

CHAPTER 29, PAUL'S MISSION

TIMELESS TRUTH: THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO THE CIVILIZED WORLD.

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

Saul began his career as a radical Jewish scholar who was so convinced the Christians were wrong that he had them imprisoned and stoned. After an encounter with the resurrected Jesus he became a Christ-follower. Saul became Paul (his Greek name) who proclaimed Christ to the Jews first and also to the Gentiles. Led by the Holy Spirit, the believers in their home base of Antioch in Syria commissioned Paul and Barnabas and sent them out as missionaries to spread the news that Jesus the Messiah is raised from the dead. Their first missionary journey took them to the island of Cyprus where they encountered a Jewish sorcerer who opposed them and a Roman proconsul who embraced the gospel. They set sail for the region of Galatia (present south-central Turkey). They were invited to preach in the synagogue in Antioch and, after an initial favorable reception, they faced persecution so they turned their sights toward the Gentiles.

Paul was joined by Timothy, Silas, and eventually Luke for his second missionary journey. They visited many cities in Macedonia, including Philippi where a church was begun in Lydia's home. The evangelists were beaten and thrown in jail where their faith convicted not only their jailer, but apparently the other prisoners as well. Many Jews and Greeks from Thessalonica believed before Paul and Silas were sent away for their own protection. Paul then met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth where he was again opposed by the Jews. But Gentiles believed, so Paul stayed and ministered there for about a year and a half. He also wrote letters to these churches to teach and encourage them. He wrote the Thessalonians to encourage them to continue to be the model of Christianity that they had become in expectation of the Lord's return.

After returning to his base of operations in Antioch, Paul set out on his third journey. As he strengthened the churches in the Galatian region, Apollos showed up in Ephesus where he met Priscilla and Aquila. He was a powerful speaker and strong disciple, but needed further teaching. Paul arrived in Ephesus, a hotbed of pagan idolatry, and as he began teaching in the synagogue, most Jews rejected his message. He stayed more than two years teaching both Jews and Greeks. Many people from the region came to hear him as the word spread. Some of the Ephesians believed and left their idols and witchcraft in exchange for a new life in Christ. This did not set well with the idol artisans who staged a riot to drive Paul out of town. While in Ephesus, he penned letters to churches in Corinth, Galatia, and Rome, though he had not yet visited there.

The Corinthian church had enjoyed a who's who of early church leaders. This privilege should have prodded them onto Christian maturity but instead they chose sides like children on a playground. Paul chastised them for their divisiveness, corrected their immorality, and answered questions that they had about spiritual gifts. They needed to practice sacrificial love for one another. Some were even denying the resurrection so Paul gave them a remedial lesson on the essentials of the gospel and the hope of a future resurrection. The Galatian churches were confused by Jewish Christians who insisted they practice the Jewish ceremonial rites. Paul's letter is a masterpiece on Christian liberty as he defended justification by faith alone. Paul's pastoral desire to minister to the believers in Rome prompted him to write a letter to convey the foundations of the Christian faith. In spite of every form of opposition, the word of God could not be contained. God sovereignly saw to it that obstacles became opportunities for Paul and others to take the gospel "*even to the ends of the earth.*"

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: What do you like best about the church you attend?

1. God set apart Saul (Paul) and Barnabas for foreign mission work (p. 407) to help fulfill the mandate to be witnesses “*to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). Review the list of missionaries supported by your church. Read about each and pray for the needs that are listed for each one. (*Bring photos and ministry descriptions of missionaries supported by your church.*)
2. What differences do you find in Paul’s message to the Jews in the synagogue (p. 408-409) as compared to his message to the Gentiles (p. 411, 413)? Discuss applications we might make today for reaching different people groups with the same gospel.
3. Compare the conversions of Lydia and the jailer at Philippi (p. 412, 413). What differences do you find? What similarities?
4. What makes the Church in Thessalonica “*a model to all the believers*” (p. 416-417; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:8) and what application can we make for our church if we want to be known as a model church?
5. What problem seems to be at the root of the divisions and quarrels in the Church at Corinth? (p. 424-425, 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 3:1-11) Do you see any lessons here for our church?
6. Read 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:3-8, and Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16. Why is the human body a good metaphor for the church and how does it relate to spiritual gifts?
7. According to Paul’s letter to the Galatians, does freedom from the law grant freedom to sin (p. 431, Galatians 5:13-26)? What are some results of living by the Spirit?
8. What is the relationship between righteousness and faith and why do you suppose Paul used Abraham to prove his point? (Hint: The Jews placed their trust in keeping the Law and the fact that they had been circumcised.)
9. Of all the books in the Bible, Paul’s letter to the Romans most clearly outlines a pattern we can follow to lead a person to Christ. It shows man’s lost condition and makes clear what we must do to receive what God has done to correct our sad condition. This collection of verses has often been called “the Romans Road to salvation.” Trace the following verses, perhaps even marking them in your Bible. Romans 3:23 → 3:10-11 → 6:23 → 5:8 → 10:9-13 → 5:1, 8:1, 8:38-39. In 25 words or less, what are the essentials of the gospel? (Hint: Review 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.) How do you think the Romans Road could help you share your faith in the future?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER