

PAUL: HIS LIFE AND TEACHINGS

Lesson 1

Introduction to Paul

WHY SHOULD WE STUDY PAUL?

Why should we study Paul? Is it not adequate merely to study the Bible? Why should we isolate one man if we believe that the entire Bible is God inspired? Why should we segregate out Paul's views on Biblical and theological issues instead of simply understand the entire counsel of God's word on those issues?

There are many wonderful reasons to study Paul. First, it is enriching to study many of the people in the Bible, whether Abraham, King David, Peter or Paul. We get insight into how God worked through Paul's strengths and weaknesses, both to grow Paul and to grow God's kingdom. We should remember that Paul was the major force behind the growth of the early church. As Foakes-Jackson wrote, "He [Paul] found the Church a small Jewish community with crude Messianic conceptions; he left it a world organization in which there was neither Jew nor Gentile."¹

How did God accomplish this transportation of his redemptive story from a few Galileans to the known Roman world principally through the mouth of one man? We shall see that Paul was made for the task! Paul had one foot firmly planted in the Roman world and one foot firmly planted in Judaism. Paul was uniquely fit for the purpose. We will explore these factors early in our study.

Another reason to examine Paul in a focused study is to better understand his writings and his teachings. 2 Peter 3:15-16 notes:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Peter was right! Some aspects of Paul's writings are difficult to understand! The more we know of Paul, the more we see how he wrote on subjects and ideas from one letter to another, and the more resources we have to understand his points.

¹ F. J. Foakes-Jackson *The Life of Saint Paul* (Boni and Liveright, Inc. 1926) at 15.

While Paul was clearly God’s mechanism for fostering belief to many around the world in the first century, God still uses Paul today. Paul’s life and story are cited by many as significant in their decision making process about faith in the resurrected Lord. Indeed, as we study Paul, we will see one whose life was headed down a road of substance and success. He had family, pedigree, money, education, and placement in his circle of the world. Yet Paul gave that and more all up, even relished giving it up, for the surpassing value of a faith that left him beaten, abused, poor, outcast, and wandering over the earth. As many recognize when they study his life, he was a wise man in full control of his facilities, yet took a route for his life that, absent lunacy, one would take only if fully convinced he had seen the resurrected Lord.

So, how do we learn of Paul? What can we know about Paul? Quite a bit! Of the 27 books in the New Testament, Paul wrote thirteen! (Fourteen if you give him credit for Hebrews, but most scholars of all persuasion seem to doubt that Paul wrote Hebrews.) Next week, we will briefly review these thirteen books to place them into context.

In addition to his own writings, we have the book of Acts. Luke wrote Acts as the second part of what was perhaps originally conceived of as a three part history. The first part is our gospel we call Luke. The second part is the early history of the church from its inception to Paul’s time in Rome, likely dating around 60-61 A.D.,² and it centers over half of its space on Paul and his experiences. If a third part had been planned, it was apparently never written (or if written, was quickly lost in history for there are no accounts of it).³

We learn through these writings about Paul, his family, his upbringing, his education, his interests and beliefs before converting to Christianity, his interactions with friends, enemies, and strangers. We read about his views on Christ as God, on scripture, on salvation, church practice and fellowship, charismatic issues and the Holy Spirit, predestination and free will. Paul addresses

² See Biblical Literacy lessons 23-27, 32-34, and 38. These lessons and those on Church History noted later are available for downloading on our website at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

³The theories about a third part come from Luke’s use of the phrase *proton logos* (πρωτον λογος) in Acts 1:1 translated “In the first book.” Ramsey and others argue that Acts reads incomplete because it was never intended to be the final product; another installment was planned! Ramsey references the phrase “first book” believing Luke would have began Acts by speaking of Luke as the “former book” if Acts was indeed the last volume. Bruce and others believe that by the time Luke wrote, the Greek for “former” was phased out and largely replaced by “first.” Therefore, Bruce believes Luke-Acts was a two-part writing from the beginning. See Ramsay, Sir William *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* (Edwards Brothers, Inc. 1949) at 23; Bruce, F. F., *The Acts of the Apostles; The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans 1951) at 65.

issues of race, morality, ethics, and proper Christian behavior. We even read his teachings on the end times. In short, we have a full array of areas where Paul either wrote directly, or was written about by Luke in the book of Acts.

WAS HE PAUL OR SAUL?

Let's start this study by getting his name right! Was he "Paul" or "Saul?" Was his name changed sometime after his conversion? Why does Acts start with one name, Saul, and then shift and call him Paul?

This is one of many places in our study where we will try to first understand the time and culture of the Biblical situation and then try to understand the text. In today's times, most western names are simple. For example, my name is William Mark Lanier. I have a first name, William, which comes from my father's first name. My second name, Mark, is my familiar name that my parents have called me since birth. My last name, Lanier, is my family name, and all the people in my family have that name.

During the time of Paul, each Roman citizen also had three names.⁴ The three Roman names were not set up like names in Western civilization today. The Roman process of three names died out with the Roman Empire in the 5th century,⁵ but history has left us with evidence to clearly understand the naming at the time of Paul. To understand the Roman naming system, we will use the example of Gaius Julius Caesar. The first name⁶ (Gaius) was the personal given name. Frequently, this is the name people would use to refer to a person either alone or in combination with one of the person's other names. The second name (Julius in our example) typically denoted one's heritage or clan affiliation (Caesar came from the Juliae clan). Typically, the last name was a nickname or sometimes a family name passed on.

We do not know all three of Paul's Roman names. We know simply his third name, Paullus (in Latin, meaning "little") while in Greek it was Paulos (Παυλος). This name would be common and a label people would use for the apostle.

⁴ Actually, people would frequently have more than just three names, but three names were required for registration of a Roman citizen. Wilson, Stephen, *The Means of Naming – A Social and Cultural History of Personal Naming in Western Europe* (London: Routledge 2004) at 4.

⁵ With the Germanic invasion, most people had one name after the fall of Rome. Over time, that expanded with second/family names becoming common in the 11th and 12th centuries. Middle names were added after the Renaissance. For a full history on the naming process, see Wilson's book cited above.

⁶ The Latin term for this first name was *praenomen*. The Latin term for the second name was *nomen or gentilicium*. The Latin for the third name was *cognomen*.

Paul would have had the three Roman names as part of his registration as a Roman citizen, but Paul would also have had an additional name. Being a Hebrew who was born into a devout family, Paul would have had a Hebrew name that was used in Hebrew circles. Paul's Hebrew name was Saul.⁷

In Hebrew circles, Paul was called "Saul." A close look at Acts shows Luke using Paul's Hebrew name past his conversion up to the time where Paul (Saul) and Barnabas are on their first missionary journey. On the island of Cyprus, before explaining Paul's interaction with a magician, Luke writes, "But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said..." (Acts 13:9). After that, Luke uses Paul's Roman name exclusively except when quoting Paul's description of his conversion (Acts 22:7, 13; 26:14).

APPROACH

We will approach this study using the writings of Paul and Acts as our primary sources. While Paul did not write Acts, he is certainly the central character for the book (human character, that is – the Holy Spirit is the central person of the book). Sir William Ramsay wrote of Luke's accounts of Paul in Acts:

The characterisation of Paul in Acts is so detailed and individualised as to prove the author's personal acquaintance. Moreover, the Paul of Acts is the Paul that appears to us in his own letters, in his ways and his thoughts, in his educated tone of polished courtesy, in his quick and vehement temper, in the extraordinary versatility and adaptability which made him at home in every society, moving at ease in all surroundings, and everywhere the centre of interest, whether he is the Socratic dialectician in the Agora of Athens, or the rhetorician in its University, or conversing with kings and proconsuls, or advising in the council on shipboard, or cheering a broken-spirited crew to make one more effort for life.⁸

⁷ The Hebrew comes from *sha'al*, which means, "to ask." It was the name of the first King of Israel. The Greek is spelled *Saoul* (Σαουλ) in places and *Saulos* (Σαυλος) in others.

⁸ Ramsay, Sir William. *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* (Edwards Brothers, Inc. 1949) at 21-22. Sir William Ramsay was a professor of classical archaeology at Oxford University who spent a great deal of his life in archaeological work in the areas of Greece and Turkey, the area of Paul's missionary works. Ramsay started his work believing that Acts was a third rate history written sometime in the second century by someone far removed from the events recorded (p. 8ff). Years of archaeological work forced Ramsay to change his view. Research and science led Ramsay to write, "Acts was written by a great historian, a writer who set himself to record the facts as they occurred, a strong partisan indeed, but raised above partiality by his

In addition to the writings of Acts and Paul's letters, we will consider some of the many scholarly works on Paul. The class handout will be the book by F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. This book is not an easy armchair read, but it is a strong scholarly work on Paul that gives a good consensus of the material that can be found in many other works. For those interested, a more readable book, still strong in its material and teaching, is John McRay's *Paul, His Life and Teaching*. These classic works, that many read and rely on, include the Ramsay works as well as F. J. Foakes-Jackson's *The Life of Saint Paul*.

Those are several readable contemporary works about Paul, as well as a number of key works over the last century. In all, there are literally hundreds of books and studies written on the life and doctrines of Paul, some going back literally almost two thousand years!

Our earliest non-Biblical writing on Paul comes from the later part of the first century (some scholars date it in the second century), a book entitled the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. The book received wide circulation in the Eastern Church. While detailing the interactions of Paul with a virgin named Thecla, the book contains our oldest description of Paul. Paul is described in chapter 1, verse 7 as, "a man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were projecting, and he had large eyes and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long, and he was full of grace and mercy; at one time he seemed like a man, and at another time he seemed like an angel."

Scholars believe the account in the Acts of Paul and Thecla is not historically valid, but rather an attempt to pass off a wonderful story about Paul as true and written by Paul himself.⁹ That makes one question the narrative, but since the story was likely written at a time when people were still alive who had known Paul, one figures the physical description is fairly accurate. If you wish to sell a story, your chances are greatly diminished if you give the wrong physical data about the man you write up!

We will also use writings as resources that are not really about Paul per se, yet teach us a good deal about Paul. For example, we know that Paul was a Pharisee.

perfect confidence that he had only to describe the facts as they occurred, in order to make the truth of Christianity and the honor of Paul apparent" (p. 14).

⁹ Tertullian (see Church History Literacy lessons 10 and 17) wrote around 190 A.D. that the work was falsely named as "Acts of Paul," that "the presbyter who compiled that document, thinking to add of his own to Paul's reputation, was found out, and though he professed he had done it for love of Paul, was deposed from his position." *De Baptismo Liber 17* (Evans' translation 1964).

We will examine the writings about Pharisees to understand where Paul kept aspects of his heritage and where he abandoned Pharisaic doctrines. Also, we know that Paul studied under the Rabbi Gamaliel, so we will examine what we know of Gamaliel and his teachings to discern their influence on Paul, both positively and negatively.

OUR PLAN

Our goal in this class is to cover the following areas:

1. Overview and Introductory Material
 - Who was Paul?
 - An overview of Paul's writings
 - Paul's background and childhood
 - Paul's Hebrew training
 - Paul's Life as a Jew
 - Paul's rebirth as a Christian
 - Paul's strengths and weaknesses
 - Paul's friends and co-workers
 - Paul the Apostle
 - Missionary travels
2. Paul's doctrine and theology
 - Paul on God
 - Paul on Jesus ("Christology")
 - Paul on Scripture
 - Paul on the Law
 - Paul on salvation ("Soteriology")
 - The gospel
 - Use of legal language
 - The elect
 - Paul on sanctification
 - Paul on guidance
 - Paul on morality/ethics
 - Paul on spiritual anatomy (spirit, soul, body, mind, etc.; "anthropology")
 - Paul on spiritual warfare
 - Paul on prayer
 - Paul on persecution
 - Paul on the Church ("ecclesiology")
 - Paul on worship
 - Paul on the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

- Paul on interpersonal relations
- Paul on the Holy Spirit
- Paul on Judaism/Gentiles
- Paul on the end times (“eschatology”)

The study should be fun, interesting, and inspirational. Buckle your seat belts, and get ready for an adventure through the life and times of a man of whom F. F. Bruce says, “No single event, apart from the Christ-event itself, has proved so determinant for the course of Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of Paul.”¹⁰

Foakes-Jackson said it this way:

Paul is so great a man that to this day he provokes the keenest discussion as to his true position. To some he appears to stand to Jesus as the prophet does to God; to others, on the contrary, Jesus gave mankind a simple and beautiful message, which Paul perversely misinterpreted. Some recognize in Paul the true exponent of Protestantism, others of sacramental Catholicism. He is claimed as the liberator of mankind from legalism, and as the enslaver of the human mind to dogma. To Marcion in the second century,¹¹ he was the true Gnostic who freed mankind from the harsh conception of the God in the Old Testament; to Augustine, in the fifth century,¹² the champion who fought for the supremacy of Divine Grace against the will of man; to Luther,¹³ he liberated Christians from reliance on works of merit, and taught them to trust in Christ alone; to Calvin,¹⁴ he made men realize the absolute supremacy and foreknowledge of God.”¹⁵

How could we not study a man that God used so mightily, that man has read so prolifically, and a man that galvanized action by believers for the length and breadth of the entire church’s history?

¹⁰ Bruce, F. F. *Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans 1977) at 75.

¹¹ See Church History Literacy lesson 8.

¹² See Church History Literacy lessons 25 and 26.

¹³ See Church History Literacy lessons 50, 53-55.

¹⁴ See Church History Literacy lessons 58 and 59.

¹⁵ Foakes-Jackson at 8.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. Get ready for some great in depth study on Paul and his teachings on God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the church. Find your best Bible for note taking, or get a new Bible! Get one with large margins for making notes! We hope to bring Paul to life in your mind as we try to more fully understand the important issues on which he wrote. Paul told the Philippians, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice” (Phil 4:9). Let’s get ready to do that!
2. Invite friends, neighbors, co-workers to class. This is a wonderful opportunity to plumb scripture in greater depth than perhaps we normally do outside of church. Paul is interesting, and he wrote on ultimate subjects. Let’s share that with others!
3. As we study Paul and his writings, we will not walk away unchanged. There is a reason God has ensured that we have his writings in scripture. Paul wrote these letters under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They helped form the church and they have no less effect today. We have the assurance that, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it’ (Is. 55:10-11). God will use our study of Paul to change us!