



## Interesting Men in the Bible: Paul

So much has been written about the man named Paul of Tarsus in the Bible. I had a young man say to me that Paul is over-rated. Clearly, he is not a Pauline believer. What he meant was that he discounted the writings of Paul. I have been fascinated with that form of thought. Are you a Moses guy? What about a Samuel guy or a Matthew fan? Who do you put stock in as a Bible writer? Conversely, who do you put little stock in? I would contend that our basic understanding of Christianity would be hollow without the thirteen books of the Bible that Paul penned. Is that ok with the young man?

A name change in the Bible means something. How or why, I have no clue but many names in the Bible fit the person and Saul/ Paul are no different. A young man named Saul appears on the scene in Acts 7. He is taking care of the clothes given to him by people stoning Stephan. This Saul becomes the main antagonist of the Christians in Acts 9. Then Jesus blinds him on the Damascus Road. Saul's name means *ask or prayed for*. This man asks Jesus who he is. Later on, a praying Saul is prayed for by a Christian named Ananias. By Acts 13 Saul's name has been changed to Paul which means *humble*.

This man named Paul has controversy follow him his whole life. Is he the true 12<sup>th</sup> apostle? Is he Saul of Tarsus? The disciples drew lots for Mathias to be the next Apostle. Is Paul

appointed by Jesus instead? Even in the Bible there were questions on Paul's role in the church. Is he the Apostle of the Jews or Gentiles? It's a miracle that he went from killer Saul to Apostle Paul. Only God can do this. Yet, from this moment on we lose Paul for some time. It's called the lost years. There is even controversy as to whether it's 13, 14, 7-8 or 10 years he is missing. All of a sudden at the end of Acts 12 Saul appears again. From then on, the Bible and Christianity was never the same. Saul turned Paul gives us 13 wonderful letters that outline the Christian faith for the most part.

Is Paul's intelligence or IQ off the charts? Much of the writing in Romans is profoundly deep. We must remember that this man was raised as an understudy of the Pharisees. They were the best of the best. Many of them could recite the Old Testament word for word. That explains Paul's deep understanding of the Law of Moses. It also explains why this man could see Jesus in the Old books. That's why it's hard to pin him down as a gentile or Jew apostle. He is clearly speaking to both groups in his letters. Paul's is able to give reasons as a gentile or Jew to follow Jesus. So many books have been written trying to understand Paul's deep writing.

Let's talk about Paul's thorn. Many people have an opinion on what Paul's thorn was. It comes from 2 Corinthians 12:7 "*Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!*" What was it? Some have said Paul is short or blind. Others have contended that he has a mistress or a sexual sin. Was it a body ailment? The fact is we just don't know. Yet, we should not focus on Paul's thorn but rather that he prayed for help.

What is most impressive is Paul's additions to the Bible theology. In Romans 3 we read that no one is righteous. Romans 5 declares we are justified before God by Faith in him. Romans

6 says *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Look at 1 Corinthians 2:10 *“these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”* How about Ephesians 5:18 *“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”* Certainly, Paul is not significant right?

Paul had attitude and grace. He argued with the great Peter and split from his understudy John Mark. Paul warned against certain leaders of the young church. This man was not afraid to go to Rome and die for Jesus’ name. He challenged the Greeks on what they believed in. Yet, he was a loving man who believed in what God and Jesus stood for. I will end this study with a quote by Paul that sums up his heart. 1 Corinthians 13:1-7 *“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”*

This is why Paul is a great man of the Bible.