

# Paul's Perspective on Life: *Testifying to The Gospel of God's Grace*

by Scot Hahn

Raleigh, North Carolina

A biblical perspective on life is of key importance for anyone whose desire is to truly live for God. Where else should we find such a perspective if not from the Bible itself? Let us take for an example the apostle Paul. Anyone who has read the book of Acts can attest that Paul was devoted to truly living for God. What was his perspective on life? Where did his motivation come from? How could he live with such self-sacrificing love, denying himself of many of the world's riches and pleasures? Did he consider his way of life worthy to be imitated by other believers? Hopefully we will be able to look to the Bible to answer these questions and in so doing help each of us to better live for God.

Paul, while speaking to the leaders of the Ephesian church says,

*I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given to me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace (Acts 20:24).*

Few statements in the Bible could sum up for us so well the proper biblical perspective for the Christian believer. Simply put, nothing in Paul's life was more important for him than serving the Lord.

There are many examples of this same attitude throughout the letters of Paul. While writing to the Thessalonians Paul sums up the actions and attitude of his ministry which he had previously carried out in Thessalonica in these words:

*For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed - God is our*

*witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.*

*As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*

*You are our witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory (I Thess. 2:3-12).*

Paul's perspective toward life was that he was "approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel." Therefore, he never focused any aspect of his life on pleasing men but "God who tests the heart." His "holy, righteous and blameless" way of life was the fruit of this perspective. Paul was so consumed with living for God that he could write to the Philippian believers,

*Even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me (Phil. 2:17-18).*

It is easy to see that for Paul *all* of life was to be lived in service to God.

But where did Paul get such motivation to devote his life to God? Two of the principles which inspired or rather drove Paul to live his life with such devotion were his complete confidence in God and his absolute certainty of Christ's return. Both of these principles were rooted in his own experience. Paul was so confident in God's ability "to work all things together for good to those who love him" (Rom. 8:28) that he even viewed the sufferings he endured as opportunities to learn to trust God's strength rather than his own. We see clearly how he

gained such confidence in God in one of his letters to the Corinthians:

*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us as you help us by your prayers (II Cor. 1:8-10).*

Paul also writes to Timothy encouraging him to take a firm stand on the gospel through which Christ had brought "life and immortality to light" (II Tim. 1:10). He reminds Timothy of the sufferings he faced as a result of being "a herald, apostle and a teacher" of the gospel. "Yet," says Paul, "I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (II Tim. 1:11-12). Paul could entrust his whole life to God and encourage others to do the same because he knew that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Even in his letters where he has to grapple with the greatest foe of all humanity, death, Paul's outlook is bright. He readily admits the fact that death is awaiting all who live, but rather than concluding that life is not worth living because of this grim reality, he remembers his risen Lord and reminds his fellow believers to do the same. Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus that,

*... having believed [in Christ] you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those*

*who are God's possession - to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:13b-14).*

Paul knew that all who believed the good news about Christ had the guarantee of eternal life by way of the gift of the Spirit of God. That Spirit was the "deposit" or "firstfruits" of the final inheritance of God's kingdom to come (II Cor. 5:5; Rom. 8:23). Those who have this guarantee of life forever with God need not fear what others fear.

In I Thessalonians Paul deals directly with this issue at hand:

*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (I Thess. 4:13-17).*

So, for Paul not even the prospect of death caused him to shrink back from living his whole life for God. Because of his belief in Christ's return he could live his life wholly devoted to serving God - even until his very last breath - because he knew that his labor was "not in vain" (I Cor. 15:58). The God in whom he trusted and for whom he lived would surely reward him - and all who longed for Christ's appearing - "on that day" (II Tim. 4:7-8)!