

# San Juan church of Christ

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## **What Does God's Word Say About... Why Paul and the Apostles Suffered for Christ**

For Christians who are “in Christ,” one of the most encouraging statements found in all of the New Testament was written by the apostle Paul. “But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better” (Phil. 1:23). Because of Paul’s faith in Jesus he faced the Roman justice system which was swift and sure. Paul knew that his being a Roman citizen would give him the opportunity to appeal his conviction of spreading the gospel. But appealing the charges of being a Christian would likely not succeed because if the Roman authorities wanted him dead, then dead he would soon be.

Yet in all of Paul’s letters in the New Testament, he never seemed bitter or aggravated that God had seen fit to allow great persecution, beatings, and the threat of his facing possible death for preaching the gospel (2 Cor. 11:23-27). In all of his suffering Paul looked at death differently than most people. Death was not a frightening possibility, but a welcome friend. In fact, he expressed it as a “desire” of his. He saw himself not as entering a dark and foreboding future but rather as entering into eternal life, which meant being with Christ.

After Paul’s conversion when he saw Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was continually pressing forward the cause of Jesus to convert the lost. Paul looked at rest and peace with God, and Christ, not as something to be dreaded, but a welcomed prospect (1 Cor. 15:55-58). And so, the power and sting of death were blunted in the realization that death would take him to his Savior, for whom he had lived, and would now be forced to die: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Paul simply trusted the prayer and promise that Jesus made to the disciples Himself: “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me...” (John 17:24).

In Paul’s last epistle before he was beheaded by Nero, he wrote to Timothy, “But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue [save] me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom...” (2 Tim. 4:17-18).

Before Saul of Tarsus [Paul] saw Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was a persecutor of the church (Phil. 3:4-8). The question we need to ask is “What would cause an influential and intelligent man like Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of the Christian message, to change his beliefs and forfeit his inheritance as a Jew, his freedom, and even his life, for the claim that he saw Jesus after His resurrection.

When the resurrected Jesus stood in the midst of the disciples and asked the disciple Thomas to touch His hand and pierced side, he and the rest of the disciples believed Jesus (John 20:20, 26-27). At this time Jesus said to the disciples, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). Jesus forewarned the disciples that they would suffer for His sake (Matt. 10:17-22). Speaking to the rest of His disciples in the ages to come, Jesus said, “Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed” (John 20:29). Peter also confirmed what Jesus said about His future disciples in 1 Peter 1:8-9. The Jews would love to have produced Jesus’ dead body and even bribed the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb to speak a lie about the resurrected body of Jesus (Matt. 28:11-15). Jesus’ disciples would not have risked their lives and suffered great persecution to protect a dead corpse! (1 Cor. 15:3-4, 16-17).

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