

# PAUL: A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST

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## CHAPTER ONE

### PRE-NATAL GRACE

(I Timothy 1:14.)

“A city throned upon the height behold,  
Wherein no foot of man as yet has trod;  
The City of man’s Life fulfilled in God  
Bathed all in light, with open gates of gold.”  
- Phillips Brooks

THE source of a stream must be sought, not where it arises in some green glen among the hills, making a tiny tarn of clear water, where the mountain sheep come down to drink; but in the mighty sea, drawn upwards in evaporation, or in the clouds that condense against the cold slopes of the hills.

So with the life of God within us. In its earlier stages we are apt to suppose that it originated in our will and choice, and return to our Father’s House. But as we review it from the eminence of the years, we discover that we chose because we were chosen; that we loved because we were first loved; that we left the sepulchre of our selfishness and the ceremonies of death, because the Son of God flung his majestic word into the sepulchral vault, crying, “**Come forth!**” All mature piety extols the grace of God that unmerited love, which each man thinks was magnified most abundantly in his own case. “**By the grace of God, I am what I am,**” is a confession which is elicited from every man as he reaches the crest of the hill, and looks back on the cities of the plain from which he has escaped.

Paul is very emphatic in his acknowledgments of this prenatal grace. He loves to trace back all the good that was in his heart and life to a Love that was set on him before the mountains were brought forth, or ever God had formed the earth and the world.

In the silence of eternity God’s delights had already been with him as a son of man.

## I. FOREKNOWN

“**Known unto God,**” said the grave, linen-vested James, “**are all his works from the beginning of the world**”; and if his works were foreknown, how much more his saints! Again the evangelist tells us, that Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him; surely then He must have known from the beginning who the believers were, and who should become his devoted lovers and apostles.

Before time began it was known in Heaven who would be attracted by the love of the Cross to trust, love, and obey; who would be drawn to the dying and risen Son of God; who would have eternal affinity with Him in death and resurrection: and of these it is said, “**Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren**” (Romans 8:29).

It is not a complete solution of the mystery of Predestination, and only removes it one stage further back; yet the suggestion casts a gleaming torchlight into the darkness of the impenetrable abyss when we are told that God included in the eternal purposes of life all those whom He foresaw would be attracted to an indissoluble union of faith and life with his Son. All who come to Jesus show that they were included in the Father’s gift to his Son. The Father gave Him all those who in the fulness of times should come. But why some have an affinity with the Man of the Cross, and not others; why some come and others stay away; why some sheep hear the Shepherd’s voice and follow, while others persist in straying, is one of those secrets which are not revealed as yet to the children of men.

But as the eye of omniscient love glanced down the ages, it must have lighted with peculiar pleasure on the eager, devoted soul of Paul.

God foreknew and predestinated him. The divine purpose, desiring his capacity for the best, selected him for it, and it for him. And there is a gleam of holy rapture on his face when, reviewing the process of those eternal movements of love from his Roman prison, he writes, “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world**” (Ephesians 1:3, 4).

## II. CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS UNTO GOOD WORKS

He has been showing the place of works in the gospel scheme, insisting, with unusual emphasis and sharpness of outline, that neither our salvation, nor our faith, is matter for boasting. “**It is the gift of God; not of works,**” he cries, and then proceeds to the magnificent assertion, “**We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them**” (Ephesians 2:10).

The Greek word translated **workmanship** is *poem*.

We are God’s Poem.

And as we review our life after the lapse of years - save where we have willfully violated the obvious intention of our Creator - we shall perceive that there has been an underlying plan and conception, the development of which has proceeded in ever-widening circles.

**“I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me,”** is as true of our life as of Cyrus, who was raised up to be the destroyer of Babylon, the liberator of the people of God. God has a distinct thought in each human life. He creates with a purpose. As a great poet may adopt various kinds of rhythm and measure, such as may suit his conception, but has nevertheless a purpose in each poem that issues from his creative fancy, so God means something as He sends each life forth from the silence of eternity; and if we do not hinder Him He superintends the embodiment of that conception, making our entire life, from the cradle to the grave, a symmetrical and homogeneous poem, dominated by one thought, though wrought out with an infinite variety of illustration and detail.

In a poem the expression is adapted to the conception. A rugged strain befits strong and terse thinking, whilst more flowing and mellifluous measures are better adapted to tender and plaintive musings. Possibly we can thus account for the differences which characterize human lives. Yonder is the fragment of a great epic, there the lyric or dramatic, here the sonnet or elegy.

Your life is smooth and flowing, or broken over stones of sorrow, or headlong in its impetuosity, because God's thought must be mated to the meter most suited for its expression. Paul's career reminds us of the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, the *Paradise Lost*, or the mighty conception of Dante. It is ocean-like in depth, variety, and change. As in an oratorio, so here, the storehouse of expression is ransacked to convey the deep and varied transition of the Creator's thought, emotion, and passion.

The poet's art demands that no touch of description or narrative, in the earlier lines, should be fruitless or redundant. To allow the canvas to be covered by figures or objects which do not conduce to the main intention of a picture is in the highest degree reprehensible. Watch well the earlier chapters of a great tale, and you will notice that the touches and descriptions of every paragraph prepare for the ultimate unfolding of the story, and lead up to the climax to which the closing pages hurry.

So in human life. God knows the works which are prepared, that we should walk in them. And as He has created them for us, so He has created us for them, in Christ Jesus. The year of our birth, the place and scenes of early childhood, our parentage and education, the influences that have molded us, whether of books or art, or the conditions of daily toil, have been planned with an unerring wisdom and predisposition, that through us might be made known unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord; in whom we have boldness and access in confidence, through our faith in Him.

It was, therefore, a matter of constant congratulation to the Apostle that he had not to cut or carve his way, but simply to discover the track which God had prepared for his steps from of old; and when he found it, it would not only be consistent with his place in the mystical Body of Christ, but be the very pathway for which his character and gifts were most adapted.

### III. RAISED IN CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Paul's education differed widely from that of his fellow-apostles. They had grown up with Christ. It is likely that the Master was familiar with many of them before He called them.

No one has travelled down from the highland village of Nazareth to the blue waters of Galilee without realizing how easy and constant the intercourse must have been during those thirty silent years. They grew gradually therefore into the mysteries of his death and resurrection. They knew Jesus the man before they recognized Christ the Messiah. From the Jordan valley they had been ascending the hill of the Lord, and were therefore less amazed when the sharp steep spur of Calvary suddenly confronted them, surmounted by the peaks of resurrection and ascension rising in peerless beauty beyond.

To Paul, on the other hand, the first conception of Jesus was in his risen glory.

He knew perfectly, for it was common talk when he was a student in Jerusalem, that Jesus had been crucified under Pontius Pilate; but now he beheld Him risen, living, speaking, his face shining with light above the brightness of the sun. It was a spectacle that could never be effaced from his memory.

Besides answering all his difficulties, it gave an aspect to his faith, which it never lost. The "**yea rather, that is risen again,**" of Romans 8 is very significant. He had to think his way back from the ascension and resurrection glory to Calvary, Gethsemane, the human life, and the far-away scenes of the Lord's nativity and early years.

But more than this, Paul had a very firm belief in the identification of all who believe with the risen Lord, and that from the moment of his resurrection. He held and taught, that all the members of the mystical body shared in the experiences and exploits of their Head. What happened to Him happened to them also, and to each of them.

There was no single believer, therefore, that could not avow as his own all that had befallen Jesus, though at the time he might have been dead in trespasses and sins, or had not begun to exist.

The apostle never allowed his views of personal union with the Saviour to clash with his presentation of the unique character of that death, by virtue of which He did for men what no one man, nor all men together, could have done.

He always taught that the death of the Cross was a propitiating sacrifice for the sins of the whole world a sacrifice which stands alone in its sublime and unapproachable glory. But he loved to dwell on that other and secondary aspect of the Saviour's death, by virtue of which, in the divine intention, all who believe are reckoned one with Him in his death, resurrection, and ascension into the heavenlies.

In one memorable text he connects these two aspects of the Cross.

**“He loved me, and gave Himself for me,”** is bound by a golden link to the words, **“I am crucified with Christ.”** He is always clear in saying, **“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us . . . We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”** But he is as clear and emphatic in saying, **“When we were dead through our trespasses, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”**

**“That one died for all”** was an undoubted article in his creed; but this was another, **“Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”** He loved to reckon that he had died with Christ, and to claim that he should daily receive the power of his risen life. He longed to know Jesus Christ, and the power of his resurrection, being quite prepared to taste the fellowship of his sufferings and to become conformed unto his death, if only he might day by day attain unto the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3).

This conception of his union with Christ in death and resurrection underlies the whole tenor of his appeals to a holy and consecrated life. **“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above . . . For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. . . . Christ, who is our life, shall appear”** (Colossians 3:1-4). It was a radiant vision, and one of which the apostle never wearied. It was attributable to nothing less than the great love with which God had loved him, when he was a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious; living, as he confesses he did, in the lusts of his flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and by nature a child of wrath even as the rest (Ephesians 2:3). For us too that vision waits; and in battling against the lusts of the flesh, the fascinations of the world, and the power of the devil, there is no position more fraught with the certainty of victory than this of our resurrection standing and privilege. When the world would cast the spell of its blandishments over you, dare to answer the challenge by the assertion that it has no further jurisdiction over you, since you have passed from its territory and control, by virtue of your union with Him who, in that He died, died unto sin once, and in that He liveth, liveth unto God.

Get up into the high mountains, believing children of God, and view the everlasting love of your Father towards you in Jesus! Recount all that that love has bought for you before you had any being! Is it likely to drop you now because of any unworthiness it perceives? Can anything appear in us which was not anticipated by One who before taking us for his own possession sat down and counted the cost? Is there not comfort in knowing that your keel is caught by a current which emanated from the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, and is bearing you towards his heart? **“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever. Amen.”**

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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