

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
November 2019**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Living the Christian Life in a Real Battle

based on: S Olyott

(Review of last week)

Today we commence what will bring our study of the Apostle Paul's letter, specifically to the local church at Ephesus, to a close. In the first three chapters we were shown how rich, as Christians, we are: the abundant blessings of Christ and how as a consequence our lives and our future lives have changed so much for the better.

Then in the next three chapters we are counselled to both recognise and foster the changes brought about by the richness of Christ: through the application of His Spirit dwelling in us. Being changed we should expect to live – that is behave – differently from how we did before. That is different from the world, which is largely composed of the unconverted: non-Christians. He gave instruction of how we should expect to show that we have been changed, by our behaviour at church, the world and especially the home.

Now we have come to the end of the final Chapter, we need to be aware that we are in a real battle, to be able to successfully *walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called*. To show by our behaviour that we really have been 'born again'. And it is a battle of potentially over-whelming proportions. No one could expect in their wildest dreams that they would be able to survive it! ... In their own strength.

Some would like to ease non-Christians into becoming Christians, with a 'sugar-coated' message: that once they choose to come to Christ all their problems will be solved. This sounds very like the range of 'prosperity religions' posing as Christianity in many Christian-looking organisations. But this has not been suggested by Paul. He clearly states the abundant grace that Christ brings to the elect. No one could fail to appreciate the 'good news': the Gospel. But at the same time the 'cost' and the necessity of the cost of 'discipleship' is clearly spelt out.

No more so that at the start of today's passage: Verse 10. After all of his letter so far he says, "Finally, ..." and then in one sentence, while acknowledging that we are in a desperate battle, gives the nub of the answer to how we can possibly succeed in the otherwise impossible: "... *be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.*"

I chose to use the rallying directive of General Eisenhower to the troops before embarking on D-day on the front of our Order of Service. See how Paul is like a general, rallying his troops to get on with a mighty but crucial battle!

So much can be learnt from this passage, as demonstrated by the dozens and dozens of commentaries that have been written on it. But we will concentrate of just 4 key points.

1. (If you've missed it so far.) We are soldiers at war!

When I was young, for a brief period before I started as a school teacher, I was in the army. National Service. At a time which was between all major wars or even rumours of wars. We wore the uniform; shouted the words, were visible at parades, and fired bigish guns at Leighton – at little rafts drawn across our field of view at Gage Roads, by motor boats. Normally we were supposed to just miss the target raft so it could be used again. We played at being soldiers, We were not in a real war! Some things (like being carried loose in the back of a truck driven by a regular army private each day from our barracks to Leighton) were difficult but, we were assured, not dangerous.

But when a soldier is in a real war things are very different:

- all one's effort is directed to it;
- you eat, to retain strength;
- sleep or relax, to recover;
- its an existence of constant sacrifice;
- difficult and dangerous;
- pain and tears, frustration.

That is the 'picture' that Paul has in mind of the Christian life. It's not a hobby. Further we draw from one of the two above examples: It is possible to look like a soldier. To turn up at 10 am on a Sunday for 'parade'; to talk the right sort of language; to go to 1 or 2 special things; put yourself out a little but never really get involved in the conflict, that is 'discipleship'. Only gather with the other troops, looking like them, but then go away never having anything to do with the 'army' until the next parade comes around. This is possible – we see it – but it's not what Paul is talking about.

Paul is not going to let us avoid the fact that the Christian Life is difficult. It's a real battle. Its worthwhile of course, but it's still a battle.

Paul at the time he wrote was probably chained to a Roman soldier by a long chain that allowed him to pace around the room as he dictated his letter. Right before his eyes was 'the very model of a modern ... ' Roman soldier. So it's natural that Paul uses military language, and a little later the details of the military uniform with which to describe the battle of the Christian life.

(verse 10) *Be strong!* And where does this seeming impossible strength come from? You need all the might of God to survive and win in this conflict.

(verses 11,13,14) You will need to 'stand your ground', and (verse 12), you will need to 'wrestle'.

All these words show the need for effort. There is difficulty, trial, hardship and even 'flaming darts' (V 16).

Behind all this is a subtle enemy (verse 11) *the schemes of the devil.*

Then we not only defend our 'position', to stand our ground, but we are required to 'go over the edge'. To take up a sword and fight. (verse 17b)

We should put an end to misleading people about the consequences of the Gospel. And what Christ requires of His disciples. Yes the blessings from Christ, announced in the Gospel, are beyond compare. (Chapters 1-3). But the Christian Life every day is hard. Difficult. A battle. These are the facts. The 'cost of discipleship' must be told at the same time as the Gospel is preached. Jesus said so, and so should we! (Luke 14:25-35)

When soldiers are at war. It is total. All or nothing. It is not a hobby.

2. This war (our warfare) is a spiritual warfare.
The aim of any war (most now of our generations have no first hand knowledge of war),
 - is to 'hold our ground', and
 - endeavour to gain some of the enemy's ground,

This is the same in a spiritual war.

- hold our ground, and
- gain our enemy's, by defeating him,

In this world we aim to keep two types of 'ground'.

- the realm of what we believe, and
- how we behave. That is the Apostolic Faith in the Bible.

The Media is clearly confused about true Christianity. And with reason. The most prominent religious groups while they claim to be Christian fall short of the Faith expressed in the Bible. Almost any, so called Christian Church today, fails to preach Christianity anymore. Instead they accept Liberalism: where in order to be popular by making man the centre of all things and not God, they choose to leave out of their system of belief anything that is difficult for man to accept. Therefore miracles are not believed; the deity of Christ is sneered at; the authorship of Moses for the first five books of the Bible is disputed; Jonah didn't happen – Jesus referred to this (Matthew 12:40); and the Revelation is figurative nonsense. That is Liberalism.

Then there is Ecumenical-ism: where it doesn't matter what we believe as long as we show a united front to the world. Therefore all Christians, whatever their label, should drop their differences and 'get together'.

Cults: Such as those who knock on doors – peddling pernicious views of the Lord Jesus Christ.

False religions the world over and increasingly amongst ourselves.

All the 'modern' views of man: Nihilism – “it doesn't matter why you're here because you're not here for any reason.” Atheism – there is no God and it's nonsense to believe so. Materialism (the religion of the majority) – the only thing that matters is things (possessions, money, goods, reputation, prestige, fame or notoriety).

All sorts of views are taking over people's minds. We have to hold our ground – and gain people from those views. Hold our ground in the realm of behavior. Since permissiveness is now the norm – any with standards are regarded as the 'fringe', the exception. Watch any hour of TV for proof of this state of affairs. Degradation all around us: Murder of babies in the womb; ridicule of those who work hard – this being seen as a 'mug's game'. Abandonment of 'principles' where ever you look. A pervasive 'pop' culture – it doesn't matter how you behave as long as it feels right to you.

All these views assault the Christian – we must hold our ground against these views and these kinds of behavior.

(verse 12) But these are not our real enemies. ¹² *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, ... We are not to be against the people who are Roman Catholics, Jehovah Witnesses, those who believe in evolution, practice sexual perversion and human degradation, pop singers and 'rappers', philosophers. Not 'flesh and blood'. Not humans – but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Why do people believe things that are not true in the eyes of God? Why do they behave in a way that God disapproves of? Because minds are darkened and controlled by other personalities. At verse 11 we read the name of the chief of these personalities. The devil – a personal, powerful personality. He controls those people's minds. He does it by countless agents, who work for him and stupefy men and women all around us. The 'principalities & powers' as described in the KJV – the rulers and authorities of the cosmic powers. Various ranks of wicked angels. Personalities who rule the darkness of this world and 'possess' men and women. Wicked spirits in heavenly places.

A man believes in evolution, because his mind has been blinded by the devil (*et al*). The doctor will murder a baby in the womb because his mind has been captured by spiritual wickedness. A person will deny the truth of the Bible or believe instead that a man is 'the vicar of Christ' because his mind has been perverted by an evil power.

We are not at war with those poor people who are thus degraded and captivated by those wicked spirits. It is not 'flesh and blood' that we must oppose. It's the evil spiritual personalities, which make people behave the way they do, by controlling their minds. This is what Paul is saying.

This then is the battle we are in. It is a battle for the mind. Who will rule the mind! Will God rule the mind and thus liberate us, in all righteousness, or will the devil darken and capture it to degrade it.

Nevertheless, as well as holding our ground in this cosmic battle, we must also seek to gain ground from the devil. Bring people out of darkness, into the light and liberty of the Gospel. Receiving the glory and privileges of Christ, as clearly revealed in the first three chapters of this letter.

The battle is ongoing. We are in it every day. Every hour. It's everywhere! When you wake in the morning the Christian doesn't regard Christianity as a hobby. Or if we wake on a Sunday, say, "This is my one day to be a Christian." Today and every day the devil will try to steal your mind from your loyalty to Christ. To ruin your standards of obedience to Christ.

Your response: ever to be on duty; resolutely hold your ground. And not only this, but to do your utmost to extend Christ's rule, so as to deliver poor people, who are believing wrongly and behaving wrongly, from the devil, by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is your duty as you wake in the morning. This is the task that goes with you during the day's activities. The totally consuming passion of your life. We are soldiers in a spiritual war. Stand firm and win for Christ!

[2098]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Living the Christian Life in a Real Battle – Pt 2

based on: S Olyott

(Review of last week)

The final passage from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians is about spiritual war. Throughout the letter he has concentrated on the abundant benefits of Christ living in you by the gift of His Holy Spirit. The initial work of the Spirit in using the call of the Gospel to 'effectively call' you into 'newness of life' - also called the 'new birth'. This 'conversion' is further developed by that indwelling Spirit, through the rest of your life on earth to 'fit you for heaven' – this is 'sanctification'.

Paul shows that the evidence of this process of sanctification happening in your life is by the way your Christian life shows a change from your former life – the typical life of a non-Christian. And becomes a continuing changing life of progress, in reaching, in practical terms, what your 'new heart' desires. He gives a template for the desired Christian Life – behaviour – for the true Christian at church, in the world, and at home.

A growing life of Christian 'discipleship' – following Christ – is not a 'cake walk'. It's glorious, fulfilling, uplifting and the most desirable and necessary thing in this earth, but it's not easy. It has to be a full-time, dedicated vocation. It cannot just be a hobby. An hour or two from 10am on a Sunday!

And it's impossible for you (and I) to do it!

So Paul in his final (see the first word of verse 10) plea, tells us to *be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*. No other way is possible.

From this stirring 'call to arms' (verses 10 – 24) we started, last week, to expand 4 major points: 1. That we are in a battle of immense proportions of crucial importance for eternity, and 2. That this is a spiritual battle. Not one against our fellow humans – flesh and blood – *but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*.

Now as we take up the third point we are boosted with the assurance of victory and then able to prepare for the 4th step. To not only 'stand our ground' in the cosmic war but advance and win. Win for Christ!

3. There is no need for us to be conquered!
(verses 11 & 13) God has provided a complete protection so that nothing can knock us down. A complete set of armour. All we have to do is put it on. No need to fear the enemy – any modern belief or modern standard. Just 'square up' to the errors of the hour. Getting our courage from God (verse 10) and joining the battle. Trusting that God's might will cause us to prevail.

However for the soldier who has no mind to fight, there is no armour in the world that will do you any good. That's why the Apostle Paul says (V 10) ¹⁰... *be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*. Square up to the errors of the hour;

put on the whole armour of God and the devil will never knock you down.

5 Pieces of Armour: Roman soldiers never dared to neglect any of them. Certain death in combat without them. So we consider the spiritual armour that the Roman's physical armour suggested to Paul. In the order in which they would have been put on.

- Belt: Verse 14a. A thick leather belt, hanging down from which are thick leather thongs – perhaps with metal plates attached, making a protective apron. Allowing freedom of movement while still providing protection. Particularly for the lower body from swiping swords.
Paul makes the connection with God's armour of truth: the objective truth found only in the Bible. Christ showed how effective the Bible was in defeating the devil in the wilderness during 40 days.
- Breastplate: Verse 14b. A tough leather garment mainly covering the front of the trunk. Often with a sheet-metal covering. It would be hard to survive in their type of battle without it.
Paul relates righteousness. Here we can apply this in two ways.
 - Perhaps it refers to the right-living of the Christian, which acts as a buffer to the errors of the hour. Yet if you know what is right and in your own strength fail to do it, you are left wide open to defeat.
 - However at a higher plain, the imputed righteousness of Christ is your protection. The devil will always do what he can to discourage you. But you are able to bring to mind that however badly you've lived, (and this is ordinarily how the 'accuser' – the devil – finds his opening) your standing with God doesn't depend of how you've lived or live, anymore. It depends on the way Christ has lived.
Even if the faith you have is faint or small, and you have many failures and doubts, today and tomorrow and any other days, because of Christ you are still acceptable to God for His sake. It is His 'breastplate' of righteousness (imputed to you) that saves you in the warfare.
- Shoes: Verse 15: ... ¹⁵ *and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.* Those Roman soldiers had hobnailed sandals, for a firm footing. To be ready to 'spring into action'. Paul relates that readiness, and associated willingness, to be the foundation of the Gospel of peace. Some may apply this phrase to evangelism or personal witnessing. But rather, as we know and treasure the thought that we are now through Christ 'at peace with God', there's no discouragement that can be brought to bear on us by an enemy. Do you go into each day remembering that you are at peace with God? You believe in His truth (the apron armour); you're made righteous with Christ (the breastplate) and now at peace with God (the ready shoes). Nothing can destroy that peace. Nothing in the whole creation can now separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39)

- Shield: Verse 16: ⁶ *In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;*
Some Roman troops had a shield about the size and shape of an old dustbin lid. But the vast majority carried a curved shield. Rectangular in shape when viewed from in front. 122 cm high and 76 cm wide. Its size and shape made it possible for a crouching soldier to resist direct arrow attack. Even the tar tipped, flaming arrows. A group of soldiers could cover themselves like an armadillo.
Paul relates that Christians have a shield that protects them from even the 'flaming darts' of the devil. Faith, believing what God has said, in His Word. Taking Him at His word. He has promised to supply all your needs. This gives a sense of His presence, having made abundant promises in His Word. Nothing can disturb us.

- Helmet: Verse 17a. ¹⁷ *and take the helmet of salvation, ...* The word salvation can be used in a number of ways: What **has** happened to you; What **is** happening to you; and what **is going** to happen to you. Here Paul most likely is referring to the future.

*The strife will not be long,
today the noise of battle,
the next the victor's song.*

Rejoice 460, V4 from last week.

Once you have a thought of heaven in your mind the battle doesn't seem so severe.

So, to sum up so far:

Believe right; obey right; remember that you're at peace with God; you are trusting God and are looking forward to heaven. That in a few words is the Christian's armour. It's how you can live tomorrow and avoid the hard knocks. Fill your mind with what God's done for you in Christ. Feed your mind with holy thoughts, Biblical, Godly thoughts. With Christian thoughts – if possible ever few hours. Remain protected from the threatening evil forces. The flaming darts (of doubt and accusation) of the evil one.

4. Soldiers in the Spiritual War. None need be conquered.

So with this objective reached, we should now turn our attention to 'advance'. From defence to offence.

Verses 17b, 18. Two weapons of attack!

- ¹⁷ *... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,* A sword wielded by the Holy Spirit. In some ways like the sword in Pilgrim's Progress. It was another hand which gave that sword its power and direction, but nevertheless Christian had to hold it.

We 'cut down' our enemies by God's Word. Error is put to flight. People are won into obedience to Christ.

How were your thoughts and doubts about eternity, settled before you became a Christian? By clever argument? No, but ultimately by the Word! What brought you to believe? Philosophy? No, by Scripture!

How are all people converted? By the Holy Spirit taking hold of the Scripture

and applying it to them personally, so that it's power comes into their lives. They come to believe it.

All spiritual advance comes not by new miracle, but by the miracle of God's revealed, written Word. Not just by zeal and enthusiasm – by Scripture. Not just by keenness and initiative – by Scripture.

- Now when Paul looks at the Roman soldier, he finds that the second attacking weapon that is to be used in our spiritual warfare cannot be seen there. There is no equivalent to be seen in the Roman arsenal. So Paul now speaks plainly, without the physical analogy. The Christian's 'secret weapon' which shares no earthly equivalent is prayer.

Verse 18. ¹⁸ *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.* Yes put on all the defensive armour of the previous verses. Have the Holy Spirit wield the sword of Scripture. But also pray! Every kind of prayer there is. Never let up. *To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ...* So that there remains no Christian alive anywhere on earth who is not being prayed for!

Some people are to be specially prayed for. (Verses 19, 20) Paul himself! ¹⁹ *and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,* ²⁰ *for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Many Christians seem to believe in magic. They believe a preacher has the power to preach. That somehow he has some form of charisma, some form of power that enables him to stand up and preach.

Paul says otherwise. He couldn't be effective in what he did without the prayers of Christians – even those that were hundreds of miles from Rome. Even in Ephesus. He says, that all his power depends on Christians praying.

All spiritual advance, depends on the Word of God and prayer. Both being facilitated by the Holy Spirit.

And because all prayer depends on information, (Verses 20, 21, 22) he sends Tychicus to give his readers that information and to encourage them with the knowledge of just how Paul is getting on in his Roman imprisonment. He makes sure that they have the information so that they can pray specifically and thus effectively.

That's how the battle advances. Everyone who's been converted has been converted through the Word. Every great spiritual advance has been accompanied by prayer. Typically when a new conversion occurs, that new Christian has been prayed for. Often by many others!

Do you pray? Pray for people you know. Pray that they will be called. Pray also for Gospel preaching and those who preach. For Church meetings. For the effectiveness of church web-sites. Pray for the overall work of the Gospel not only to bring about new converts, but for the continuing Gospel ministry to new and old Christians. And while praying for the Gospel, pray also that you will be

motivated and empowered to engage in the work of the Gospel yourself.

The difference between real soldiers and part time or hobby, soldiers is that real soldiers use their weapons. Part time soldiers, look at them, clean them, but don't 'live fire' them. Real soldiers actually fire their weapons at the enemy.

Do you use the real weapons that God gives you? The Word: do you take the Word to the unconverted in personal speech. In correspondence. If you can't manage that, start with a tract. The Gospel only makes progress where the weapons are used. It's not enough to just look after yourself and hold your ground. Think in terms of advance. Bringing all our thoughts into captivity in Christ. That's how Paul closes his magnificent letter.

(Verses 23, 24) The spirit with which Paul closes is the same as the spirit with which he opened it. He began with kindness and concern for the Ephesians, with such love for them. That's still there in the close. He prays that the faith that those believers have will be accompanied by peace and love. That God will bless everyone who loves His Son. Incorruptible love!

Only two questions remain: Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ, who is wondrously unveiled, especially in the first three chapters of this letter? And will you live for this Jesus?

[2236]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Who was Paul? - Part 1

Acts 9:15b,16

¹⁵ ... “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Last week we concluded our study of Paul’s prayerful letter to the Church at Ephesus. From today it is my plan that we should study Paul’s letter to the Romans. This will probably span the next year. Here Paul also proclaimed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as the first four verses of Romans demonstrate:

Greeting

¹ Paul, a servant^[1] of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David^[2] according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Footnotes:

1. Romans 1:1 Or *slave*; Greek *bondservant*
2. Romans 1:3 Or *who came from the offspring of David*

During this week and next I propose that we spend some time getting to know Paul, even better: his background, his actions, his mission and his theological framework through which he expounded and demonstrated the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have already seen in the reading from Acts (9:1-23) that Saul (later to be called Paul), a noteworthy Rabbinical leader of the established Jewish Religion, set out to destroy the fledgling Church of the New Covenant; was met by Jesus and converted; then became a staunch member of “those who call on His Name”. The account in Acts briefly states that Saul “spent several days with the disciples in Damascus”, then “at once (urgently) began to preach in the synagogues: that Jesus is the Son of God (divine)” ... To the astonishment of those who knew him and knew of his recent murderous intentions.

“Saul grew more and more powerful (as a preacher) and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.”

This brief introduction to Paul in Acts shows several key steps in Paul’s preparation to become the powerful force bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles.

- Paul was already a serious and conscientious seeker after God.
- Paul was called and prepared by Jesus Himself.
- Paul was filled (anointed) with Christ's Holy Spirit.
- Paul eagerly got to work on his mission “at once”.
- Paul grew more and more effective as he preached to those who were opposed to his message. Those who were baffled by his *proving that Jesus is the Christ*.

All examples we can and should follow faithfully.

However the account in Acts is brief and condenses the time taken in Paul's initial training in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Elsewhere (Gal 1:10-17) Paul gives his own testimony of more details of His training, where in the wilderness of Arabia he was further instructed by Christ Himself.

¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant^[1] of Christ.

Paul Called by God

*¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.^[2] ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born,^[3] and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to^[4] me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;^[5] ¹⁷ **nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.***

Footnotes:

1. Galatians 1:10 Or *slave*; Greek *bondservant*
2. Galatians 1:11 Greek *not according to man*
3. Galatians 1:15 Greek *set me apart from my mother's womb*
4. Galatians 1:16 Greek *in*
5. Galatians 1:16 Greek *with flesh and blood*

Verse 17 interposes a sequence of events. (The total time from Paul's first entry to Damascus and his ultimate departure to see the Apostles in Jerusalem was about 3 years. For much of this time he was under Christ's instruction in the wilderness of Arabia).¹

Consider the conversion of Paul.

Paul's initial passion, zeal and experience pre-conditioned him within narrow constructs and stubborn beliefs bound to the concept of ethnic superiority of the

¹ In his book *Galatians: The Wondrous Grace of God*, John MacArthur at page 15 comments: **Jerusalem ... Arabia ... Damascus** (V 17) Rather than immediately travel to Jerusalem, to be instructed by the apostles, Paul instead went to Nabatean Arabia, a wilderness that stretched east of Damascus down to the Sinai peninsula. After being prepared for ministry **by the Lord**, he returned to minister to nearby Damascus.

Jewish people. After all, the Jewish religious view was that it was only with and for the Jewish nation, as a whole, that the Covenant made by God was to be applied. Yet Paul was required to accept that God's gift of salvation was for all peoples, regardless of race. That the true 'sons of Abraham' were not genetic but rather those who inherit God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ the Lord. (Gal 3:29) ²⁹ *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

The essence of Paul's conversion experience was such that it goes beyond what the mind can fathom or even imagine (*metanoia*²).

Paul's idea of the anticipated Jewish Messiah was also to be challenged and overturned. That the mighty leader who would rout Israel's enemies to restore the nation's pride and fortunes, should suffer the shame of a Roman crucifixion was ridiculous. Jesus could only be a false Messiah. The vision on the Damascus road overturned this. Paul's proven zeal for his former understanding of God and His purpose was transferred to his new awakening of the true nature and role of Jesus. Accepting Him as truly God's instrument of salvation. Not only for the Jews but for the rest of the world.

The extreme nature of his conversion is shown by the contrast between who he was both before and after that encounter with the Risen Lord. His own letters and the Acts of the apostles describe more than enough to make the point. Paul's experience teaches us then that to be Christ's messenger, we too **need a profound encounter with the Risen Lord**. Such an encounter transforms! Enabling one to accept being seen as foolish in the eyes of the world while wise in the sight of God. Paul's conversion experience had as its starting point the revelation from the One he persecuted. We too are called to continually rediscover who the Risen Lord is for us. As Jesus put to his disciples: "But who do you say that I am?" (Mk 8:29)

Paul's own comment on what we call his conversion can be traced from passages like (Gal 1:15) ¹⁵ *But when he who had set me apart before I was born,^[1] and who called me by his grace,*

Footnotes:

1. Galatians 1:15 Greek *set me apart from my mother's womb*

Less than of a conversion as a call to service – the call to the Gentile mission. Somewhat like the call of the OT prophets (Jer 1:5)

⁵ *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

and the second of the four Isaiah references to Jesus as the Servant of the Lord. (Isa 49:1-6)

Paul's conversion shows a pattern that is repeated.

- **The call,**
- **the response, and**
- **then the mission:**

2 Metanoia, a transliteration of the Greek **μετάνοια**, is "a transformative change of heart; especially: a spiritual conversion." The term suggests repudiation, change of mind, repentance, and atonement; but "conversion" and "reformation" may best approximate its connotation.

like the calling of Jacob (Gen 46:2-3)

² *And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here am I."* ³ *Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation.*

and of Moses (Ex 3:4,10)

⁴ *When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."*

... ¹⁰ *Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."*

A passionate man

You can get some idea of Paul's passion when you read his letter to the Galatians. A group of his converts had decided that they want to be circumcised and Paul is absolutely furious about this because he feels it compromises their very nature as Christians. You can almost feel him banging on the table or pacing round the room as he dictates the letter. At one stage right towards the end of the letter he grabs the pen out of the scribe's hand: and he says ¹¹ *See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.* ' (Gal 6:11) He's really frustrated. Paul never shied away from conflict.

Dr Mark Goodacre, Senior Lecturer in New Testament, University of Birmingham

The passion of Paul's life was that Christ be exalted (Phil 1:12-18a).

The Advance of the Gospel

¹² *I want you to know, brothers,^[1] that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard^[2] and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.*

¹⁴ *And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word^[3] without fear.*

¹⁵ *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.*

¹⁶ *The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.*

Footnotes:

1. Philippians 1:12 Or *brothers and sisters*. The plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated "brothers") refers to siblings in a family. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, *adelphoi* may refer either to men or to both men and women who are siblings (brothers and sisters) in God's family, the church; also verse 14
2. Philippians 1:13 Greek *in the whole praetorium*
3. Philippians 1:14 Some manuscripts add *of God*

Later in life he was torn between two options: (Philippians 1:12-26)

- living on in the body, since the love of Christ compelled (or constrained) him to continue to preach the gospel. (2 Cor 5:14-15)

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

or

- departing to be with Christ.

He longs to be with Christ, but not in order to escape reality.

However his sense of mission and love for the Philippians (where he was at that time) takes precedence over what he would naturally prefer. (Phil 1:24)

²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

In conclusion for part 1 we remember that:

Paul was born in Tarsus (now in the south east of Turkey) to a Jewish family. He had a dual identity as lots of Jews did in antiquity. He had a Jewish education, a Jewish way of life and abided by the Law of Moses. But was brought up outside of the homeland and was also at home in Greek culture, fluent in Greek, and had at least some understanding of the Greek or Roman cultural traditions.

He was a Pharisee, one of a group of Jews who policed the boundary of the law and made sure that they and others were faithful to the law of Moses. Paul was an extremely passionate Jew and he often uses the word 'zeal' of himself. One of the most fascinating stories about Paul is his incredible transformation on the Damascus road but one thing that doesn't change in this transformation is his passion. He just becomes passionate for a different cause.

Professor John Barclay, Professor in New Testament and Christian Origins, University of Divinity

By God's grace, through such passion, preservation and perseverance by such as Paul we have the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. By which we are convicted of sin, called to belief and repentance and saved to eternal life.

[2107]

Pray God this will be so, for all the saints present today. Amen

Delivered Sunday 24^h November 2019

(Selected readings)

Who was Paul? - Part 2

Colossians 3:17

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him

Last week, as part of a two part background study, we started to answer, *Who was Paul?* The purpose being to aid our serial progress through Paul's letter to the Romans which we will begin next week. Such progress likely to occupy us for about a year.

So far we have noted that Paul was a conscientious, zealous and well-credentialed Rabbi. Who was passionate about his serving God to the best of his current understanding. This led him to actively and violently oppose the early beginnings of Christianity.

A profound encounter with the Risen Lord, on the road to Damascus redirected his passion to his lifelong mission: to proclaim the name of Christ to *the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel*. (Acts 9:15b) The substance of the commission was given by Christ during that profound encounter.

Further we read from Paul's own accounts that, ¹¹ *I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.* (Gal 1:11,12)

This man then, by God's grace, is a significant vehicle through whom by his passion, preservation and perseverance we have the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. By which we are convicted of sin, called to belief and repentance and saved to eternal life.

Not of human origin then, nor the product of earthly experience (existentialism), nor the product of Jewish history, rather Paul's theology was received by revelation from Christ Himself.

We look now, briefly, at that Christ given theology. Over 2000 years scholars have dissected, analysed, synthesised and often misdirected the words of Paul, which he used to convey the Gospel to developing Churches in the expanding mission field, of the first few decades after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. One common endeavour has been directed towards identifying the 'centre' of his theology, with the inevitable result that otherwise related themes have been sited in what has been called an 'onion', model far from the central core. Disturbing the necessary unity of God's purpose demonstrated by the Gospel.

The following is extracted from the Introduction to a 2001 book on Paul's theology by Thomas R. Schreiner. In framing this description Schreiner acknowledges his indebtedness to John Piper for his understanding of Paul and of biblical theology as a whole³, and recommends further reading of Piper's many books.

3 ... this book is dedicated to John Piper. As my

The Image of a House

The image of a house, rather than an onion, may help us visualise the heart and soul of Pauline theology.

Visualising Paul's thought in terms of the building of a house provides an entry point into Paul's thought, a doorway through which we can enter into his world-view.

The foundation of the house is God himself. From him the house takes its shape, and it is utterly dependent on him for its growth. The house in this illustration represents God's saving plan in history, and that plan includes the role of the church in history – its mission. God is the foundation for all that occurs, “because from him and through him and for him are all things. May the glory be his forever” (Rom 11:36) God is the source of all things—he is the foundation. This verse is not wrenched out of context, for Paul introduces this thought after explaining in Romans 9—11 God's saving plan by which both Jews and Gentiles will be beneficiaries of God's saving mercy. God has constructed history so as to pour his lavish mercy on both Jews and Gentiles. That God is the origin of all things is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 8:6, “But for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things.” One advantage of thinking of God as the foundation is that the other teachings of Paul are able to be included with equal weight. Whether Paul thinks of justification, reconciliation or sin, they are all based on the foundation; they are not separate from the foundation, nor are they far removed. They are themes that frame the house and give it detail, but all these themes depend on the foundation. Since God is the foundation of the house and it depends on him for its survival, he deserves honour for the building of the house. Paul draws this very conclusion, as we have seen, in Romans 11:36. Since God is the one from whom all things come, He is therefore the one who receives glory. Such an illustration also highlights the importance of salvation history.

When we speak of salvation history, we think of the fulfilment of God's saving plan and promises which is announced in the Gospel as Paul relates it. The promises made to Israel in the Old Testament have now become a reality in and through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's saving promises are already a reality for the believer in Jesus Christ—in this sense God's plan is “already” being fulfilled. The gift of the Holy Spirit, for example, demonstrates that God's covenant promises are now a reality for those who have faith. On the other hand, believers still await the consummation of salvation history; in this sense we do “not yet” enjoy all that God has promised. Believers who have the gift of the Spirit still struggle with sin and await the day when their bodies will be resurrected (Rom 8:18-25). Salvation history, then, could represent the remodelling of the house, for the new covenant fulfils what was promised in the old (Jer 31:31-34; 2 Cor 3:4-18). Yet the image of “remodelling” is misleading if it suggests that God “starts over” with the church. Perhaps we should think of the Old Testament

as the framing of the house and think of the fulfilment of salvation history as the completion of the inside of the house. We could also say that the

theme of salvation history is the gospel of God (Rom 1:1). Hence, the image of the house nicely captures various dimensions of Paul's theology—the foundation is God and Christ, salvation history portrays the progress being made on the house, and the **theme** of the house is the gospel.

God and Christ

God is not only the foundation of the house; he and his Son, Jesus the Messiah, are the means by which the house is built. They are the architects, the contractors and the workers who build the house. Saying that God is the one who builds the house does not deny the role of human beings in the house's construction. It has already been noted that Paul lays the foundation of the house (i.e., the church) and others build on the foundation (1 Cor 3:9-15). But the work accomplished by Paul and others is ultimately ascribed to God (1 Cor 3:5). *So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, "but God is the one who gives the growth"* (1 Cor 3:7). And the foundation laid for the house is none other than Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11).

But one should not conceive of God (or Christ) merely as a static foundation of the house; he is actively building the house now. Once again, both Romans 11:36 and 1 Corinthians 8:6 are germane (relevant). The house is not only from God but also "through him" (Rom 11:36). Paul often describes Jesus Christ as God's agent. In 1 Corinthians 8:6 he says that there "*is one Lord, Jesus the Messiah, through whom are all things and we exist through him.*" Jesus is the agent through which all things, without exception, exist. A similar theme is sounded in Colossians. Everything in the universe is created "in Christ," whether earthly or heavenly beings. In other words, "*all things have been created through him and for him*" (Col 1:16). Nothing exists in the universe apart from the mediating, creative work of Christ. Nor is it right to think of Christ's work in the past only, as if he brought the world into being and then it continues on its own power. Colossians 1:17 clarifies that "*all things in him hold together.*" The natural world endures and continues because of the dynamic work of the Son who continually sustains and preserves it. Suffice it to say that there is ample evidence that the building, whether it is conceived of as the people of God or the universe, would not remain without the sustaining and preserving work of the Father and the Son.

To continue the illustration, what is the ultimate goal of the building of the house? The goal is not the building itself, whether it is conceived in terms of God's righteousness, reconciliation, salvation history or apocalyptic. All of these themes constitute the house, but they are not the end for which the house was made. Fulfilling salvation history cannot itself be the goal of salvation history, for that would be redundant. Instead **God has built the house to bring honour and praise to himself**. Romans 11:36 again surfaces as a crucial text: ["*Because from him and through him and for him are all things. May the glory be his forever.*"] Not only do all things have their source and agency in God, he is also the one "for whom" all things exist. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 8:6, after Paul says that all things are from the Father, he reaches a climax by saying that "we exist for him". Nor is such language restricted to the Father, for not only were all things created by means of the Son's agency, but also ["*all things were created for him*"] (Col 1:16). The ultimate reason for the creation

of the world and for the fulfilment of salvation history (see Rom 11:36) was for the sake of the Father and the Son.

We can say that **God in Christ** is the foundation of Pauline theology.

In Paul's case the priority of God and Christ emerge again and again as that which dominates his thinking. We might be tempted, for example, to think that the gospel is Paul's foundational motif. The gospel, however, is "the gospel of God" (Rom 1:1), indicating that the gospel cannot be prized over the God who makes it a reality. The gospel is good news because it proclaims the saving message about God and from God, and this gospel centres on God's Son, who fulfils the ancient prophecies (Rom 1:2-3). As noted earlier, the gospel can be conceived of, as the theme of the house, while the glory of God and Christ constitute its foundational purpose.

Righteous Living and the Priority of God in Christ

The supremacy of God and Christ is applied to the major themes of Paul's theology. In Colossians, for instance, the recipients are exhorted to put off sin and be clothed with righteousness (Col 3:5-17). The exhortations are punctuated with the words, "And everything, whatever you do, whether in speech or work, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17). We could scarcely claim, therefore, that ethics can be sundered (separated) from the pre-eminence of Christ, for everything done by believers is to be done in the name of Jesus and for his honour. There is no conception here of doing what is right simply because it is the right thing to do, or of duty for duty's sake.

Similarly with food: He sums up by saying, "Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31).

We simply observe here that there is no activity in life, no realm of existence that is outside the sphere of God's rule. Even the ordinary actions of eating and drinking should be done to honour God. That honouring God should be the goal of ethics is unsurprising once we grasp that dishonouring him is the root of all sin. The wrath of God is visited on the world (Rom 1:18-25) because people have rejected him. They know he is God but they refuse to glorify him as God or give thanks" (Rom 1:21). They abandon the glory of God and turn to the worship of idols (Rom 1:23). They worshipped the creature rather than the creator" (Rom 1:25). Because God has been rejected as God, he hands human beings over to all the other sins that blight human existence (Rom 1:24, 26, 28). The fundamental sin, however—which is the root of all others—is the failure to honour, praise and glorify the one and only true God. It is fitting, then, that a life pleasing to God is marked by doing all things in his name, by the desire to honour him in all things.

Once we grasp that the origin of all sin is failure to serve and worship God, we also understand why "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom 14:23).

Paul's call to honour God in our everyday existence is not restricted to the few texts cited above. Though Paul uses various terms, the notion that God and Christ are the centre and circumference of the ethical life permeates

Paul's writings.⁴

The centrality of God and Christ in the warp and woof of life is woven into the fabric of Paul's theology of ethics. Believers are to live worthily of the Lord (Col 1:10) and give thanks to the Father for their liberation from sin (Col 1:12). They should avoid the vain and licentious behaviour of Gentiles, for they did not learn of Jesus in such a way (Eph 4:20). Tensions surfaced between the weak and strong in Rome (Rom 14:1—15:6). Paul calls on them to accept one another and wants them to worship in harmony instead of being rent by mutual recriminations. The reason he wants them to accept each other is that such acceptance brings glory to God (Rom 15:7).

In the concrete circumstances of life, the particulars that constitute everyday existence, Paul directs his readers' minds God-ward.

Conclusion

When Paul prays for Christians to grow strong in the faith, he does so “for the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:9-11). When he thinks of the coming of the Lord, he says that “he will be glorified among his holy ones and be marvelled at among all those who have believed” (2 Thess 1:10). When he considers God's merciful grace in calling him as the chief of sinners to salvation (1Tim 1:12-16), he breaks into praise, saying, “Now to the king of the ages, incorruptible, invisible, to the only God, be honour and glory for the ages of ages, amen” (1 Tim 1:17). When he considers his call to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations, he says that this is done “for the sake of his name” (Rom 1:5). When he concludes his greatest letter and returns to the theme of bringing about the obedience of faith among the nations (Rom 16:25-26), he again breaks into prayer: “To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to him be the glory for the ages, amen” (Rom 16:27). The passion of Paul's life, the foundation and capstone of his vision, and the animating motive of his mission was the supremacy of God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Pray God this will be the passion and motive, of all the saints present today.
Amen [2605]**

4 A few examples will suffice. Paul warns the Corinthians about the dangers of sexual immorality, employing a number of arguments against sexual license (1 Cor 6:12-20). He concludes, though, by reminding the Corinthians that their lives are not their own. They have been purchased with the price of Christ's blood. He draws the final conclusion in verse 20, “Therefore glorify God with your body.” The fundamental reason for sexual purity is that such a life honours God, showing that the person who lives chastely trusts that following God's will is the path to joy. The Corinthians are exhorted to give generously so that thanksgiving might be rendered to God (2 Cor 9:11-12) and so that he will be honoured and glorified (2 Cor 9:13).

Similarly, Paul thanks the Philippians for their generosity to the gospel cause in Philippians 4:10-20. Paul is exceedingly careful here, for he does not want the Philippians to think that they put God in their debt, and yet at the same time he is genuinely grateful for their assistance. He reminds them that God will supply all their needs, and thus “to our God and Father belongs the glory for all the ages, amen” (Phil 4:20). The ultimate source of every gift is the one who is to be praised for his lavish generosity.