

## **SUMMARY TO THE WRITINGS OF ST. PAUL**

**Who is St. Paul?** He was born in Tarsus, belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, studied the Law under the feet of Jewish scholar Gamaliel. He started his life as a radical Jewish Pharisee to destroy the Christians as he considered them a great threat to Judaism and their beliefs and he fiercely persecuted the Christians going door to door. While he was going on the way to Damascus, he encountered the Risen Christ and that event became a conversion moment in his life and afterwards, he was not anymore the persecutor of Christians instead a great instrument of Jesus and his gospel message to the Jews and the Greeks and for that he made three missionary journeys establishing churches, local leadership and constantly having a follow up with churches through visit and letters. No person apart from Jesus himself shaped the history of Christianity like St. Paul.

**St. Paul's Justification by faith** is a very core faith of Christianity. It has been biblically and theologically established by St. Paul in his writings especially in the letters of Romans and Galatians. He teaches very strongly and convincingly that we are justified (declared righteous) at the moment of our salvation by our faith in Jesus Christ. Only Faith in Jesus gives us strength, courage, stability, hope and true purpose in life. Only faith in Jesus makes us bear fruits in life.

**The Mystery of the Cross according to Paul:** St. Paul was profoundly stuck by the reality of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Cross of Jesus for St. Paul is the true gospel message as the death of Jesus on the cross justifies, saves, delivers, redeems and reconciles us to God. The Cross is the symbol of Jesus' victory over death. By faith in Jesus, we are called to be crucified with Christ.

**What is the meaning of the Church?** St. Paul established many churches which were growing, blooming, blossoming in the early Christianity. He calls Church as the bride of Christ and we are his bridegroom. He calls the Church as the body of Christ and we are the members of his body. In the body of Christ, there are many members and every member should be united to Christ, as our head and body for our salvation. St. Paul teaches in the books of Romans, Ephesians and 1 Corinthians that every member has a spiritual gift, given by the Holy Spirit on the day of our baptism and later on through our human efforts and that spiritual gift should be used for the common good of the Church. Through Prayer, prayerful reading of the Bible, discernment of the Holy Spirit, guidance by the spiritual directors and ministers, we can identify our spiritual gifts.

**Who is a Christian?** A Christian is one who trusts in Jesus as his/her personal savior and follow Him in every area of life having a personal relationship with Jesus through prayer, word of God, worship in the community and fellowship with the humanity in the name of Jesus. St. Paul in his letters lists out Christian behaviors such as Spiritual unity with others, sincere love for others, honoring others, being hospitable, dealing kindly with unbelievers, having true freedom, relationship between husband and wife, caring for family members, knowing the difference between love of money and need of money and place of prayer in families with gratitude and obedience to those who are in authority.

**St. Paul as an apostle of the Gentiles:** Like any apostle, St. Paul was called to be an apostle primarily of the chosen people of Israel. When he encountered rejection and hatred for the gospel message from the Jews, he shifted his focus from the rebellious Jews to the most willing gentiles. When he saw his labor bearing abundant fruits in the Gentiles soil, he was convinced

of his call to be ministering to the Gentiles by calling himself an apostle of the Gentiles. This is an invitation for the church to reach out people of other faiths with open mindedness allowing the holy spirit to activate our life in the gospel values and making us the visible presence of Jesus and means of God's salvation through our sincere efforts.

**Women in the writings of St. Paul to the Corinthians:** This is one theme which has been on heated discussions by the progressives and feminists who find difficult to accept the tone of St. Paul on the presence and role of women in common worship (keep silent) and families (they should be submissive to their husbands). Paul is not undermining the dignity of women. He is only reflecting the biblical notion of men as spiritual authorities in families and the society in the ancient world thus men have to teach women and women have to learn from men. Paul justifies the stand in the particular Corinthian community which has certain irregularity in their common worship. He was only bringing some order in the worshipping assembly. Paul was not against women. He had many women leaders in local communities. St. Paul's words have to be understood in his historical context and interpreted in our historical context having always the mind of God for all his children who are created in His own image and likeness. God's order is that the husband is the head of the wife as God is the head of Christ. There is no inequality and inferiority implied.

**What is the day of the Lord according to St. Paul?** Paul uses the figure of a thief to emphasize the unexpectedness of the second coming, thus warning us his readers to be ready for its occurring at any time (1 Thes 4:15). If we heed his words, then it would not come as a surprise to them. St. Paul calls the second coming of Jesus as a blessed hope. If we are faithful to God, we will receive a crown of righteousness without fear. Who knows the day of the Lord? No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in Heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Mt 24:36). It is God the Father's secret to be revealed when he wills. No one can predict by Scripture or Science the exact day of Jesus' return. In view of this fact, Christ tells us to be vigilant. In Matt 24: 42 "Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come". This is the same point illustrated by Paul in his letters.

**How did St. Paul die as a martyr?** Tradition says that he was beheaded during the reign of the Emperor Nero between 64 and 68 A.D. The historical writings of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Tertullian attest to the fact that he was beheaded. Not only did St. Paul lay down his life, but he also suffered: Flogging, Beating with rods, Stoning, Imprisonment, Shipwrecks, Hunger, Cold and Sleeplessness. He was willing to suffer because he knew that in Jesus was the most important message ever delivered to mankind: the offer of eternal life and forgiveness of sins by God himself. Paul looked at a perishing world and knew that he had the message that was able to save those who believed it. He was willing to suffer, to give himself up to death, if only Jesus Christ might be proclaimed. But no matter how he met his death, Paul's life laid a crucial foundation for the Christian faith. St. Paul's life, teachings and martyrdom have been always an incentive for the reinforcement of the Christian identity of each one of us and for the rejuvenation of the entire church. God captured this misguided man's heart and used it to change the world. Paul was never outside of God's reach and neither are we!