers in the annals of Judaism. The Mishna pays tribute to him saying: “Since Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, there has been no more reverence for the law, and purity and abstinence died out at the same time.” While believing the law to be wholly inspired by God, he ruled that the Sabbath laws should be less rigorous and more realistic. He also argued that the law should protect women during divorce and urged Jews to be kind towards Gentiles. His legislation on behalf of the poor was formulated so as to include Gentiles as well as Jews. He also appears in Acts 5:34-40 when the apostles were brought before the council, charged with preaching the resurrection of Jesus. Gamaliel counseled moderation and calmness. By a reference to well-known events, he advised them to “refrain from these men.” If their work or counsel was of man, it would come to nothing; but if it was of God, they could not destroy it, and therefore ought to be on their guard lest they should be “found fighting against God.” His speech is rather indicative of one who knew the deeper truth in the Old

Testament of the universal fatherhood of God, and one who recognized that the presence of His power was the deciding factor in all human enterprise.

- c. Pharisee – Of the four major religious societies of Judaism at the time of the New Testament (the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots, and the Essenes), the Pharisees were often the most vocal and influential. The origin of the Pharisees is uncertain, but their movement is believed to have grown from the Assideans (*i.e.* the “pious”), who began in the time of the Maccabean Revolt around 165 B.C. Their names comes from an Aramaic word “peras” (found in Daniel 5:28), signifying “to separate,” owing to a different manner of life from that of the general public. They were also known as “chasidim”, which means “loyal to God, or loved of God.” It was during that roughly 4 centuries between the end of the Old Testament record and the birth of Jesus, prior to the rise of the Roman Empire, that the idolatrous Greek influence was at its peak in Israel. The Sadducees aimed at removing Judaism from its narrowness and sharing in the advantages of Greek life and culture. The Sadducees were the “liberal party” within Judaism. They did not believe that the damned will be punished eternally in hell and that the saved will dwell eternally in heaven (see Acts 23:8). The Sadducees were popular among the rich, ruling-class minority. The chasidim, or “pious ones,” were a society of men zealous for religion, who acted under the guidance of the scribes, in opposition to the godless Hellenizing party. They opposed one high priest when he was on the Greek side and as a result 800 were crucified. The Pharisees were the “conservative party” within Judaism. They held very strictly to the Torah and the Talmud and were very outwardly moral. They were the leaders of the majority of the Jews, mostly the “common people.” They were revered by their followers for their religious zeal and dedication, and they were held up as models worthy of imitation. Luke 18:9 gives us the very heart of Pharisaism. They trusted in themselves – they had confidence in themselves – that they were righteous. They believed that their own works – their doing what God commands and their abstaining from what God forbids – were what gained and maintained God’s favor and recommended them to God. They believed that their justification, their sanctification, their perseverance, and their entitlement to heaven, all depended on themselves. They believed that one’s own righteousness is what makes the difference between heaven and hell. This is the epitome of self-righteousness. The Pharisees were characterized by seeking to establish their own righteousness. The Pharisees self-righteously, hypocritically despised all others who did not live up to the same standard of law-keeping that they met. They would not even eat with the tax collectors and other “sinners” because they were so self-righteously aloof. The Pharisees perhaps meant to obey God, but eventually they became devoted and extremist in very selective parts of The Law as well all the traditions that they themselves had added to it. The Pharisees were close students of the sacred text. On the wording of a sentence they based many decisions about how to follow the Law. So much so, that it is said of them that on the Text of the Law they suspended mountains from hairs. This is especially the case with regard to the Sabbath law with its burdensome minutiae. At the same time

there was care to protect the actual wording of the text of the Law; this has a bearing on textual criticism, even to the present day. In their zeal for the Law they almost deified it and their attitude towards holiness became merely external, formal, and mechanical. They laid stress, not upon the righteousness of an action, but upon its formal correctness.

There were said to be seven classes of Pharisees: 1) the “shoulder” Pharisee, who wears his good deeds on his shoulders and obeys the precept of the Law, not from principle, but from expediency; 2) the “wait-a-little” Pharisee, who begs for time in order to perform a meritorious action; 3) the “bleeding” Pharisee, who in his eagerness to avoid looking on a woman shuts his eyes and so bruises himself to bleeding by stumbling against a wall; 4) the “painted” Pharisee, who advertises his holiness lest any one should touch him so that he should be defiled; 5) the “reckoning” Pharisee, who is always saying “What duty must I do to balance any unpalatable duty which I have neglected?”; 6) the “fearing” Pharisee, whose relation to God is one merely of trembling awe; and 7) the Pharisee from “love.”

4. In Acts 6:8-10 we meet a man who also may have had a profound impact on young man Paul (then known by his Hebrew name, Saul). Who was this man and how could these two have come into contact?

5. The story continues in Acts 6:11-7:56. Do you see any similarities between this sermon that Paul may well have heard and any of the messages that Paul would later deliver? Explain your answer.

6. Read these passages about Paul’s early career: Acts 7:57-8:3; 22:4-5; 26:4-11; and Galatians 1:13-14. How did Paul’s background and training help encourage him to react in this way to the new teachings?

7. Dr. Getz gleans two important principles from Paul’s early life that can help challenge us to become God’s man. After each one, describe ways that you have seen it to be true. As you read the Scriptures that go with each principle, what further insight do they give you?

1. “It’s possible to be intense and zealous about our religious and philosophical convictions but sincerely wrong.” (See Galatians 1:13-14 and Romans 10:2-3.)

2. “It’s possible to be very intelligent and knowledgeable about many things but also sincerely wrong.” (See 1st Corinthians 2:1-5, 12-14; 8:1-2; and James 3:15.)
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8. Time to see what applications you can make from Paul’s experience to your own life.
 - a. How did Paul’s training and background – in spite of his early rejection of Christ – help prepare him for his future ministry? As you look back over your life, what experiences – even before you came to know Christ – has God used (or could He use) to help prepare you to serve Him?
 - b. Paul was very religious and pious – but he was lost. How do you know that this is not true in your life?
 - c. Paul was very zealous and very intelligent, but he was sincerely wrong. How can you make sure that you are not sincerely wrong in the way that you are living and thinking?
 - d. As you have studied Paul’s early life, what did God impress on you as the most important thing you need to do or change in your life?
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9. Dr. Getz asks us to memorize 2nd Timothy 2:15: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” How does this verse relate to Paul’s experience? What lesson do you see for your own life as you build the truth of this verse into your spirit? How would putting this verse into practice help to keep us from being sincerely wrong?
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10. What do you need your brothers at EBC to pray for?