

Question

What motivated Paul to so vehemently and relentlessly persecute Christians?(v1-2)

There are two main factors that drove Paul's actions.

The first motivation for his behavior was his personal ambition. In his writings, Paul introduced himself as someone who had many reasons to boast in the flesh: he was a Hebrew, a Pharisee from the strictest sect, and a student of Gamaliel. These were things he once took pride in, but now he considers them worthless compared to knowing Christ. These were his former pursuits—he excelled among Jews and sought achievements within the religious system. This could have been one of the reasons why he was so zealous in persecuting Christians, although it's not the primary reason.

The main reason, I believe, was his misguided zeal rooted in false beliefs. We can see the dangers of false beliefs even today; Islam is one example, where teachings about terrorism surprise many. Though many Muslims argue that these teachings don't represent all of Islam, the Quran's endorsement of Jihad has indeed led some into these dangerous traps. Similarly, Judaism operates in a comparable way—not as militant as Islam and seemingly filled with wisdom in the eyes of many—but it shares a common trait with other man-made religions: self-salvation. Paul describes them as having zeal but not according to true knowledge. Their zeal stems from human traditions and Satan's common lie to humanity: either 'I can save myself,' or 'I am inherently a good person.' Though the methods differ, they all lead to the same end. The devil uses various strategies, with doing good deeds being one of the most common; for example, Islam teaches caring for orphans and widows to earn merit, but the highest reward comes from participating in Jihad, with killing seen as a shortcut to paradise. Their zeal is fueled by Satan's deception. Judaism is no exception—though not through killing, they seek merit by strictly adhering to rules, misinterpreting the true intent of the scriptures. Other world religions like Catholicism, Buddhism, and Taoism follow similar patterns but use different methods for self-salvation. When truth clashes with false religions—such as when truth denies salvation through rule-keeping—it essentially denies everything Pharisees stood for and destroys all human pride in

self-salvation. This pride, coupled with zeal for lies, drives such persecution."

Read Acts 22:8-10 What was going through Paul's mind at this time? Why did someone who once opposed Christ suddenly submit to His command? (What reminder does this hold for believers today?)

Acts 22:8-10 LSB

"And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'

"And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me.

"And I said, 'What should I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been determined for you to do.'

"When Paul realized his mistake, his response was a complete turnaround. His first question was, 'Lord, what shall I do?' This can be seen as a true sign of transformation—understanding and obeying God's command came naturally to Paul! This is an inevitable expression of true change. Many today who decide to accept Jesus have not experienced what Paul expressed when he said, 'Lord, what shall I do?' Without recognizing their own desperate state, like Paul did, they wouldn't ask this question. For Paul at that moment, obedience and following the path set before him were the only options—he didn't know what else to do. Everything he once knew was wrong, and without God's guidance, he didn't know how to go on living. This should be the profound response of every disciple when they are transformed! They should ask, 'Lord, what shall I do?' (Acts 22:10). They cannot return to their old way of life because they see that it was all wrong and they can't continue in error.

However, the current state of the church seems quite different. People accept Christ, and then that's it—they lack the urgency that Paul had, the realization that they cannot go back to their old lives. This actually reveals that they haven't truly transformed; they've merely added Christ as another principle in their lives, like placing an extra piece of art on a display shelf. This is not true repentance, and their journey of faith has never truly begun."

Read v4, What is the connection between persecuting the church and persecuting Christ? What reminder does this offer modern believers in how they view the church?

"The Bible says the church is the body of Christ. This description not only refers to the church's obedience to Christ but also highlights the inseparable relationship between Christ and the true church. The true church is Christ's representative on earth; opposing the church is not just opposing an institution or a group—it is, in fact, offending God Himself. Similarly, when the church does not follow God's will, it is not just this group that is shamed; it is God Himself who is dishonored. We often view the church as an institution or a community rather than from Christ's perspective. Christ sees the church as Himself, and He feels all the persecution and internal conflicts personally. If believers truly realized that what they do to the church, they do to Christ, there would be fewer fleshly disputes within the church. What we often lack is the reverence for Christ when dealing with His church.

On the other hand, some people are misled into thinking that any conflict within the church is wrong. They may use this understanding to urge others to compromise on the truth, suggesting that otherwise, it would harm Christ. It's important to recognize that while Israel was God's chosen people, they were not the true church. Only those who believe in God and follow the truth are the body of Christ. Throughout history, it has often been false churches that rise up to persecute the true people of God. Lies persecute the truth, and false churches persecute true disciples. Many modern believers interpret these occurrences as church division and see any conflict as sin, but this plays into Satan's deception. Just as the Jews who followed Christ were separated from those who merely claimed to be God's people, true disciples must also be set apart from false churches.

Why did Christ take the initiative to appear to Paul? Did he deserve such an act from Christ?

No one deserves for Christ to do anything for them. Paul did not deserve to be saved by God. Every sinner is unworthy of Christ's actions on their behalf, and the punishment they receive is fully deserved. However, God, in His great mercy, extends grace to people—whether they are like Paul, whose sins were in his actions, or those whose sins are in their thoughts and minds. God saves according to His mercy. No one is worthy of anything. And in salvation, God is always the initiator. Even if we don't encounter Christ in the same way Paul did, God is always at work in the hearts of His chosen, bringing us to Him at the appointed time. Without God's work, no one would seek Him on their own. Paul's experience of being sought out by God through a direct

revelation is not a unique case; rather, every believer is sought by God, though the manner may vary

Read v9, What did Paul do during these three days? Why did Christ wait for a period of time before giving Paul new instructions?

During these three days, Paul continuously prayed. In the Old Testament, prophets often experienced fear after witnessing great visions (such as Daniel). However, Paul's prayer and fasting during this time were very different. He wasn't just afraid of what he had experienced; more importantly, he finally realized the enormity of the sins he had committed. As a former Pharisee, Paul was accustomed to praying, but those prayers were the self-righteous prayers of a Pharisee. This time, everything was different—his self-righteousness and pride were completely shattered, leaving him fully aware of his spiritual poverty.

I personally believe these three days were a time given by the Lord for Paul to reflect and contemplate. His physical blindness was also a reflection of his true spiritual blindness. Before God could use Paul, he first had to be cleansed, acknowledge his own corruption, and see the depth of his sin. Only after confession and repentance could he be used as a vessel for God's work. The Bible often teaches us to remember the time when we lived in sin and darkness (such as Ephesians 2:11), so that we may now live in the light. In fact, these words come from Paul's own exhortation to believers.

While we may not experience the same dramatic encounter as Paul did, or undergo a time of physical blindness in such deep repentance, every believer will go through periods of reflection on their past sins—and this should happen regularly. Paul frequently reminds us in Scripture to 'remember' our former state of darkness. The more we grow in our understanding of God's holiness, the more we become aware of our own sin, leading to deeper reflection and repentance. As a result, we also grow in our understanding of God's grace. This ongoing process of reflection, repentance, and recognizing God's grace is part of our sanctification, the continual renewal of our lives.

Only through this process can we be used by God, rather than being led by our own desires.

Read v10-14, What risks did Ananias face in obeying the

Lord's command? Was Ananias' response to the Lord a sign of weak faith? (Was it necessary to remind the Lord of what Saul had done?)"

Ananias was very likely one of the leaders of the church in Damascus. In Acts 22, Paul describes him as a devout man according to the law, and he was well-respected by the local Jews. The news of Paul's impending arrival in Damascus had already reached them, probably because the church in Jerusalem had warned them in advance. Facing the notorious Paul, the church in Damascus might have been discussing and preparing how to deal with the coming persecution, trying to avoid being captured by Paul. However, Ananias never expected that the Lord would ask him to personally go and meet Paul. Ananias was fully aware of the risks he would be taking. From a human perspective, this could mean risking his life, in a way that seemed like walking into a trap.

Ananias voiced his confusion (or protest) to the Lord, telling Him what he had heard about Paul. Ananias didn't ask why the Lord wanted him to do this but instead emphasized Paul's actions. These violent acts had been inflicted upon the church, and as the Lord Himself shares in the suffering of His people, how could the Lord not know as much as Ananias had heard? Personally, I believe this reflects a moment of weakness in Ananias' faith. He could have inquired about the Lord's deeper purpose or why He chose this course of action. Instead, he focused on recounting the sins he had heard about Paul.

Yet, our Lord responded to him patiently, giving him a clear command: 'Go.' Although Ananias didn't ask for an explanation, the Lord still revealed His purpose in His response. As a man who feared God, Ananias obediently followed the Lord's instruction and went to meet Paul.

Read v15, Why did Christ refer to Paul as His chosen vessel? What is the significance of this?

2 Timothy 2:21 LSB

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, having been prepared for every good work.

2 Corinthians 4:7 LSB

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the

power will be of God and not from ourselves;

In the original language, the word 'vessel' can also mean 'instrument' or 'tool.' We often dislike being called a tool because it carries a sense of being degraded or used. However, being a tool in God's hands is completely different. To be more precise, becoming a noble vessel in God's hands (as opposed to a dishonorable vessel, which refers to those who bear God's wrath to display His justice) is an immensely glorious thing. This is where our true value lies.

Though we see that Paul spent the latter part of his life running from place to place, even standing before kings and Caesar, paying a great price to advance the gospel and achieving remarkable results, all of this was merely God using His chosen vessel to accomplish His predetermined purpose. A vessel in itself does not have much value; it is meant to hold something, and its value lies in what it contains. May God make us all noble vessels in His hands.