

Introduction *The Foremost of Sinners*

The importance of the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul is hard to overstate. After meeting the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, over the course of the next three decades Paul would journey more than seven thousand miles—during an age of travel by wind and muscle power—to hold forth the Word of God.

He would establish and minister to God's people in Damascus, in his hometown of Tarsus, in Antioch of Syria, at Jerusalem, into Cyprus, over all Asia Minor, across the Aegean throughout Macedonia and Greece, and all the way to Rome with plans to continue on into Spain.

Of the twenty-seven books in the so-called New Testament,¹ Paul wrote fourteen, more than half. He wrote Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Hebrews.

But the importance of Paul's life and ministry is far greater than can be gauged by merely counting books or tallying miles. It is when we "open the Book" and take a look at what God has to say in His Word that we discover a significance that is uniquely Paul's own.

I Timothy 1:12-16

I [the Apostle Paul] thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.

And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief [*protos*, the foremost].

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first [*protos*, the foremost] Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern [*hupotuposis*] to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

If you are among the number who think that Paul wrote this, and other verses like it, to underhandedly aggrandize himself while appearing to be humble, you need to read no further. You are wasting your time on this book. This study is not intended for critics of the Word of God—be they high or low—nor for armchair generals, argumentative infidels or self-absorbed nincompoops. It is intended for the called-out of God who want to follow the pattern shown forth by Jesus Christ himself in the Apostle Paul.

It is a remarkable fact in God's Word—researched by Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille and presented in Chapter 16 of *The Bible Tells Me So*, "When Judas Hanged Himself"—that Judas Iscariot was not only still alive as of Acts Chapter 1, he was present with the other apostles just before Christ's ascension.

Jesus Christ, on that occasion, promised in Verse 5 that "ye [the twelve apostles] shall be baptized with holy spirit not many days hence," addressing the promise to Judas along with the rest. Judas Iscariot—without the plea of ignorance Saul of Tarsus would have—nevertheless rejected the "exceeding abundant" grace of our Lord.

After Judas' suicide, no one rose up to demonstrate greater enmity against God and His Son than this Saul of Tarsus. A self-admitted blasphemer and persecutor, after abetting the murder of God's man Stephen—carried out by the self-same rulers who had suborned Judas in their conspiracy to murder the Lord Jesus Christ—Saul would lead, in Jerusalem, the first persecution in history against the church of God. Then, on his own initiative, he would take on the task of rooting out Christ's followers beyond Jerusalem.

When it came to sinners Saul became "the foremost." Yet the Word of God declares that, in this same Paul, Jesus Christ himself would show forth a pattern of longsuffering that applies to every individual who will believe on the Lord to life everlasting.

It is this pattern, represented by the Apostle Paul's life and ministry, that we will look at in the ensuing chapters.

The word "pattern" in I Timothy 1:16 is the Greek word *hupotuposis*. It is made up of the prepositional prefix *hupo*, which means "under," and the root *tupos*, which means "a mark," "an impression," "a form," "a pattern." *Hupotuposis* is used only one other place in the Greek New Testament.

II Timothy 1:13

Hold fast the form [*hupotuposis*] of sound words, which thou hast heard of me [the Apostle Paul], in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

The English word "form" here is an interesting translation of *hupotuposis*. In construction work when pouring a cast-in-place foundation for a building, once the blueprints are drawn up and a hole is dug out, the first things built are the wooden forms. These forms then determine the shape and structure of both the concrete foundation and the building to be built on top of it.

So it is with the "sound words" which were revealed to and made known by the Apostle Paul. They set the shape and structure of the more abundant life that God has made available in Christ Jesus.²

To build that life as workers together with God in Christ,³ we must "hold fast the form," the shape, the structural pattern of those "sound words" as shown forth by Jesus Christ himself in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul.

In construction work, poorly-drawn blueprints—or inattention well-drawn ones—produces faulty forms, which in turn produce a faulty foundation, which in turn produces a faulty building. If you have ever navigated a building that has a foundation which has shifted, one of the more obvious consequences you may have noticed is that doors which ought to open are stuck shut, and doors which ought to shut are stuck open.