

No one, other than the Son of God made flesh, has been used by the hand of God to do more for the Christian church than the apostle Paul. The apostle was human, sinful, and had strengths and weaknesses like anyone of us sinful creatures, but God raised up in Paul a mighty man. Paul was valiant for the truth, valiant for the gathering of the church, valiant for the glory of Christ. One Reformed man rightly stated that “the apostle Paul was the most influential Christian that ever lived.... In his epistles (by inspiration) he gave the Christian church the theology which has dominated all of its thought forms to this day, in both its Christology and its soteriology, in both its ecclesiology and eschatology. He was a man of God in the truest sense—perhaps the most gifted, the most loyal, the most heroic, certainly the hardest working man that Christ ever sent forth to labor for him in the whitened harvest.”¹ All by sovereign grace.

If you pay attention when you read the epistles and the book of Acts, you will discover that Paul was a unique man—brilliant, pious, sincere, devoted, driven, passionate, and empathetic. He was a man by virtue of his upbringing able to live in two worlds, the Jewish and the Gentile, for the good of the church, But if one day in glory you ask the apostle to describe himself more than likely he will only say one thing, the same thing he already said about himself in Romans 1:1, “You want to know who I am? I am Paul, a servant of Christ.”

When we introduce ourselves to people, the first things we talk about reveal how we identify ourselves. We can therefore learn much about how the apostle Paul identifies himself when he introduces himself to the Roman Christians for the first time in Romans 1:1: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.” Paul tells us, this is centrally how I understand myself, and this is centrally what I want you to know about me: I am a servant of Jesus Christ.

¹ Reymond, Robert. *Paul, Missionary Theologian*. N.p.: Mentor, 2003. 17,24. Print.

The word for servant is actually stronger than servant; it is the word for slave in the New Testament. Paul says the most fundamental reality about me is that I am a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. To be slave of another means two things. First, it means that you do not have rights over yourself any longer. Second, it means that ultimately you are not in control of your own life any longer. You have a mind and you have a will, but your mind is conformed to the mind of the master, and your will actively coincides with the will of the master. A slave is not just one who serves and then goes home, but one who is completely owned by the master, body mind and soul, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The master for the apostle is Jesus Christ. At the heart of Paul's identity is the fact that he is a man who no longer lives for himself, but lives for the master, Jesus Christ the Lord.

By saying, "I am Paul, slave of Christ," the apostle could have just as easily said, "I am Paul, Christian." For slave of Jesus Christ is the very definition of any true Christian. According to Scripture it is not Paul alone who is a slave of Christ, or apostles, or office bearers alone, but all believers are to be identified this way. In Revelation 1:1, where John is speaking to the whole church—office bearers, laymen, young people, children, old members—the text says, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ...to shew unto his servants (the same word, his slaves) things which must shortly come to pass." The church is made up of slaves of Christ.

This must lie at the center of the existence of the child of God—you young people—already now. I am his property. He is my master. Not later when I get married and have my first child, but now, right now. At the center of who I am is not what school I go to, or where I am from, or where I have been, or how good I am at sports, or what kind of instrument I play, or how many people I know or don't know, or how I look or don't look, or how much I weigh or don't weigh, or who my parents are or are not, or where I work or don't work, how much money

my family has, or how much money my family does not have. The child of God must be able to say, if you strip all those things away from me, I still am who I am; you have not destroyed me, you have not shaken me to my core, for at the heart, the center of who I am is a slave of Jesus Christ, a being owned by the master, and willingly so.

As you can well imagine, if that is your identity, it will affect your life, and the more you grow in this central identity, the more that identity will show in your life. It showed itself in the apostle's life. I point out three ways.

First, that Paul was a slave to Christ showed itself in his mind, in that the substance of what he believed and preached was what Christ taught him to believe and preach. Paul was taught by Jesus Christ himself in Arabia and submitted himself to that teaching all his days. Our minds and hearts too are surrendered to the mind of the Lord Jesus. When they are, we see the beauty of what he teaches and would not want to compromise that truth for anything in all the world.

Second, Paul honors his master by speaking the truth of his master to others. It is astounding if you watch him carefully. You see him in prison in Phillippi, and yet speaking about the things of God and singing praises to God, which was the means God used to convert the Philippian jailor. You see Him before Agrippa where he is on trial, using the opportunity to speak to call Agrippa to believe in Christ. It didn't matter to him what people thought. It didn't matter how people looked at him. The apostle was a slave of Christ; that stood at the center of his identity, and he would speak of Christ at every opportunity.

We must be willing to speak of him too, brothers and sisters.

Even if by doing so it means suffering for our master. That is the final manifestation of the apostle's slavery to Christ that I highlight. Paul was so identified by his master's rule over

him that he was willing to suffer for his Lord. The apostle tells us of his suffering for Christ in 2 Corinthians 11:24–33, which you may read for yourself. To be a slave of Christ will mean suffering for us today too. The apostle in 2 Timothy 3:12, after recounting some of his sufferings, looks ahead to the future church and turns his eye upon you young people and says, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” You too.

That is always true in every age, but it increases in expression in various ages and the closer we get to the end. You young people must know that greater suffering is coming for us in these United States. One would have to be blind to not see the storm clouds of persecution rolling in. I don’t mean to scare you, but you must ask yourself, and I myself, Am I willing to suffer for my master? Give up if necessary the nice home or the boat and the weekends by the lake, and the closets full of clothes and the shopping and the good food? Am I willing to have church without the nice buildings or the church picnic at the nice park? It will take time yet, but it’s coming, it’s coming. And it will expose who is a slave of Christ and who is not. For a slave of Christ is not identified ultimately by those things, and will not compromise his devotion to the master when those things are stripped away.

The master has suffered and given his life for our ransom. We must be willing to suffer for his name’s sake. One has to ask himself, What would cause Paul so willingly to give himself up to all of this as slave of Christ? The answer is that his master is the Christ who redeemed his life from destruction by sovereign, irresistible grace. Paul was headed for the pit of hell. In natural arrogance he had viewed himself as righteous, clothed with his own good works. When God opened the eyes of Paul’s heart, he saw not righteousness in himself, but sin. There was covetousness of other rabbis in him, self-love, pride, envy, and every manner of putrid motivation before God. Only after this did Jesus and his death on the cross start to make sense

to him. Jesus did not die because God was rejecting Jesus personally, but he died because God was rejecting him for the sins of his people upon him. Then by the Spirit Paul made the next step: “died for my sins.” And then the next step: “Why, out of all the people in the world, did he choose me?”

Paul began to realize he was a slave already before God gave him faith in Christ, a slave to sin. As owned as Paul was by him now, so owned was he by sin before. In Romans 6:6 the apostle uses the same word, “slave,” to describe himself and us when he says that before Christ’s work in us we served sin—we served sin as *slaves* is the meaning of the original Greek.

The apostle understands, young people, that the options are not slave or not slave. The options are slave to sin and Satan and destruction and hell, or slave to Christ and life and truth and joy. The apostle understands that the only freedom from master sin is to be liberated as slave to master Christ. Such a thing is only possible by sovereign grace. A slave has no means to free himself, but must be freed by another. It is only this gospel of pure, undeserved, and sovereign grace—you understand, don’t you, young people? — that could possibly produce a Paul who loved the Lord unto the death.

Young people, do you love the Lord Jesus? You know him, I know you do; you’ve been taught him. Do you love him? He is a real person, and his gospel is a real gospel. Paul met him on the road to Damascus. You realize that he walked, this earth two thousand years ago, and that he was crucified on a cross outside the northwest corner of Jerusalem (you can go there if you’d like), that he rose out of a tomb in heavenly life, life from the next age beyond the chasm of death and the curse. You realize that in the same sky you are living under, the one you know, he will return with all the holy angels with him, filling it with the brightness of his glory. And you realize that when this person comes back, he’s coming back for you.

You realize that everything you are learning in catechism is not just nice, logical arguments that make sense, though it all is logical and makes sense, for God is a God of logic. You realize all of your instruction acts as spokes on a wheel to lead you to the center where stands a real person, the second person of the Trinity robed with your flesh, come to your world to redeem you, to take you to himself, and to bring you out one day and all creation with you. All your instruction is that you might see him by faith as Paul saw him by sight.

As important as money is, money did not become incarnate for your soul. As important as sports are, sports did not die upon a cross for you. As important as sexual relations are as a gift of God used properly, it was not sexual relations that rose again from the grave victorious. It was Christ. All other would-be masters are not worthy of your willing service. He alone is worthy of complete surrender.

I was talking to a young woman in the seat next to me on the plane last time we had to fly for Classis West. She had just gotten out of rehab for the third time for heroin addiction and was on her way back home. As it ended up, the Lord gave the opportunity to open my Bible and explain to her for forty minutes the gospel of Christ. She was very interested and asked a lot of questions...until I got to the part where I said when one comes to faith in Christ, Christ becomes not only savior but master, and part of salvation is that he rules over our lives for our good. At that point, she interrupted me and asked, "Wait a minute. Does that mean I have to stop sleeping around?" A little bit taken aback I responded, "yes, yes it does." With that she was done. Willingly bound to sin, the prospect of being slave of Christ sounded horrific.

Your maturity, young people, is that you more and more look sin in the eye and say by sovereign grace the exact opposite of what that young woman said. You say, "There is only hell and destruction with your sin. And there is freedom in slavery to my Christ. By grace alone I

Read: Romans 1:1
Text: Romans 1:1

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Paul: Servant of Jesus Christ

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don't want sin. I am free, slave to him. And since I do nothing to earn the master's work of redemption, then all that is left is for me is to enjoy living free with him and unto him, unashamed of the one who has done everything for me."