

Pastor's Papers | Ronald H. Gann
Bible/Apologetics

The Character & Credentials Of Paul

A Survey Of The Life & Ministry Of The Apostle Paul (Part 1)
(Extracted From *A Hebrew Of Hebrews*; Ronald H. Gann [Aventine Press, 2008])

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At 7:55 AM on the morning of December 7, 1941, one of the defining moments in American history took place. As the nation awoke to an otherwise calm Sunday dawn, Japan jolted the world by bombing the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor. Captain Mitsuo Fuchida,¹ chief coordinator of the assault, led the Japanese campaign with the notorious battle cry, “*Tora, tora, tora!*” which means “Attack, attack, attack!”² The swift success of his squadron’s raid catapulted a reluctant United States into an already problematic global war.

Six Japanese aircraft carriers lying in wait off of the coast of the Pacific Ocean, north of Oahu, launched successive attacks upon the Hawaiian isle. The first air raid consisted of a 183 fighter planes, led by Fuchida. A second wave of fifty-five dive-bombers followed shortly afterwards, culminating in a third and final assault by forty-five torpedo planes. By 10 AM, the three sortie bombardments had successfully disabled the U.S. Pacific Fleet’s battleship force. The Battleship Arizona was the major armament casualty, having been pierced by a 1,760-pound armor shell in its forward ammunition compartment. The precision bombing effectively sank the vessel within nine minutes,³ killing 1,177 servicemen aboard, and crippling twenty-one merchant ships. In total, 2,403 people in the Pacific fleet were killed, including sixty-eight civilians.

Eighteen months earlier, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had relocated the United States Fleet from San Diego to Pearl Harbor as a precaution against increasing Japanese aggression. Intent on helping Great Britain withstand Nazi encroachment in eastern Europe, the United States politically negotiated its way through the unstable situation. However, redeploying the U.S. Pacific Fleet off the West Coast in May of 1940 gave reason for the Axis powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan—to believe a neutral America was assuming an advanced military position.

The Japanese army, which had been involved in a seemingly endless assault on China since 1931, was in dire need of natural resources to sustain its expansion march into China. Commercial acquisition of crude oil for Japan had gradually dwindled by 1941 due, largely, to an effective embargo put in place by the United States and Great Britain. Because the sanctions were viewed as an act of provocation, a desperate Japan concocted a battle scheme to seize the petroleum from mineral-rich Indochina and oil-rich Indonesia. However, before it could lay claim to the vital oil, Japan first had to eliminate the one unsettled obstacle between it and its ‘black gold’—the U.S. Pacific Naval Fleet.

On December 8, 1941, less than twenty-four hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt addressed a joint session of the United States Congress.

His impassioned speech condemned the aggression and called upon Congress to issue a declaration of war against Japan. Congress responded by voting almost unanimously in favor of *total war*,⁴ effectively enlisting the United States into World War II. President Roosevelt then issued a state of emergency radio address to the nation on December 9. Two days later, Germany and Italy joined Japan in declaring war on the United States.

While his country recovered from the attack, the American President worked with European leaders to build a unified command center. The agency was dubbed the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). The purpose of the enterprise was to coalesce the Allied forces under a single umbrella of tactical leadership where, as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill summarized, “one man was placed in charge of all the preparation for it.”⁵ General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff to President Roosevelt, was responsible for appointing the Supreme Allied Commander of the task force.

The Commander, yet to be chosen, would supervise the largest number of American formations ever committed to warfare, including a substantial foreign contingency. He was to be a man of superlative intellect, capable of coordinating Allied artillery power and the tactical deployment of countless divisions. Submitting to his authority would be his junior commanders in charge of the European, North African, and the Pacific theaters of operation.

Whoever the American government appointed to spearhead SHAEF, one thing was certain: the position demanded a strategist of the highest order who commanded the respect of both international and domestic troops; a man capable of steering the war to a successful end and who was also effective enough to inspire the confidence of an angst-ridden world. The stalwart leader would need to be astute, credible, aggressive, persuasive, obedient, and in possession of a spiritual resolve for unmitigated victory.

As SHAEF became fully operational by 1943, President Roosevelt and his Chief of Staff found a man whom they believed to be the right one for the job. The respected but untested General Dwight D. Eisenhower, an administrative associate and strategy officer under Marshall, was promoted to the position. Many accepted the appointment with curious uncertainty, knowing only Eisenhower’s reputation as a witty ‘paper pusher’ whose combat expertise was unproven.

Certainly, General Eisenhower turned out to be a commendable choice for the job, but an unusual one given his résumé. Other prominent military leaders could boast of extensive battlefield experience amassed through decades of commanding forces on the frontlines. However, General Eisenhower had never seen combat. Although he oversaw the European Theater of Operations from London and was a reputable military scholar who specialized in battlefield theory, he personally lacked any actual familiarity with the rigors of battle.

Furthermore, Eisenhower was unimpressive in person. In fact, he was seen as dull. He had no distinguishing features or unique characteristics to command the attention of a willing press corps eager to pound out patriotic news stories. The press wanted a Clark Gable-like figure to helm the war; not a balding, middle-aged man of unassuming appearance. While the General had the full confidence of Marshall, Roosevelt, and Churchill, the American and British populace remained skeptical. Pundits debated whether Eisenhower was really the right man for the job.

Less than a year later, General Eisenhower's detractors were silenced. Although inexperienced in combat, he quickly won the respect of his fellow frontline commanders due to his exemplary military acumen. Demonstrating his skill for supervision and diplomacy, he dealt capably with difficult subordinates such as Generals Omar Bradley and George Patton as well as allies Churchill, British Field Marshal Montgomery, and French General Charles de Gaulle. The General displayed his great forte for leadership with a persuasive flair that contradicted his bland military bearing.

Eisenhower was the chief architect behind the epic strategy to liberate Europe from the Third Reich. Two years in the making, the D-Day operation of June 6, 1944, brought together the land, air, and sea forces of the Allied armies in what became known as the largest invasion in human history. The operation dispatched five naval assault divisions to the beaches of Normandy, France. Eisenhower commandeered five thousand ships and landing craft manned by over one hundred and ninety-five thousand naval personnel from eight Allied countries. Adding to the complexity of the assault, one hundred and fifty thousand troops from England, Canada, and the United States stormed the beachfront at Eisenhower's command. Valiant fighting by the Allied forces on the western and eastern fronts led to the defeat of Nazi forces and the eventual liberation of France.

Two months after D-Day, Eisenhower engineered the invasion of southern France. From there, Allied forces under his control pushed forward for the final intrusion into Germany in April of 1945. After the capitulation of the Axis powers, he supervised the invasions of Sicily and the Italian mainland. Following the Nazis' unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945, he was appointed Military Governor of the U.S. Occupation Zone based in Frankfurt, Germany.

Notwithstanding the ingenious leadership of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, together with the sacrifices made by countless soldiers, airmen, sailors, and Marines between September 1, 1939 to September 30, 1945, it is General Eisenhower who is chiefly responsible for the Allied victory in World War II. A noncombatant general who turned out to be a prolific warrior in the worst conflict in mankind's history, General Eisenhower returned to the United States a treasured hero and a proven champion of gallantry. Western civilization stands forever indebted to the West Point graduate from Abilene, Kansas; a man whose leadership experience was once the target of punch lines only to later become the thirty-fourth American president and leader of the free world.

Similarities abound between the apostle Paul and General Eisenhower. Neither was flamboyant in their respective work nor catered to public vanity when carrying it out. Both had to direct the efforts of others during a time of upheaval. Both had to inspire their followers to make sacrifices for the greater good—whether of a nation or of the Church. In addition, both had to prove that they were up to the challenges they were given. Forced to overcome opposition from within their own ranks, both men had to prove they were the right candidates for the job.

Paul's Apostleship Challenged

Like many great men in history, Paul did not embark upon his commission with the goal of earning a name for himself or to cement his place in history. Rather he was consumed by an insatiable desire to exalt the name of Jesus Christ and to preach to a hell-bent world in desperate need of salvation. The apostle, a former opponent of Christianity, embraced “the Nazarene sect” as its “ringleader” (Acts 24:5) and as its principal mouthpiece. He made it his mission to stand before governors, kings, emperors, Jewish authorities, and indignant mobs and command “that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds” (Acts 26:20).

The New Testament paints a striking portrait of the apostle Paul. He was a courageous, daring man whose mobile preaching and great learning is beyond compare in the annals of Church history. Unfailing in his perseverance to advance the gospel, he showed himself to be a man of meekness and warm disposition (2 Cor. 10:1) while equally bold and chilling when under fire (2 Cor. 13:2–3). He was the example of remarkable self-will carrying out the Lord’s commands without complaint or reservation. During his lifetime, he led thousands to a life of godliness, and millions thereafter in death. He traveled the Roman world restlessly and with an insatiable hunger to enrich the spiritually impoverished.

Paul had few equals in terms of his Greek erudition and Jewish credentials. An impeccable Pharisee, he was tutored by the greatest rabbi of his day, Gamaliel, in a city made famous for its Hellenistic university. Having earned advanced degrees before his nineteenth birthday, he himself admitted to “advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14). Indeed, “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless” (Php. 3:5–6), few men could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the apostle in terms of his strength of character.

In spite of his celebrated appeal in history, many of Paul’s contemporaries found him to be anything but impressive, especially in person. In fact, the insinuation from Scripture is that Paul’s appearance was somewhat laughable. Similar to King David, who was perceived as too “ruddy” to wear a king’s crown in the eyes of Samuel (1 Sam. 16:1–13), so, too, was Paul in the eyes of many Corinthians. “His letters are weighty and forceful,” they contended, “but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing” (2 Cor. 10:10).

A first century scroll and rock drawing discovered in 2003 during an archaeological dig in Turkey revealed the testimony of an ancient farmer who had traveled to Ephesus to “see the great speaker, Paul, this follower of Jesus they call the Christ.” The farmer was apparently surprised when “a man no taller than a child entered the room, climbed onto a table and began to exhort us to good works, and to explain the gospel.”⁶ Evidently, Paul’s reputation dwarfed his physical stature.

Furthermore, apocryphal literature⁷ portrays Paul as one who was “of a low stature, bald (or shaved) on the head, crooked thighs, handsome legs, hollow-eyed; had a crooked nose.” Although lacking physical prowess, apparently his godliness was still perceptible. “Full of grace,” the account continues, “for sometimes he appeared as a man, sometimes he had the countenance of an angel.”⁸

His appearance notwithstanding, the apostle Paul was an immovable giant. It was to him alone that God gave the daunting assignment to take the gospel into the Roman

world (Acts 22:22); a short man summoned to stand tall before Gentile kings, governors, and ruling authorities. Such an intimidating commission required a unique man of indelible drive. Paul regarded his ordination as a privilege, even though it meant incurring the scorn and contempt of a hostile world.

Historically, every great man who spearheads a revolutionary movement usually has cynics lying in wait to malign his progress. For every Martin Luther who comes on the scene, there rises up a Johann Tetzel to counter his move. For every Elijah, there are the prophets of Baal. For every Abraham Lincoln there comes a Confederate Army. The opposition to Paul's ministry, particularly his apostleship, was similar.

Generally understood to be a messenger or a commissioned ambassador, the Bible is particular in its definition of an apostle. In brief, an apostle was an early Christian leader, assigned to the first generation of believers, whose ministry was widely-recognized as inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:11–14). Accompanying his office were signs and wonders (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4); the personal eye-witness testimony of the resurrected Lord (Acts 1:21; 1 Cor. 9:1); and a God-ordained commission to preach the gospel throughout the world (Luke 6:13 cf. 1 Cor. 3:10).

Although revered by most in the Church, Paul's credentials as an apostle were the subject of heated debate. Rumors of his illegitimacy ran amok. The New Testament does not retreat from the regrettable truth that, for reasons not entirely clear, the unsavory gossip of a small but effective group of detractors threatened to derail his ministry by casting doubt on his credibility. His opponents demonized him to no end.

The likely slander against Paul suggested that his apostleship was second class—that is, not up to the first-class standards of the original twelve disciples. Paul was not a disciple of Christ during his earthly ministry, as were the revered Peter, James,⁹ and John; he had not been privy to the Lord's private teachings. His glaring absence as a member of Christ's inner-circle of followers called into question his standing as a *bona fide* herald of the gospel, demoting him in rank, as it were, to an 'apostle-would-be.'

Paul did not witness the transfiguration of Christ, as did Peter. Paul did not eat and drink with Christ, as did James. Paul did not entrust himself to Christ's bosom, as did John. Paul did not walk the roads of Galilee alongside Christ, as did Andrew. Furthermore, Paul did not share a banquet with Christ, as did Matthew. Paul was never chastised by Jesus, as was Philip. Paul never ministered with Christ, as did Thomas and James (the son of Alphaeus), or Simon (the Zealot) and Thaddeus. And although Paul regarded himself as the consummate Israelite—indeed “a Hebrew of Hebrews” (Php. 3:5)—it was the disciple Nathanael that Jesus affirmed, “Here is a *true Israelite*, in whom there is nothing false” (John 1:47b, emphasis added).

The apostle Paul was nothing like the other apostles, in almost every respect. The disciples were from Galilee;¹⁰ Paul was from Tarsus, Cilicia. The disciples intimately knew Christ; Paul had only heard his name. The disciples were unsophisticated and academically undistinguished; Paul was an educated elitist who flaunted advanced degrees. The disciples were simple men of humility; Paul had been a man of egotism and extreme piety. Although some had different trades, most of the disciples were unhygienic fishermen. Paul, on the other hand, had been a ceremonial-clean Pharisee. The disciples loved Christ and were willing to die for him; Paul had regarded him as a firebrand whose followers were worth killing.

As if Paul's bothersome past were not enough to undermine his credibility as an apostle, the murky details around his first ten years as a Christian continued to raise doubts. Rather than partner with the Twelve to proclaim the Christian faith, Paul had been strangely aloof from Jerusalem, the hub of Christianity, for over a decade. In the eyes of some, this inexplicable silence undermined his weight as an apostle. The apostles Peter, Philip, and John spent their early years ministering in Jerusalem, Samaria, and Caesarea while the remaining apostles took the gospel to the surrounding provinces of Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (Acts 11:19–20). During this vitally important and historic time in the Church's development, Paul was conspicuously 'missing-in-action.'

All things being equal, Paul did not seem like the right man to shepherd the Church. It seemed far more logical that responsibility for the Church's welfare should fall on the shoulders of Peter and the battle-hardened disciples, rather than on a former persecutor from the halls of academia.

It is doubtless that such libel was difficult for the apostle to bear (1 Cor. 2:3 cf. Acts 18:9–10). The unending ridicule he received from the minority opposition—in contrast to the esteem awarded to the more popular Twelve—was a divisive and somewhat successful tactic meant to impugn his ministry. Paul was forced to defend himself against ad hominem attacks time and time again. For example, in a manner that seemed almost desperate, he wrote to the Corinthians:

Let no one take me for a fool ... Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? ... *I am more. I have worked much harder* (2 Cor. 11:16, 22–23, emphasis added).

Moreover, to the churches situated through Galatia—the region that hosted the largest concentration of opposition—Paul was resolute:

But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super-apostles.' I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge ... I want you to know brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ ... I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was ... (2 Cor 11:6; Gal. 1:11–12).

For those who seemed to be important ... James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me (Gal. 2:6–7, 9).

Paul's critics even went so far as to call into question his financial modesty—especially in light of the potentially lucrative signs, wonders, and miracles he performed. Because his opponents measured success by one's income, they viewed Paul's lackluster 'portfolio' as a reflection of his standing as an apostle. They viewed him as inept and unpersuasive. As they saw it, his grubby clothing, worn-torn sandals, and disheveled

hair was unbecoming of an apostle of Christ. That Paul refused to exploit the gift of God for financial gain only buttressed their stance against him.

Certainly the Scriptures do not forbid a preacher from earning an income from preaching the gospel (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7; 1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:18). Yet Paul refused to avail himself of the monetary privileges so as to avoid any appearance of impropriety. For that reason, he felt that those who misconstrued his meager lifestyle for an inept résumé were hoodwinked or, even worse, pawns of the demonic (cf. 1 Tim. 6:5b–6).

Paul was no stranger to physical affliction either. Jesus informed the prophet Ananias that Paul—the one-time cheerleader of an anti-Christian terrorist squad—would himself be terrorized in his mission to advance the gospel. The Lord cautioned, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:6). Indeed, suffer he did. As Paul’s three missionary journeys unfolded in the ensuing decades, Ananias’ prophecy came to pass in dramatic fashion. Paul reflected upon his sufferings later in his ministry:

I have ... been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely and exposed to death again and again ... I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and I have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have been cold and naked ... (2 Cor. 11:23–28).

Paul endured innumerable hardships. Having no harbor to call his home, the apostle often expressed grief over his lonely nights abroad for the cause of Christ and his uncertainty over safe accommodations. Furthermore, he had received five sentences of thirty-nine whiplashes from the Jews for preaching the gospel. He had been shipwrecked four times while sailing the Adriatic Sea. As well as being repeatedly beaten with rods, imprisoned in Gentile dungeons and placed in stocks, he miraculously survived a stoning at the hands of a Lycaonian mob.

Bandits and thieves prowled the back roads of Achaia and Galatia, jeopardizing Paul’s life as he traveled by foot. He became well-acquainted with the brutal effects of sleep deprivation, hunger, and a lack of adequate clothing. Adding to his distress were the false teachers who had infiltrated the Church to thwart its growth and to sabotage his doctrine of Justification. Thus, an exasperated Paul could also lament: “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28). He knew adversity to no end:

... as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots, in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger ... For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within (2 Cor. 6:4–5; 7:5).

Paul's Apostleship Defended

If nothing else, Paul was a tenacious man with a stalwart personality who refused to be dampened by the rain of criticism showered upon him. He had received his commission from the Lord through stupendous revelation, having been appointed to the apostolic ministry from birth (Gal. 1:15; Rom. 1:1). Moreover, the apostle had received at least five personal visitations from Christ which unequivocally sanctioned his charge to advance the gospel (Acts 9:1–6; 18:9–10; 22:17–18; 23:11; 27:23–24). His pure conviction, divine commission, miracle-working, countless converts, laborious toiling abroad, special revelations, and the scars he bore on his body would not allow him to stand aloof while others challenged his apostleship and maligned his character.

To prevent the Church from falling into disrepair, the apostle took a strong-minded approach when addressing his critics (cf. Gal. 1–2; 2 Cor. 11–12). He was quick to note that his cynics conveniently overlooked the fact that, following his conversion, he did not immediately hurry into Jerusalem to curry favor with the twelve disciples or seek their instruction. Instead, to prepare for his role as the task manager of the Church, he spent three years in Arabia alone where he received direct revelation from Christ himself—a claim no other apostle could make.

Furthermore, when Paul did eventually make the commute to Jerusalem to meet with the Twelve, the apostles Peter, James, and John were the first to affirm his apostleship—an act witnessed by Barnabas. They welcomed him into their brotherhood as one of their own with little deliberation.

It was Paul's defense that the apostolic "pillars" (Gal. 2:9), all of whom were thoroughly versed in the teachings of the incarnate Christ, were neither concerned over his aptitude of the gospel nor felt compelled to correct his doctrine (Gal. 1:11–12; 2:6–7). In Paul's own words, "those men added nothing to my message" (Gal. 2:6b). Years later, in fact, Peter endorsed Paul's epistles as Scripture:

Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him ... His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the *other* Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15–16, emphasis added).

Clearly Peter, an apostolic brother and an inspired co-writer of holy writ, viewed Paul's writings as equally authoritative as his own.

Paul was a man of grace, but he was also a man of conviction. When Peter, the captain of the disciples, yielded to Jewish peer pressure and began ostracizing Gentiles, Paul shamed his co-apostle before a watching crowd. "I opposed him to his face," was his boast, "because he was clearly in the wrong" (Gal. 2:11). By recalling the confrontation in Antioch, Paul invoked evidence of his apostleship. Were he not a legitimate apostle, he could not have effectively reprimanded one of the more venerated leaders in Christendom for his hypocrisy.

With pronounced penmanship (Gal. 6:11), Paul chastened his skeptics in Galatia: "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? ... [L]et no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal. 1:10a, 6:17). To his opponents in

Corinth he warned that he would not cower under intimidation or turn a deaf ear to their murmuring taunts, “since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me” (2 Cor. 12:2b–3).

Paul also reminded his readers that many of them were eyewitnesses to the supernatural phenomena that complemented his ministry, further validating his claim to apostleship: “The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders, and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance” (2 Cor. 12:12). His stark reprisal no doubt stung his opponents:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve ... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also ... For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me (1 Cor. 15:3–9).

The apostle Paul stood strong in his calling to spread the gospel and to pioneer churches. The scores of scars that tattooed his body from countless beatings did not embarrass him (2 Cor. 11:22ff; Gal. 1:17). As a free man, he preached the gospel throughout the Roman world. As a prisoner, he daringly preached the gospel to Roman officials. He gave little thought to his diminishing reputation in the eyes of the academic world, which once esteemed him as a great scholar only to pity him later as a buffoon. Indeed, he regarded the ovation he received as a Pharisee as mere “rubbish” (Php. 3:7–8) while, as an apostle, he coveted the affection of “the foolish ... the weak ... the lowly things of this world and the despised things” (1 Cor. 1:27–28).

Unmoved by the allure of social standing, Paul could boast instead of his standing with the God of the universe. In addition to his life-transforming encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, the resurrected, glorified Lord had personally visited him on a number of occasions. Moreover, he was the only apostle who could provide eyewitness testimony as to the majesty of paradise, having enjoyed the unique privilege of being caught up to the third heaven¹¹ (2 Cor. 12:2). He had performed all the signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12) and was the most itinerant of those who heralded the gospel in the first century (2 Cor. 11:5).

Given the supernatural revelations cascaded upon him, coupled with his inspired command of the Law, it would have been understandable if Paul had been bigheaded, swollen with pride, and haughty. Instead, he mimicked his Lord and was tender, congenial, and modest (Matt. 11:29 cf. 2 Cor. 10:1; 1 Tim. 1:12–17).

Perhaps the greatest convert to Christianity in human history and the most effective Christian the Church has ever received, the apostle Paul remains largely responsible for framing much of classical Christian theology. With thirteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books bearing his autograph—more than any other inspired apostle—the former Pharisee-turned-apostle set the benchmark for

interpreting and applying the gospel. It is fitting, therefore, that the world's scholars, teachers, preachers, bishops, biblicists, priests, ministers, reverends, pastors, philosophers, historians, students, laypersons, and theologians follow in his shadow, to dissect his every written word, in an effort to better understand the God of Scripture and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Although John the Baptist is duly commended as the greatest of all God's servants to ever mount Israel's stage (Matt. 11:11), Paul must also receive a prestigious crown as a tribute to his ambassadorship for the Faith (cf. 2 Tim. 4:6–8). Spurned by his family and friends, beaten beyond recognition and left for dead by the very people he loved enough to share God's message with, Paul was a man of resolve who modeled unwavering faith for nearly three decades. A one-time "blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man" who acted impulsively in "ignorance and unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:13), the apostle became a man of unshakable faith, humility, and compassion who turned the world upside down for the Kingdom of Christ.

Given that other men appeared more qualified to lead the Christian cavalry into battle in the first century, the apostle Paul was the least likely candidate to assume generalship, much like General Dwight D. Eisenhower and his appointment over SHAEF during World War II. Despite being handpicked by God as His mouthpiece to the Body of Christ, Paul's call as an apostle was met with apprehension by many—inside and outside the infant Church.

Armed only with a formidable knowledge of the Scriptures, Paul admitted that he possessed no outstanding traits—such as eloquence of speech or physical charisma—which entitled him to success. Nonetheless, by means of his unrivaled acumen, tenacious evangelism, and the Holy Spirit's empowerment, the apostle Paul managed to overturn the religious culture of his day. Only weeks after his conversion, Paul convinced even the most hardened pessimist that he was, indeed, fit for Christian service. His brilliant but simple preaching, his expressive epistles, and his combative miracles in the face of jeopardy quickly cemented his legitimacy, despite those who argued to the contrary. As the general of the Church in the battle to advance the gospel, the apostle Paul proved himself, in the manner of General Eisenhower, to be precisely the right man for the job.

—*Ronald H. Gann*

¹ After World War II ended with Japan's defeat, Mitsuo Fuchida became a Christian and considered himself to be an evangelist until the day he died.

² "Tora" is Japanese for "tiger" but in the case of Fuchida's cry "to" is the initial syllable of the Japanese word totsugeki, meaning "charge" or "attack." Moreover, "ra" is the initial syllable of raigeki, meaning "torpedo attack." The three-word message meant that complete surprise had been achieved in the attack.

³ Although it took only nine minutes for the Battleship Arizona to finally sink, the ship first burned for two days after being hit by the bomb.

⁴ 'Total war' is a military conflict in which nations mobilize all available resources in order to destroy another nation's ability to engage in war.

⁵ Meacham, Jon. *The Big Three*, Newsweek, February 27, 2004; extracted from *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship* (Random House, 2003), as cited at www.msnbc.msn.com.

⁶ Lark News, vo1. 1, issue 1. January, 2003. www.larknews.com

⁷ In Judeo-Christian theology, the apocrypha refers to texts that are not considered canonical but are of roughly similar style and age as the accepted canonical Scriptures. From a Protestant standpoint, the apocrypha is believed to be sensational literature that either lack inspiration or are forgeries.

⁸ Acts of Paul and Thecla 1:7.

⁹ Although James was not a disciple of Christ during his earthly ministry, he exercised prominent sway in the Jerusalem church as the leading apostle and half-brother of Christ. (Neither the disciple James, son of Zebedee, nor James the son of Alpheus is in reference here. The son of Zebedee was martyred early in Church history in Acts 12:1-2 and the ministry of the son of Alpheus lacked distinction).

¹⁰ Of the Twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot was the only non-Galilean. He was from Kerioth, a Judean town, about twelve miles from Hebron.

¹¹ Scripture indicates that there are three heavens. (1) The first heaven is the atmosphere that surrounds the earth (Hos. 2:18; Dan 7:13). (2) The second heaven is that of the stars (Gen. 1:14-18). (3) The third heaven, also called paradise, is God's abode and the home of all departed believers (2 Cor. 5:8; Php. 1:23).