

Paul: Background & Call

Memory Text: “But the Lord said to him [Ananias], ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’” (Acts 9: 15, 16)

Setting The Stage: Without a doubt one of the most prominent figures in the NT is Paul, originally Saul of Tarsus. “Paul was to the early Christian church what Moses was to the children of Israel.”

When you think of Paul, what comes to mind? 1) He is known for his itinerant evangelistic program, a program that has left its impression upon the Christian church for two thousand years. His methods, dedication, zeal, and relationship with God have been studied for centuries and have inspired many to also engage in aggressive evangelistic outreach for Christ.

2) He is also known for extracting biblical truths from the tightly woven fabric of Jewish tradition and custom to be given to all people that they might know Christ and be saved. Paul’s inspired message and ministry continues to influence the church today.

Sunday – Saul of Tarsus

Who was Saul? 1) He is first mentioned in the Bible in Acts 7:58 at the stoning of Stephen. 2) He was born in Tarsus (south-central Turkey) an important town on the trade route between Syria and western Asia (Acts 22:3). 3) He was born of Diaspora Jews (Jews not living in Israel) and was from the tribe of Benjamin. As a Pharisee he was probably married. We only know of his sister and nephew (Acts 23:16). He was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-28). He was educated in Jerusalem under the famous rabbi, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). His trade was tent making (Acts 18:3). He was a Pharisee (Phil 3:5) who were known for their strict observation of all the laws of God.

Saul’s background as a Pharisee helped him to be a successful missionary to both Jew and Gentile. With his knowledge of the OT and scribal expansions of the same, he was able to extract timeless biblical truths from the tightly woven fabric of Jewish tradition and custom and make meaningful applications of the truth to all those he ministered to. He was able to differentiate between truth and later cultural additions.

What traditions in the Adventist church have we mistaken as biblical absolutes? How important is it that we make a clear distinction between the two? Are we more interested in baptizing a person into our culture or into Christ?

Monday – Paul, the Man

What type of man was Saul/Paul? What was his personality (“a combination of characteristics or qualities that make up a person”)? What type of character (“the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual”) did he have? The following verses give us some clues:

Acts 9:1: “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest.”

Philippians 3:6, 8: “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.... Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”

Galatians 1:14: “And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”

1 Corinthians 15:9, 10: “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” How would you summarize the personality of Paul?

Paul was a man of conviction and zeal. As Saul he used these traits to persecute the early church. As Paul he used these traits to advance the gospel. This idea begs the following questions: **What changes in us when converted?** Have we had a mistaken notion of conversion to the extent that we have believed our personalities change when we give our lives to Christ?

“The ingredients that are seen before conversion are seen after conversion. This is disturbing to people who expect it to be otherwise, but perhaps we will better understand our position in Christ if we see that God’s intentions for us is not replacement of who we are, but redemption of who we are. God’s creation of us, including our basic motivational pattern, is not bad. Conversion has us rejoicing in the fact that we are enabled to become who we originally were made to be, rather than becoming someone entirely different. The renewal takes place when we are resurrected in conversion and sanctification causes a radical change, not in the gift we have, but in its purpose and use.” (Finding a Job You Can Love p. 119)

Tuesday – From Saul to Paul

Acts 9:1-22; 26:16-18

Not too long ago I read that residents of Thailand can quite easily change their names if they feel like doing so. Now some people change their names to escape

their embarrassing past, or simply because they don't like the name they were given at birth. However, in Thailand many are making a name metamorphosis in the hopes it will bring a little good luck.

An interesting article showcased some surprising outcomes when individuals changed their names. Junpim Kuntatean is an example. She won a silver medal in the world weightlifting championships, but then suffered an elbow injury a year before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. She visited a fortuneteller who recommended a name change. With her new name, Prapawadee Jaroenrattanatarakoon (poor commentators), which roughly translates as "Sparkling River-flow of Brilliant Prosperity", she won a gold medal. Similar stories illustrate this fascinating name change phenomena in Thailand.

While a name change may bring temporal success and good fortune to some Thai citizens in the 21st century, the real name change which God offers us provides an eternity with Him.

Acts 9:1-9. Saul's encounter with Christ changed him. Is it possible that we don't think that change is possible for us? How can we be changed like Saul?

Acts 26:16-18: "But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

Saul's experience, his conversion experience included a call to service. **When we give our lives to Christ, does it also include a call to service, or was that experience reserved exclusively for Saul?**

Acts 9:10-19. *"Christ had performed the work of revelation and conviction; and now the penitent was in a condition to learn from those whom God had ordained to teach His truth."* (Acts of the Apostles, p. 121) God connects Saul to His church in order to provide instruction and direction for him. Here he is encouraged to work for the Gentiles. What should this tell us about the important work Christ has given to His church? How do we help engage people in service once they have given their lives to Jesus? Is this work to be left solely for the pastor to accomplish?

Acts 9:20-22. *"God in His providence not only spared Saul's life, but converted him, thus transferring a champion from the side of the enemy to the side of Christ. An eloquent speaker and a severe critic, Paul, with his stern purpose and undaunted courage, possessed the very qualifications needed in the early church."* (Ibid., p. 124)

Wednesday – Paul in the Mission Field

What are some aspects of Paul’s successful missionary work that we can put into practice today? 1. Christ was central to his preaching. 2. Multiple missionary centers (churches) were established across the region. 3. Nurture and care of newly established members was his constant concern (half of the NT contains pastoral letters to the various churches).

Romans 15:19: “In mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 1:23: “ But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.”

Galatians 6:14: “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Why is it important to keep Christ central to our preaching, teaching, and sharing? Bottom line, Jesus saves. Doctrines nor prophecies can do that. Is there a risk we can get off track and think that uplifting and defending doctrines only is sufficient in converting people? Yes we can, but we need to remember that the truth as it is in Jesus has drawing and converting power. What is the purpose of doctrines in the believer’s life? Doctrines clarify the nature, character, intentions, and plans of God.

Thursday – Mission & Multiculturalism

Galatians 2:1-17

The term “multiculturalism” is a recent word. According to the Oxford English Dictionary it first appeared in the 1960’s. If we go back in time people were categorized into two groups – them and us. For the Greeks, all non-Greeks were “barbarians.” For the Jews, all non-Jews were Gentiles. The early church struggled with the Jew/Gentile divide as the gospel spread beyond Israel’s borders. The questions was: Should a Gentile become a Christian without first becoming a Jew?

Gal. 2:11-14. What did Peter do that was so wrong? He allowed what other Jews thought of his association with Gentiles to influence his actions. *“When Peter, at a later date, visited Antioch, he won the confidence of many by his prudent conduct toward the Gentile converts. For a time he acted in accordance with the light given from heaven. He so far overcame his natural prejudice as to sit at table with the Gentile converts. But when certain Jews who were zealous for the ceremonial law, came from Jerusalem, Peter injudiciously changed his deportment toward the converts from paganism.*

“A number of the Jews “dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.” This revelation of weakness on the part of those who had been respected and loved as leaders, left a most painful impression on the minds of the Gentile believers. The church was threatened with division.” (Acts of the Apostles, p. 197, 198) Fortunately Peter sought to correct the mistake he made after being confronted by Paul.

What lessons can we learn from this incident in our ministry to those who are not Christian, or not of our faith? Does a person have to know “Adventese,” or eat Loma Linda foods before we accept them into membership? Surely not! Can we take this too far by thinking that certain distinct doctrine don’t need to be taught and accepted before welcoming a person into membership? Yes, and unfortunately some do. It’s important that we know the difference between the Adventist message and cultural Adventism when wining people to Christ.

Appeal: The apostle Paul drew strength from his experience with Christ in order to become better acquainted with unbelievers in order to win them to Christ. What lengths are we willing to go to bring somebody to Christ?