

# PAUL: HIS LIFE AND TEACHINGS

## Lesson 2

### Paul – An Overview of His Writings

#### GOD SPEAKS

Communication is a vital component to building meaningful relationships. The ability to know and be known, to love and be loved, to care and to be cared for, produces an extraordinary environment for relational growth. God takes the initiative to communicate with the crown of His creation, human beings. God designed us for relationship. God chooses to communicate with us.

How does God communicate? Henry Blackaby captures God's communication method by identifying that, "God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways."<sup>1</sup> As you read the Bible, you are hearing from God. The Bible is God's revelation to us. God also speaks through prayer. Prayer is communication with God. You have the privilege of communing with the Creator of the universe through prayer. God also communicates to us through circumstances. God reveals His compassion, His mercy, and His provision through adversity as well as tranquility. God also uses other believers within the Body of Christ to communicate His love and to clarify His plan.

God is a God of revelation. God chooses to make Himself known. His primary tool of communication is the Bible. The Bible is divided into two sections: Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament can be divided into four sections: the Books of the Law (*Genesis-Deuteronomy*), the Historical Books (*Joshua-Esther*), the Poetical Books (*Job-Song of Songs*), and the Prophetical Books (*Isaiah-Malachi*). There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. The New Testament can be divided into four sections: the Gospels (*Matthew-John*), the Acts (*Acts*), the Epistles (*Romans-Jude*), and the Revelation (*Revelation*). These sixty-six books were written by forty human authors over a period of about 1500 years under the direction and inspiration of the Author, God.

In Paul's letter to Timothy, he affirms the inspiration of the Bible, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"(2 Tim 3:16-17 NIV).

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<sup>1</sup> Blackaby, Henry. *Experiencing God* (Lifeway 1990) at 225.

Of the twenty-one epistles found in the New Testament, Paul wrote thirteen of them. “He continued and expanded his ministry by writing letters. He wrote letters to places he had been and to places he hoped to visit.”<sup>2</sup> God guided the process of writing to further the gospel.

In the Graeco-Roman world private letters averaged close to ninety words in length. Literary letters, such as those by the roman orator and statesman Cicero and by Seneca the philosopher, averaged around two hundred words. Since the usual papyrus sheet measured 9½” x 11” and could accommodate 150-250 words, depending on the size of writing, most ancient letters occupied no more than one papyrus page. But the average length of Paul’s epistles runs to about 1,300 words, ranging from 335 words in Philemon to 7,101 words in Romans.<sup>3</sup>

The Epistles are unique in form in comparison to the Gospels, the Acts, and the Revelation. “Since divine providence chose this method of communication for so much of the New Testament, it is important to understand both the form and the function of the ancient letters in order to interpret them properly.”<sup>4</sup> According to Robert Gundry, “For long documents like Paul’s Epistles, single papyrus sheets were joined edge to edge and rolled to form a scroll.”<sup>5</sup>

God did not create us to be robotic, but to be relational. In speaking through Paul, God did not bypass Paul’s personality and experiences.

Of all the New Testament authors, Paul is the one who has stamped his own personality most unmistakably on his writings. It is especially for this reason that he has his secure place among great letter-writers in world literature – not because he composed his letters with a careful eye to stylistic propriety and the approving verdict of a wider public than those for whom they were primarily intended, but because they express so spontaneously and therefore so eloquently his mind and message.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Butler, Trent. *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Holman 1991) at 873.

<sup>3</sup> Gundry, Robert. *A Survey of the New Testament* (Academie 1981) at 245.

<sup>4</sup> McRay, John. *Paul: His Life and Teaching* (Baker Academic 2003) at 264.

<sup>5</sup> Gundry, 245.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, F.F. *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans 1977) at 15.

Paul traveled extensively in what have become known as his Missionary Journeys. “Paul adopted the strategy of preaching in major cities. From these centers the gospel reverberated through the surrounding villages and countryside.”<sup>7</sup> In Paul’s letters, he reconnected with people he had met and churches he had birthed. Nine of his letters were to churches and four of his letters were to individuals.

## **PAUL’S LETTERS TO CHURCHES**

The overview of Paul’s letters will be based on chronological order rather than the order of their appearance in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> Imagine Paul’s personal faith journey as he matures spiritually. God develops Paul through the crucible of suffering. “But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’”(Acts 9:15-16 NIV). Paul’s familiarity with suffering becomes evident in his letters to the churches.

### **Galatians**

Paul’s first letter is the book of the Bible we call Galatians. Paul is writing from Antioch to the churches in Galatia (Modern day Turkey). Galatians is the only one of Paul’s letters specifically addressed to churches in more than one city. These churches were birthed as a result of Paul’s First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14). “The letter was written to Gentile Christians who had been converted from paganism, primarily under the influence of Paul’s preaching.”<sup>9</sup> Warren Wiersbe denotes that, “Galatians is God’s strongest word against legalism.”<sup>10</sup> As you trace history, you find that Galatians was the battle cry of the Reformation.<sup>11</sup>

One of the key verses in the book of Galatians is where Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, “Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith’”(Galatians 3:11 NIV). To capture the book of Galatians in one word: Unshackled.

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<sup>7</sup> Gundry, Robert. *A Survey of the New Testament* (Academie 1981) at 224.

<sup>8</sup> Boa, Kenneth. *Talk Thru the New Testament* (Tyndale 1981) at 148.

<sup>9</sup> Crapps, Robert. *Introduction to the New Testament* (Wiley 1969) at 273.

<sup>10</sup> Wiersbe, Warren. *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Victor Books 1992) at 515.

<sup>11</sup> Lowery, Fred. *Making the Bible Clear* (Love Publishing Company 1980) at 227.

## **I & II Thessalonians**

From Corinth, Paul writes to the church of the Thessalonians. Paul founded the church on his Second Missionary Journey. Each chapter contains some reference to the second coming of Christ. One of the theme verses is, "...they tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God"(I Thessalonians 1:9).

Though the word "rapture" is not found in the Bible, the Greek word that means to be snatched up or raptured is the word, "*harpazo*." It denotes the resurrection of deceased believers and the simultaneous translation of the believers. Notice the phrase "caught up" in the I Thessalonians 4:16-17:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

To capture the intent of I & II Thessalonians in two words: Be Ready!

## **I & II Corinthians**

Paul writes I Corinthians from Ephesus and then II Corinthians from Macedonia. He writes to the church of God in Corinth. Paul actually wrote four letters to the church in Corinth:

Correspondence A: probably lost (I Cor. 5:9)  
Correspondence B: I Corinthians  
Correspondence C: a painful and severe letter (II Cor. 2:4, 7:8)  
Correspondence D: II Corinthians

Paul spent 18 months of his Second Missionary Journey in Corinth (Acts 18:1-11). In Acts 18:6, we learn of Paul's shift in ministry focus: "...from now on I will go to the Gentiles."

The church is equated with the Body of Christ in Paul's letter known as I Corinthians. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink"(1 Cor. 12:12-13 NIV).

To sum up I and II Corinthians in one word: Unity.

## Romans

Paul is writing from Corinth at the home of a wealthy Christian named Gaius during Paul's three-month visit on his Third Missionary Journey. The letter was written down by Paul's secretary, Tertius (16:22), and taken to Rome by a prominent widow named Phoebe (16:1-2). "This letter is the premier example of the epistolary form of writing, not only in the Pauline body of material and in the New Testament but also in all ancient literature."<sup>12</sup> Gundry clarifies, "Paul wrote Romans as a preparation for his first visit to that city and to the Christian community there."<sup>13</sup>

The book of Romans has more Old Testament quotations than all other epistles together. It is considered the theology book of the New Testament. The theme passage is Romans 1:16-17:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'

God's provision of righteousness for unrighteous men through Jesus Christ is the overriding theme of Romans. The word "righteous" is used in one form, or another, over sixty times in the book of Romans.

The following verses have been used for what has become known as the "Roman Road to Salvation":

- "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23 (NIV)
- "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23 (NIV)
- "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8 (NIV)
- "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Romans 10:9-10 (NIV)
- "For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" Romans 10:13 (NIV)

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<sup>12</sup> Walvoord, John. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Victor Books 1988) at 435.

<sup>13</sup> Gundry, p. 278.

Romans in one word: Righteousness.

### **Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians**

During his imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote what has become known as the “Prison Epistles” which include Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. We will take a look at Philemon under the heading of Paul’s letters to individuals.

Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years (Acts 19 & 20:31). He writes to the saints in Ephesus. The book of Ephesians is a perfect balance of doctrine and duty. Ephesians emphasizes the believer’s position in Christ and the believer’s role in the Body of Christ.

Ephesians in one word: Blessed. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ”(Eph 1:3 NIV).

Paul writes to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse (1:2). Paul had not visited Colosse (2:1), but Timothy and Epaphras (1:1 & 1:7) preached there and probably established the church during Paul’s Third Missionary Journey (Acts 19:10, 26). Epaphras served as pastor of the church (1:4-8).

“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”(Col 1:27 NIV).

As affirmed in Colossians 1:18-20, the book of Colossians in one word: Supremacy.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

The church at Philippi was the first Christian church planted by Paul in Europe and represented the first major penetration of the gospel into Gentile territory (Acts 16:11-14).<sup>14</sup> Paul went to Philippi in obedience to the vision he received from God (Acts 16:9-12). Philippians is a love letter from Paul’s heart to the church. He unveils his deep abiding love for the saints in Philippi and his

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<sup>14</sup> Lowery, p.236.

appreciation for their partnership in the Gospel. Paul mentions the name of Jesus at least forty times in this short letter. The letter is saturated with the presence of the word joy (rejoice) 18 times. Paul reveals his passion for spiritual maturity in Philippians 3:12-14:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians in one word: Joy.

## **PAUL’S LETTERS TO INDIVIDUALS**

### **Philemon**

The shortest of Paul’s inspired writings, Philemon is the only one of the prison epistles addressed to an individual. Paul had led Philemon to the Lord earlier during his ministry in Ephesus. Philemon was a man of wealth and had a house large enough to host the Colossian church.<sup>15</sup>

Tychicus delivered this letter from Paul to Philemon. It is likely that Philemon’s slave, Onesimus, who had been won to the Lord by Paul, traveled with Tychicus back to the home of Philemon. This short letter gives us insight into the tenderness of Paul for those who have been wounded.

The book of Philemon in one word: Forgiveness. “So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me”(Philemon 1:17-18 NIV).

### **Titus**

Paul writes from Corinth during the time between his first and second imprisonment. Titus was one of Paul’s sons in the ministry. “To Titus, my true son in our common faith...”(Titus 1:4 NIV). Titus was serving as pastor of the churches on the island of Crete. “Titus is an evangelistic letter whose ultimate

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<sup>15</sup> MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon* (The Moody Bible Institute 1992) at 203.

purpose was to prepare the church for more effective witness to unbelievers on Crete.”<sup>16</sup>

The book of Titus contains two of the most comprehensive statements concerning the Christian experience and life to be found anywhere in the New Testament (Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7). “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you”(Titus 1:5 NIV).

The book of Titus in one word: Godliness. In Titus 2:12-14, Paul extends his plea for godliness:

It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

## **I & II Timothy**

Paul wrote I Timothy during the time between his first and second imprisonment. Timothy was led to the Lord by Paul and joined Paul on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 16:1-3). Titus, I & II Timothy are considered “Pastoral Epistles.”

Paul established Timothy as the pastor of the church in Ephesus. “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith”(I Tim 1:3-4 NIV).

The book of I Timothy in one word: Order.

Paul wrote II Timothy during his final imprisonment. About to be martyred, Paul writes his final letter to encourage Timothy, his spiritual son in the ministry. “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also”(II Tim 1:5 NIV).

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<sup>16</sup> MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Titus* (The Moody Bible Institute 1996) at xi.



Embracing an eternal perspective, Paul examines his life in light of eternity as indicated in II Timothy 4:6-8:

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

The book of II Timothy in one word: Loyalty.

### **POINTS FOR HOME**

1. **Remember that your beliefs determine your behavior.**
  - a. Seek to grow in your knowledge of God's Word.
  - b. Solidify what you really believe about God and His revelation.
  - c. Stay open to allow God to make adjustments in your life.
2. **Make room in your life to hear from God.**
  - a. Practice solitude.
  - b. Protect your daily time and place to be alone with God.
  - c. Pray, listen, and reflect.
3. **Commit to read through the letters of Paul.**
  - a. Read four chapters per day.
  - b. Write down one verse from each chapter.
  - c. Develop an action statement that captures what God is asking you to do.

*Excerpt from my Daily Quiet Time Journal (11.01.07)*

After reading Daniel 1-4:

What God Is Saying to Me Through His Word...

- Stephen, take care of the temple of the Holy Spirit.
- Stephen, honor Me with your body.
- Stephen, speak with wisdom and tact.
- Stephen, trust Me to reveal My dream.