

Missiology of Paul

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“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”
1 Corinthians 2:2-4(KJV)

Mission is the heart of the Bible, the center of salvation and the beginning and means of the Church. This is evident in both the Messianic and missionary approach, which Jesus took through the incarnation. Similarly, the Great Commission that He left is also mission centered. Following his words and example, The Early Church was a mission church that began its activity from Jerusalem only to extend it to the end of the world.

Independently from the motives, mission has always been the main objective of the church of all centuries. This interest arises from the necessity with which the Bible focuses on missions. While the words mission, missions or missionary are not found in the Scriptures, it is quite clear the New Testament is instrumental in describing the role, structure and results of the mission activities. They are often contained in the boundaries of the apostolic ministry, but can also be found in other ministerial contexts.

For example, the Gospels focus on the future of missions. The rest of the New Testament however, and specifically the writings of Paul, addresses the mission issue in its present predicament accenting on the various problems and practical dilemmas.

Since in our Pentecostal theological and historical background, we are secure to claim that the Early Church ministries are present and active in the church 21st century,

we can also accept the fact that mission is still the primary ecclesiastical objective. Therefore, the same basic principles presented in the writings of Paul are valid in the modern context of missions. In this sense, to write a missiology of Paul which includes the background, development and methods of his mission strategy is a historical, theoretical and practical necessity.

Pre-Christian Mission Influence

Paul's missiology starts in the adjunct with His early religious experience, including his training and post-training pious involvement. Therefore, it is imperative to include his pre-Christian religious activities as beginning of his mission interest. Paul himself sees this experience as fundamental for his later ministry, and he often gives in his writings partial or full description. From such passages we are aware of his Judaic background, as well as his early training at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). It is reasonable to conclude that in that period Paul is formed as a Pharisee who understands and strongly supports his convictions.¹ This combined with the spread of proselytism defines Paul's understanding of Judaic mission in three aspects: *presentation, conversion, and organization*. These three will be essential for his future apostolic ministry. Presentation will evolve into the preaching of the Gospel, conversion to the Sola Fide and organization to the Church infrastructure.

Also essential for the formation of Paul's missiology is the Greeko-Roman historical, cultural and ethnic epoch in which he lives. This formation does not remain unnoticed in the Bible narrative, where it is carefully pointed as an undivided part of Paul's ministry. Examples of such occasion are Paul's numerable referrals, Greek

literature and religion (Acts 17). Furthermore, it is also evident that Paul is influenced by the economical structures and political classes, especially in the areas of citizenship and slavery (Acts 21:29; Eph. 6:5, 6).²

Paul's missiology, however, is not influenced only by traditional, non-Christian orders. A leading part in the formation of his Christian theological convictions plays his conversion on the road to Damascus, and more specifically the vision of the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:17; 26:16). For Paul, this is the same experience as one of the original apostles received (1 Cor. 15:5-11).³ The experience of Christophany is not only the turning point in the life of Paul, but also is the source of authority for his later ministry. Han further writes that this experience was not only central in the ministry of Paul, but, without any doubt, it was a life-changing personal experience.⁴ This was also what turned Paul's zealous persecution of Christians into passion for missions and devoted ecclesiastical work. Later in his ministry, Paul would use the same experience of the risen Christ against the numerable sectarian and cultic heresies such as Gnosticism and Curious Cult.⁵

Another important point in the development of Paul's missiology is his fourteen year long training experience in the area of Asia Minor (Gal. 2:1). Although we do not have extensive information about this early period of Paul's ministry, we can not deny that its influence is essential in the development of Paul's Gospel and missiology. It is imperative to suggest, in this case Priscilla and Aquila, who were active apostles and

¹ Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 154.

² Young Chul Han, *Apostle' Paul's Theology of Mission* (Cleveland: Pathway Press, 1997), 27, 28.

³ Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 55.

⁴ Han, 53.

missionaries in this particular geographic area and are also mentioned by Paul's closest fellow workers, were also instrumental in the completion of this process (1Cor. 16:1). Paul himself recognizes this period as an important factor in the formation of his personal convictions and apostolic authority to the point when they were not questioned once he appeared in front the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:6-10).

Mission Call and Formation

It is evident from the above meeting that the object of Paul's general mission is to preach the Gospel of the resurrected Christ to all people.⁶ While such a ministry is in parallel with mission strategies of Peter and James's work among the Jews, it is in radical contrast with the ethnic objects of their mission.⁷ The focus of Paul's ministry is on the Gentiles, a mission field is untouched at the time.⁸ Paul is also convinced that Christianity must escape the Jewish framework and categories in which it has been born.⁹ This is in contrary with the mission statements of Paul. Such a neoteric idea presupposes the breaking of ethnic norms and cross-cultural religious barriers along with constant resistance from old traditional structures. In this sense, the objective of Paul's ministry is revolutionary. He not only extends the limits of mission, but also universalizes salvation for all. His mission plan does not stop at Judea and Samaria, but following the Great Commission, it extends to the ends of the world.¹⁰

Paul draws credentials for apostolic authority and qualifications for global mission from his personal Christophany experience and the call Christ has placed upon

⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁷ E. Early Ellis, *Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 124.

⁸ Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 56.

⁹ Benrad T. Smyth, *Paul. Mystic and Missionary* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980), 24.

¹⁰ Helen Doohan, *Paul's Vision of Church* (Wilmington: Michael Glazer, 1989), 21.

his life (Gal. 1:15-16). He also often refers to his early Christian training and his extended Jewish education, to which we can add his cross-cultural gifts and open to other religions.¹¹

Paul also often points as authoritative out the fact that he had received the Gospel directly from Christ and not from “flesh and blood” (Gal 1:16). He is extremely self-conscious about his apostolic.¹² The purpose of the preached gospel is to lead people to the “obedience to faith,” and in this since Paul’s Gospel is missionary.¹³ The message Paul preaches carries the mysticism of his conversion experience in three related doctrinal teachings: *the Son of God, Sola Fide, and the Universal Church*, which are the corner stones of Paul’s Missiology.¹⁴

Beside the apostolic authority, in his writings and ministry, Paul often refers to the responsibility of the mission. He refers to the spiritual gifts and ministries as the means by which God intends to build His church (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:1,2). Nevertheless, these are not of the greatest importance for Paul, because in his theology, love prevails over all (1 Cor. 13). This is why in all his writings and activities Paul is careful to show mercy and love, not anger and vengeance. Although, his apostolic authority allows him to be strict in all situations, he prefers to find the way of peace. The last is the base on which Paul builds his methods of mission work. ***Mission Goals and Strategies***

Paul’s mission strategy includes five operational methods: (1) preaching, (2) organization, (3) appointment, (4) revisiting and (5) epistles. The first refers to the

¹¹ Gilliland, 264, 265.

¹² J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortpress Press, 1980), 4.

¹³ P. T. O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 58.

presentation of the Gospel to the unbelievers in a way understandable for them. Such a presentation should be genuine, apart from any human wisdom and liberated from extra cultural, religious or personal hidden agendas. Due to the presence of the power and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Paul's preaching was often accompanied by signs, wonders, supernatural operation of gifts of the Spirit and normally numerable conversions (1 Cor. 1:4,5). Paul's desire was that every Christian has a personal experience of Christ, as the one he was introduced to on the Damascus road.¹⁵

It is also important to note that Paul's mission work starts where the mission work of the existing ecclesiastical structures ended. Paul sought to work in new areas. This is to say that Paul prefers to work where no one else has worked (Romans 15:23).¹⁶ Nevertheless, his work often started in the synagogues or other religious meeting existing body of believers (Acts 16:13, 16; 17:16).¹⁷

The second factor implies the organization ecclesiastical infrastructure as unified in one universal body. Paul calls this structure the Mystery of Christ (Rom 16:24; Eph. 3:4; Col. 4:3). For Paul, church planting is important for the expansion of the already-not-yet Kingdom of God. As such, the church is the place for redefining corporate identity. It is also cult-free, charismatic and Christ-like.¹⁸ In this sense, the church is the assembly of the saints, fellowship of the first born and the community of the believers whose primary missions is spreading the Gospel. This is a corporate effort, not an

¹⁴ James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 37.

¹⁵ Doohan, 23.

¹⁶ J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 113.

¹⁷ Doohan, 28.

¹⁸ Dunn, 534, 543, 552.

individual one. Paul recognizes this through being a part of a mission team (Acts 18:5; 20:4; 1 Thess. 1:1; Col. 4:7-18).

The church is a Christian community.¹⁹ The unity in the church is based on communal principles of love and care.²⁰ However, discipline and authority are also essential elements of its infrastructure.²¹ The unity of the church was not something that needed to be created, but rather an existent factor that needed to be recognized by the believers.²²

The foundation for Paul's ministry was his appointment of elders. In the Ephesian church particularly, we see him saying farewell to the leadership team that he had trained (Acts 20:28-31). Later he sent Timothy to them to deal with problems there caused by false teachers (1 Tim. 1:3-7), something that he had foreseen (Acts 20:29-30). We see him having the same purpose in leaving Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5). Paul himself demonstrates submission to higher church leadership, and not his personal agenda (Acts 13:3).

The authority of the church is two-dimensional. First, the church has authority Satan, demons and the entire Kingdom of Darkness. This kind of authority is exercised by all believers. Second, the church has the right of authority within its structural formations. This kind of authority is exercised by believers who are appointed by a divine calling and conformation from the local congregation. Furthermore, appointments are carefully chosen based on personal characteristics in order to prevent all possible heresy, misconduct or abuse of power.

¹⁹ Doohan, 21.

²⁰ Dunn, 565.

²¹ Roland Allen *Missionary Methods. St. Paul's or ours?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1962), 81.

There can be no substitute for establishing local leadership in church planting operations. The purpose of ecclesiastical leadership is twofold: protection and preparation. The leader is to protect the believers from all enemies, including spiritual and physical. He must assess and respond to the needs of the congregation. The leader is the good shepherd for the flock of God.

His second concern must be focused on the preparation of the believers. Through this, Paul recognizes the transitory nature of individual ministry and the need for ministry to be related to more than one generation (1 Tim. 2:2). On many occasions, Paul himself serves as a personal mentor, teacher and even father in the faith. Similar to the Hebrew tradition, Paul is looking for continuity of the ministry of the apostles recognizing its importance for the church and the Kingdom of God.²³

The fourth step in Paul's mission's methodology is revisitation. On many occasions the New Testament tells us the story of Paul visiting churches and places for a second time. This is also relative to his personal knowledge of the problems and the people of a given congregation (Rom. 16). Paul always made a point to visit the vital centers of trade and culture, knowing that each of them radiated an influence on the surrounding area. Not that he ignored villages, for connecting cities to surrounding villages were permanent lines of communication.²⁴

Paul's efforts for contact did not stop there. Not much has been said or written about Paul's epistles as missionary methods. They, however, not only assume a large part of the New Testament, but also presuppose a list of serious questions and answers

²² Gilliland, 200.

²³ Allen, 81.

²⁴ Verkuyl, 113.

concerning the area of Christian conduct, doctrinal soundness and church government. Most all of Paul's writings serve as circular letters in the early church. This means that they were used not only for one location or one problem, but were essential for the establishment of the foundations of the teachings and practices in the Early Church as a whole.

It is imperative that to the above methodology we add the constant traveling in which Paul was engaged in. It seems like his life was an endless journey. Before the conversion, it was a traveling to that road leading to Damascus where he met the Savior. After the conversion, it was a constant journey from city to city and church to church till the very last moment when he writes, "For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come" (2 Tim 4:6).²⁵

But Paul's missiology is not only a step-by-step program to be accomplished by the next 2, 5 or 10 years. The mission is not only a clerical obligation, but rather a lifestyle and means of existence. Becoming a gentile for the gentiles and a Jew for the Jews is not Paul's priority, but rather his necessity in order to fulfill the commission given him by Christ. All of the above requires enormous strength, discipline and emotional endurance.

²⁵ Dooham, 34.

Epilogue

The following concluding thoughts were inspired by a chapter in Bernard T. Smyth's book *Paul Mystic and Missionary*. The chapter is about Paul's prayer life and can be summarized in one New Testament phrase: "Behold he is praying" (Acts 9:11). While this particular passage is connected to the immediate time after Paul's Christophany experience and conversion, it is also clear that the prayer factor remains constant through the rest of his life. The recorded cases of prayer are numerable. Paul prays at all times and in all situations. He looked for the places where it was a custom for the people to have corporate prayer (Acts 16:12). When imprisoned with Silas he prayed again (Acts 16:25). Paul prayed at Miletus, where everyone who was praying with him started crying (Acts 20:20-36-38). What kind of prayer and what extraordinary presence and power can do that? The answer is very simple. This can be only done through the simple, ordinary prayer that Paul had. This is the prayer that he was engaged in from the very beginning of his Christian life to the very last "I have fought the good fight; I have kept the faith..."

The only reason why Paul's missiology and mission strategy worked was because he was constantly engaging in prayer. The only reason our missiology in the 21st century will work will be because of our desire to know Christ "and the power of His resurrection." This is possible only through prayer.

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