

New Testament 2 – Paul’s Life and Letters

“Paul of Tarsus, educated in the Greek tradition, a Diaspora Jew with Pharisaic training, of the tribe of Benjamin, former persecutor of the Christian church, had a ‘religious experience’: he received a revelation of Jesus Christ which he associated with his call to become apostle to the Gentiles. He became a Christian missionary who was especially equipped by his background and training to communicate his gospel to the non-Jewish inhabitants of the Roman Empire. With zeal he planted house-churches in the major urban centers of Asia Minor and Macedonia-Greece. Although he would stay for a short period, we mainly catch glimpses of him on the move, as he established a small community where none had existed, or on his travels. He usually supported himself as a tentmaker. Often he encountered opposition from political authorities and religious opponents. [He stayed in touch with his communities and nurtured them primarily through letters.]”

-- from The New Testament – An Introduction, by Perrin + Duling

I. Focus Questions

1. An adjective to describe Paul?
2. Your encounters with Paul’s letters?
3. Your impression of Paul’s influence on the Catholic Church today?
4. Something about Paul that you’d really like to see addressed in this class...

II. Sources for Paul’s Life and Thought

1. Paul – Letters, c. 51-58
2. Luke – Acts of the Apostles, c. 85

III. Paul’s Letters

1. Authenticity
2. Order
3. Writing Process
4. Structure
5. Activity: Philemon

IV. Two Critical Events for Paul

1. Conversion
2. Council of Jerusalem

V. Paul and Women

- 1 Tim 2:9-15; Eph 5:22; Gal 3:27-28; Phil 4:2; Rom 16:1;
1 Cor 7:4, 11:3-16, 14:33-35

VI. The Problems in 1 Corinthians (activity)

1. Factions --> 1:10 – 4:21
2. Incest, immoral people, litigation before the courts --> 5:1, 6:11
3. Marriage, celibacy, sexual promiscuity --> 6:12 – 20
4. Meat sacrificed to idols --> 8:1 – 13, 10:23, 11:1
5. Problems in Christian worship --> 11:17 – 34
6. True nature of spiritual gifts --> 12:1, 14:40
7. Future resurrection of the dead --> 15:12 – 58

VII. What Would Paul Do? (activity)

Assignment Question

Write a Pauline-type letter to a faith community that you are familiar with (e.g. your parish, prayer group, fellow-ministers, pastoral council, parish staff, perhaps another Christian denomination or sect, K. of C., etc.). Please try to emulate the format that Paul used in his letters. In this letter include the following features as Paul did:

--> problems that you hear of/see in the community.

--> effective spiritual advice and theological rationale for each of your directives.

N.B. This exercise in emulating Paul's style and method of theologizing is not intended to be critical of individual Christians. Every community has various issues and problems and could use some prophetic guidance. Also, Paul's approach was always very practical and problem-centered. If you find this assignment too negative or judgmental, please feel free to create a fictional situation.

E-Mail to:

John McGrath at jmcgrath02@gmail.com