

Paul and His Epistles
ReCatechism 7
By Dr. Maria-Fotini Kapsalis

This evening's topic is about Paul and the Pauline epistles. Through my studies as a historian and theologian I have come to the opinion, that when one reads, studies or meditates on writings from the distant past, that one first has to erase their 21st Century thinking, prejudices, and even understanding of words and language, in order to enter the world and mind of the author, and to understand the words written as they were used in their time. Thus, before we can study the letters of Paul, we need to first understand the world of Paul, as Paul lived it in order to better understand why he wrote, what he wrote.

The Early Years

So, "Who is St. Paul?" The saint was born in the Greek city of Tarsus in Southern Asia Minor. Thus, his family lived in two different worlds of Greek and Jewish culture. But he was first and foremost a Jew, a son of Pharisees. According to Jewish tradition he was named Saul after the First Great King of the Hebrew people. However, Saul also had another name, in Latin he was called Paulus, and was proud to be a citizen of Rome and a citizen of his homeland Tarsus. Acquiring Roman citizenship indicates that the family had wealth, as their citizenship had to be bought.

What type of upbringing did Saul have? Being a Diaspora Jew of wealth meant that he was most likely educated in Greek culture in the Pagan City schools. However, Saul's family did not stay in Tarsus. They moved to Jerusalem during his youth where Saul was educated to become a Pharisee. And in order to support himself, Saul here also learned the craft of tent making.

In the Book of Acts, we first encounter Saul at the martyrdom of St. Stephen encouraging those who are stoning. And we ask, "How could a religious man do such a thing?" We must remember that everything that Saul held as sacred: his view of God, the Mosaic Law, the Temple and its worship, and all the Jewish traditions were doomed to be destroyed if Stephen and other Christians like him were allowed to spread their teachings. For what did these Christians teach but a broken law, (replaced by Grace), a destroyed temple, (replaced by Christ), and an accursed Messiah who was hung on a tree. (See Dt. 21:23 – "...for a hanged man is accursed by God.") Christ took upon himself the greatest disgrace, in order to heal all of humanity. But Saul didn't understand any of this at the time. Thus, Saul first persecuted Christians in Jerusalem and then extended his hunt for them outside Judea. It was for this purpose that he was on the road to Damascus when he had his famous conversion.

Saul was suddenly knocked off his horse by a great force, and was then blinded by a bright light. He saw the risen Christ, and heard Jesus ask why he is being persecuted. Understandably, Saul was shaken to the core. He went to Damascus a changed man. He was baptized and became a Christian.

Saul then traveled to Arabia and remained there for two to three years. When he returned to Damascus his “fame” was such that King Aretas wanted him captured. Saul’s friends led him down in a basket through a window in the wall of the city. (2 Cor. 11:33) Saul then went to Jerusalem and met Sts Peter and James. The Church in Jerusalem was understandably very suspicious of him. St. Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus helped Saul overcome the suspicion by vouching for him. Saul soon left Jerusalem and returned to Tarsus.

The next 10 to 12 years were quiet with Saul teaching in his home and were no doubt used by him to reflect on all his learning and to crystallize the theology that later appears in his letters. We see Saul again in Antioch of Syria, helping Barnabas with the new church composed mostly of Gentiles. This church raised relief to assist the church in Jerusalem and Saul and Barnabas took the aid and returned with St. Mark, Barnabas’ cousin and author of the gospel of Mark. Mark was the man who we read about in the gospel who followed Jesus to the garden of Gethsemane wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. When the arrest happened and all about started to flee, Mark was seized but leaving the linen cloth was able to run away naked. (Mark 14:51-52) So, three men, Paul, Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, Barnabas’s home and began the first missionary journey.

From this point in his life Saul changed from his Jewish name to his Roman name, Paul. It is also from this point in his life that Paul began through the power of the Holy Spirit to perform miracles. As we can see on the map, Paul and his group crossed into Asia Minor, to the region of Lycaonia, establishing Churches. However, hostile opposition led to Paul being stoned almost to death in Lystra. He was to physically suffer from this event for the rest of his life. The group then traveled back to Antioch now with a young Greek convert named Titus.

At this time, tensions between Jewish and Gentile converts were high over question of circumcision. Paul and Barnabas took the uncircumcised Titus to Jerusalem where the first general assembly decided that circumcision was not required for membership into the Church, *but* eating sacrificed meat was strictly forbidden, and living a moral life was a must. At this assembly, it was acknowledged that Peter was chosen by God to lead the mission to the Jews, and that Paul was chosen to lead the mission to the Gentiles.

The outcome of the Jerusalem Assembly was that Christianity was to be a Universal (Catholic) religion open to all people. Paul and Barnabas worked very closely together but when Mark for some reason abandoned the two and then returned, Barnabas was

willing to accept him back. Paul, however, said, “No way!” So great was their dispute that the two friends parted ways. Barnabas and his nephew Mark went to Cyprus, and Paul chose Silas as his companion and the two traveled to Asia Minor on Paul’s 2nd Missionary Journey. [Mark and Paul were eventually reconciled.]

Paul with Silas and now Timothy traveled north to the region of Galatia, and then west to Phrygia founding small churches along the way. Once they reached Troas they sailed to Macedonia and spread the gospel to Philippi converting the woman Lydia who allowed her home to become the first church in the city.

Here Paul encountered the slave girl who was possessed with a demon spirit of foretelling. She followed Paul around for days, crying out “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” Paul expelled the demon from her. When her owner saw that he couldn’t make money from her any more, he became so angry that he had Paul beaten with rods and then dragged to prison with his companions.

They were chained with their feet in the stocks, and about midnight, when Paul and Silas were praying a great earthquake shook the prison. All the doors were opened and every one’s chains were unfastened. The terrified jailer when he saw that everyone was freed went to kill himself. Paul stopped him and the man fell at his feet asking for salvation. He was converted and took the saints to his house. That same night he and his family were baptized. In the morning, the magistrates released Paul and his companions.

From Philippi they traveled west to Thessalonica establishing churches along the way. There, Paul made dear friends and violent enemies. He began, as was his custom, by teaching about Christ first at the Jewish synagogue. A great argument arose and those in the synagogue were divided over Paul’s message. Many Gentiles who were leaning toward Judaism were converted to Christianity. Paul’s opponents were enraged and “set the city in an uproar”. They stirred up the authorities in the city with charges that Paul was a traitor to the state as he was proclaiming Jesus as a rival to the Roman emperor. The Brethren helped Paul and Silas to flee in the middle of the night. Unfortunately, the opponents in Thessalonica followed him to Berea and forced Paul to then flee to Athens, where on his very short visit there he made his famous proclamation “I come to teach you about this unknown God.”

Paul then quickly moved on to Corinth. However, since leaving the Thessalonians he became very anxious about them and so sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to learn how the Church was doing. When Timothy returned with good news, Paul began a new venture that changed the course of history. What was this new venture? Letter writing. We now enter the Age of the Pauline Epistles.

The Age of the Pauline Epistles

These letters to the Churches that Paul established and to his coworkers in the ministry provide the following for us reading them today:

- insight to St. Paul's life and character
- a history of the early Churches, their problems, structure, worship, and unity
- the earliest development of the teachings of Christ (the birth of Theology)
- with direction on how to live like Christians

Now since the first letter that appears in the New Testament Canon is that to the Romans, most people would expect that that was the letter that Paul wrote first. But it wasn't. All Fathers and scholars through out the Church's history, agree that the first letters written by Paul are 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. Unfortunately, after this letter there is very little agreement as to the chronological order of the letters. So when St. Athanasius in 367 AD listed which books were to be included in the New Testament Canon, the Letters of Paul were placed according *to length*. The Orthodox Church never concerned herself with finding the true chronology, but rather focused on the message and theology taught in each of the letters.

I have placed the letters of Paul in the order that I think will best help me tell you Paul's story. I doubt that it is accurate, but then again that is not our intent this evening.

Romans	1st Thessalonians
1st Corinthians	2nd Thessalonians
2nd Corinthians	1st Corinthians
Galatians	Philippians
Ephesians	Galatians and (Most of 2 nd
Philippians	Corinthians but not sent
Colossians	until later)
1st Thessalonians	Colossians
2nd Thessalonians	Philemon
1st Timothy	2 nd Corinthians competed
2nd Timothy	and sent
Titus	Romans
Philemon	Ephesians
	Titus
	1st Timothy
	2nd Timothy

The City of Corinth

So, if I can back track, Timothy returned with good news about the Church in Thessalonica. Despite persecution they had remained strong in faith (2:13-16).

1st and 2nd Thessalonians

In his 1st letter to the Thessalonians Paul encouraged the believers in their persecution and answered their concerns, as there were many questions that they needed answered. What concerns did the new church in Thessalonica have?

Well, they were basically worried about two things. First, when will Christ return and second, what is the fate of their members who died before the second coming?

So what did Paul have to say about Life after Death? Paul taught that:

First- we are not to grieve as those who have no hope

Second- as Jesus rose so all who are asleep in the Lord will also rise with him

Third - at the 2nd Coming, the dead will rise first and then the living will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord

(1st Thessalonians 4:13-18)

What did Paul have to say about the 2nd Coming? Paul taught that:

First - the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night

Second- Christians are children of Light and will always be ready

Third- we must be sober and always ready with the breastplate of faith and love, and a helmet of hope of salvation

(1st Thessalonians 5:1-11)

A few months after writing his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote his second letter to them. It was in response to news that a group of believers had been led to incorrectly believe that the Second Coming had already occurred.

Paul responded to this misunderstanding by explaining that there are signs to watch out for. He wrote: Let no one in any way deceive you, for [second coming] will not come unless the [anti-Christ] comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (2nd Thess. 2:3-4)

In other words, Paul taught that life needs to go on as normal, since no one knows when Christ is coming. We must continue to live our day-to-day lives, taking care of our families, going to work, taking care of the poor, being upright citizens in our communities and not just sit around lazily waiting for Jesus to come. Paul wrote that whoever doesn't want to work, also shouldn't eat. For us in 2012, it is clear that "God's time" is not "our time". Everyday we are closer to the Second Coming but we may be just a generation away or another 2000 years away. Regardless of when it will happen, Paul's words are relevant even for us today. Live your day-to-day lives and always be spiritually prepared.

Meanwhile, Paul's mission to the Corinthians was flourishing. He won over Crispus the ruler of the Synagogue and also Titius Justis who allowed Paul to stay at his house situated right next to the Synagogue. Paul's circle now included Aquila a fellow tent maker and his famed wife, Priscilla. The Church in Corinth was a multicultural mix of Jews and Gentiles who were mostly from the lower classes. The city had a very bad reputation for its sexual immorality. These evil forces in the city caused the church in Corinth to seriously backslide. Paul stayed in Corinth for a whole year and a half before moving on to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquilla, and this marked the beginning of his third Missionary Journey.

Paul left his companions behind in Ephesus and as we can see on the map, journeyed alone to Caesarea, and then Jerusalem. He then revisited Churches before rejoining Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. Paul never lost an opportunity for working for Christ. He used the cities as a base from which he sent his coworkers out to the surrounding areas to establish more churches. In this way the church in Ephesus and district began to grow and thrive, but reports of growing problems soon reached him. First on the list of troubled churches, as was to be expected was dear Corinth.

1st Corinthians

If we can just sum up Corinthians in one sentence we can say that it was concerned either directly or indirectly with numerous doctrinal and ethical problems that were disturbing the Corinthian Church. Paul wrote about many things and I will just highlight a few.

Corinth's church had become divided into "clubs" according to who had baptized who be it Paul, Apollos, Peter or Christ. Paul wasted no time correcting their "superiority" sin and explained to them how only God can judge the heart, and that they were not to judge each other. Paul asked, "Is Christ divided?" He reminded them that there is one Christ, and if we are to boast, we are to boast in the Lord, and Him alone. Some members also claimed superiority over others because of their supposed deeper wisdom. Paul scolded them for presuming that they were wiser. He said, "I could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food,

because you weren't ready for it yet, and you are still not ready, since you behave like ordinary squabbling men." (1 Cor. 3:1-3). He asked them in chap. 4, **"For who sees anything different in you?"** (1 Cor. 6:6). This speaks to us today. Being a Christian means that we are to stand out and be different from 'normal men'. We are to be united, kind and loving, patient, respectful, humble, caring of the poor and each other. If we are behaving in the same manner as the rest of the world, then we have no right to claim that Christ lives in us.

Paul also wrote about sexual immorality, incest and prostitution and that for the Christian these are abuses of the body, which is made to serve God. These rules have not changed for us today. Society condones sex before marriage, living together, affairs, abortions, gay lifestyles and even gay marriages. Times have changed and it is "okay" in the secular world to behave this way. But it is not okay in the Christian world. Our God is not old-fashioned. Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb. 13:8) We are known by how we live. Didn't Paul just say, "Who sees anything *different* in you?" We are not called to blend but to stand out, even if it means being teased or ridiculed.

Paul also wrote about public worship, and how we should take Holy Communion saying: "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself... If we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged." (1 Cor. 11:27-31). Isn't this how we should prepare for Communion? Judge ourselves before God in the sacrament of Confession and examine ourselves before we partake? Who sees anything different in you?

And finally, I must mention again my favourite section in Corinthians, where Paul wrote the greatest description of love ever written in chapter 13, ending with "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends..." (1 Cor. 13:7-8a) For Paul, **Love is what is different in us**. So to quote the old Youth Retreat camp song, "And they'll know we are Christian by our Love." Not love of self, but love for God, first, and then for neighbour.

The City of Ephesus

2nd Corinthians is a much later letter either written or finished in Macedonia after leaving Ephesus over two years after writing 1st Corinthians. So I will deal with it later. However, 2nd Corinthians and Romans, mention a harsh imprisonment in Ephesus. 1 Cor. 15:32 mentioned how he even "fought with beasts". Church Fathers and many modern scholars interpret this as Paul being placed in the arena and surviving the lions. Some others interpret this as a metaphor for hostile opposition. Regardless of which

interpretation one follows, it is evident that Ephesus dealt very harshly with Paul and so it makes sense for Paul to here receive a letter from the Church of Philippi voicing their deep concern for his imprisonment at this point in time.

Philippians

The Church of Philippi had sent Epaphroditus to Paul with money for the Church in Jerusalem. There were five reasons why Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians. The first was to explain how Epaphroditus became ill and was being sent home to recover. Second, to thank the Church for their generous gift for Jerusalem. Third, to reassure the very concerned Philippians of his current welfare as they heard he was enduring hardships in prison. Fourth, to express his great opposition to rival Judaizing Christian preachers (1:15-18) who insisted on persuading Christians of the need to be circumcised in order to be Christian. He warned the Philippians against them saying “Look out for those dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh” (3:2) And lastly, to encourage the Philippians, especially Euodia and Syntyche who are feuding, to always be united and put away their disputes (4:2-3).

Throughout this letter, Paul showed how an apostle met challenging difficulties and prevailed over them with the power of Christ. The letter described Paul’s joy and happiness in Christ, even during imprisonment, hardships and possible death. This part of the letter is very relevant for those of us reading it today. It helps us face challenges and difficulties with faith and perseverance.

Paul during his imprisonment heard of serious problems affecting many of his established Churches due to rival missionaries who taught a different gospel, and attempted to turn his spiritual children against him. In the district of Galatia, rival missionaries were accusing Paul of having watered down the teachings of Christ, and were adamantly imposing circumcision and the Mosaic Law in the established churches in the area.

Galatians

Needless to say, Paul was very disturbed to hear this. He sent an urgent letter to the Churches in Galatia which is often called the “Magna Carta of Christianity” (Complete Guide to the New Testament, p. 392.) Paul here stressed the liberation from the Law of Moses and dealt with the most intense controversy of early Christianity...whether Gentiles (non-Jews) could be included within the Christian church without first becoming Jewish. Galatians is a thunderous call to a gospel of salvation based on grace and freedom. Paul wrote: “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” (Gal. 5:1) Paul strongly voiced his opposition to the need to follow the Law of Moses, which is impossible for humans to follow in its

entirety. He stressed how Christ freed us from this burden of the Law, and justified us through faith.

It is in this letter where we find the beautiful hymn, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:27) And Paul continued to write, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Gal 3:28-29).

Colossians

The letters to the Colossians and to Philemon were written at the same time, by Paul and Timothy. Colossians was addressed to the whole church at Colossae, while Philemon was a personal letter addressed to a member of the church there. Colossae was a town close to Ephesus.

Paul was informed of a problem that we know of today as “the Colossian heresy”. Basically, this heresy teaches that there are levels of “better” and “worse” Christians. We saw something similar to this in 1st Corinthians. Now, however, this view was growing into something bigger. In Colossae we see the beginning of the rise of Gnosticism, which taught that few are chosen and allowed to know of the secret knowledge. Paul warned, “See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.” (Col 2:8) The false teachers insisted that *strict ascetics* needed to be practiced. This was in order to put great restraint on the pleasures of the flesh so one could then supposedly encounter the secret deeper mystery where hid the “*real*” way to salvation. Naturally, Paul stressed that **Christ** was the **only** way to salvation, (Col 2:16-19).

Paul (and Timothy) emphasized that there was nothing hidden in the message of salvation. Whatever we need to obtain salvation is easily accessible and only found, in Christ. And the message of salvation is offered equally to all people and not to a select few. Paul was convinced that the Christian faith “must be a faith for realistic living. So he ended his letter by showing how the power of Christ that lives in every Christian works itself out in the family (3:18-21), at work (3:22-4:1), in the church (4:2-4), and in life in general (4:5-6).” (Drane p. 342) It cannot be denied that there are many similarities in Paul’s arguments in Galatians and Colossians. The differences between the two being that the one church dealt with seeing the Law of Moses as necessary to salvation, and the other church dealt with strict asceticism that led to “secret knowledge” as necessary for salvation. For Paul Christian Gospel required one thing for salvation, and that is faith in Christ.

Philemons

The letter to Philemon though highly personal, was not intended to be entirely private. Paul wrote to Philemon who was a Christian slave owner, an appeal for mercy for his runaway slave, Onesimus. Runaway slaves could be punished by death, and harboring a runaway was punishable by a fine. Paul offers restitution for any wrong done by the slave—telling Philemon to “charge that to my account” in verse 18. Paul mentions that he will soon visit Philemon in Colossae, when we assume he will pay his account.

For us today, the letter to Philemons teaches us that regardless of social status, and opinions of the state, all Christians are not only equal in Christ, but one in Christ and so we are to view each other, and treat each other, and love each other as brethren.

Paul leaves Ephesus for Macedonia

During the two years since his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul’s relationship with Corinth had greatly deteriorated, and again it was due to rival missionaries. This time, his rivals were trying to persuade the Church to transfer its loyalty away from Paul to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Paul, now out of prison, is believed to have made a “painful visit” to Corinth, and returned to Ephesus very distressed. He then wrote a severe letter which has been lost to us, and sent it to Corinth with Titus in hopes of reconciliation.

Paul began to write 2nd Corinthians. The letter is very choppy, and is almost like reading several different letters strung together. Meanwhile, the situation in Ephesus climaxed with a riot led by a silversmith named Demetrius against Paul. Paul’s mission was seen as having impacted negatively against the worship of the city’s goddess Artemis. Paul, also being anxious about Corinth’s response to his letter, went to Troy and then to Macedonia in search of Titus. When Paul finally met Titus in Macedonia he was relieved to hear that the Church of Corinth had changed its attitude towards him. Paul then completed and sent what we know of today as the 2nd letter to the Corinthians.

2nd Corinthians

In this letter, Paul illuminated his own life, ministry, and the concern, which he felt for the churches he had established. Paul wrote: “For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.” (2 Cor. 4:15) Paul shared all the hardships that he endured while in Ephesus, and warned the members of the Church of Corinth not to be “yoked together with unbelievers” (6:14-7:1). For us today, the advice will be, choose carefully who your friends are as you will be negatively influenced by their unbelief.

Paul also wrote to them about the nature and “high calling” of the Christian ministry. He poetically wrote: “...thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and

through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ." (2 Cor 2:14-17.) This beautiful passage pertains to each and every one of us as we are all called, whether a little or a lot, to be ministers of Christ. We are all commissioned by God at our Baptism to speak of Christ and to spread the fragrance the knowledge of him to our family, and extended family, to our friends, to our coworkers, even to strangers that we meet in social events. When the opportunity lends itself speak of Christ and lead others to him and the truth. This is what it means to love your neighbour. You can give no greater gift than the knowledge of salvation in our Lord.

Paul in Corinth

After sending the letter, Paul returned to Corinth for a short three-month visit. And here he came to a decision, that the time had come for a new challenge in spreading the Gospel. He decided to go to Spain where the Gospel had yet to be proclaimed. He began to plan for this journey. He would stop at Rome on his way and so needed to introduce himself to that already established Christian Community and to ask for their hospitality.

Romans

The letter to the Romans is the longest of the Paul's epistles to the churches. It was written during the height of Paul's career, between 54 and 58 AD, and is viewed by many as the weightiest of the epistles. Romans is a comprehensive summary of most of Paul's theology, as it lacks his belief in the second coming and the afterlife. However, it does convey the full richness of Paul's experience of Christ. We had seen in the other letters that Paul was very concerned with collecting money for the impoverished Christian community in Jerusalem. Paul anticipated that this offering would dispel certain suspicions of him and his work, which some Christians in Jerusalem felt and which had been a source of concern to him. Paul wrote in Romans that the collection is now complete, and so helps us place all the letters that speak of a collection before this letter to the Romans (Rom 15:25-27).

Paul repeated the themes that we have already encountered in Galatians and 1st Corinthians but articulated them here more clearly (Drane p. 326). It is assumed that Paul wanted to present his theology, and understanding of the gospel as a message of salvation for all, in order to secure support from the Church in Rome for his mission to Spain.

Romans can be divided into 3 main sections. John Drane titles the first as “How Christians know God”. Paul entered into a long theological argument going over the same points as in his letter to the Galatians, namely, that it is faith and not good works (i.e. following the Law) that saves us. He expanded on how we have freedom in Christ who endured all for us. He then clarified that even though Christians are not longer bound to the Law of Moses, they still must behave as servants of God and not as servants to sin. The second section, “Israel and salvation” was written to deal with Israel’s rejection of salvation as they chose “works” over “faith.” Paul did not believe that Israel would always reject Christ. He viewed their rejection as God’s plan, a necessary act to ensure the salvation of all races. He believed that when all nations have accepted Christ, Israel would then return to God and accept Christ also. (Drane p. 327) In this section, Paul demonstrated his deep love for Israel and her place in the plan for salvation. Christian anti-Semitists should read this letter to understand how they err in their views. The last section, “How Christians should behave” is a practical application of God’s righteousness in Christian living. Paul dealt with a Christian’s relationship to the church, others and the state. In one word, a Christian is to “love” and behave “lovingly” to others. A Christian is to submit totally to the will of God, to Christ as Lord, and to be open to the power of the Holy Spirit to work through his or her life. And this I feel and fear is the weakness in our Church today. It is too often that the “my will” over “God’s will” governs the decisions and actions in our lives.

Paul Journeys to Jerusalem

Paul did not go directly to Spain. He needed to first give the collection to the Church in Jerusalem. Paul is joined by many men, including Timothy and Luke, and travelled in a round about way to Syria. He was told on two occasions not to go to Jerusalem, but Paul didn’t listen. He was convinced that even though imprisonment and hardship waited for him, the Spirit was still directing him. The warnings proved true.

His “fame” unfortunately preceded him, and when he entered the Temple, Ephesian Jews started a riot accusing Paul of desecrating the temple by bringing in Greeks.

The tribune Claudius Lysias saved Paul from the mob but put him under arrest. So violent was the mob, that Lysias had to send Paul to Caesarea, to governor Felix for his protection. Felix kept Paul in custody for 2 years. It is my belief that Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians from this prison.

Paul in Prison at Caesarea

Ephesians

Paul intended the letter to the Ephesians to be a circular letter to be read by the many churches he established, and as such should not be thought of as being addressed only to the Ephesians. Some early Christian writers refer to it as the letter to the Laodiceans. We call it Ephesians since the letter that survived and was handed down was the particular one that was sent to Ephesus. "This letter contains, in a fuller and more carefully argued form, the same kind of teaching about the person of Christ as in Colossians, but without the pointed references to the local Colossian heresy." (Drane p. 344)

The letter was written to encourage the faithful to live as true Christian followers and to minister and serve in unity and love while being persecuted.

Again in this letter Paul placed Christ in the centre of all things. Those who know Christ are privileged as they were raised up together with Christ and sit with him in heaven. Christians are part of God's new creation. To show this to the world they have to live out by their actions who they really are. They are to be peaceful, kind to each other, tender hearted, and forgiving, always displaying self-sacrificing love for each other. Paul wrote that Christians are to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness (fortune telling, pagan celebrations and the like). He went on to explain how a Christian life is to be ruled by the principles of self-less or self-giving love both in the family and at work. Lastly, Paul said that all Christians can expect attacks from the devil and strong opposition so they need to be prepared and to "put on the whole armour of God". On our own we stumble. "We are only strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." (6:10) Paul repeatedly told the believers to "stand firm".

In 59 AD, the Governor Felix was replaced by Governor Festus who wanted to send Paul back to Jerusalem in a plot to kill him on the way. Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen by appealing to Caesar, and so was sent to Rome. And thus began his 4th Journey while in captivity.

Paul Journey's to Rome

Paul was placed under the guard of a kindly centurion named Julius and put on a ship. A sudden storm that lasted 14 days carried the ship off course and eventually ran it aground on a reef at Malta. Miraculously, no life was lost. In the spring, Paul was placed on a new vessel and was sent to Rome.

There he received a warm welcome from the Christian community. Paul was placed under a loose house arrest, guarded by a single soldier, for two years. He was able to freely teach and preach to all who visited him.

The Pastoral Letters: Titus and Timothy

It is believed by many, that the final letters, known as the Pastoral Epistles, were written when Paul was finally released. They were written to advise Timothy and Titus on how to not only be exemplary church leaders, but how to choose leaders who will carry on Christ's ministry. These three letters were probably written at the same time as they are very similar to each other and deal with the same four main subjects:

- False teachers
- True belief
- Christian behaviour
- Christian leadership

Not surprisingly, Paul wrote to advise Timothy and Titus on how to deal with Judaizers, Gnostics and Ascetics as they too faced the same problems that Paul encountered. Paul reminded Timothy "Everything that God has created is good; nothing is to be rejected..." (1 Tim. 4:4), when Judaizers were imposing the Law upon matters of sex and food. Paul then dealt with a Jewish form of Gnosticism that viewed the world as evil, and not really created by God. Following this he addressed both the rigid Ascetics and the extreme permissive.

In response to these ideologies Paul reaffirmed the basic component of true Christianity. Jesus was truly human and divine and thus God does care about the world we live in. Jesus also was involved with sinners, and called all to salvation not through philosophy but through humbly accepting God's mercy and love through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. And once we accept this true belief, we behave like our Lord, in a Christ-like manner. Those who serve the church, the leaders, are called to be examples of good behaviour to all, and not only this but to also be courageous to stand firm before all types of opposition even unto death.

Paul's biography becomes difficult to piece together at this point, as we can no longer depend on the book of Acts to help us. Acts does not tell us if Paul made it to Spain or how he martyred. Thus, for the rest of Paul's story we need to depend on early Patristic writings and Church Tradition.

Paul goes to Spain

St. Clement recorded in the 1st Century (1 Clem 5:5-6) that Paul was released from Rome under Claudius, and did in fact travel to Spain and proclaimed the Gospel “to the farthest bounds of the West”.¹

Thus, we believe that Paul was free to continue teaching the Gospel under Claudius (41-54) to the farthest west being Spain, but when Claudius died Emperor Nero (54-68) made it a capital offence just to even be a Christian.

Paul was therefore arrested, sent to Rome, was tried, as Clement wrote, “bore his testimony before the rulers”, and was sentenced to death.

Paul in Rome

And so ends the life of Paul, the Apostle to the Nations, and the writer of the Epistles. Truly, he was by the grace of God a superhero. To have accomplished what he did during the times that he lived in is nothing short of miraculous. According to tradition, Paul being a Roman citizen had the right to a quick execution. He was beheaded sometime between 64 and 67 AD in Rome for being a Christian, a disciple of Christ. His theology, and teachings on life as a Christian were relevant for his times, are relevant for us today and will be relevant until the awaited second coming of our Lord. Paul continues to challenge us and ask us, **“For who sees anything different in you?”**

¹ 5 By reason of jealousy and strife Paul by his example pointed out the prize of patient endurance. After that he had been seven times in bonds, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, had preached in the East and in the West, he won the noble renown [fame] which was the reward of his faith, -6- having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached *the farthest bounds of the West*; and when he had borne his testimony before the rulers, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance.

Sources

Text

May, Herbert G. and Bruce M. Metzger (editors). The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (RSV). New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Drane, John. Introducing the New Testament. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986.

Gardner, Joseph L. (Edit. Director). Who's Who in the Bible: an illustrated biographical dictionary. Pleasantville, NY: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1994.

Visalli, Gayla (edit.). Complete Guide to the Bible: An Illustrated Book-by-Book Companion to the Scriptures. New York: Reader's Digest, 1998.

Internet

<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/turkey/ephesus-paul.htm>

<http://www.bible-researcher.com/athanasius.html>

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3155941?seq=4>

<http://bible.org/article/i-corinthians-introduction-and-outline>

<http://www.abu.nb.ca/courses/ntintro/paulcareer5.htm>

<http://www.slideshare.net/niwres/in-the-footsteps-of-paul>

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/romans/>

<http://markmoore.org/resources/essays/acts/johnmark.pdf>

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/2-corinthians/>