

## **PAUL AND HIS LETTERS - 3rd update**

### **Paul: Apostle of Jesus Christ for the Good News to the Gentiles**

It is evident that the intense apostolic activity of Paul is sustained by a great spiritual dynamism and above all by a strong love for Jesus Christ, the centre and the scope of all his life and work.

Besides the book of the Acts of the Apostles which offers us biographical notes of Paul, we have his letters to the various Churches, formed during his missionary journeys. They contain gems of doctrine and guidance which still speak today.

The letters of Paul have a strong personal character. In fact, in these letters we can discover the strong personality of Paul in his human and spiritual dimensions. In his epistolary with his Christians we draw a portrait of a personality capable of great and intense emotions and reactions, a personality capable of profound and lasting friendship with his collaborators.

Going deeper into his letters we discover a Paul who speaks freely of his sentiments, of his reactions and of his sufferings, both physical and spiritual.

### **Paul's Theology**

Paul is the first Christian Theologian and his influence and writings have shaped Christianity. The Gospels have brought us closer to the teachings of Jesus. But if theology is measured in terms of articulation of Christianity then Paul's Letters laid a foundation for Christian theology. The letters of Paul are the earliest works of the New Testament. To present the theology of Paul in brief would be impossible. The richness of his thought can be experienced through a reflective and meditative reading of his letters themselves. We shall present his thought in brief when we present each letter.

### **The Centre of Paul's Good News**

The centre of his evangelisation is Christ and his salvation for everybody. Paul defines it with the richness of expressions:

**Jesus Christ:** "We do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor 4: 5).

**Christ Crucified:** "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2: 2).

**The wisdom of God:** ... "We speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2: 7-8).

**The inscrutable richness of Christ:** "To me, the very least of all the holy ones, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inscrutable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3: 8).

**The things freely given us by God:** "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God" (1 Cor 2: 12).

### **Pastoral Attitude in Announcing the Gospel**

Christ is Paul's model, the Good Shepherd, who with His incarnation and message has concretised the most splendid adaptation to every human situation.

For his communities, each so different and in various situations, Paul adopts himself to the circumstances. Each letter of Paul reveals his effort to communicate his Gospel by apply it to local situations, avoiding any rhetorical and abstract preaching.

The letters of Paul addressed to the various communities were cherished and valued as means of instruction in Christian faith, worship and daily living.

### **Debtor towards All**

Paul is aware that he has to proclaim the Gospel to the multitude and not to groups or social categories: "This man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles, kings and Israelites" (Acts 9: 15)".

"I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13: 47)".

"I have become all things to all, to save at least some" (1 Cor 9: 22).

The "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9: 16) is the expression of his obedience to God, to the vocation received; it is the answer to the call to the apostolate.

### **The Pauline Corpus**

Even though fourteen letters are attributed to Paul in the New Testament, it is probable that only seven of them were actually written by Paul himself. In the approximate chronology of their composition they are: 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Romans.

The other seven letters that are attributed to him (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews) were most likely written by assistants of Paul in his name and with his authority, after his death. One of

these fourteen letters to the Hebrews, does not claim to be the work of Paul. However these letters, too, represent an authentic development of Paul's thought and may therefore be considered "Pauline" in a wide sense. Four of the letters in the Pauline corpus (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) are called the "Captivity Epistles" because in each of them the author speaks of being in prison at the time of writing. Three others (1-2 Timothy and Titus) are known as the "Pastoral Epistles" because, addressed to individuals, they give advice to "bishops" about caring for the flock. (From: African Bible: The Letters of Paul – Introduction)

### **Plan of Paul's letters**

The letters of Paul are written according to the manner of his time.

**Address:** the letters began with greetings. Paul names himself and his co-workers; he names his correspondents and sends them greetings.

**Thanksgiving:** a short prayer of thanksgiving to God.

**The body of the letter:** that includes important points of teaching and the exhortation for a correct behaviour based on his teaching.

**Conclusion and final greeting:** Paul ends his letter by giving news of himself and of his co-workers and greetings followed by a blessing.

## **COLUMN**

### **Paul in His own Words**

#### ***Renewed in Christ***

One day God called me,  
He who had chosen me from my mother's womb;  
And He was pleased to reveal in me his Son,  
that I might make Him known  
among the pagan nations.

*Galatians 1:15-16*

Read also:

*Galatians 2:19-20*

## **EVENTS**

### **TO GO DEEPER...**

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