

SAKLC CONVERSATIONS

Mid-week adult study at St Armands Key Lutheran Church, Sarasota, FL

“ROMANS, a letter for today”

Session Plan for

Thursday, January 19, 2017

OPENING PRAYER (Unison)

O God, who taught the whole world through the preaching of the blessed Apostle, draw us, we pray, nearer to you through our study of St. Paul upon whom we focus today, and so make us witnesses to your truth in the world. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

WHO WAS PAUL?

An Introductory Statement: No one is neutral about Paul! People either love him or hate him. Some see him as the greatest theologian of all time, others see him as an antifeminist and anti-Semite. Some see him as the strong, yet gentle poet who wrote a great biblical poem about love (1 Corinthians 13); others see him as a bully. The fact is that many of our misconceptions about Paul are not based on sound historical and scriptural judgments. Today we seek to reassess our own understanding of the Great Apostle to whose pen is attributed much of the New Testament. Our study will chiefly focus on Paul's letters; the other great scriptural source about Paul is the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, which was written a full generation after Paul's death.

OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

1. To enable you to relate factual statements about Paul's life and his impact on Christianity.
2. To enable you to tell how Paul's background equipped him to preach the Gospel of Christ to a Gentile world.
3. To enable you to describe Paul's understanding of the great mission to which he was called.

I – A MAN OF TWO WORLDS:

Paul lived in two distinctly different worlds. His thought and ministry were influenced by both worlds, one Jewish and the other Greek. “Greek” and “Roman” are two words, that in doing biblical studies, we often speak of in the same breath. This is because the Roman Empire still bore the marks of Greek culture which had spread throughout the area following the conquests of Alexander the Great in the 4th century before the birth of Jesus. (For further discussion see *Kerygma Resource Book – pages 10-12*)

Now take some time to reflect:

- a) Have you ever experienced living in 2 different cultures at the same time?
- b) Are you/ your parents first-generation immigrants to the USA? What special challenges have been experienced?
- c) Did you ever feel like you lived in 2 different worlds when you visited with your in-laws?
- d) For Paul, what were some of the results of living in a Jewish world?
- e) For Paul, what were some of the results of living in a Greco-Roman world?

PRACTICUM: Below are a series of statements descriptive of either the **GREEK-ROMAN WORLD** and/or the **JEWISH WORLD**. Next to each statement mark “GRW,” “JW” or “BOTH” to indicate which ‘world’ you think the statement applies:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ___ The Septuagint | ___ Knew and kept the Law |
| ___ Polytheistic beliefs | ___ Hellenistic philosophy |
| ___ Circumcised | ___ Torah |
| ___ Citizen of a world power | ___ Olympics |
| ___ Monotheism | ___ Spoke Hebrew |
| ___ Greek–primary language | ___ Temples |

II – PAUL’S AUTHORSHIP OF LETTERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A) In the past, thirteen letters found in the New Testament were attributed to St. Paul. However, modern biblical scholarship has now limited **Paul’s authorship** to just these **seven letters**:

- **1 Thessalonians**
- **1 and 2 Corinthians**
- **Galatians**
- **Philippians**
- **Philemon**
- **Romans**

(These were all written in the “fifties” {50-59 A.D.}, are the oldest writings of the New Testament, and contain the most accurate details of Paul’s life history.)

B) Then we have the **deutero-Pauline letters** (*i.e. written by some disciple of Paul*)

- **Colossians**
- **Ephesians**
- **2 Thessalonians**

C) Finally, these are now considered the **pseudonymous writings** (*all being pastoral letters*):

- **1 and 2 Timothy**
- **Titus.**

(These three {3} were written under Paul’s name by some unknown author, dealing with clerical offices of bishop, priest, and deacon as well as their discipline.)

D) Of the thirteen letters, Philippians, Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians are called **captivity letters** because imprisonment is mentioned in them.

- E) The author(s) of the Pauline letters generally accepted - in the past as authentic - is now sometimes referred to as "The First Paul." Some contemporary scholars assert that he was followed by "Conservative Paul" (the author of Colossians, Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians) and finally by "Reactionary Paul" (the author of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus).
- F) There is mention of other letters that are not included in the above that must have been either lost or destroyed.

- **1 Cor. 5:9** refers to a previous letter written to Corinth.
- There was another "*written in tears*" **2 Cor. 2:3-4**.
- **Col. 4:16** mentions a letter to the Laodiceans.
- Some believe that **Romans 16** was intended as a separate letter.

- G) The other major source of information about Paul is from the **Book of Acts** written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke in which more than half deals with his missionary work. The author was a fellow worker and accompanied Paul on some of the journeys. It was written toward the end of the first century almost forty years after Paul's letters were written.

In places where Acts and Paul's letters disagree, modern scholarship has now determined that the letters prevail. It is strange that in Acts no mention is made of Paul's extensive letter writing. Even more strange is that Paul in his letters makes no attempt to give us a biography of Jesus and his deeds.

It is now believed that the collection of Paul's letters was completed by the early second century. A mention of this appears in the last New Testament book written (2 Peter 3:15-16). The heretic Marcion (144 A.D.) drew up a list in Rome of ten Pauline letters which included the previously listed seven authentic letters.

- H) It was Paul who first used the term euangelion, '**the gospel**' in connection with the teaching of Christ [Acts.20.24 τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς χάριτος; Romans1.1 εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ].

III – PAUL’S LIFE:

- A) Our sources on the apostle come mainly from Paul’s own writings. Modern Biblical scholarship attempts to piece together scraps of information primarily from Scripture and sometimes also using other writings of that period, using a technique that's like a combination of sociology and forensic anthropology. The resulting picture of Paul is one of a man of his time and place; a hot headed Mediterranean who was quick to defend his honor and the honor of his followers, but who would have demanded total loyalty in return.
- B) Paul was **born in the first decade of the Christian era** (or very late in the last century B.C.E.) @ **Tarsus**, in Cilicia, in what is now Turkey. (It was a Greek-speaking area of the Roman Empire.) His parents came from Gischala, in Galilee, according to ancient writings of St. Jerome. He was also known by the Jewish name of Saul. Paul, was a name he may have had thanks to his Roman citizenship.
- C) He was considered to be a **“Hellenized Jew of the diaspora”** who traced his lineage back to the tribe of Benjamin. **“A Hebrew...as to the law, a Pharisee”** (Phil. 3:6). His letters reveal that he knew Greek well.
- D) Acts specifically presents him as a **Pharisee** (Acts 22:3,6), having a Jewish name, Saul (13:9), as having a sister (23:16), and was a **Roman citizen from birth** (22:25f) which implies that his father was a Roman citizen before him. As a Pharisee living in the diaspora, Paul was one of a group of Jews who policed the boundary of the law and made sure that they and others were completely faithful to the law of Moses. Paul was an extremely passionate Jew, and he often uses the word 'zeal' of himself.
- E) He **grew up in Jerusalem** and was **educated at the feet of Gamaliel**, the elder (22:3). His writings never openly state that he had personal contact with Jesus during his public ministry.
- F) Some hold that he was a **rabbi** (the age for ordination was forty) in view of his going to the Damascus synagogue to root out the followers of Christ. Paul says nothing about this. Nor does he mention anything in his letters about the death of Stephen. {Stephen, the first Christian to be martyred, was killed by being stoned to death; Acts provides an account of Paul being present. Paul supported these killings and was, at the time, attempting to stamp out the new Jewish, Christ-worshipping sect.}

- G) He admits to being a **persecutor of Christians** (Gal. 1:13) and presumably was married since it was required of rabbis. He probably was widowed later (1 Cor. 7:8).
- H) So why did people like Paul persecute Jesus' followers? The problem seems to have focused around the cross. It was simply intolerable to zealous Jews like Paul that God's special envoy could have died a criminal's death. He describes it as a "stumbling block" to Jews (1 Corinthians 1.23), using the Greek word skandalon from which we derive our word "scandal". It was unthinkable that the Messiah could have suffered in this way. The problem would have been sharply focused for someone like Paul; not from Israel but was born in Tarsus, he lived outside the Jewish homeland (the diaspora). Since they lived among pagans, these Jews were particularly conscious of how their religion might appear to those around them. Jews were called to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 42.6); this story of a crucified Messiah might have the opposite effect. It could hold Judaism up to ridicule.

IV – PAUL'S CALL (Conversion)

- A) **On the way to Damascus** he experienced a vision of Christ which changed his entire life. Whether it occurred in his mind (Gal. 1:12,16) or externally (Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-11; 26:12-19) remains unclear. It changed him from a persecutor to a supporter of Christianity.
- B) **Christ himself ordered him to witness to the Gentiles** (Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8-11 Gal. 2:7). At that time followers of Christ were part of Judaism, so in reality Paul switched from Pharisaic Judaism to Christian Judaism.
- C) **Paul** reports (Gal. 1:17-24) that he **immediately went to Arabia**. He obviously joined in with mission work already underway to the Gentiles. He probably avoided contact with the apostles at this time because he expected their hostility to the Gentile mission.
- D) Three {3} years later he **visited with Peter in Jerusalem** for fifteen days and also saw **James the "brother" of the Lord** (Gal. 1:18-24). Following his visit he set out for Antioch on a mission trip through his home area, Syria and Cilicia where he converted Gentiles. (Gal. 1:21). This helped make Christianity a universal religion.
- E) Toward the end of his life, Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem, but then sent to Caesarea. Two years later, Paul was to be sent back to Jerusalem for trial, but

preferred, instead, to be sent to Rome, where he arrived in A.D. 60. He spent two years there under arrest.

F) As previously noted (*Part I – “F” above*) **Acts at times disagrees with Paul’s letters on certain facts early in Paul’s life.** The author of Acts had no access to the letters because they weren’t in one collection until the first quarter of the second century. Scholars have concluded that the author of Acts used a style of “*literary design*” to fill out his history.

G) Eusebius of Caesarea reports that Paul was beheaded under the Roman Emperor Nero in either A.D. 64 or 67.

