

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE TRELIS OF PAUL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

“By the grace of God, I am what I am; and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain” (I Corinthians 15:10)

There is something intensely real about the life of Paul.

His rugged individuality and rare dauntlessness add a delightfully dramatic effect to his autobiography, be it ever so incomplete. More vivid than the augmenting strokes of the artist's brush, stronger than the accented syllables of the poet's pen, more penetrating than the clarion notes of the trumpet are the challenging revelations of his own positive, practical experience.

Paul was endowed with exceptional qualities, the kind which makes men champions in their particular spheres of influence. He was resolute but not vindictive, decisive but not impetuous, aggressive but not erratic, undaunted but never boastful. His actions betrayed more than balanced judgment, for his course was charted by omniscient wisdom; his ministry was fused with a power sublime.

It is well stated in expressive imagery that no one can increase his altitude without increasing his size; yet Paul was not scaling the ladder of success, rung by rung—he was pressing toward a mark, step by step. His aim was to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.

Not a Utopian dream this. No, it was a vision glorious. It could be realized only by the decrease of self and the increase of Christ—something of a dispossession by preoccupation.

With one steady stroke of his pen he transferred all his pre-Christian gains to the loss column in the ledger of his life. Then, with the slate of his mind and heart cleared, he set himself with deep resolve to increase in the excellency of the knowledge of his Lord. If he were to be a winner, there could be but one worthwhile prize—**“that I may win Christ!”**

This aim became the habitual bent and tenor of his evermore exemplary life and earned for him the honour of being Christianity's most prominent apostle.

HIS DETERMINATION

“I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

This was more than a platform; it was an enunciated conviction, expressed with resoluteness. It was devoted attachment to a glorious cause. It was a position assumed through faith, one which proved soul-satisfying and heart-encouraging. It was a ministerial anchorage that defied dislodgement. When most public personalities would have feared losing prestige or would have hesitated because of likely criticism, he counted it the grandest moment of many a day to reveal his position.

Paul did not use the word determine as meaning “*to mark out before hand,*” but rather in the sense of arriving at a decision. He employed the same thought later when asserting, **“but I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness”** (II Corinthians 2:1).

He was addressing an academically-minded people who employed their learning in ill-advised arguments against the purposes of God. They were more pedantic than prudent. To them the Apostle said more about wisdom than is found in any other given portion of the New Testament. He, too, had pondered and pursued the so-called wisdom of the world; but when the light of the glory of God flooded his soul, he was confronted with an issue. Was he called to be a philosopher? A psychiatrist? A literary genius? He stood at the crossroads of his life. Nor was the decision difficult. The Holy Spirit had already displayed life’s true values on the horizon of his renewed mind. Prominent, indeed, was the fact that **“the world by its wisdom knew not God”** (I Corinthians 1:21).

There it was, clear, concise, convincing—irrefutable! How strange that one poignant sentence can swing the balance of mental power, subdue the emotions, submerge the aspirations and shape the life. What could he desire more than to have men know God? If a world of wisdom could not effect this end, then he must possess the means that could.

The decision was made—firmly and irrevocably made. The message of Christ was unquestionably sufficient.

It did not enter the Apostle’s mind that the day would come when one of his persuasion would be dubbed “a one-track mind” or “an insult to intelligence.” Nor would he have cared. This was his decision which suffered no violation in his entire Christian career nor brought him a single vestige of regret. To the unregenerate intelligentsia, he had sadly limited himself; but, on the contrary, it was undeniably an entrance into the unlimited, the unfathomable, the inexhaustible, the transcendent.

This self-imposed restriction never proved to be an handicap either among the academically-minded or among any others to whom the beloved Apostle ministered. Christ was the incomparable, exclusive means of life and liberty, happiness and hope, and the cross became the way from the old into the new for all who accepted it by faith. With such depth of wisdom and breadth of knowledge, Paul was never destitute of material either to exalt Christ or to expound the crucifixion. His proclamations were productive of the most amazing results.

HIS DEMONSTRATION

There was an impressive symphony of characteristics which enriched the life of Paul. His demonstration was clearly in keeping with his determination for it was **“of the Spirit and of power”** (I Corinthians 2.4). The word employed here (*apodeixis*) does not occur elsewhere in the Scriptures. It has no relation whatsoever to an ostentatious display of personal charm or acquired ability. It means expressly *“a showing or pointing out.”* It is used in the sense of his being *a beacon light to point people to Christ.*

Paul emphasized the features of two plausible types of ministry and used himself to illustrate the acceptable and fruitful kind. He could have majored in that school of homiletics which judges preaching by man’s oratorical ability and forensic eloquence, but he did not. **“My speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man’s wisdom,”** he explained. He chose rather, and what a commendable choice it was, to be a “pointer out” of Christ.

“. . . in demonstration of the Spirit.”

What a multitude of holy impressions comes to the student with these words! It was not so much his demonstration as it was the Spirit’s. It was the Holy Spirit who was pointing out Christ through a transformed persecutor. The one who once breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1) now is breathed upon by the Spirit of God. The erstwhile troublemaker is now a trustworthy messenger.

All of this presupposes a yieldedness which is the primary prerequisite to usefulness in the field of Christian service. It demands a removal of cluttering impedimenta, a spirit of devotion and a vision of lost souls. Then the Spirit can work through a human agent to point out the sufficiency of Christ.

“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Then, too, the demonstration was of power.

No one would question the fact that there was a noticeable potency in the ministry of the Apostle that defied difficulties, challenged kings, opposed councils and wrought miracles. Was it human ingenuity, developed prowess or acquired ability? Let Paul answer for himself: **“By the grace of God I am what I am”** (I Corinthians 15:10).

Grace is implanted power. It is the wherewithal of divine provision that makes a deficient one proficient in an assignment for the Lord. It is the force of accomplishment and the productive factor of advancement in spiritual procedure. Paul was a general who believed in driving offensives, moving ever onward, as in a rush against time. He waged the fight for righteousness whether in an Areopagus or in a dark prison. Man’s philosophy could not prevent his preaching nor chains retard his challenge. His demonstration was of power, and that power was from God through the Holy Spirit. This was equipment indeed.

HIS DECLARATION

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel . . .” (I Corinthians 15:1).

The main emphasis of Paul’s life was to make vocal the virile message of the good news which had so flooded his own soul. He walked amid a labyrinth of voices which enunciated doctrines widely diverse, but the gospel must neither be superseded nor suppressed. Indeed, it must be sounded forth, that, through the hearing, men might be saved. It was this same discerning one who enquired, **“How shall they hear without a preacher?”** (Romans 10:14).

He purposed to be a herald of the truth, cost him what it may.

The need of a lost and dying world exerted an irrepressible urge upon his heart. He was forced to do something, and that something was well defined in the divine economy, for, **“It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe”** (I Corinthians 1:21). As soon as this truth dawned upon the Apostle, he acknowledged the weight that settled with heaviness upon his soul. **“. . . necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel”** (I Corinthians 9:16).

The matter of declaring the good news is expressed in a most emphatic manner. The word **“declare”** has many meanings, such as *to express, to explain, to speak, to make known, to recount, to tell, to manifest, to lead through*. At least ten different words are used to convey these meanings. However, the word Paul chose in I Corinthians 15:1 was employed by none other in the Scriptures, save Jesus Christ our Lord in John 17:26.

Paul used it once again in Colossians 4:7. With the word declare and its derivatives occurring so many times, this restricted use of the one form denotes special importance. The word itself (*gnoridzo*) means *to express*, but it is derived from another word (*ginosko*) which means *to understand, to know, to feel, to resolve*. It is clearly seen, then, that the preaching of the gospel by Paul was an expression of glad tidings propounded with conviction and through experiential knowledge. Festus, the governor of Judea, and King Agrippa were both affected by his forcefulness. The governor complained, **“Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.”** Without the least vindictiveness, this fearless preacher, though a prisoner, replied, **“I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”**

Herein, we meet something of a challenge for homiletical persuasiveness.

Dubious statements are doubtfully received and insincerity fails to elicit interest. There must be knowledge and understanding, while conviction and resoluteness are equally indispensable. It is inferred that Paul preached to rescue the lost as a defence attorney pleads for the life of his client.

Wholehearted exuberance characterized him in his praise of the Lord and an obsessing pity moved him to tears as he sent out the message of hope to the perishing. He wept as he spoke of them (Philippians 3:18), but he was firm in his urgency as he spoke to them. Solemnly, he declared, **“Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”** (II Corinthians 5:11).

HIS DENUNCIATION

The archenemy of God and man could not go unchallenged with so brave a general in the field as Paul. Whether incarnated in Goliath of the Philistines, or represented by Arba of the Anakims, or disguised under the garb of a Galatian preacher, the devil's agents are vicious. Paul had to withstand vigorously the insurgent forces. Sometimes, this was accomplished by denunciation. Paul never hesitated to raise his voice in opposition to false teachers and their deception.

The clever inroads of legalism brought the wiry, little warrior to the defence of the Galatian believers. “. . . **there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ; but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you-than, which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed!**”

He knew how to register a stinging rebuke, when necessary, and always in the most unequivocal language. He does not impress us as one who delighted in conflict; yet he is never pictured as the kind of weakling who would retire sheepishly from a situation that needed his presence. He was not, subsequent to his conversion, a belligerent individual, but he was noted for his unmovable stand on the side of truth and righteousness. So impartial was he that principle prevailed regardless of friendship or association. The Holy Spirit records one instance when Paul withstood Peter to his face because “**he was wrong.**”

He expressed his disapprobation of all practices which could, by any chance, heap reproach upon the gospel. He warned against such matters as women improperly behaving in the church, irreverence at the Lord's Table, disobedience to parents, uncomely apparel, lack of respect for dignitaries, neglect of home responsibilities, unequal yokes and all kinds of immoral conduct. His code of ethics was epitomized in a letter to his missionary partner on the isle of Crete. “**In all things show thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine shewing gravity, sincerity.**”

Under the control of the Spirit, Paul unveils something of a sad picture of future conditions which seem to be having a fulfillment contemporary with our present day.

To Timothy, he wrote about those who are self-lovers, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, trucebreakers, incontinent, traitors, immoral, truth-blinded, empty professors of godliness. He wanted his son in the faith to look upon such multiplied sins as grossly dangerous. “**From such turn away,**” he pleaded, explaining that those who find unrestrained affinity for such practices could only be “**men of corrupt minds.**”

Paul's denunciation of false teachers and the progenitors of evil, together with their illicit wares, proves the pronounced hatred he held for the forces of unrighteousness. He was a true servant. He had assayed true spiritual values and he knew the worth of godly possessions.

He drew an unmistakable line of demarcation between law and grace and between truth and error. He strongly urged the Christian runner to throw off the weights of handicap and to renounce the sin that most largely hindered. He pointed out the futility of beating the air in profitless superficiality. Then, as an athletic coach giving final instructions to his team before the most important game on schedule, Paul urged, “**So run as to win.**”

HIS DEMEANOR

The knowledge we have of an highly irate individual proceeding toward Damascus to apprehend Christian people for legal prosecution must not blind our eyes to the fact of Paul's moral background. His training in comportment and decorum had not been neglected.

He, himself, testified that "**touching the righteousness of the law, [I was] blameless.**" He further contended that "**If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more.**"

He substantiated such a claim by a genealogical statement, revealing that he was of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; religiously, a Pharisee. The tutoring he was accorded by the eminent Gamaliel added much in the way of culture and refinement along with the interpretive knowledge of the ancient Scriptures.

There came a day when he had to admit the truth of the revered prophet's contention that all our self-righteousnesses are as filthy rags. He met the thrice-holy One; and, in the blinding brilliance of His effulgent glory, the Pharisaical "good man" died, and Paul wrote his obituary, designating him "**the chiefest of sinners.**" Coincident with the death of the Pharisee, a Christian was born. New desires, new aims, new motives came with the new life, and none the less than He Who is perfection personified became the plumbline for his behavior.

"The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God."

This was his holy standard.

The practical effect of Christianity upon Paul's everyday living was most evident. He reminded Timothy of this fact. "**Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience.**"

His past was hidden away in God by Christ Jesus and his future was secure in the most excellent glory. He made it plain that the Christian's manner of living is closely scrutinized. "**Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men.**"

His daily living was highly exemplary. Approaching a serious matter at Corinth where disorders had become grievously apparent about the Lord's Table, he prefaced his disciplinary comments by saying, "**Be ye imitators of me even as I also am of Christ.**" This is entirely free of egotism. It is not the language of a proud boaster but the example of thorough dedication.

His daily behavior was also most encouraging. While we know something of the influence of one strong personality upon another, it would be difficult for us to comprehend fully the extent of his encouragement upon those of his day. Timothy, Titus, John Mark, Epaphras, Lydia, together with many more, were not only turned heavenward by his faithful ministry but were also strengthened in the faith by his life.

HIS DEPENDENCY

Of all the many immortal expressions which fell from the lips and pen of Paul, few excel in meaning the words of Philippians 4:13, “**I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.**” Native equipment, acquired capabilities, developed resourcefulness—these endowments and developments were all negligible without the supplied power of Christ. No one knew better than the Apostle the great need a human servant has of this promise of divine assistance. Nor did anyone realize more of its gracious bestowments than he. Whether bound in chains, remanded to prisons, lashed to the stake, wrecked on the sea, pelted with stones or plagued by a physical indisposition, the One Whose he was and Whom he served had assured, “**My grace is sufficient for thee.**”

When Paul testified that he had strength for anything through Christ who gives him power, he had not only given us a clue to the basic reason for his successes, but he had revealed the secret of all his spiritual ennoblement as well as his enablement. He was in contact with the source of supply; and, in any hour of necessity, he could tap heaven’s resources.

- This is why kings trembled and enemies quaked in his presence.
- This is what made him bold in presenting the claims of Christ.
- This is what supported him in ignominious and excruciating ordeals.
- This is why he could affirm, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself.”

The manifold and complex experiences which befell him would have overwhelmed the average individual. Paul, however, was one who had learned to throw himself with reckless abandon upon an able Deliverer.

When Judah was being invaded by Moab, Jehoshaphat was at his wit’s end and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were faint with fear. In the most crucial moment, the Lord moved to allay their fears by sending Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah, with a message of comfort. “**Thus saith the Lord unto you, be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s**” (II Chron. 20:15).

Paul had heard that same counsel. That is why he was not vindictive under criticism nor fearful under attack. It was never his battle, but God’s. On Him, he leaned for repose; on Him, he depended for strength. When it was God’s battle, God would win and Paul would enjoy the victory.

Dependency is a spiritual relaxation;

- It is a trustfulness that never fears the outcome.
- It is a state of being which is possible for all, but possessed by few.
- It is a kind of self-emptying, an exinanition that permits a divine influx to banish fear, to control action and to accomplish ends otherwise impossible.

“I can do all things through Christ.”

This is one way of saying that the Lord has the power for the accomplishment of His every commission; and when the servant relies upon Him, the commission is fulfilled. Any task to which the Lord assigns man is too great for human strength, but He always supplies the needed means.

The “**all things**” of Paul’s occupation were, of course, the things of God’s appointment —matters within His revealed will. Otherwise, he could not have been confident of help. God does not furnish men through Christ who are not true to Christ. God’s Son becomes the channel of heaven’s provisions when men are “**sanctified and meet for the Master’s use.**” Complete and willing yieldedness brings the servant into this holy status and then he becomes fruitful. This was the life Paul lived which made him a veritable blessing to countless numbers.

HIS DECEASE

The earth, which is the scene of life’s drama, is not only the place of human beginnings, but it is equally the place of human conclusions. However pleasing a situation, it must have a point of termination; however severe a sorrow, there must be a time of surcease; however interesting a book, it must have a closing chapter; however remarkable a life, it must have an earthly cessation.

Just so, Paul the aged, that grand old man of the early church, one day bade adieu to his fellow workers, and, like Abraham, turned his eyes toward a continuing city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. He announced his decease; for, through some intuitive means, he knew it was imminent. “**For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.**”

- It was not a disaster, but a departure.
- He would be unclothed to be clothed upon.
- He would be absent from the body, but present with the Lord.

His colleagues had heard him declare earlier that that would be far, far better. He knew that when the earthly house of his tabernacle was dissolved, he would have a building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Jacob, in announcing his decease, gathered his sons around him. It was a farewell with the family present—a time of solemn sacredness as the faint voice of an aged father quietly recited a few final words. Paul made his announcement under different conditions. He informed Timothy that Luke only was with him. Tychicus was sent to Ephesus, Titus had gone to Dalmatia, Crescens had moved on to Galatia and Demas had forsaken Paul for the allurements of the world.

The declining Apostle, worn by many a battle, felt the end of his career was imminent, and asked Timothy to hurry to his side, bringing Mark who had been such a profitable assistant in the ministry.

The announcement of his decease, one of the most notable extant, embodies three distinct considerations.

(1) *He emphasized his readiness.*

Few people can declare themselves ready to meet the Lord. Think of what it involves. To be ready to stand in His presence presupposes a completed task, constant obedience and fruit for His glory. It means that one knows whom he hath believed and is persuaded that He is able to keep that which is committed unto Him against that day. It signifies that one has remained unspotted from the world. It denotes confidence that the work done can stand the test of fire which will try every man's work of what sort it is. It indicates that one can rightfully expect the Lord of Glory to say, **"Well done, my good and faithful servant."**

While all of this was true with the Apostle, the tense of the verb reads, "*For I am already being offered.*" This is most suggestive. Paul exercised the utmost care lest, while he preached to others, he, himself, might be disapproved. He urged the believers to present their bodies a living sacrifice. He must do likewise. Thus, he bore in his body throughout his ministry, the marks (stigmata) of the Lord Jesus (Galatians 6:17).

Now, the climax approaches and the offering of himself would be fulfilled; he would lay down his life amid all the ignominy Satan could impose. It was all for Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us. To Paul, the offering was pitifully small, yet he had but one life to give.

(2) *He indulged in a moment of serious reflection.*

"I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith."

Perhaps the consciousness of death's approach would hurriedly send the thoughts of any man back across the course he pursued through life's little day. How many could be so justifiably satisfied? Paul had waged a good warfare. He who urged Timothy to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ was a veteran of many battles at the time. He never feared the conflict because of his confidence in the Captain of his salvation. Paul was a finisher; never a quitter.

The main reason, statedly, that he did not allow the vicissitudes of life to be a disturbing hindrance was due to his desire for a joyful conclusion of his calling—a fight well-fought and a course completely negotiated. However, the deepest consolation by far was the heart assurance that he had, all the way and in every conflict, held unswervingly to the faith once delivered unto the saints.

(3) *This dear old favorite of most of us also anticipated his reward.*

That was much in keeping with the Lord's desire. Moses, we are told, gave respect unto the recompense of reward. It was as a challenge to spur God's servants on in faithful obedience to His Word and His will. Yet, note what it was that filled Paul's mind with such sweet contemplation. It was not the crown of a martyr nor the prize of a soulwinner. Surely, he would receive these from the nail-scarred hand of his Saviour. That he died as a martyr is not denied. *Non est mors, sed causa mortis quae martyrem facit.* (It is not death, but the cause of the death which determines the martyr). And that he was a soulwinner is firmly established. His heart's abounding desire, supported by earnest prayer to God, was for the salvation of sinners (Romans 10:1).

He saw multitudes turn to Christ. Otherwise, he could not have said, **“I am pure from the blood of all men”** (Acts 20:26).

Yet the crown he had in view was the same that all others saved by grace will receive. It is the ultimate of redemptive development, **“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.”** Paul was not longing for compensation for what he had done. No, he sweetly contemplated the fullness of what Christ had done for him. That was a joyful expectation. He was positive of its fulfillment both for himself and for all who love the Lord’s appearing. It was his last will and testament, and how rich is our faith in the inheritance of such a testimony.

One, whose life has been so rich in transcendent qualities, exerts an urge upon appreciating folk to indulge in eulogizing. Were we thus to give ourselves, we should wittingly transgress one of the Apostle’s most sacred wishes.

He was great and greatly used. His record is without equal among the many who have trod the narrow pathway of Divine calling; but, in deference to his own desire, we shall think of his invaluable contributions as resulting from the presence of Christ in his life. It was the Lord who sought him, sent him, supported him, and, finally, summoned him. It was the Lord who made his faith immovable, his influence immeasurable, and his message immortal. But by what means of psychological inhibition could we refrain from being emotionally stirred by so great an example of exceptional dedication, obedience and sacrifice. Up to the very moment of his decease, not one vestige of self-esteem or self-aggrandizement is evident. **“That in all things, He might have the preeminence,”** was the guiding incentive in his life and in his death.

“How did he die, Marcus,
Whom thou callst ‘That poor old Jew,’
As he knelt at the aqua solvae,
The sport of the rabble crew?”

“How did he die, that Paulus,
That man of hated race?
Why, like a soldier dying in battle,
With sunshine on his face.

“He was old and worn and weary
As we left the city gate;
But with each step, he seemed to grow
Stronger and more elate.

“And as we passed from the city
Along the Ostian road,
Men stopped and gazed and wondered;
His face so strangely glowed.”

As the dying sunset drapes yonder horizon with the glow of beauty and paints its exit on the canvas of the firmament in variegated grandeur, even so, this brightest luminary in the orbit of Christian profession has, in the ending of his constant journey toward the dawn of Eternal Day, left an afterglow that has embellished and blessed the lesser lights which have flickered down through the night of years.

As the hand of the Infinite held forth the martyr's crown, the enemy was quick to strike the mortal blow. Yet, his was not the repose of death; it was the repose of rest—a time of surcease. Then and there, like the calm which follows the fierce thunders of a summer's storm, there was sweet relief from the constant groaning for the adoption, the redemption of the body. Now, he awaits with us the trumpet blast to signal that glorious meeting with the Lord in the air, when the graves relinquish their dead in Christ and earth releases its heavenly sojourners, and our human bodies will be transformed into the image of Him.

Then, that long-contemplated, triumphal presentation before the Father with exceeding joy will become the glad day of meeting and greeting for those who love His appearing. Until then, Paul rests and we trust.

We shall not imitate the Ephesian elders who once wept over his departure; but we ought, with the deepest resolve, to emulate his sterling example of faith, humility and perseverance. Then, we shall be “**looking unto Jesus, the Author of faith.**” Then, we shall be journeying heavenward with Paul.

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