

Studies in Philemon: Lesson Two

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus...”

At the writing of this letter the Apostle Paul was under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30-31) where he remained for two years, following two years in prison in Caesarea awaiting a trial before Caesar. Although he is in a rented house he is still chained night and day.

Paul’s Physical Description

Early church eyewitness accounts have left us some clear descriptions of the Apostle Paul’s physical appearance. It’s not flattering. In the Apocryphal book The Acts of the Apostles as description given is as follows:

“A man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared as a man, and now he had the face of an angel.”

Other descriptions say that he was a small man of three meters in height (4’ 6”) He was balding with thin reddish hair and a shiny head. He had a long hooked nose, his eyebrows were thick with no break in the middle. He had large eyes, and his legs were crooked and his knees protruding. From some of his letters we understand he had bad eyesight (Gal. 6:11). The ridicule from his detractors in Corinth accused him of writing strong letters, but in his physical presence he was weak, and his speech was despicable. By that many have inferred that Paul had some kind of speech impediment or at best a raspy irritating voice. (2 Cor. 10:10) Here is a great man of God imprisoned in a lousy body.

Paul Described His Previous Life

Paul was born a citizen of Rome in city of Tarsus. His father was and important figure to have earned his citizenship, though a Jew. Paul was sent to Jerusalem for his education. He studied at the feet of Gamaliel, one of Israel’s foremost scholars. Paul was the head of his class, probably a child prodigy. He excelled in knowledge and zeal for the law. He was a Pharisee by doctrine. He persecuted the church and tried to stamp it out. (Acts 22:3-20). By his own admission he was the worst of sinners. (Galatians 1:13, 1 Timothy 1:13-15)

Galatians 1:13 I persecuted the church and wasted (destroyed) it

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

1 Timothy 1:13, 15 Blasphemer, persecutor, and odious, (offensive)

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.

2 Cor. 10:10 Letter weighty but physically weak and speech is despicable.

For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing."

Paul Described His Suffering for Christ

He met Jesus in a face to face encounter with the resurrected Lord on his way to Damascus to arrest and execute Christians. God transformed his life and turned his upside down and inside out. He had been filled with the Holy Spirit and through him God did amazing miracles, casting out demons, healing the sick, and raising the dead. Though the Apostle Paul became the most famous disciple next to Peter, his life was filled with conflict and struggles from within the church and from without. Though he was powerfully used of God nothing came easy for Paul.

Second Corinthians gives us a clear insight of Paul's constant suffering which far above and beyond what any other apostle had to endure. Read these passages and you will see a man troubled on every side and blocked at every turn. Bad luck followed him around like buzzing knats, but in all this he kept a smile on his face and a song in his heart believing that *"all things work together for good to them that love God who are called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28) and that *"therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."* (2 Cor. 12:10)

Read the Book of Acts

- Paul Persecuting Church – Acts 7:54-8:3, 22:3-5
- Paul's Conversion – Acts 9:1-19
- Paul's Rescue in Damascus – Acts 9:20-30
- Barnabas Gets Paul in Tarsus – Acts 11:19-30
- Paul in Antioch – Acts 13:1
- Paul stoned and left for dead – Acts 14:19
- Report to Council in Jerusalem – Acts 15:1-35
- 2nd Missionary Journey with Silas – Acts 15:36-41
- Macedonia and Prison in Philippi – Acts 16
- Athens, Mars Hill speech – Acts 17
- Corinth (2 years) – Acts 18
- Ephesus (3 years) – Acts 19-20
- Jerusalem Arrest – Acts 21
- Plot to kill Paul – Acts 23:12-22
- Caesarea Prison (2 years) – Acts 23:23
- Before Felix – Acts 24
- Before Festus & Agrippa – Acts 25-26
- Sails to Rome – Acts 27-28:10
- Roman Prison (2 years) – Acts 28:17-31

**A Servant of God
A Child of the King
A Citizen of Heaven
A Soldier of the Cross**

"I'm a prisoner of the Lord!! Hallelujah!!!

Paul's Constant Suffering

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

2 Corinthians 6:4-10

*Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; 8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet **we live on**; beaten, and yet **not killed**; 10 sorrowful, yet **always rejoicing**; poor, yet making **many rich**; having nothing, and yet **possessing everything**.*

2 Corinthians 11:23-30

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore **I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.** 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, **I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

*This is the only letter to begin by referencing himself as a prisoner. The only other occasion is Ephesians 3:1 and 4:1 refer to being a prisoner. **Yet he more often refers to himself as a slave (doulos) of Christ. To apprehend that for which he was apprehended of God. (Philip. 3:12-14)***

Discussion Starters

1. What is the worst thing that every happened to you? Tell your story.
2. What has been the hardest test of your faith? Share your experience.
3. Have you ever wondered if God had abandoned you, ignored you, or didn't really care what about your situation? Share your struggle.
4. What got you through those doubt-filled days? What Scripture or truth helped you in those times? Share your victories.
5. How can you help someone going through "hell and high water"? What do you think?

(Take time to pray for each other as you face testings, trials and troubles.)

Dig Deeper

What does the Bible teach about trouble, trials and tribulations?

(Use a word search to discover answers to each. Use a Bible app or computer program that has Strong's numbering system to Greek words, such as Online Bible app)

2 Corinthians 1:4

Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

John 16:33

In the world you will have trouble. Be not afraid, I have overcome the world.

Matthew 13:21

Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while: for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended.

Trouble/Tribulations <2347> thlipsis

Trial <1382> dokime

Sufferings <3804> pathema

Affliction <3680> oneidismos

Suffer Affliction <4778> sugkakoucheo

Persecution <1377> dioko

Cut and paste your findings into a Word document so you can easily see and share the verses that teach us concerning suffering for Christ.