

The Life and Theology of Paul: Turning the World Upside Down

Review

- In the 1st century Roman Empire, there was no separation of religion from civic life:
 - Religion was *not* a private sphere of personal life, but a public, civic duty to help bind together the invisible and visible worlds and hold together every aspect of daily life.
 - To refuse to participate in the pagan rituals was seen as dangerous and rebellious – except for Jewish people, who had been granted a special exemption by the Roman government.
 - In order to maintain both public order and the Jewish exemption, it was very important for the Roman authorities to be able to identify who was – and who was *not* – Jewish.
- For 1st century Jews, there was an additional religious concern to maintain strict observance of the Old Testament law: Israel's failure to obey had led to Exile once before; failure to obey again might lead to further delay of the final fulfillment of God's saving plan. Even Jewish Christians, who saw Jesus as the center of God's plan, would have felt this cultural pressure in some way.
- In this context, nothing could be more 'problematic' than what began to happen: Gentiles becoming Christians and abandoning the pagan civic rituals *without* becoming Jews.
- This situation led to the 1st great controversy in the early Christian church: could Gentiles become Christians *without* also becoming culturally Jewish?
 - Before this, "The idea of a single community across the traditional boundaries of culture, gender, and ethnic and social groupings was unheard of. Unthinkable, in fact," (Wright).
 - To force Gentile Christians to embrace Jewish cultural identity seemed a simple and tidy solution – a way to address the concerns of both Roman authorities and zealous Jews.
- Recognizing this 'solution' was "not in step with the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2.14), Paul fought with his pen (*Galatians*), his personality (Gal. 2.11-14), and at presbytery (Acts 15). In the end, the Jerusalem Council agreed: Christians are defined not by our *culture*, but only by our *Christ*.

Team Conflict: the Scourge of Missionary Life (Acts 15.36-41)

- Despite their alliance at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15.12), it is likely that Barnabas's lapse in Antioch (Gal. 2.13) had created tension in his relationship with Paul. Therefore, when Barnabas proposed bringing Mark along with them (v. 37), a "sharp disagreement" erupted:
 - Mark was Barnabas's cousin (Col. 4.10). It's natural that Barnabas would have wanted to give him a 2nd chance. If Barnabas's word had been enough to give Paul a 2nd chance with Christians in Jerusalem, why wasn't it enough to give Mark a 2nd chance with Paul?
 - Based on previous performance (v. 38), Paul had his doubts about Mark's fitness for missionary work. Mark also had links to Peter (1 Pet. 5.13) – perhaps even being the author of Mark's Gospel under Peter's preaching! Was Paul leery of bringing along an ally of Peter, who had also 'wobbled' in Antioch, to a mission among Gentiles? We cannot say for sure.
- Paul's view of Mark later changed dramatically (Col. 4.10, Phm 24, 2 Tim. 4.11). Yet it led to a permanent rift with Barnabas. Barnabas and Mark go to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas – a Jerusalem Christian and witness to the Council's letter (Acts 15.27) – went to Galatia. Though Paul knew of Barnabas's later work (1 Cor. 9.6), Barnabas *never* reappears in the book of Acts.

2nd Missionary Journey: the Gospel Spreads into Europe (Acts 15.41-18.22)

- From Antioch in Syria, Paul and Silas charted a northwest course across modern-day Turkey, going first through "Syria and Cilicia" toward the churches of Galatia: Acts 15.41-16.5.
- In Lystra (cf. Acts 14.8-20), Paul recruited Timothy – the protégé of whom he will later testify: "I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel," (Phil. 2.20-22).

- After visiting all the existing churches (Acts 16.4-5), Paul tried to move into ‘Asia’ (western Turkey) and then to ‘Bithynia’ (northwest Turkey). In both cases, the Holy Spirit forbade it – and so they ended up passing along the border of these provinces to the coastal port of Troas.
- Acts 16.6-12: Arriving in Troas, two very important things happen. First, Paul and Silas and Timothy meet Luke (notice the ‘we’ appears for the 1st time in v. 10). Second, Paul receives a vision calling him to cross the Aegean Sea to Macedonia – the southeast corner of Europe.
- Though it’s hard today to imagine a European city without a cathedral, Philippi did not even possess the minimum 10 Jewish men needed to form a synagogue. Thus arriving in this strange city with no obvious starting point, Paul and his friends go down to the riverside: Act 16.13-15.
- The rest of Paul’s 2nd missionary journey reads like the plot of an action film:
 - He exorcises a demon from a fortune-telling slave girl and is imprisoned (16.16-24).
 - The prison is hit by an earthquake; the jailer and his household are converted (16.25-34).
 - Leaving Luke behind (note ‘they’ in v. 40), they move west to Thessalonica and Berea.
 - Leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea (17.14), Paul sailed south to Athens: the city of idols, debaters, and philosophy (17.21) – where he goes on trial before the Areopagus (17.22-34).
 - From Athens Paul journeys west to Corinth. Here he meets Aquila and Priscilla, fellow Jews and fellow-tentmakers (18.1-3). Here, he is rejoined by Silas and Timothy (v. 5). And here, despite opposition, he is able to stay for 18 months to plant a church: 18.5-11.
 - When Paul’s enemies in Corinth finally bring him to trial, the Roman proconsul ruled, in effect, that Christians are just an offshoot of Judaism – and therefore are not breaking Roman law. This established an important legal precedent and protection: 18.12-16.
 - After this, Paul sailed east to Ephesus. Silas is not mentioned again in Acts, but Aquila and Priscilla went with Paul (v. 18) – and perhaps also Timothy (cf. 19.22). After only a brief visit, Paul leaves his friends in Ephesus – with a promise to return, God willing: 18.18-22.

3rd Missionary Journey: the Great Awakening in Ephesus (Acts 18.23, 19.1-21.16)

- Unlike his 1st and 2nd journeys, each of which was relatively short (c. AD 46-47 and AD 49-51), Paul’s 3rd missionary journey spanned approximately 5 years, from AD 52-57.
- Beginning at Antioch, Paul eventually traveled all the way to Greece and back. However, the heart of this journey was spent in Ephesus (19.1-20.1), where he served for 3 years (20.31).
- Paul’s arrival in Ephesus triggered a great awakening in the city (19.1-40):
 - For 3 months he ministered in the synagogue, until opposition forced him to move to “the hall of Tyrannus,” (vv. 8-9). There, he was “reasoning daily... for two years, so that all the residents of Asia [the Roman province of Western Turkey] heard the word,” (vv. 9-10).
 - In the wake of this faithful and persistent ministry of the word, the Holy Spirit worked astonishing miracles, numerous conversions, and social reformation: 19.11-20.
 - As always, the mighty work of God provoked a vicious backlash from the Enemy – in this case through economic and patriotic interests. The result was a massive riot: 19.21-40.
 - Note: We get a telling glimpse of Paul’s personality in vv. 30-31!
- Leaving Ephesus, Paul journeyed to Greece and Macedonia (20.1-3). Along the way, he picked up several companions – including Luke, who seems to have rejoined him at Philippi: 20.4-6.
- At Troas he preached all night, pausing only briefly to raise a man from the dead: 20.7-12! On his way to Jerusalem, he also met and addressed the Ephesian elders (vv. 17-38).

Summary

- In Thessalonica on his 2nd journey, Paul and his team had been called “men who have turned the world upside down... saying that there is another king, Jesus.” (17.6-7).
- By the time he reached Jerusalem in AD 57 (21.15), Paul had been a Christian for ~25 years. He has planted churches on 2 continents, and written 6-10 of his 13 epistles. He wasn’t finished...