

Slave of Christ

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God (which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures) concerning His Son Jesus Christ"—Romans 1: 13

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ."

EVEN the name that he chose, gives us a sympathetic insight into his character, for this was an adopted name. We first find him as Saul, a Benjamite, proudly named after his royal compatriot, who had stood head and shoulders above the people.

But after he had become the servant of Jesus Christ, the name Saul would no longer seem appropriate. It rang too much of regal splendor and Jewish pride, and to his now enlightened mind it would speak too vividly of the same imperious and headstrong, but misguided, temperament that he had shared with his ancient royal namesake.

So when he began his mission to the Gentiles, he chose a new name. Perhaps it was a name Christ gave him, after the example of Peter and James and John.

And, in keeping with the course that lay before him, it was a Gentile name, while "Saul," like his whole previous life had been so distinctly and exclusively Hebrew.

The meaning of this new name is interesting and significant. To us and to the world, his life has invested it with dignity and honor, and none would hesitate to bear it now, but when he chose it, it had no such atmosphere. It meant "small" or "little," in sharp contrast to the high-sounding pretensions of the name Saul. The king Saul started out commendably as Paul, the little; and ended dismally as Saul, for Samuel said to him—

"When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel?"

But Paul on the other hand began as Saul, the learned and respected Pharisee; and became Paul, the little and despised. From the same root we derive our word "paucity" meaning "insufficiency," and also perhaps "paltry" meaning worthless and contemptible.

This is the humble significance the name would carry as it fell upon the Gentile ear. It had the same meaning in both Latin and Greek. It was the calling card with which he introduced himself—Paul, the insignificant. He said, frankly and sincerely (1 Cor. 15:9)—

"I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle."

And again (Eph. 3:7)—

"I, who am less than the least of all saints."

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"A servant of Jesus Christ."

Doulos—"a bondservant, a slave." There are 7 words translated "servant" in the New Testament. This is the one Paul always uses of the believer's relation of God and Christ. It means one who is completely subject to the will, and wholly at the disposal, of another; one who is bound to serve, one who has been purchased or acquired as a possession.

James, Peter and Jude all open their epistles with the same description of themselves—the "slave of Jesus Christ." It is the word Paul uses in such passages as Eph. 6:6—

"The servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

It is a repeated reminder that we are not our own, we have no freedom of action, we are bound to a proscribed and narrow course that is irksome to the flesh, but joyous to the spirit—

"Ye are bought with a price; be ye not servants of men" (1 Cor. 7:23).

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15).

We are bondservants whose reasonable and expected service is a living and lifelong sacrifice, as Paul says later in this same epistle (Rom. 12:1).

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But there is always another aspect to remember. This only expresses one angle of our position—our duty and obligation to complete devotion and service. Paul also says—

"He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman" (I Cor. 7:22).

Our slavery to Christ is the only true freedom, and this is how we must regard it—not as bondage but as release.

Release from the galling restraint of the humiliating slavery to sin: an abject subservience to fleshly corruption the whole world lies under.

The natural man is ignorant of this slavery, but the enlightened man perceives it and realizes that the only release is by becoming bound to a new and stronger and better master whose rigorous but beneficial regulations, if faithfully followed with an eye to the future, will rebuild the body and purge out the old disease of sin and death.

There are no neutrals, for the whole universe is divided into 2 camps, 2 allegiances, 2 slaveries: to righteousness or to sin—

"Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves slaves (**douloi**) to obey, his slaves ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16-18).

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But further, there is yet another aspect. "Servant" does not completely describe our relationship to God, as Paul is careful to explain. It is far more vital and glorious than that.

Having voluntarily, and with true humility, assumed the obligations of bondservice in recognition of our position and of the mercy of God in receiving us at all, we find that mercy further freely extended in raising us far above the position of servants to that of beloved sons. This is the lesson of the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son—

"I am no longer worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants."

But the father said—

"This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

"The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost."

—the lost sons of God.

"All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

He was made the Son of man that we might again become the sons of God. Through Moses, the Servant "faithful in all His house," came the Law which gave men the opportunity to become accepted servants—

"The Law was our schoolmaster."

—Paul says to the Galatians (3:24), and he adds (4:1-7)—

"The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

"Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son: and if a son then an heir of God through Christ."

Paul's words to Philemon regarding Onesimus well express our present position of favor through and in Christ (11-16)—

"Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved" . . . In time past unprofitable, but now profitable . . .

"Perhaps he therefore departed for a season that thou shouldest receive him forever."

A miniature allegory of the history of man.

So the word "servant" comes far short of expressing the complete picture, but it is a constant reminder that it is only by grace and favor that we are anything more—Paul warns (Rom. 11:20)—

"Be not highminded but fear."

We are sons only by mercy, and upon condition of humility and faithfulness. Jesus himself was first a servant. He humbled himself that God might exalt him in due time—

"He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7).

And so he taught his disciples (Luke 22:26-27)—

"He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger: and he that is chief as he that doth serve. I am among you as he that serveth."

And when he washed their feet he said (John 13:12-16)—

"Know ye what I have done unto you? I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you. The servant is not greater than his Lord."

He was THE servant—

"Behold My servant, whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased"

(Matt. 12:18 quoting Isa. 42:1).

And the remarkable passage in Is. 49:6-7—

"It is a light thing that thou shouldest be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel.

"I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth.

"Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers.

"Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and He shall choose thee."

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"Called to be an apostle; separated unto the Gospel of God."

Both expressions have a general, and also an individual meaning. All believers are called, and all are separated, but Paul especially so. He was called by Jesus Christ on the way to Damascus, and his separation was twofold, first to the service of God, and secondly to the specific mission of carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The first and general separation he refers to in Gal. 1: 15, coupling it with his call—

"God, Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace."

The mention of the second more particular separation again unites it with his call (Acts 13:2)—

"The Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

And Paul was not just called, but "called to be an apostle." It would appear that having been a witness of Christ after his resurrection was an important feature of his apostleship. Acts 2:22 speaks of the necessity of the apostles being "witnesses of his resurrection," and Paul in 1 Cor. 9:1, supports his claim to apostleship upon his having "seen Jesus Christ our Lord."

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"The Gospel of God which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures."

The promise of the Gospel consisted essentially of the promise of the Deliverer who should bring it into effect, even the restoration of Paradise. Paul notes this in his next words—

"Concerning His Son Jesus Christ."

That is the vital, personal important living heart of the Gospel, as distinguished from the necessary details of how the deliverance should be accomplished and of what it should consist. The nucleus was that

there should come in due time a Deliverer, a Savior, a Redeemer, a Restorer, in whom the whole purpose centered, and through whom it should all be accomplished.

God at sundry times and in divers manners unfolded various parts of His purpose to His servants. But to all, right from the beginning, He revealed the one main point—that One should come through whom all would be put right, and in whom all must have faith.

Adam and Eve were promised a Seed who would destroy the power and consequences of sin.

Abraham was promised a Seed who would bless all nations.

Job was promised a Redeemer that would bring man from the grave.

Moses spoke of the greater Prophet to come to whom all must hearken.

David was promised a Son who would bring perpetual peace and righteousness.

And Israel were repeatedly assured of a Messiah who would save them, not only from all oppression and distress, but first and most important of all—FROM THEIR OWN SINS.

How slow were they, and we too, to realize that it is salvation from our own sins and weaknesses that we require above all—the knowledge to discern, the example to follow, the strength to resist, the incentive to overcome.

This was the first promise to Adam and Eve—a savior from sin—long before there had arisen any oppressor or desolator. Before there was another human being on the earth, they required a savior—from themselves.

Someone to stand up on their behalf and fight and overcome this terrible curse called sin that they had loosed upon the world.

Someone to lay a foundation of perfect obedience, perfect faith, perfect love.

Someone to show them the way, and to give them the power and example and incentive to make themselves over, to root out the ugly weeds of the flesh, and cultivate the small and tender God-planted seeds that must develop the fruits of the Spirit.

Someone to nourish their pitiful weakness and ignorance into confident strength and wisdom.

Someone who, by bitter sacrifice and suffering and self-denial, would indelibly impress them with the sacred, solemn importance of holiness and truth.

He would be "raised up," he said, speaking of the manner and purpose of his death, that he might draw men up to him—

"I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32).

Up from the earth—up from the flesh—up from themselves to newness of life. The long and stumbling ascent from the ugly, ignorant, groveling, mind of the flesh to the beautiful, glorious mind of the Spirit—the beauty of holiness.

Why did Christ die? To seal forever the one great lesson that ONLY HOLINESS CAN LIVE, and that Sin is the great destroyer. When all else is stripped away, these two things stand—HOLINESS and SIN: and every word, thought and action falls under one or the other—

"All unrighteousness is sin."

Everything outside the sanctuary of the service of God—every concession to the flesh—falls under the same sweeping condemnation—

"The WHOLE WORLD lieth in wickedness."

Every action that is not sanctified by spiritual holiness of heart and purity of purpose, is contaminated with the ugly, fleshly stigma of sin. There are no neutrals in either thought, word or deed —"*WHATSOEVER IS NOT OF FAITH IS SIN.*"

—G.V.G