

# St. Paul: The Model Servant and Witness to Christ

Michael Barber, Ph.D. / John Paul the Great Catholic University © 2012

[www.TheSacredPage.com](http://www.TheSacredPage.com) / [www.JPCatholic.com](http://www.JPCatholic.com) / [www.SaintJoe.com](http://www.SaintJoe.com)

## Year of St. Paul

“Dear brothers and sisters, as in early times, today too *Christ needs apostles ready to sacrifice themselves*. He needs witnesses and martyrs like St Paul. Paul, a former violent persecutor of Christians, when he fell to the ground dazzled by the divine light on the road to Damascus, did not hesitate to change sides to the Crucified One and followed him without second thoughts. He lived and worked for Christ, for him he suffered and died. *How timely his example is today!*”—Pope Benedict, July 28, 2007

## St. Paul’s Importance

1. 13 of the 27 NT books attributed to him
2. More responsible than almost anyone else for the spread of Christianity throughout the world
3. Importance and brilliance of St. Paul’s letters recognized early on  
And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to *the wisdom given him*,<sup>16</sup> speaking of this as he does in all his letters. *There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.* (2 Peter 3:15–16)
4. Taught by example: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1)

## 1. Prayerful Preparation Before Evangelization

1. Prayer: Paul spent three years preparing for his ministry  
But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace,<sup>16</sup> was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, *I did not confer with flesh and blood*,<sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but *I went away into Arabia*; and again I returned to Damascus.<sup>18</sup> Then *after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas*, and remained with him fifteen days. (Galatians 1:15–19)
2. True apostle: spent three years with Christ!
3. Trusting in Christ’s strength, not his own!  
<sup>7</sup> And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated.<sup>8</sup> Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me;<sup>9</sup> but he said to me, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.<sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; *for when I am weak, then I am strong.* (2 Corinthians 12:1–10)

## 2. Working in Union with the Church and Apostolic Authority

<sup>18</sup> Then after three years *I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days.*<sup>19</sup> But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother. . . .<sup>1</sup> Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.<sup>2</sup> I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, *lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain.* . . .<sup>7</sup> . . . when they saw that *I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised*<sup>8</sup> (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles),<sup>9</sup> and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, *gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship*, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised;<sup>10</sup> only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do. (Galatians 1:18–24; 2:1–2, 6–10)

### 3. Evangelizing in the Workplace

And he found a Jew name Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla. . . and he went to see them; and *because he was of the same trade he worked, for by trade they were tentmakers*. And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:1–3)

<sup>5</sup> For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; <sup>6</sup> *nor did we seek glory from men*, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. <sup>7</sup> *But we were gentle among you*, like a nurse taking care of her children. <sup>8</sup> So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. <sup>9</sup> For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; *we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God.* (1 Thessalonians 2:5–9)

### 4. Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so *be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*” (Matthew 10:16).

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “*Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial.*” <sup>7</sup> And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. <sup>9</sup> Then a great clamor arose; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party stood up and contended, “*We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?*” <sup>10</sup> And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, *commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks.* (Acts 23:6–10)

### 5. Knowing the Culture and Finding the Good in It

<sup>22</sup> So Paul, standing in the middle of the Are-opagus, said: “Men of Athens, *I perceive that in every way you are very religious.*” <sup>23</sup> For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘*To an unknown god.*’ *What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.* <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, <sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, <sup>28</sup> for ‘*In him we live and move and have our being*’; as even some of your poets have said, ‘*For we are indeed his offspring.*’ (Acts 17:22–28).

“Let us begin with Zeus. Never, O men, let us leave him unmentioned.  
All the ways are full of Zeus, and all the market-places of human beings.  
The sea is full of him; so are the harbors. In every way we have all to do with Zeus,  
*for we are truly his offspring.*” (Aratus, *Phainomena*, 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.)

“They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—  
The *Cretans*, *always liars*, evil beasts, idle bellies!—  
But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest for ever  
*For in thee we live and move and have our being.*” (attributed to Epimenides, 6<sup>th</sup> B.C.)<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The quatrain is preserved by the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D. Syriac writer, Isho‘dad (ed. M.D. Gibson, *Horae Semiticae*, X [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913], 40. For further discussion see F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 339.

“This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. . . .<sup>12</sup> One of themselves, *a prophet of their own*,<sup>2</sup> said, ‘*Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.*’<sup>13</sup> This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith. . . .” (Titus 1:12–13).

“And when [Epimenides] was recognized he was considered by the Greeks as a person especially beloved by the Gods, on which account when the Athenians were afflicted by a plague, and the priestess at Delphi enjoined them to purify their city; they sent a ship and Nicias the son of Niceratus to Crete, to invite Epimenides to Athens; and he, coming there in the forty-sixth Olympiad, purified the city and eradicated the plague for that time; he took some black sheep and some white ones and led them up to the Areopagus, and from thence he let them go wherever they chose, having ordered the attendants to follow them, and *wherever any one of them lay down they were to sacrifice him to the God who was the patron of the spot*, and so the evil was stayed; and owing to this one may even now find in the different boroughs of the *Athenians altars without names*, which are a sort of memorial of the propitiation of the Gods that then took place.” (Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 1.110, 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. A.D.)

## 6. Mortification

But I say, *walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.*<sup>17</sup> For *the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh*; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. (Galatians 5:16–17)

Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.<sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.<sup>26</sup> Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air;<sup>27</sup> but *I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.* (1 Corinthians 9:24–27)

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”<sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13:2–3).

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and *in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church*,<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. Persecuted. (Colossians 1:24–26)

## 7. Eucharistic Ministry

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all *under the cloud*, and all passed through the sea,<sup>2</sup> and all were *baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*,<sup>3</sup> and all *ate the same supernatural food*<sup>4</sup> and all *drank the same supernatural drink*. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and *the Rock was Christ*.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.<sup>6</sup> Now *these things are warnings for us*, not to desire evil as they did. (1 Corinthians 10:1–6)

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,<sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”<sup>25</sup> In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

---

<sup>2</sup> Epimenides’ reputation as a prophet is mentioned by both Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1418A) and Cicero (*Div.* 1.18.34). Plutarch calls him a “friend of God and a wise man” (*Sol.* 12).

<sup>27</sup>Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup>*Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* <sup>29</sup>For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body *eats and drinks judgment upon himself.* <sup>30</sup>*That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.* (1 Corinthians 11:23–30)

## 8. Humility

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. <sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart” [Isa 29:14]. <sup>20</sup>Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.* <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>*For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

<sup>26</sup>For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; <sup>27</sup>but *God chose what is foolish* in the world to shame the wise, *God chose what is weak* in the world to shame the strong, <sup>28</sup>*God chose what is low and despised* in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>*so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.* <sup>30</sup>He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; <sup>31</sup>therefore, as it is written, “*Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord*” [Jer 9:24].