

# THE LIFE OF SAINT PAUL

by

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

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115. Principal Literary Period - It has been mentioned that the third missionary journey closed with a flying visit to the churches of Greece. This visit lasted several months; but in the Acts it is passed over in two or three verses. Probably it was little marked with those exciting incidents which naturally tempt the biographer into detail. Yet we know from other sources that it was nearly the most important part of Paul's life; for during this half-year he wrote the greatest of all his Epistles, that to the Romans, and two others only less important - that to the Galatians and the Second to the Corinthians.

116. We have thus alighted on the portion of his life most signalized by literary work. Overpowering as is the impression of the remarkableness of this man produced by following him, as we have been doing, as he hurries from province to province, from continent to continent, over land and sea, in pursuit of the object to which he was devoted, this impression is immensely deepened when we remember that he was at the same time the greatest thinker of his age, if not of any age, and, in the midst of his outward labors, was producing writings which have ever since been among the mightiest intellectual forces of the world, and are still growing

in their influence.

In this respect he rises sheer above all other evangelists and missionaries. Some of them may have approached him in certain respects - Xavier or Livingstone in the world-conquering instinct, Bernard or Whitefield in earnestness and activity. But few of these men added a single new idea to the world's stock of beliefs, whereas Paul, while at least equaling them in their own special line, gave to mankind a new world of thought. If his Epistles could perish, the loss to literature would be the greatest possible with only one exception - that of the Gospels which record the life, the sayings and the death of our Lord. They have quickened the mind of the Church as no other writings have done, and scattered in the soil of the world hundreds of seeds the fruits of which are now the general possession of mankind. Out of them have been brought the watchwords of progress in every reformation which the Church has experienced. When Luther awoke Europe from the slumber of centuries, it was a word of Paul which he uttered with his mighty voice: and when, one hundred years ago, our own country was revived from almost universal spiritual death, she was called by the voices of men who had rediscovered the truth for themselves in the pages of Paul.

117. Form of his Writings - Yet in penning his Epistles Paul may himself have had little idea of the part they were to play in the future. They were drawn out of him simply by the exigencies of his work. In the truest sense of the word they were letters, written to meet particular occasions, not formal writings, carefully designed and executed with a view to fame or to futurity. Letters of the right kind are, before everything else, products of the heart; and it was the eager heart of Paul, yearning for the weal of his spiritual children or alarmed by the dangers to which they were exposed, that produced all his writings. They were part of his day's work. Just as he flew over sea and land to revisit his converts, or sent Timothy or Titus to carry them his counsels and bring news of how they fared, so, when these means were not available, he would send a letter with the same design.

118. His Style - This may seem to detract from the value of these writings. We may be inclined to wish that, instead of having the course of his thinking determined by the exigencies of so many special occasions and his attention distracted by so many minute particulars, he had been able to concentrate the force of his mind on one perfect book and expound his views on the high subjects which occupied his thoughts in a systematic form. It cannot be maintained that Paul's Epistles are models of style. They were written far too hurriedly for this; and the last thing he thought of was to polish his periods. Often, indeed, his ideas, by the mere virtue of their fineness and beauty, run into forms of exquisite language, or there is in them such a sustained throb of emotion that they shape themselves spontaneously into sentences of noble eloquence. But oftener his language is rugged and formless; no doubt it was the first which came to hand for expressing what he had to say. He begins sentences and omits to finish them; he goes off into digressions and forgets to pick up the line of thought he has dropped; he throws out his ideas in lumps instead of fusing them into mutual coherence.

Nowhere perhaps will there be found so exact a parallel to the style of Paul as in the Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell. In the Protector's brain there lay the best and truest thoughts about England and her complicated affairs which existed at the time in that island; but, when he tried to express them in speech or letter, there issued from his mind the most extraordinary mixture of exclamations, questions, arguments soon losing themselves in the sands of words, unwieldy parentheses, and morsels of beautiful pathos or subduing eloquence. Yet, as you read these amazing utterances, you come by degrees to feel that you are getting to see the very heart and soul of the Puritan Era, and that you would rather be beside this man than any other

representative of the period. You see the events and ideas of the time in the very process of birth.

Perhaps, indeed, a certain formlessness is a natural accompaniment of the very highest originality. The perfect expression and orderly arrangement of ideas is a later process; but, when great thoughts are for the first time coming forth, there is a kind of primordial roughness about them, as if the earth out of which they are arising were still clinging to them: the polishing of the gold comes late and has to be preceded by the heaving of the ore out of the bowels of nature. Paul in his writings is hurling forth the original ore of truth. We owe to him hundreds of ideas which were never uttered before.

After the original man has got his idea out, the most commonplace scribe may be able to express it for others better than he, though he could never have originated it. So throughout the writings of Paul there are materials which others may combine into systems of theology and ethics, and it is the duty of the Church to do so. But his Epistles permit us to see revelation in the very process of birth. As we read them closely, we seem to be witnessing the creation of a world of truth, as the angels wondered to see the firmament evolving itself out of chaos and the multitudinous earth spreading itself forth in the light. Minute as are the details he has often to deal with, the whole of his vast view of the truth is recalled in his treatment of everyone of them, as the whole sky is mirrored in a single drop of dew. What could be a more impressive proof of the fecundity of his mind than the fact that, amid the innumerable distractions of a second visit to his Greek converts, he should have written in half a year three such books as Romans, Galatians and Second Corinthians?

119. His Inspiration - It was GOD by His Spirit who communicated this revelation of truth to Paul. Its own greatness and divineness supply the best proof that it could have had no other origin. But none the less did it break in upon Paul with the joy and pain of original thought; it came to him through his experience; it drenched and dyed every fiber of his mind and heart; and the expression which it found in his writings was in accordance with his peculiar genius and circumstances.

120. The Man Revealed in his Letters - It would be easy to suggest compensations in the form of Paul's writings for the literary qualities they lack. But one of these so outweighs all others that it is sufficient by itself to justify in this case the ways of GOD. In no other literary form could we, to the same extent, in the writings have got the man. Letters are the most personal form of literature. A man may write a treatise or a history or even a poem and hide his personality behind it; but letters are valueless unless the writer shows himself. Paul is constantly visible in his letters. You can feel his heart throbbing in every chapter he ever wrote. He has painted his own portrait - not only that of the outward man, but of his innermost feelings - as no one else could have painted it. It is not from Luke, admirable as is the picture drawn in the Acts of the Apostles, that we learn what the true Paul was, but from Paul himself. The truths he reveals are all seen embodied in the man. As there are some preachers who are greater than their sermons, and the principal gain of their hearers, in listening to them, is obtained in the inspiring glimpses they obtain of a great and sanctified personality, so the best thing in the writings of Paul is Paul himself, or rather the grace of GOD in him.

121. His character presented a wonderful combination of the natural and the spiritual. From nature he had received a strongly marked individuality; but the change which Christianity produces was no less obvious in him. In no saved man's character is it possible to separate nicely what is due to nature from what is due to grace; for nature and grace blend sweetly in the redeemed life. In Paul the union of the two was singularly complete; yet it was always clear that

there were two elements in him of diverse origin; and this is, indeed, the key to a successful estimate of his character.

122. Physique - To begin with what was most simply natural - his physique was an important condition of his career. As want of ear may make a musical career impossible or a failure of eyesight stop the progress of a painter, so the missionary life is impossible without a certain degree of physical stamina. To anyone reading by itself the catalogue of Paul's sufferings and observing the elasticity with which he rallied from the severest of them and resumed his labors, it would naturally occur that he must have been a person of Herculean mold. On the contrary, he appears to have been little of stature, and his bodily presence was weak. This weakness seems to have been sometimes aggravated by disfiguring disease; and he felt keenly the disappointment which he knew his bodily presence would excite among strangers; for every preacher who loves his work would like to preach the Gospel with all the graces which conciliate the favor of hearers to an orator. GOD, however, used his very weakness, beyond his hopes, to draw out the tenderness of his converts; and so, when he was weak, then he was strong, and he was able to glory even in his infirmities.

There is a theory, which has obtained extensive currency, that the disease he suffered from was violent ophthalmia, causing disagreeable redness of the eyelids. But its grounds are very slender. He seems, on the contrary, to have had a remarkable power of fascinating and cowing an enemy with the keenness of his glance, as in the story of Elymas the sorcerer, which reminds us of the tradition about Luther, that his eyes sometimes so glowed and sparkled that bystanders could scarcely look on them.

There is no foundation whatever for an idea of some recent biographers of Paul that his bodily constitution was excessively fragile and chronically afflicted with shattering nervous disease. No one could have gone through his labors or suffered the stoning, the scourgings and other tortures he endured without having an exceptionally tough and sound constitution. It is true that he was sometimes worn out with illness and torn down with the acts of violence to which he was exposed; but the rapidity of his recovery on such occasions proves what a large fund of bodily force he had to draw upon. And who can doubt that, when his face was melted with tender love in beseeching men to be reconciled to GOD or lighted up with enthusiasm in the delivery of his message, it must have possessed a noble beauty far above mere regularity of feature?

123. Enterprise - There was a good deal that was natural in another element of his character on which much depended - his spirit of enterprise. There are many men who like to grow where they are born; to have to change into new circumstances and make acquaintance with new people is intolerable to them. But there are others who have a kind of vagabondism in the blood; they are the persons intended by nature for emigrants and pioneers; and, if they take to the work of the ministry, they make the best missionaries.

In modern times no missionary has had this consecrated spirit of adventure in the same degree as that great Scotchman, David Livingstone. When he first went to Africa, he found the missionaries clustered in the south of the continent, just within the fringe of heathenism; they had their houses and gardens, their families, their small congregations of natives; and they were content. But he moved at once away beyond the rest into the heart of heathenism, and dreams of more distant regions never ceased to haunt him, till at length he began his extraordinary tramps over thousands of miles where no missionary had ever been before; and, when death overtook him, he was still pressing forward.

Paul's was a nature of the same stamp, full of courage and adventure. The unknown in the distance, instead of dismaying, drew him on. He could not bear to build on other men's

foundations, but was constantly hastening to virgin soil, leaving churches behind for others to build up. He believed that, if he lit the lamp of the Gospel here and there over vast areas, the light would spread in his absence by its own virtue. He liked to count the leagues he had left behind him, but his watchword was ever Forward. In his dreams he saw men beckoning him to new countries; he had always a long unfulfilled program in his mind; and, as death approached, he was still thinking of journeys into the remotest corners of the known world.

124. Influence Over Men - Another element of his character near akin to the one just mentioned was his influence over men. There are those to whom it is painful to have to accost a stranger even on pressing business; and most men are only quite at home in their own set - among men of the same class or profession as themselves. But the life he had chosen brought Paul into contact with men of every kind, and he had constantly to be introducing to strangers the business with which he was charged. He might be addressing a king or a consul the one hour and a roomful of slaves or common soldiers the next. One day he had to speak in the synagogue of the Jews, another among a crowd of Athenian philosophers, another to the inhabitants of some provincial town far from the seats of culture. But he could adapt himself to every man and every audience. To the Jews he spoke as a rabbi out of the Old Testament Scriptures; to the Greeks he quoted the words of their own poets; and to the barbarians he talked of the GOD who giveth rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

When a weaker, insincere man attempts to be all things to all men, he ends by being nothing to anybody. But, living on this principle, Paul found entrance for the Gospel everywhere, and at the same time won for himself the esteem and love of those to whom he stooped. If he was bitterly hated by enemies, there was never a man more intensely loved by his friends. They received him as an angel of GOD, or even as JESUS CHRIST Himself, and were ready to pluck out their eyes and give them to him. One church was jealous of another getting too much of him. When he was not able to pay a visit at the time he had promised, they were furious, as if he had done them a wrong. When he was parting from them, they wept sore and fell on his neck and kissed him. Numbers of young men were continually about him, ready to go on his errands. It was the largeness of his manhood which was the secret of this fascination; for to a big nature all resort, feeling that in its neighborhood it is well with them.

125. Unselfishness - This popularity was partly, however, due to another quality which shone conspicuously in his character - the spirit of unselfishness. This is the rarest quality in human nature, and it is the most powerful of all in its influence on others, where it exists in purity and strength. Most men are so absorbed in their own interests and so naturally expect others to be the same that, if they see any one who appears to have no interests of his own to serve but is willing to do as much for the sake of others as the generality do for themselves, they are at first incredulous, suspecting that he is only hiding his designs beneath the cloak of benevolence; but, if he stand the test and his unselfishness prove to be genuine, there is no limit to the homage they are prepared to pay him.

As Paul appeared in country after country and city after city, he was at first a complete enigma to those whom he approached. They formed all sorts of conjectures as to his real design. Was it money he was seeking, or power, or something darker and less pure? His enemies never ceased to throw out such insinuations. But those who got near him and saw the man as he was, who knew that he refused money and worked with his hands day and night to keep himself above the suspicion of mercenary motives, who heard him pleading with them one by one in their homes and exhorting them with tears to a holy life, who saw the sustained personal interest he took in every one of them - these could not resist the proofs of his disinterestedness or deny him their

affection.

There never was a man more unselfish; he had literally no interest of his own to live for. Without family ties, he poured all the affections of his big nature, which might have been given to wife and children, into the channels of his work. He compares his tenderness toward his converts to that of a nursing-mother to her children; he pleads with them to remember that he is their father who has begotten them in the Gospel. They are his glory and crown, his hope and joy and crown of rejoicing. Eager as he was for new conquests, he never lost his hold upon those he had won. He could assure his churches that he prayed and gave thanks for them night and day, and he remembered his converts by name at the throne of grace. How could human nature resist disinterestedness like this? If Paul was a conqueror of the world, he conquered it by the power of love.

126. His Mission - The two most distinctively Christian features of his character have still to be mentioned. One of these was the sense of having a divine mission to preach CHRIST, which he was bound to fulfill. Most men merely drift through life, and the work they do is determined by a hundred indifferent circumstances; they might as well be doing anything else, or they would prefer, if they could afford it, to be doing nothing at all. But, from the time when he became a Christian, Paul knew that he had a definite work to do; and the call he had received to it never ceased to ring like a tocsin in his soul, "**Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel;**" this was the impulse which drove him on. He felt that he had a world of new truths to utter and that the salvation of mankind depended on their utterance. He knew himself called to make CHRIST known to as many of his fellow-creatures as his utmost exertions could enable him to reach. It was this which made him so impetuous in his movements, so blind to danger, so contemptuous of suffering. "**None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.**" He lived with the account which he would have to give at the judgment-seat of CHRIST ever in his eye, and his heart was revived in every hour of discouragement by the vision of the crown of life which, if he proved faithful, the Lord, the righteous Judge, would place upon his head.

127. Devotion to CHRIST - The other peculiarly Christian quality which shaped his career was personal devotion to CHRIST. This was the supreme characteristic of the man, and from first to last the mainspring of his activities. From the moment of his first meeting with CHRIST he had but one passion; his love to his Saviour burned with more and more brightness to the end. He delighted to call himself the servant of CHRIST, and had no ambition except to be the propagator of His ideas and the continuer of His influence.

He took up this idea of being CHRIST's representative with startling boldness. He says the heart of CHRIST is beating in his bosom toward his converts; he says the mind of CHRIST is thinking in his brain; he says that he is continuing the work of CHRIST and filling up that which was lacking in His sufferings; he says the wounds of CHRIST are reproduced in the scars upon his body; he says he is dying that others may live, as CHRIST died for the life of the world. But it was in reality the deepest humility which lay beneath these bold expressions. He had the sense that CHRIST had done everything for him; He had entered into him, casting out the old Paul and ending the old life, and had begotten a new man, with new designs, feelings and activities. And it was his deepest longing that this process should go on and become complete - that his old self should vanish quite away, and that the new self, which CHRIST had created in His own image and still sustained, should become so predominant that, when the thoughts of his mind were

CHRIST's thoughts, the words on his lips CHRIST's words, the deeds he did CHRIST's deeds, and the character he wore CHRIST's character, he might be able to say, "**I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.**"

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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