

“Windows into the Heart of Paul”

His humility

Intro: When we hear the name of the apostle Paul we immediately think of the man who almost single-handedly spread the gospel over a great part of the first century world. But what kind of man was he?

Paul was a man of sterling character. As a disciple of Jesus, he took seriously the responsibility of becoming more like Him. In his writings we see statements that serve as windows into his heart. In next few lessons I want to consider some statements that reveal Paul’s heart.

“By the grace of God, I am what I am...” (1 Cor. 15:10)

This remarkable statement reveals an important aspect of Paul’s heart. He was a man of deep humility. That humility is seen several ways. Paul demonstrated humility by:

His acknowledgment of sin in his life and the need for salvation by grace.

Paul humbly admitted that he was a sinner saved by grace. He never forgot his former life in which he persecuted the people of God. He referred to himself as:

“the chief of sinners” (2 Tim. 1:12-17.)

“The least of all apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9)

“The least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8)

Likewise Paul considered both his salvation and his apostleship a matter of grace.

But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, (Gal. 1:15-16)

His willingness to giving God the credit for His accomplishments rather than glory in his own strength and accomplishments.

Paul showed a reluctance to even speak of his own accomplishments.

On occasion Paul was forced to defend himself against false charges by those who sought to undermine him. When he spoke of his life’s accomplishments he seemed embarrassed and acting out of his head. *Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. (2 Cor. 11:23)*

He attributed his moral successes to Christ.

His glory then was in the Lord and not in himself.

But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

He attributed his evangelistic successes to Christ.

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:5-7)

His willingness to praise others for their accomplishments

Pride may keep a person from acknowledging the good or the success of another person.

We may withhold praise when we feel inferior because we do not want to acknowledge what others do.

We may withhold praise when we feel superior because we consider our own accomplishments greater.

Either way we're wrong.

Yet Paul shows no such inclinations of either superiority or inferiority. Instead he can freely praise others for what they have done.

Note the many examples from Paul's pen in Romans 16 and how Paul has a commendable word for each one.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. (Romans 16:3-6)

If you can give another a sincere compliment, it is a sign of humility.

His refusal to misuse His apostolic authority

One could not rise to a higher level of exaltation in the kingdom than to be made an apostle over the church. Yet notice how Paul describes himself:

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Corinthians 4:1)

Paul used a term that means a galley slave!

When he exercised apostolic authority it was with an awareness of the "grace" that had been given him

But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:15-16)

Conclusion: There has probably never been a greater disciple of Jesus than Paul. Yet, a part of what made him great was his humility. For him, he would not say, "Look at all I've accomplished"; but instead "by the grace of God, I am what I am..." May we also learn to think this way and to live this way; for only then can we be of greatest usefulness to the Lord.