

Watching Out for Paul – 2

To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ at Laramie:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

OK, so I may have modified it a bit, but that was the opening greeting from Paul to the Colossians, the source of our New Testament lesson today. It seems appropriate to start this way as I did last time with Galatians, and maybe even more so this time.

In my sermon two weeks ago, I talked about Paul's life through his first Missionary trip. The Asia Minor (Turkey) synagogues that Luke refers to in Acts 13 and 14 are located within 100 miles of the southern coast in the region of Galicia. Barnabus and Paul found three conditions at the synagogues they visited:

- a. Most Jews were not interested in the story of Jesus.
- b. Most gentiles outside the synagogues were not interested in the story of Jesus.
- c. There are many gentiles who attend synagogue regularly but don't want to become Jews who were interested in the message. Why not become Jewish? In large part, because of circumcision and dietary laws. The more they preached, the more Barnabus and Paul came to realize that Jesus' message is not "become Jewish and follow me", it is "follow me."

Barnabus and Paul return to Antioch after their 2-year mission in about 49-50 CE (and Paul about 42 years old). Paul goes to Jerusalem and meets with Peter and the rest of the disciples to discuss whether conversion to Judaism is required before accepting Christ. The primary outcome was that the Jerusalem apostles would preach to the Jews and Paul would preach to the gentiles. But a second outcome was that some of the more conservative Jews then went to the churches that Paul and Barnabus had visited and tried to make them converts to Judaism first before becoming Christians. When Paul learned of this, he wrote his first letter to the Galatians, about 50-51 AD, possibly before his second missionary journey, though some say he wrote the Galatians as late as 52-55 CE, during or after his second Missionary Journey.

Paul's second Missionary Journey takes him to his Galatian churches first and then to Greece. At his first stop in Greece, in Phillipi he meets and converts Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth, and her family. From there, he travels to Thessalonica, to Berea, to Athens, to Corinth where he stays for almost a year, and then back through Ephesus, Caesarea and finally, Jerusalem.



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He almost immediately turns around and goes back to Greece on his third Missionary Journey.



(https://www.theologyfortherestofus.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/paul_s_third_journey.png)

He stays in Ephesus for over a year, then returns to many of the same locations as he was in on his second trip.

He finally returns to Jerusalem in 57 CE where he is quickly arrested, held in Roman Caesarea for 2 years and then is transported to Rome where he is held for two more years, still preaching from prison.

And this is where his story in Acts ends. This is about 62 CE and he likely dies under the hand of Nero in 64 after the burning of Rome. It is possible that he traveled to Spain during this time and maybe even back to Israel and could have died as late as 66CE.

Between 52 and 57 CE while he is on his second and third trips that he writes his letters to the Thessalonians, the Corinthians twice, the Philippians, the Romans (who he hasn't visited yet), and to Philemon (a colleague who has trouble with his slave, Onesimus).

When I signed up for the "Footsteps of Paul" tour last year, the leaders sent out a reading and watching list, which included two books, "A Jewish Paul" by Matthew Theissen and "The First Paul" by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, a pair of Lutheran and Catholic Professors who wrote several books together. Two

weeks ago, I said that I had a Love/Hate relationship with Paul, and “The First Paul” largely resolved that for me.

The basic thesis of the first half of the book is there is not one Paul, but three (or four if you count Acts). Of the thirteen books attributed to Paul in the New Testament, seven were definitely written by the real Paul, who they refer to as the Radical Paul.

These are Galatians, 1st Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Philippians, Romans and Philomen. Three may have been written by Paul, but were more likely written by a group of Paul’s followers in the ten years after Paul’s death, referred to as the Conservative Paul. These books are 2nd Thessalonians, Colossians and Ephesians. The last three were likely written later, possibly as late as 100-110 CE, referred to as the Reactionary Paul. These are 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus.

Because of their different thrust and feel, they are the most “Roman Imperial” of the works. They are often referred to as the “Pastoral” letters. Careful with that word. These are harsh notes to two specific preachers; it does not connote a calm, peaceful pastoral, heavenly scene.

The Radical Paul

The Radical Paul is the one most Christ-like. Borg and Crossan give two extended examples, comparing Paul's views on Slavery and Patriarchy between the three Pauls. Patriarchy is a social system in which positions of authority are primarily held by men. As an example using patrimony, in 1st Corinthians, Chapter 7, the Radical Paul talks about the equality of men and women in marriage. Paul's first concern is actually about what he fears is the impending "end of the world", and that it would be better if men and women didn't marry so they could concentrate on that. However, in Verses 2 and 3, he writes, "But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman should have her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband." Borg and Crossan write "Paul deliberately strains his syntax to make certain that any obligation of the wife is balanced by that of the husband and vice versa. It is always about mutual and reciprocal rights and duties."

In mixed Christian-pagan marriages, divorce may be allowed if the pagan party refuses to live in peace. However, he also advises in such marriages, "The unbelieving husband is made

holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband.; “Wife, for all you know, you may save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you may save your wife.”

(Verses 14 and 16) And the rest of the chapter is about female/male and male/female rights in various situations, but always emphasizing “Wife and husband are equal in the family.”

Likewise, while discussing head coverings and long and short hair in church, Paul states, “any man who prays or prophesies” and “any woman who prays or prophesies” takes for granted that both men and women are equal in the church assembly just like in the home.

Finally, in the greater world, Paul mentions both males and females in the final chapter of Romans, Chapter 16. First, the letter is being delivered by Phoebe, who is expected to read and explain the letter to the house-churches in Rome. Phoebe is a deacon of her church and is also Paul’s patron. She obviously has a place of authority in Paul’s mind. Next he says, “Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ...” and later “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who were with me in prison,....and they were in Christ before I was...”

Of the twenty-seven Christians Paul lists for greetings, ten are women. But even beyond that, five women and six men are singled out for special attention. And he names four women for their apostolic activity, and no men. For him, women as well as men were called by God to be apostles of Christ.

It is obvious that the Radical Paul considered women to be on totally equal footing as men in marriage, in the church and in the apostolate.

The Conservative Paul

The Conservative Paul of Colossians, Ephesians and 2nd Thessalonians (probably written within 10 years of Paul's death) backs off that equality and fits into the Roman gender hierarchy.

In Chapter 3:18-19 of Colossians, it is written:

“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.”

And in Chapter 5 of Ephesians:

“Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is head of the Church... Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, subject to their husbands.” (22-24)

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy...Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband. (25, 33).

That doesn't sound like the equality Paul strived to attain earlier. And the same continues on for children and fathers (mothers aren't mentioned) and slaves and masters. The thrust has gone from equality to “being subject to.”

The Reactionary Paul

The Paul of Timothy and Titus is different altogether. Concerning female leadership in the church, he writes:

“Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” (1Tim 2:11-15)

This doesn't sound like the Radical Paul at all. In fact, it is attempting to negate Paul's teachings in Romans where he

discusses the equality of husbands and wives and then names the significant women in the church and in the apostolate.

Here, I've focused primarily on the views of the three Pauls on men/women and marriage. The "First Paul" book actually begins with this same process on slavery and then talks about Patrimony and the family. And similar comparisons can be made on Paul's "changing" views on Anti-Semitism and on homosexuality.

The "First Paul" and my two weeks with Bishop Mike and Pastor David Hansen on our Paul trip have given me a new insight into the works of Paul. Now I'm careful to hear what books are being referred to "by" Paul.

The Radical Paul is the one we today would consider the most "Christ-like", the most firm and definitive. And this is the Paul I think of with lines like "Faith, Hope and Love abide, but the greatest of these is Love." (1st Corinthians 13:13) And "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be

able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Romans 8:38-39)

Amen.