

Paul a Pattern

by Samuel Logan Brengle

Paul's life and experience show the saving power of Jesus and the importance of obedience to the heavenly vision.

Scripture: Acts 20:23, Romans 6:11, Romans 8:35 - 9:4, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, 2 Corinthians 12:14-15, Galatians 2:20, 1 Timothy 1:16, 2 Timothy 4:7

Topics: "Faith", "Perseverance"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle emphasizes that the Apostle Paul serves as a profound example of faith and perseverance, illustrating how his life reflects the saving power of Jesus. Despite enduring immense suffering, including imprisonment and persecution, Paul maintained unwavering faith and love for others, demonstrating that true obedience to God's vision leads to spiritual fulfillment. Brengle encourages believers to follow Paul's example of self-sacrifice and commitment to Christ, highlighting that such a life is attainable for all who heed the heavenly vision. He concludes by urging the congregation to embrace this call to follow Christ wholeheartedly.

Transcript

Paul tells us that the Lord Jesus made him 'a pattern to them which should hereafter believe' (I Tim. i. 16). This fact makes his life and experience exceptionally interesting and valuable to us. And it is an especial mark of our Heavenly Father's wisdom and love that He has given us in Paul such a striking example in every particular of the saving power of Jesus. People say Jesus was Divine, and so excuse themselves for their unlikeness to Him, but Paul was human, and if he was like Jesus, so may we be.

Let us study his experience.

I. His sufferings. It is difficult to conceive any form of suffering to which Paul was not subjected; in every instance the grace of Christ was all-sufficient. Here is a catalogue of his sufferings recorded by himself: 'In labors more abundant.' If anyone exceeds him in their labors, it is only because of the improved facilities of later ages for doing more in the same space of time. 'In stripes above measure' -- so many and so often inflicted as to be beyond his computation. 'In prisons more frequent, in deaths oft . . . once was I stoned.' I was stoned once with one brick, and nearly killed, but Paul received many stones, and was dragged out of the city like a beast, and left for dead.

'Thrice I suffered shipwreck.' There have been Salvationist leaders who have suffered shipwreck once, and escaped immediately; but, 'a night and a day I have been in the deep,' says Paul. 'In journeyings often,' under such disagreeable circumstances as we who live in the days of Pullman cars and ocean steamers can scarcely imagine. 'In perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen' -- the Jews, who hated him bitterly, and sought his life in every city. 'In perils by the heathen' -- whom he sought to save through the knowledge of Jesus, but who clung to their idols. 'In perils in the City' -- by wild, mad mobs. 'In perils in the wilderness' -- from ferocious beasts and yet more ferocious men. 'In perils in the sea' -- from drowning and from monsters of the deep.

'In perils among false brethren' -- to whom he would naturally look for help and sympathy. 'In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches' (2 Cor. xi. 23-28) which were organized from Jewish and heathen converts, and were bitterly opposed by the idolatrous heathen on the one side, and the bigoted Jews on the other, and which must have been far more difficult to properly organize, train and manage, than any Salvation Army corps. Nor could he look forward to brighter days, when circumstances would be more favorable, and life more free from pain and care, for he says, 'the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me' (Acts. xx. 23).

II. His faith in God and love for man. And yet, in spite of all these afflictions and physical sufferings and bitter persecutions, he maintained a joyful faith in God and a tender, self-sacrificing love for all men. And when God the Holy Ghost testifies there will be no 'let up' to his stupendous trials, he cries out, 'But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself (Acts xx. 24). 'I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake' (2 Cor. xii. 10). And in face of all these things he asks, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' And though he adds, 'we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter,' yet, 'in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. viii. 35-39). And at the last, almost in sight of the block and axe, where his multitudinous sufferings were to be crowned by a martyr's death, he exclaimed, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith' (2 Tim. iv. 7).

Just as his faith in his Lord was not in the least hindered or destroyed by his sufferings, so also was his love for his fellow men untouched by them. He says of the Jews, who were his perpetual and bitter enemies, I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites' (Rom. ix. 1-4). This is perfect love. It is love that 'suffereth long, and is kind.' It is love like that of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Then again, in writing to his corps in Corinth, many of whom seemed to have gone wrong, and to have made many unjust and contemptuous criticisms of Paul himself he says, 'I seek not yours but you: . . . and I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved' (2 Cor. xii. 14-15). Many floods could not quench his love nor drown his faith.

III. The secret. The secret of Paul's marvelous endurance, his quenchless faith and burning love is found in his testimony, 'I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision' (Acts xxvi. 19).

Away back in the days when he was a persecutor and was scattering the little flock of Christ, and driving them to death, Jesus met him -- met him just as He meets men to-day, showed him a 'strait gate' and a 'narrow way,' and Paul was 'not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.' Obedience meant social ostracism, banishment from home and friends, the overturning of all his plans and ambitions, a life of toil and shame and suffering, the loss of all things and the sacrifice of his life; yet he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. And, maintaining this obedient spirit to the end, everything else followed. The reason why so few have an experience like Paul's is because so few count the cost as he did, and obey the heavenly vision Jesus gives them.

Several years ago a bright young girl of eighteen, full of fun and love of society, was induced by a friend to enter an Army meeting for the first time. No sooner had she entered than the faces of the soldiers enchained her eyes, and their testimonies went to her heart. She sat for a while, and Jesus came to her, not in visible presence, or with audible voice, but in a spiritual vision. She left the meeting convicted of sin. On her way home the vision spoke with her, 'You ought to have got saved to-night,' But I am engaged for that dance next Wednesday night.' 'You should give up the dance.' 'But there are my lovely white dress and slippers. I will get saved after the dance.' 'But you may die before Wednesday night, and lose your lovely dress and the dance and your soul.' That was sufficient for this young girl. She tore the feathers from her hat, and threw them into the fire. She rushed upstairs, got her lovely white dress, cut it up and cast it into the fire.

The next evening she went to the meeting. At last a sister, probably discerning in her face the hunger of her heart, went to her and asked, 'Don't you want to get saved to-night?' 'Of course I do,' replied the girl; 'why did you not come to me before?' and immediately she rushed to the Penitent-form, where, in obedience to the heavenly vision, she found Jesus almighty to save. And after four years her face shines with the glory of her Lord, and her voice rings with triumph as she testifies to the cleansing power of His Blood and the sanctifying power and presence of His Spirit. She was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

A man, a millionaire, came into a meeting and listened to an Army Captain, and the heavenly vision came to him, and he saw the Cross, and the 'strait gate,' and the 'narrow way,' and like the rich young man who came to Jesus, he went away, saying, 'If it were not for the red stripes round that fellow's collar I would have gone forward,' He was disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Sooner or later the heavenly vision comes to all men. It comes in the whisperings of conscience, in the strivings of the Spirit, in the calls of duty, in the moments of regret for an evil past, in moments of tenderness and sorrow, in the crises of life, in the entreaties of God's people. It comes in afflictions and losses, in the thunders of the law, in fearful, ominous threatenings of eternal judgment, in the death of loved ones, in crushed hopes, disappointed plans and thwarted ambitions. In all these things Jesus hides Himself as He hid Himself in the burning bush, which Moses saw on Horeb. If men would but turn aside and heed the vision as Moses did, a voice would speak and cause them to know the Lord, and if they would not be disobedient to the heavenly vision, Jesus would turn them back from the pit, and satisfy every questioning of their minds and every longing of their hearts. God so satisfied the heart and mind of Paul.

Some people imagine that Paul tells his best religious experience in Romans vii. 24, when he cries out, 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' But the fact is, he is here describing his condition under the law, when, as a convicted sinner, the law showed him what he ought to do, but brought no power to deliver him from his guilty past and the corruptions of his own heart. However, in the eighth chapter he finds the secret of deliverance from the condemnation of the past and the Carnal mind, which prevent his doing the will of God on earth as the angels do it in heaven.

From that point he rises to such marvelous testimonies as, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live -- I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me' (Gal. ii. 20). And through a consecration in which he counted all things loss for Christ and a faith by which he reckoned himself 'dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom. vi. 11), he entered into an experience in which, as one has well said, he was 'free from a repining temper, for he had learned in every state therewith to be content. He was free from vanity, pride, and unsanctified ambitions, for he gloried only in the Cross of Christ. He was free from every feeling of resentment, for he was ready to die accursed by his enemies. He was free from selfishness, for he was ready to spend and be spent for those whose love diminished for him in proportion as his love abounded for them. He was free from covetousness, for he counted all things but dung and dross for Christ. He was free from unbelief, for he knew in Whom he had trusted, and was persuaded that nothing could separate him from the love of Christ. He was free from the fear of man, for stripes, imprisonment and martyrdom had no terrors -- being ready to be offered up. He was free from the love of the world having a desire to depart and to be with Christ. The absence of these corruptions implied the maturity of the graces of the Holy Spirit -- the fulness of love. Indeed, it was that love which constrained him, which cast out fear, and counteracted every tendency opposed to its hallowing influence.'

What a great salvation was this that Paul found through obeying the heavenly vision! It is ten million leagues beyond the poor little salvation from wrongdoing which most people seek in order to escape hell. It is a salvation not only from sin, but from self; a divine union with God in Christ, so intimate and so sacred that father and mother and wife and brother and sister and child, yea, and his own life, are all shut outside. And yet it does not make him nerveless, and lead him to 'sing himself away to everlasting bliss,' but rather to lavish his love upon all men regardless of their hatred or affection, and to pour his life out, a sacrifice for the world. Well might he say, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ' (I Cor. xi. 1).

And by the grace of God I will follow.

Will you?

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