



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF ST. PAUL AND OUR JOURNEY

Reflection #1: Paul's Quest for God

Paul grew up in Tarsus in southern Turkey. Although they were Roman citizens, his Aramaic and Greek-speaking family remained devout Jews. Paul wrote: "I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors" (Gal.1:14). A brilliant student at the University of Tarsus, he probably spent many hours discussing Stoic philosophy with his fellow students. Paul became a master of Greek writing style.

However, he must have struggled with an identity crisis - was he a faithful Jew? or a Gentile? Choosing to live as a Jew he decided to go to Jerusalem where became a pharisee under the guidance of Gamaliel I, and for 8 or 9 years counselled Jewish laity on the 613 regulations of the Mosaic Law. He became passionately devoted to observing the Law perfectly since for him, it was THE way to find God and to follow God's will. He was an extremely "religious" man!

As the "Jesus Movement" grew, Paul saw its threat to a religion of LAW. If faith in Jesus was the way to salvation, then the LAW (the centre of his very life) would be rendered useless! There could not be TWO saviors!

In 34 AD, while Paul was travelling to Damascus, he received a sudden, dramatic DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF JESUS RISEN and recognized him as Lord, Christ, Messiah, Son of God. The blinding realization that the time of law was over, and that Jesus was Messiah for the world left him completely stunned! (Read Acts 22:6-16 and Acts 26:12-18)

Moreover, so overwhelmed was he by the experience of the Risen Lord's personal love FOR HIM, Paul, that his world was turned upside down. After meeting the Christian community in Damascus, he took brief time "away" probably in modern Jordan, but returned to Damascus where he lived for three years. He needed time and space to be re-birthed into a new person! To support himself, he learned to make and mend tents. Then in 37 AD he visited Peter in Jerusalem for two weeks (Gal. 1:18) in order to learn more about Jesus. Paul gained an enormous admiration for Jesus because of His total dedication to his mission and his gentleness (Phil. 1:8). More than ever, Paul grew in love for Christ who chose death by crucifixion to show his love (2Cor.10:1). "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal.2:20).

Read: Phil 1:8; 2Cor.1:20; 2Cor.5:14; 2 Cor. 10:1; Eph.3:18-19; Rom.8:35-38.

Reflection questions:

1. How did I "seek for God" in my early life?
2. Can I recall an experience when I felt deeply loved? deeply cared for?
3. When did I first experience Christ's personal love for me?
4. How has that experience changed my life?

Hymn: "God is Love" - #473 (CBW3)

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