

PAUL, THE SUPERLATIVE

BY A. S. COPLEY

“Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel (a vessel of election) unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel”

Act.9:15

PREFACE

REFERENCES USED IN THIS PUBLICATION

- **American Standard Version** (ASV or AV) is a version of the Bible that was released in 1901. It soon came to have other names, such as the American Revised Version, the American Standard Revision, the American Standard Revised Bible, and the American Standard Edition. By the time its copyright was renewed in 1929, it had come to be known by its present name, the American Standard Version.
- **Diaglott** is a two-language polyglot translation, of the New Testament by Benjamin Wilson, first published in 1864. It is an interlinear translation with the original Greek text and a word-for-word English translation in the left column, and a full English translation in the right column.
- **King James Version** (KJV) references are used throughout this publication unless otherwise noted.
- **Revised Version** (RV) (or English Revised Version) of the Bible is a late 19th-century British revision of the King James Version of 1611. It was the first and remains the only officially authorized and recognized revision of the King James Bible.
- **Wuest**: Kenneth Samuel Wuest (1893–1962) was a noted New Testament Greek (Κοινή) scholar of the mid-20th century...produced his own English translation of the New Testament (the Wuest Expanded Translation—abbreviated WET) based on Nestle's critical text.

Note: Definitions of references pulled from WikipediA, The Free Encyclopedia, January 2013.

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Why do we have so much to say about the Apostle Paul? And why do we emphasize his writings? If people do not understand the whole Truth, they may think that we idolize this man and his message. No, we do not idolize either one; but, since we know him and his distinctive mission and message, we are persuaded overwhelmingly to give him and his words the place and prominence that God has given them.

We consider Paul the **superlative figure**, with the **superlative message**, for a **superlative purpose**, on God's program. The word **superlative** means, literally, "a carrying over and beyond." In grammar we read of 3 degrees: The **POSITIVE**, the **COMPARATIVE**, and the **SUPERLATIVE**; or, the good, the better, and the best. Paul writes of "*that good, and acceptable, and perfect (superlative), will of God*" [Rom.12:2]. By his teaching, Paul carries us over, above, and beyond the best, the most, the richest, and the most glorious of any other Bible character who has brought to us Divine Truth. Let us consider several vital facts.

PAUL'S SUPERLATIVE CALL

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." [Act.9:15-16]

In our text, the Lord terms him "*a chosen vessel*," or a vessel of election. He was sovereignly arrested by the heavenly police on his way to Damascus to seize Christians and put them into prison because of their loyalty to Christ. He saw a blinding light above the light of the sun at noonday, and heard the voice of Jesus calling, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me*" [Act.9:4]. That sudden arrest produced such powerful conviction in his bosom, that afterward he acknowledged himself to be the chief of sinners. He had supposed that he was the most upright Jew, and was doing God service in wasting the church. On that journey, he received an invincible revelation of Jesus Christ. He says,

"I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jew's religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb. And called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" [Gal.1:13-16]

Superlative grace was bestowed upon him, by which he obtained a **superlative call** from Judaism into Christianity (compare Eph.3:3, 7—Marvelous Grace!). The Holy Spirit captured his zeal and used it to glorify Christ.

PAUL'S SUPERLATIVE ORDINATION AND APPOINTMENT

He introduced himself to the Galatian saints, as "*Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him (Jesus) from the dead)*" [Gal.1:1]. Writing to his son Timothy, he said, "*I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity*" [1Ti.2:7]. We must give full credence to his testimonies; for he wrote always in the fear of

God, and called Him to witness to his integrity (see 2Co.4:2). Luke's record of his Divine Appointment, confirms Paul's personal testimony. Five prophets and teachers, including Luke and Paul, were together in prayer. Luke says,

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia." [Act.13:2-4]

Observe that the other apostles, Peter, James, and John, were not consulted about Paul's ordination. They had no hand in it, although they were powerfully and sovereignly filled with the Spirit; and had definitely been chosen and ordained by the Lord near the beginning of His ministry on earth. Nevertheless, they accepted Paul's appointment and ministry as Divine, and confirmed it at a great conference in Jerusalem [Act.15]. The Apostle Peter also ratified the same, saying to his Hebrew friends, *"even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you (his Epistle to the Hebrews); as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things (end time things); in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction"* [2Pe.3:15-16]. Is that not some commendation and endorsement? Peter recognized that special wisdom was given to Paul which was manifested in all his epistles. Although Paul wrote some things hard to understand, yet Peter did not excuse anyone for abusing them.

PAUL HAD A SUPERLATIVE MESSAGE

He terms the body of truth, committed to his trust, *"my gospel"* at least 3 times, and *"our gospel"* once. He declares that, *"Our God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to MY GOSPEL"* [Rom.2:16]. And He will *"stablish you according to MY GOSPEL"* [Rom.16:25]. Only through a knowledge of his unique message can believers be fully established in the Truth; because he alone possessed and proclaimed the whole Truth. No minister can do his flock justice, except by ministering Paul's Gospel. He further affirms, *"That Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to MY GOSPEL"* [2Ti.2:8]. He was made a minister of Christ, *"to fulfil (or fill up, or complete) the word of God"* [Col.1:25]. That is, whatever else had been written, the canon of Scripture could not have been complete without his teaching. And, to the extent that the preachers withhold his doctrine from The Church and the world, they rob mankind of what Christ has purchased for them, and they deplete the body of Christ, The Church.

The uniqueness of Paul's gospel is proven further, by the nature and compass thereof. It is not only the **gospel of grace**, but also the **gospel of the glory**. The phrase *"glorious gospel,"* in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 1 Timothy 1:11, should read, *"gospel of the glory"* because the consummation and culmination of God's plan for The Church (which is the body of Christ) will be in the gloryland. Likewise,

- Romans 8:21 should read, *"liberty of the glory"*,
- Philippians 3:21 *"the body of His glory"*,
- Colossians 1:11 *"the might of His glory"*, and

- Titus 2:13 “*the appearing of the glory.*”

These are different phases of the **gospel of the glory**. Reader, have you ever heard anyone speak on the gospel of the glory? Or have you read anything about it? If not, you have missed an essential part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ask your pastor why he does not preach on the gospel of the glory, then write me his answer. Remember, this statement, “*the gospel of the glory*,” is found only in Paul’s epistles. The superlativeness of Brother Paul’s doctrine grows on our hands, as we proceed to study other vital points of superiority.

THE SUPERLATIVE PURPOSE OF PAUL’S MESSAGE

This purpose is expressed in Ephesians 3:1-7 (Revised Version):

*“For this cause (or grace) I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles—if so be that ye have heard of the dispensation (stewardship) of that grace of God which was given me to youward; how that by revelation was made known unto me **THE MYSTERY**, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when you read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men (namely, Israel), as it hath now been revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit to wit, that the Gentiles are fellowheirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel, whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of His power.”*

It was God’s sovereign purpose that a people should be taken out from the Gentiles for the name of Jesus Christ [Act.15:14]. This coming company, Jesus had before termed **My Church** (congregation), in distinction from the house of Israel, was in fulfillment of Matthew 16:18: “*Upon this rock I will build **MY CHURCH**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*” This purpose has been in process of fulfillment during this present age which will end soon.

The consummation of this purpose is expressed in Ephesians 2:6-7:

“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come (the millennial and eternal ages) He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

The Church, as a whole, will then be on a grand display in glory as the mystical Body of Christ; and the full overcomers in The Church will be on display as the royal Bride of Christ. The Bridal Company will constitute the assembly glorious, “*Not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but...holy and without blemish*” [Eph.5:27]. Jesus Christ will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords over heaven and earth, and His Bride will reign with Him. That will be the crowning day, the culmination of the **gospel of the glory**. Reader, can you afford to miss it?

PAUL'S GOSPEL GIVES CHRIST SUPERLATIVE HONOR

"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." [Eph.1:22-23]

Scripture not only recognizes Him as our Redeemer and Savior; but it announces Him to be *"the Head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."* In Colossians 1:16-20 the Apostle Paul declares that *"all things were created by him (Jesus Christ), and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (hold together)."*

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence (first place). For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." [Col.1:18-20]

*"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is **LORD**, to the glory of God the Father." [Phi.2:9-11]*

In theory, most Christians admit the above facts; but, in practical everyday life and in church life, they ignore His Lordship. They rush stubbornly past the first official announcement by Peter of His high place.

*"Therefore let all the house of Israel (and all Christendom also) know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both **LORD** and **CHRIST**." [Act.2:36]*

Men have put themselves and others up as lords over Christ's Body. Many heads have made many sects. Many unyielding minds have made many laws and bylaws, contrary to the plainly written law of **LOVE ONE ANOTHER**. If Christ had always been held as the only rightful Head and Lord of His people, divisions would never have come. Study 1 Corinthians 1:12-13 and 3:3-5.

"Let no man beguile (rob) you of your reward (prize) in a voluntary (make-believe) humility and worshipping of angels (messengers, preachers—they were not lords), intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head (who is Christ)." [Col.2:18-19a]

No marvel then that most Christian gatherings are lifeless, powerless, shriveled, and dwindling. **DEATH IN THE POT** is the inevitable verdict; and death always stinks.

PAUL'S MESSAGE GIVES US THE SUPERLATIVE PLACE WITH CHRIST

Salvation from sin, healing of the physical body, and the anointing with the Holy Spirit, seem to be the climax of most people's thoughts and experiences. They

never see beyond this triangle; hence, never aim to go beyond it. And more—their conception of salvation falls far short of Scriptural teaching. The simplicity of the way of salvation staggers them. Salvation by grace through faith is too easy. They try to help the Surgeon cut away the stinking cancer and cure the leprosy of sin. The beauty, power, fullness, certainty, and assurance of salvation bewilder and alarm them. They regard “*eternal*” or “*everlasting life*” a ghost to be shunned, a doctrine to be fought, a nightmare to be dreaded. They know nothing of growing in grace, because their clabbery food affords no nourishment. Most doctrines that they read and hear are men’s windy words. Even if they fed on Peter’s “*sincere milk of the word*” [1Pe.2:2], they would make some progress.

The famine of “*the word of the Lord*” [Amo.8:11] among us is deplorable. Saints are famishing, fainting, starving, groping, fussing, weeping, wondering what to do. Reader, we invite you into God’s clover field of blooming plenty. Come over into the wheat field and barley patch of boundless grace, where there is bread to spare. In Paul’s storehouse of unlimited Truth, you will never find a shortage of supplies; instead, “*my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*” [Phi.4:19]. That is glorious tested truth. Try it out.

God’s salvation is absolutely free; it was paid for by the blood of Christ. It is complete; for Jesus cried, “*IT IS FINISHED.*”

- It is full and sufficient, for it is written, “*He will abundantly pardon*” [Isa.55:7].
- It is safe and sure; for “*salvation is of the Lord*” [Jon.2:9].
- It is everlasting or eternal because Jesus said, “*He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life*” [Joh.6:47].

You cannot lose it: for it is a new birth, a new creation, a translation, an implantation, an impartation, a regeneration. You are **in Christ**. Christ is **in you**. God’s salvation is not an imitation, a reformation, a confirmation, an education, nor a civilization. We who are saved are absolutely...

- **a new creation, in Christ,**
- in a new world—the realm of grace,
- under a new dominion—the kingdom of God,
- breathing a new atmosphere—faith, and
- in an entirely new location—“*the heavenlies in Christ*” [Eph.1:3; 2:6].

Once you get these invincible seed thoughts and facts in your mind, you will never again indulge in the frivolous twaddle of being lost, or losing your salvation. **Never!** The cry about being saved today and lost tomorrow is squarely against Paul’s gospel. It is an insult against Christ’s finished and perfected redemption, against the love and goodness of our heavenly Father; and against the tender, sleepless watchcare of our heavenly Dove, the Holy Spirit. Such teaching revels in cold, hard negatives, steeped in legality.

- God forbid that we grace preachers should belittle our gospel in any measure.
- God forbid that we should give the people anything short of the best and richest that the cross has purchased, that the promises offer, and that the Holy Spirit waits to bestow.
- God forbid that we should shun declaring unto all men the whole counsel of God, whether they hear or forbear.

Are we right? Then, let us forge fearlessly ahead. Have we the Truth? Then let us blaze it boldly everywhere. Have we received the Holy Spirit? Then let us yield our hearts and brains to His unlimited power and wisdom. If we hold our peace, the stones (some other “*living stones*”) will publish the glad tidings; for so mightily must grow the Word of the Lord, the sustaining and upbuilding Word of Divine Grace, and it will **Prevail** [Act.19:20]. Let us possess the land, for “*we are well able to overcome*” [Num.13:30], by His unbounded grace. Glory!

James speaks of the perfect law of liberty; but Paul tells us what it is, even the law of love which “*worketh no ill to his neighbor*” [Rom.13:10]. James exhorts us to walk uprightly; but Paul teaches us how to do it. The other apostles may write of the horribleness of sin; but Paul alone shows us the way of victory over it. He describes our unbounded wealth in Christ. He gives us a seat in the heavenlies in Christ. He instructs us how to run so as to win the Prize in the Christian race. He shows us that **Christ** is the **Prize** [Phi.3:14]. Peter may introduce us into the primer class of milk diet; but Paul takes us step by step through the different grades, then graduates us, and grants us a diploma—the sublime honor of reigning with Christ in glory in “*His heavenly kingdom*” [2Ti.4:18].

PAUL DIFFERENTIATES BETWEEN KINGDOM AND CHURCH TRUTH

Peter’s ministry was to the Jews; but Paul’s was chiefly to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, he first sought to give the Gospel to his own people (the Jews), then to the nations (Gentiles). But who could have written a better document to the Hebrews than Paul’s letter? Of course he wrote it (see Heb.10:34, 13:23; 2Pe.3:15). The 12 apostles had a message concerning the Kingdom of God. John’s revelation of Jesus Christ is an exception, comprising much Church truth in connection with the consummation. We never would have understood fully, God’s dealings with Israel, but for Paul’s teaching. Observe the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters of Romans—a symposium of Kingdom Truth:

- Romans 9 explains about Israel’s past.
- Romans 10 treats of God’s present dealings with Israel.
- Romans 11 outlines Israel’s future, and their relation to the Gentiles.

The Old Testament writings are wonderfully illuminated by Paul’s unique epistles.

The power of God was demonstrated at Pentecost; but what would we know of the diversities of the gifts in The Church, but for Paul’s letter to the Corinthians? He alone wrote of the 7 mysteries, some of which are:

1. “*the mystery of godliness*” [1Ti.3:16];
2. “*the mystery of iniquity*” [2Th.2:7];
3. the great mystery [Eph.3:3-5];
4. the mystery of translation [1Co.15:51], etc.

We would not understand about the 4 living creatures of Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4 and 5 and the 24 elders. Indeed, how should we understand the last book of the Bible? Paul’s letters are a complete commentary on the whole Bible, because they fill up (complete) the Word of God. They perfect the canon of Divine Truth.

PAUL IS OUR SUPERLATIVE EXAMPLE

At the very beginning of his ministry, “*many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas*” [Act.13:43]. Although the order of those 2 men at first was “*Barnabas and Saul*”; yet quite soon, the latter was to the front, because God had sovereignly commissioned him and was unfolding to him an entirely new line of Truth. Paul became the prominent spokesman. In Lystra the people “*called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker*” [Act.14:12]. Thenceforth, he became the chief speaker and leading writer, under the New Covenant. He became the chief sufferer also; therefore, we read Paul’s own repeated entreaty: “*And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead*” [Act.14:19].

“Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.” [1Co.4:16]

He considered those Corinthian saints his spiritual children; hence, showed a father’s concern for them. Again he said,

“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” [1Co.11:1]

In the Revised Version the word for “*followers*,” in every case, is translated “*imitators*.” He knew that he was walking after the Spirit, seeking only God’s highest glory and the people’s greatest good. He knew of no better pattern of scriptural conduct and teaching; therefore, he was bold to exhort the people to walk in his steps.

He commended the devoted Thessalonians, saying, “*And ye became followers (imitators) of us, and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost*” [1Th.1:6]. As a wholesome result, they became “*ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia*” [1Th.1:6-7]. Philippians 3:17-18 is emphatic,

“Brethren, be followers together (joint-imitators) of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.”

Either Paul was a high-hatted egotist and a bombastic blowgun; or he was a most humble, Spirit-guided, and Divinely-Appointed Apostle. Else, how could he insist that his children walk in his steps, and in no others? His instructions

to Timothy are alike weighty and practical. With the gallows staring him in the face and eternity in view, he says,

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” [2Ti.1:13]

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” [2Ti.2:2]

“Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds.” [2Ti.2:7-9]

Study also the following:

“But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.” [2Ti.3:10-11]

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” [2Ti.3:14]

Does it not become us to acquaint ourselves with Paul’s career and writings? Can we esteem his epistles too highly? Does any New Testament figure, except our Lord Jesus, excel him in any particular? What improvement can anyone make in his teaching or walk? Shall we not conclude that God made him the superlative character for this age?

Paul’s gospel shows us...

- who we are—“saints” (holy ones);
- where we are—“in Christ”;
- our provisional location—seated “in the heavenlies”;
- our ultimate destiny—“His heavenly kingdom”; and
- our exceedingly great reward—reign with Christ.

Paul’s gospel holds high before us the glittering “*crown of glory*” [1Pe.5:4] and fills us with faith, courage, and strength to run with patience until we win the **Prize**, even Jesus, “*Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame*” [Heb.12:2].

Our ringing slogan is, “*The riches of the glory of this mystery...Christ in you, the hope of glory*” [Col.1:27].

HALLELUJAH!

WHAT A **Savior! WHAT A **life!** WHAT A **hope!****

IMMANUEL'S LAND

O, I AM MY BELOVED'S
AND MY BELOVED'S MINE;
HE BRINGS A POOR VILE SINNER
INTO HIS "HOUSE OF WINE."
I STAND UPON HIS MERIT;
I KNOW NO OTHER STAND,
NOT E'EN WHERE GLORY DWELLETH
IN IMMANUEL'S LAND.

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