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(Disciples of Christ)
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MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

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The Apostle Paul

This year we have covered the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark from baptism to resurrection. As I reflect upon what to do next, I am thinking about focusing on the Apostle Paul. So, I decided to write this newsletter article as brief summary of his theology and ministry.

Saul was born in Tarsus; he was a smart man that lived in an unusual time. Different religious sects were popping up but held on to the sound doctrine of Jesus. Saul was one of the influential people of the day that believed they were in the right relationship with God; all they had to do was keep the law intact. They were proud of their heritage, descendants of Abraham, they held a special favor with God that nobody could take away and they were quite proud of this special privilege.

Saul was a Pharisee in good standing. He was the son of a Pharisee, of the tribe of Benjamin, tracing his family tree back to Jacob. An ambitious person, he desired to be at the top of the patriarchal social echelons. So, he went to Jerusalem to study - it was the center of Judaism the perfect place to study for his vocation. He was educated by his famous tutor Gamaliel in the school of Hillel. After Jesus died and the mission of Jesus continued with success, he was zealous and impulsive and felt the need to attack the followers of Jesus to protect his orthodox beliefs. He was not happy with what he heard about Jesus. The momentum that was building after the death of Jesus troubled him.

Saul and his people took pride in their ability to explain the meaning and the purpose of the scriptures. They were gaining success in persuading some Gentiles to accept the Jewish faith and become circumcised as evidence of their conversion. They were especially displeased with someone that disrupted their work and claimed to be the Son of God.

Saul, as well as many others like him, separated themselves from the others because they thought that they were better than any of them. They separated themselves from those that they thought were evil, impure, and unclean. Tax collectors, sinners and unworthy Jews were cast away from their ranks. They abided by the traditions of fasting and the rituals of washing. They knew that the kingdom of God would come; but the prevailing that was that they had to get all of the people to keep the law perfectly. If they could just get the people to be good enough, to obey all the laws, then God would take action against the Romans and send the redeemer to lead them in victory.

One day a crowd gathered around a man named Stephen. Saul was there in an official capacity as a representative of the High Priest. His responsibility was to defend the law against blasphemies and apostasy. Stephen said that they were stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, always resisting the Holy Spirit, they killed those who announced the coming of the Righteous One, received the law but did not keep it. Saul didn't like that, especially since the Pharisees took so much pride in their keeping of the law. The crowd got all worked up, took Stephen out of the city and picked up large rocks and hurled them at him. He fell down to the ground. The stones smashed against his body one by one, breaking his bones and crushing his skull until finally he lay there breathless, motionless, dead. There was an amazing characteristic of Stephen that may have influenced Saul. He had a characteristic that was similar to Jesus, as he lay there suffering he showed compassion for his enemies instead of hatred and contempt.

George