

Biblical Missionaries

Paul: Mission and Message

Lesson #12 for September 19, 2015

Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 1:22-24; 15:12-22; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7; Acts 15:38-41.

1. With his incredible background in Greco-Roman society, Pharisaic Judaism and then Christianity, Paul put together what he believed was the correct form of Christian salvation history. Could anyone have been more qualified? He believed that the prophecies of the Old Testament pointed forward to the life, teachings, and death of Jesus Christ. But, with his background, he was able to distinguish clearly between Jewish civil, ritual, as well as moral practices and those essential biblical truths that remain in force not only for Jews but also for Christians.
2. Could you correctly distinguish between the necessary components of the gospel and the culturally-determined civil, ritual, and moral practices of Jewish life? A careful consideration of Paul's 13 New Testament letters will demonstrate clearly that Paul took a definite interest—a very personal interest—in every detail of the lives of his church members. He was not only focused on their conversion but also in every aspects of church life.
3. But, foremost in his concerns was the teachings about Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2) What did he specifically have in mind? Does it seem like Paul was focusing on “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” instead of focusing on the resurrection as most modern Christians do? Paul met people where they were from Palestine to Italy and possibly as far as Spain. He established churches in at least four provinces of the Roman Empire. His mission was to establish well-founded Christian companies and churches in major cities so the gospel could spread out from those centers.
4. Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-24. Keep in mind that Jesus was crucified as a traitor against the Roman government. It was considered to be the worst kind of torture and death that a person could suffer in order to prevent others from following the “traitor’s” example. Try to imagine yourself in Paul’s footsteps going to major cities and convincing the people that someone who had been crucified as a traitor against the Roman government was the Savior of the world! What approach would you take? Paul discovered fairly quickly that Jews who demanded miracles and Greeks who wanted logical explanations required very different approaches to the gospel. For those who were set in their ways and only wanted to ask more and more questions and raise more doubts, there is little that one can do. However, for those who are willing to consider new ideas, thinking outside the box, Christianity brought them salvation. What evidence do you think Paul produced to prove that Jesus was no longer in the grave?
5. In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses had predicted that the Messiah who came would be a prophet like himself. This led many Jews to think that the Messiah would come to free them from the Romans and that there would be many miracles similar to the plagues on Egypt.
6. Don’t you think the miracles and signs that Jesus performed should have been enough to convince people? What was different about the miracles and signs that Jesus produced versus those that Moses performed? As Paul approached these different groups of people, he found one way or another to bring them to an understanding of Christ, His life, His violent death, and His resurrection. To the Jews, he began with the stories of the Old Testament, pointing out how he believed prophecies from the Old Testament foretold what had happened to Jesus Christ. (Acts 13:16-41) To Gentiles Paul spoke about the Creator God, One who upholds everything and sustains lives and ultimately will be the Judge of all mankind. He spoke about sin’s entry into the world and the salvation which had come

through Jesus. (Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31) How did Paul convince them that Jesus was alive? When they got back to Rome, did the Roman soldiers who had guarded Jesus's tomb tell the truth about what had happened? Remember that they were bribed by the Jewish leaders to keep quiet! (Matthew 28:11-15)

7. Why do you think the message of the cross did not appeal to traditional Jews? And what about Greeks? And Romans?
8. Upon what is your faith based? Do you have a solid, biblical explanation for what you believe? Do we all need to have exactly the same explanation for what we believe? Or, can we have individual paths to light and righteousness?
9. As we know, Paul used the familiar as a stepping stone to talk about the unfamiliar. He used illustrations from common Greco-Roman society as well as Jewish society. He talked about athletes and their various contests. Like modern-day peoples around the world, the Greeks and the Romans were very interested in athletic games. Paul also sometimes used the ever-present Roman soldier to illustrate a point or two. The Greeks and the Romans were especially fond of foot races. Wrestling was also popular. Sometimes, foot races were carried out in full military armor! Athletic skill was what mattered, not ethnicity, nationality, or social class.
10. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Galatians 5:7; 1 Timothy 6:12; and 2 Timothy 2:5. What can we learn from these passages about Paul's use of illustrations with which his readers were familiar? Christians must run the best race we can, but we are running for an eternal prize; everyone who runs faithfully can win—not just one person. From the days of the Roman consul Marius who ruled on three different occasions starting in 107 B.C. and ending in 86 B.C., the Roman government replaced temporary soldiers with full-time career warriors. These were stationed in Roman outposts throughout the empire. People were recruited from all kinds of backgrounds and were accepted if they were willing to totally pledge their loyalty to the ruling emperor. They were given handsome rewards at the end of their terms of service. (See 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Ephesians 6:10-11; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3-4.)
11. From these passages, Paul concluded that Christians should use the weapons of truth and persuasion. We are not fighting a war using the military weapons that soldiers use; we are fighting against the Devil and his evil angels, and we need to use weapons that work against their false claims and arguments. And we must not allow ourselves to be distracted by worldly matters.
12. Paul applied many of these metaphors to himself. He said in 2 Timothy 4:7, *GNB*: "I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith." Some translations say, "I have fought the good fight." The original Greek suggests a "conflict" or a "contest" of some kind. It uses the word *agōn* from which we get *agony*.
13. In what ways do we struggle in the battle against false ideas and claims? Do we struggle against the constantly advancing arguments of evil forces? Are we in a contest with them? Is there ever a time when we are free to sit back and relax based on what we have done already?
14. Paul condemned pagans in Romans 1 and condemned Jews in Romans 2. Read Romans 3:31. After mentioning how we are to be saved apart from law, Paul suggested in Romans 3:19-20 that true Christianity upholds the law. Which law was he talking about? An educated Pharisee like Paul, no doubt, included all of the books of Moses when he spoke about the law. Of course, that included the Ten Commandments. Paul spoke about the law at least 130 times in his writings. And in *Acts of the Apostles* written by his friend Luke, *law* is mentioned 20 more times. Paul wanted his hearers—both Jews and Gentiles—to

understand the implications of the Ten Commandments and the other cultural, civil, and moral laws in the books of Moses. Is it completely clear in your mind which of the laws in the books of Moses are still applicable to us? Is there any benefit from studying the Old Testament in our day? Can one have a government without any laws?

15. Being under the law might seem like a contradiction to those who believe they are free in Christ. What are we supposed to learn about or from the religious ceremonies, civil laws, health laws, and laws of purification that applied to the ancient Jews? Paul suggested that he was still under the law. (Romans 3:19) But, he also said that he was released from the law. (Romans 7:6) He talked about a law of sin (Romans 7:25) and a law that is holy. (Romans 7:12,25) He mentioned the law of Moses (1 Corinthians 9:9) but also the law of God. (Romans 7:25) To non-Jews all of these discussions were probably confusing. But, to Jewish believers who had grown up with a rabbinic education, they understood what all that meant.
16. Read Romans 13:8-10; Romans 2:21-24; 1 Corinthians 7:19; and Ephesians 4:25, 28; 5:3; 6:2. Is it clear in your mind from these verses that Paul is telling us that the Ten Commandments are still binding on Christians today? Does anyone really want to do away with any of the Ten Commandments except the Sabbath commandment? Did Paul clearly realize that the ceremonial laws connected to the sanctuary, the details about relating to the priesthood, and all the details of the sacrifices ceased to be relevant after the crucifixion and especially after the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70? Are we supposed to learn anything from all that Old Testament material? Is it relevant to us in our day?
17. On the other hand, the Ten Commandments are laws describing the way that moral, intelligent, thinking people will live their lives. There is no reason for those commandments ever to be eliminated. Those laws are descriptive of reality in God's loving universe.
18. Read 1 Corinthians 2:2, *GNB*. What was Paul thinking when he said: "I made up my mind to forget everything except Jesus Christ and especially his death on the cross." Would the cross mean anything without the resurrection? Would an ordinary death followed by a resurrection have meant anything? There have been many of those. So, why was the way Christ died and why He died and the way He arose so crucial for the Christian message?

All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. **The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.**

Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. **He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.1-2.

When the voice of the mighty angel was heard at Christ's tomb, saying, Thy Father calls Thee, **the Saviour came forth from the grave by the life that**

was in Himself. . . . John 10:17-18; 2:19.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 785.2. [Bold type is added.]

19. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-22. **The life and death of Jesus is the absolute core of the gospel.** What are we supposed to learn from those events?
20. The resurrection of Christ—proving as it does that He was God and thus that His life teaches us about God—is an essential part of the gospel. But, if people are actually immortal and go straight to their reward at the time of the first death, then Jesus who lived the best life of any human that has ever lived on planet earth would have gone straight to heaven and there would not have been that great struggle/fear of losing His relationship with the Father or of being forever separated from Him. To prove that it is possible to live a good life as a human being here on this earth, Jesus did not use His divine power in any way for His personal benefit. However, after His death, when the demonstration was over, He was able to use His divine power to raise Himself from the dead.

Again [in Gethsemane] Christ went away, and prayed that if it were possible this cup might pass from him. **His soul was filled with an overpowering fear of separation from God in consequence of sin.** Satan told him that if he became the substitute and surety for a sinful world, he would nevermore be one with God, but would be under his control.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 3, 1897 par. 6. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

21. But, as we know, the majority of Christians tend to believe that the human soul is immortal and that we go directly to heaven or hell when we die. That is contrary to what Paul taught:
1. Only God has immortality. (1 Timothy 6:16)
 2. Immortality is a gift from God to the saved. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)
 3. Death is a sleep until Christ returns. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15; 1 Corinthians 15:6,18,20)
22. As we know, beliefs in almost all religions include many false ideas based on the immortality of the soul, beliefs like reincarnation, praying to saints, veneration of ancestral spirits, and eternally-burning hell, and many of the beliefs and practices of the New Age including channeling. This is why a correct understanding of the nature of man and his state in death is absolutely essential to a correct understanding of the gospel.
23. Our loving and gracious God would never commit lost souls to an eternally-burning hell. The dead are asleep; after the third coming, they will cease to exist. That is the most merciful thing that God can do for those who do not want to be with Him and do not want to have anything to do with Him. Notice what will happen to Satan at the third coming:

Satan sees that his voluntary rebellion has unfitted him for heaven. He has trained his powers to war against God; **the purity, peace, and harmony of heaven would be to him supreme torture.** His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced. The reproach which he has endeavored to cast upon Jehovah rests wholly upon himself. And now Satan bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, p. 670.2. [Bold type is added.]

24. Paul was a very forceful person with a strong personality. Yet, he found it possible to work with a lot of associates. A number of them (Barnabas, Silas, Aquila and Priscilla, Luke, Timothy, Aristarchus, etc.) are mentioned by name: Acts 13:2; 15:22,37; 16:1-3; 18:2; 19:22; Colossians 4:7,10-11; and Philemon 24. Paul also mentioned 24 others in Romans

16.

25. But, not everything was always smooth between Paul and his co-laborers. Read Acts 15:38-41, and *Acts of the Apostles* pp. 169.3-170.1. Mark, being somewhat inexperienced, turned back when they faced difficulties and trials in Pamphylia. At first, Paul did not want to forgive him for that; however, later, he was reconciled to Mark. (2 Timothy 4:11)
26. Why do you think it is that these 13 relatively short letters from Paul have probably had more influence on the world than any other document in Greek literature? When the Jews in Macedonia were determined to capture Paul and kill him, he escaped by fleeing to Athens. There he met with the intelligentsia of the city and gave them a very convincing sermon, parts of which are recorded in Acts 17:16-31.
27. Do you find it difficult to speak to associates, friends, or casual contacts about the truth? Especially truths which are in contradiction to the common beliefs of other Christians?
28. The Jews wanted miracles and signs. What is a sign? Is it different from a miracle? Are miracles good evidence to prove the correctness of some belief? What role does logic play in our evaluation of religious claims? (See *Steps to Christ* 105.)
29. Most of us live among and associate with people who are of other Christian persuasions or not Christian at all. What is the best way to open up a conversation with them about things that are really important? First, get to know them personally.
30. Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-24. Paul apparently struggled with knowing how to relate to people of different backgrounds. How are we supposed to know which method God wants us to use with any given individual with whom we may come in contact? The Seventh-day Adventist Church has traditionally used evangelistic meetings, individual Bible studies, and printed lessons as typical ways to reach out to the public. Is it time for us to think of some creative, new ways—perhaps some untraditional and untried methods—to reach out? Are we prepared to be all things to all people so that by all means we might win some? (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)
31. Do you find speaking to people about the death of Christ to be a stumbling block in 2015? Do you know how to make it sound important and interesting? What steps can we take to make our approach to people more sensitive to cultural differences and beliefs? Surely, we would agree that God wants us to share the good news of salvation in ways that will be attractive and meaningful to different peoples.
32. The experience of pioneer missionaries Fernando and Ana Stahl might be a good example. At first, they tried to sell literature door-to-door in South America in the Peruvian Andes. They soon discovered that was not a very effective method because 95% of the population were illiterate. So, they rethought their approach and started up schools, clinics, and even markets. As a result, they transformed the society of the indigenous Indians and brought them up out of the vices of coca and alcohol and helped them to rise above superstition and ignorance.
33. One of the remarkable metaphors that Paul used in describing the Christian community is its similarities to a human body. Not all can be eyes or ears or arms or legs. But, if we all work together each using the skills which God has given us, we can be an effective tool in God's hands. (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26)
34. Paul reached out into many areas of life to adapt metaphors while trying to explain the Christian experience.
35. He likened salvation to the experience of being adopted (Romans 8:15), reconciled (Romans 5:10), justified (Galatians 2:16), liberated (Romans 6:18), married (Romans 7:2-4), redeemed (Ephesians 1:7), and the recipient of an inheritance (Romans 8:17).

36. Many Adventist Churches have tried to establish programs for making the church environment a more friendly one. Those ideas are excellent, but the time is surely here when we need not only to make the church friendly but also we need to reach out into the community.

37. How can we know when it is the right time to share certain truths with people? How can we be sure that we are not watering down our message to try to make it more attractive?

Avoid a Rut.--God's workmen must labor to be many-sided men; that is, to have a breadth of character, not to be one-idea men, **stereotyped in one manner of working, getting into a groove, and unable to see and sense that their words and their advocacy of truth must vary with the class of people they are among, and the circumstances that they have to meet.**

–Ellen G. White, Letter 12, 1887; *Evangelism* 106.1. [Bold type is added.]

38. “Be very careful not to present the truth in such a way as to arouse prejudice, and to close the door of the heart to the truth.”–Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 141.3. How do you respond when you have an opportunity to sit down with a friend and see if you can explain things in a convincing manner to him/her. How would you explain your belief in the soon return of Jesus to a group of educated professionals? How would you convince a group of young university students that God created the earth in six literal days?

39. Try to imagine what Paul would do if he were alive today. Can you think of metaphors from current society that he might use to illustrate aspects of the gospel?

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