

# NT SURVEY: PAULINE EPISTLES

## WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION TO PAULINE EPISTLES

### INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW SERIES

- Over the course of the next six weeks, we are going to survey the Pauline Epistles. The goal is to find out more about Paul and his writings so that we are able to better understand and apply them.
- 11/14 - Week 1: An overview of Paul's epistles, who was Paul and where did he travel?
- 11/21 - Week 2: 1 & 2 Thessalonians
- 11/28 - Week 3: Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians
- 12/05 - Week 4: Romans
- 12/12 - Week 5: Prison Epistles
- 12/19 - Week 6: Pastoral Epistles<sup>1</sup>

#### Why should we know more about this history?

- We know that the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible's writing, but He also used the specific character traits of the individual authors.
- **2 Peter 1:20–21 “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”**
- This union of the divine and human agencies in inspiration is not to be conceived of as one of external impartation and reception.
  - On the other hand, those whom God raised up and providentially qualified to do this work, spoke and wrote the words of God, when inspired, not as from without, but as from within, and that not passively, but in the most conscious possession and the most exalted exercise of their own powers of intellect, emotion, and will.<sup>2</sup>
- We have strong biblical support here for what B. B. Warfield called *concursum*. Both human beings and God were fully involved in the process of inspiration. The personality and gifts of the human authors were not squelched or suppressed. We can detect their different literary styles even today. And yet the words they

<sup>1</sup> There will be no adult EH 12/26, 01/02 or 01/09

<sup>2</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 212.

spoke do not cancel out the truth that they spoke the word of God. Concursus means that both God and human beings contributed to the prophetic word.

- Peter, of course, referred only to the prophets here, but by extension we are justified in concluding that what Peter said about the prophets is also true of the New Testament canon.
- These writers also spoke from God and were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Evangelical theology rightly infers from this that the Scriptures are authoritative, infallible, and inerrant, for God's words must be true. Ultimately, however, and most significantly, these human words are God's words<sup>3</sup>

## WHO WAS THE APOSTLE PAUL?<sup>4</sup>

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- As a letter writer and as a man, Paul has no superior in the history of the Church. His life story is one of the most amazing in the history of mankind, and people of all ages since the beginning of the Christian era have, in one way or another, been indebted to him.
- The best insights into Paul's life come from his own pen and are to be found in several of the Epistles, particularly Philippians, Galatians, and the Corinthian letters. In addition, the three accounts of Paul's conversion experience and the record of his activities and witness recorded in the book of Acts give valuable information.
- After Paul's conversion and running for his life in Acts 9, Barnabas (8 years later) goes and gets him from Tarsus (Acts 11:25) to go to Antioch and work with the church there.
- By the time we reach Acts 13, some 14 years have passed, and Saul (Paul) is being sent out with Barnabas on their first missionary journey.
  - It is of some importance to note that beginning in Acts 14, there is only one more mention of Peter and that is at the first council meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 15).
  - After this time, the focus of Acts is really on Paul's church planting and discipleship ministry.

### Personal Life and Appearance<sup>5</sup>

- Little can be said regarding the personal appearance of the great apostle. In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* he is represented as "short, bald, bow-legged, with meeting eyebrows, hooked nose, full of grace."
- John of Antioch preserves a similar tradition, which adds, however, that he was "round-shouldered and had a mixture of pale and red in his complexion and an ample beard."

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman 2003), 324.

<sup>4</sup> Walter M. Dunnett, *Exploring the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 42–43.

<sup>5</sup> L Berkhof, *New Testament Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1915), 141–142.

- His opponents at Corinth said of him: “His letters are weighty and powerful, *but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible*,” 2 Cor. 10:10 ff.
- He himself refers once and again to his physical weaknesses. In all probability he was not a man of magnificent physique.
- His personal life was full of contrasts, as Deissmann correctly observes. He was encumbered with an ailing body, and yet was a man of great endurance and of almost unlimited capacity for work in the Kingdom of God. The secret of his strength lay in his God, who spoke to him: “My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Cor 12:9
- He was a man of great humility, but was at the same time capable of uttering words of the greatest self-confidence, “before God a worm, before men an eagle” (Deissmann).
- It is Paul that says: “I am the least of the apostles,” 1 Cor. 15:9; “I am less than the least of all the saints,” Eph. 3:8; and: “of whom (sinners) I am chief,” 1 Tim. 1:16.
- But it is the same Paul that speaks: “I labored more abundantly than they all,” 1 Cor. 15:10; and: “For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles,” 2 Cor. 11:5.
- But he realizes that all that is commendable in him and that is praiseworthy in his work, is fruit of the grace of God. Hence he follows up the statement in 1 Cor. 15:10 by saying: “*yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*”
- Paul was a tenderhearted man, and was yet on certain occasions very severe. He was capable of the most affectionate feeling, always concerned for the welfare of the churches; but just on that account relentless over against all those that were enemies to the truth. Compare in this respect the epistle to the Philippians with that to the Galatians.
- He placed himself entirely at God’s disposal, following where He led, and was willing to be the unworthy instrument in the hand of his Lord in spreading the glad tidings of salvation. Hence he was great in the Kingdom of God.

### **Before His Conversion<sup>6</sup>**

- Paul was first and foremost a Jew. This is the main factor in understanding his character and activities. He was born of Jewish parentage in the city of Tarsus, in the province of Cilicia, and was thus known for many years as Saul of Tarsus.
- According to his own testimony he was a Pharisee, as his father had been before him (Acts 23:6); he spoke the Aramaic tongue (“a Hebrew of the Hebrews”); and he was taught the trade of tentmaking in his youth (Acts 18:3).

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<sup>6</sup> Dunnett, *Exploring the New Testament*, 42–43.

- Further, Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5). Historically, the Benjamites were fighters, and Paul seems to give evidence of an abundance of zeal in all his endeavors, especially in the persecution of the Church (Gal. 1:13).
- At an early age he went to Jerusalem, and according to his recorded testimony in Acts, studied under the noted Rabban Gamaliel I, a leading teacher of the School of Hillel (22:3).
- From Paul’s own words in Galatians, we learn that he had “profited in the Jews’ religion” beyond many of his fellows, “being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers” (1:14).
- The beginning of Saul’s furious campaign to exterminate the Church coincided with the murder of Stephen (Acts 7:58–8:3). Not only did he persecute “both men and women” in Jerusalem, but, with letters of arrest from the high priest (Joseph Caiaphas), he went to other cities as well to carry on his work (Acts 26:10, 11). It was on one such mission that Saul of Tarsus met Jesus and was dramatically converted.
- Saul was a Greek by culture. Not only was he reared in one of the leading centers of Greek learning, but he shows an acquaintance with the Greek mind.
- As an intelligent scholar, Saul knew many of the commonly used sayings taken from classical and contemporary writers (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). He also had a world outlook. Unlike the man of provincial demeanor, Paul could write, “I am made all things to all men, that I may by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). Thus, by his background, he was suited to stand before the Gentiles proclaiming Jesus’ name.
- Further, Saul was a Roman citizen. When questioned about his status by the Roman captain in Jerusalem who had informed his prisoner that he had purchased the coveted citizenship with “a great sum,” Paul replied with pride, “But I was actually born a citizen” (Acts 22:28).
  - He had appealed to his citizenship rights earlier in Philippi to gain proper respect from the local magistrates (Acts 16:37–39). This status allowed a number of valuable rights such as the right to a proper trial before condemnation and punishment, the right to appeal to Caesar for justice (cf. Acts 25:11, 12) and, in event of the death penalty, execution by decapitation rather than crucifixion.

### **Paul’s Conversion<sup>7</sup>**

- One day it happened! The thing that Saul could never have imagined would happen to him occurred with revolutionary effects. He had denied the Christian claim that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God.
- Further, he did not believe that Christ had risen from the dead as Stephen had proclaimed when he cried, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). “Liar!” the mob cried and stoned him. Saul stood by “consenting unto his death.”

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<sup>7</sup> Dunnett, *Exploring the New Testament*, 42–43.

- But when the Lord Jesus spoke to Saul on the day of the great experience outside Damascus, Saul knew that Stephen had been right, and he had been wrong. Jesus was alive after all! And further, He must be the Son of God. Thus, in the synagogues of Damascus, Saul proclaimed Christ as Savior.
- To explain exactly what happened to Saul is difficult. But there can be little doubt, from Paul's own testimony, that the change in his life was due to a personal encounter with Christ and a new relationship to Him (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:7ff.; 2 Cor. 5:14–19).
  - While the experience was sudden and dramatic, the effects were enduring.
- The impact must have necessitated great psychological and intellectual readjustments. This may well account for the period spent in Arabia and Damascus before his first visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:16–19).
- Then he went back to his home territory, and for a period of 8-10 years little is known of his activities.
- Paul leaves us in no doubt, however, that Christ had both appointed him an apostle and revealed the Gospel to him, so that he “might preach him among the heathen” (Gal. 1:1–20).

### **His Ministry**<sup>8</sup>

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- Beginning in Antioch (Acts 11:25, 26) Paul later evangelized the provinces of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia, besides many smaller areas as well. He founded, established, and organized churches in all these areas.
- Together with Barnabas, Peter, James, and other leaders of the Church, Paul had a major part in resolving the problem of the basis of Gentile salvation and the matters of fellowship between Jew and Gentile (cf. Acts 15:1–35; Gal. 2:1–10). Paul's wide outlook and genuine concern that the Gospel might reach out to all the world triumphed over the narrower perspective and more limited concern of the Jerusalem apostles. He had truly caught the vision of his Lord that the message should go out to all nations.

### **HIS WRITINGS**<sup>910</sup>

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- Paul's greatest contribution to the faith is his theology. However, as we well know, Paul did not write a “theology”—that is, a single book, or series of books, in which he systematically set out his teaching (think of Calvin's Institutes or Barth's Church Dogmatics).
- Rather, think of Paul as both a missionary and a pastor. He was concerned with the spread of the gospel and the building up of the local church so that they too could be concerned with the sharing of the gospel and the building up of the local church.

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<sup>8</sup> Dunn, *Exploring the New Testament*, 43.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 43.

- Synthesizing Paul’s “theology” from these letters is a serious challenge. And while I have argued that the biblical theologian needs to engage in the synthetic task of putting the various pieces of Paul’s theologizing together, it is also essential that we understand his letters in their own right.
- At least thirteen samples of Paul’s correspondence have been preserved, and he doubtless wrote many others that did not survive. His written ministry shows great diversity, and yet the letters may be naturally grouped under four basic headings, each reflecting a common emphasis.
- An attempt is also made to indicate an approximate chronological sequence, though any sense of finality here is impossible.
- **The Eschatological Letters:** 1 and 2 Thessalonians (date: about A.D. 50–51)—These epistles emphasize the doctrine of the last things and are especially concerned with the Second Coming of Christ and the implications of that event in the present life of the believer.
- **The Soteriological Letters:** 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans (date: about A.D. 55–58)<sup>4</sup>—Various aspects of the doctrine of salvation are delineated in this class of letters. The Corinthian Epistles stress the application of salvation to the life of the Church; Romans and Galatians discuss the doctrine of justification and its outward expression in Christian living.
- **The Christological Letters:** Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philippians (date: about A.D. 60–62)—Often called the Prison Epistles, as they were written (according to tradition as well as internal evidences) from Paul’s prison in Rome (Acts 28:30, 31), these letters present the doctrine of Christ in a distinct manner. They contain great passages that highlight the person and work of Christ in a definitive fashion (Col. 1:14–22; 2:3, 9–15; Philem. 15–20; Eph. 1:7–12; Phil. 2:5–11).
- **The Ecclesiological Letters:** 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy (date: about A.D. 63–67)—The doctrine of the (local) church is the main theme of these last three letters of Paul, often called the Pastoral Epistles. They deal primarily with the responsibilities of the leaders of the churches. The letters contain detailed instructions regarding the officers, administration, and activities of the church. The last days of Paul are reflected in the closing chapter of 2 Timothy.

### **Coauthors?**

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- Most of the letters we usually attribute simply to Paul include in their opening verses references to other Christian leaders:
  - Paul and Sosthenes (1 Cor 1:1)
  - Paul and Timothy (2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phlm 1)
  - Paul, Silas, and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1)

- Some interpreters argue that the intention of these openings is to identify the persons named as genuine coauthors. However, the frequent use of first-person singular forms in the letters as well as personal allusions to Paul only (never to the alleged coauthor) strongly suggest that we should view these individuals as “cosenders.”
- Paul is responsible for the content of the letter, although we also have to allow that Paul’s secretaries may have had a role in the wording. Paul includes reference to coworkers in the introductions to many of the letters to remind his readers that what Paul says in the letter has the backing and authority of other key Christian leaders.
- Often, of course, these leaders are included because they played a significant role in the life of the church or individual Paul is addressing.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 52–53.

## Paul's Letters

- 35AD**      **Paul's conversion**
- 46 - 48AD**    **Paul's First Missionary Journey**
- 49 / 50AD**    **Paul attends the Council of Jerusalem**  
                   50AD      Letter to the Galatians
- 50 - 52AD**    **Paul's Second Missionary Journey**  
                   51/52AD    First Letter to the Thessalonians  
                   52AD      Second Letter to the Thessalonians
- 53 - 57AD**    **Paul's Third Missionary Journey**  
                   56AD      First Letter to the Corinthians  
                   56AD      Second Letter to the Corinthians  
                   57AD      Letter to the Romans
- 57 - 60AD**    **Paul's arrest, imprisonment & journey to Rome**
- 60 - 62AD**    **Paul in Rome awaiting trial before Nero**  
                   c.60AD      Letter to the Ephesians  
                   c.60AD      Letter to the Colossians  
                   c.60AD      Letter to Philemon  
                   c.60AD      Letter to the Laodiceans (lost)  
                   c.60AD      Letter to the Philippians
- 62 - 67AD**    **Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey**  
                   c.63AD      First Letter to Timothy  
                   c.63/64AD    Letter to Titus  
                   c.67AD      Second Letter to Timothy
- c.67AD**      **Paul executed in Rome**



