

1. For Such a Time as This: The Apostle Paul (3Q 2008—Agents of Hope)

Biblical material: Acts 9:1–9, 22:3–5, 25–29, Rom. 7:19–25, 11:1, 15:17, Phil.3:5, 2 Pet.1:3–8.

Quotes

- What can you say about a society that says that God is dead and Elvis is alive? *Irv Kupcinet*
- God gives every bird its food, but He does not throw it into its nest. *J. G. Holland*
- To believe in God or in a guiding force because someone tells you to is the height of stupidity. We are given senses to receive our information within. With our own eyes we see, and with our own skin we feel. With our intelligence, it is intended that we understand. But each person must puzzle it out for himself or herself. *Sophy Burnham*
- How do you define God? Like this. A God I could understand, at least potentially, was infinitely more interesting and relevant than one that defied comprehension. *Robert J. Sawyer*
- I want to know God's thoughts...the rest are details. *Albert Einstein*

Questions

What was so special about Paul, his calling, and experience? How was he an agent of hope, an agent of change? What issues did he deal with very specifically? How does an understanding of Paul and his life help us understand the issues in the great controversy and how God is working these issues through to their eventual conclusion?

Discussion

“The idea that the good news was also good news for the Gentiles was a shocker to people who, despite the teachings of their own prophets, had grown up with a different understanding. God's salvation was for the entire world, not just for Jewish people. Talk about a paradigm shift!” *Sabbath's lesson*. In this the work of Paul is surprising. He himself admits he was a ‘Pharisee of the Pharisees,’ with all that this implies. So it must have been very difficult for him to accept, as a very rigorous law-keeping Jew, that the message of the gospel was to go to the Gentiles as well...

When Saul—who-became-Paul met Jesus on the Damascus road, he had many decisions to make, many ideas to change, and much to learn. (That's why he spent time in Arabia, far away from Jerusalem). He needed to work through the implications of this ‘paradigm shift.’ Most of all, this was a radical change in his picture of God. Instead of seeing a God who would delight in his persecution of Christians, he came to know the true God as revealed by Jesus. But as for so many of us, he had to spend a long time thinking this through—and unlearning many ideas about God that he had been taught. Only then could he be a true ‘ambassador for Christ.’ For while he was previously very ‘zealous for God’ (Acts 22:3), he was zealous for the ‘god’ as portrayed by the adversary. This is a cautionary note for all of us—we may be very missionary minded, as was Saul before his conversion, but zeal and enthusiasm does not always correlate with truth!

We are encouraged to re-read Paul's experience, and also his appearance before Festus and Agrippa. After all the experience of hostility from his fellow-Jews, it's

perhaps not surprising that it should become the clearer to Paul that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles as well. This really was a seismic shift in perspective—the more so for a ‘Pharisee of the Pharisees’! But in the end he concludes “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” Acts 28:28 NIV. In the next study we’ll look at how he tried to do that—to present God in the best way to everyone he met. But for the moment we need to concentrate on how and why Saul changed into Paul, and how his understanding of God was central to this whole process. For in explaining God to those around him, Paul gives us great examples...

Comment

“Paradigm shift is the term first used by Thomas Kuhn in his influential 1962 book The Structure of Scientific Revolutions to describe a change in basic assumptions within the ruling theory of science. It is in contrast to his idea of normal science. It has since become widely applied to many other realms of human experience as well even though Kuhn himself restricted the use of the term to the hard sciences. According to Kuhn, ‘A paradigm is what members of a scientific community, and they alone, share.’” (The Essential Tension, 1997). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradigm_shift

“World Paradigm Shift is an opening, a doorway, a window to a new awareness, a different way of thinking, being, experiencing. There is no ‘one way,’ but there is. There is no answer, but there is. There are no boundaries, this is true. This may well be one of our greatest explorations, our most enjoyable journeys into our unknown. Where will it lead us and what will it mean? Only you have the answers.” *Scott Ross*.

Ellen White Comments

Paul speaks of the riches of the glory of the mystery that is to be made known to the Gentiles. There are many mysteries in the word of God that we do not comprehend, and many of us are content to stop our investigation when we have just begun to receive a little knowledge concerning Christ. When there begins to be a little unfolding of the divine purposes to the mind, and we begin to obtain a slight knowledge of the character of God, we become satisfied, and think that we have received about all the light that there is for us in the word of God. But the truth of God is infinite. With painstaking effort, we should work in the mines of truth, discovering the precious jewels that have been hidden. It is the laborer’s privilege to have a constant supply of fresh truth for the people. He should be in such a position that he can bring from the treasure house of God, not the same thing over and over, but new beauty and new truth.

We must not for a moment think that there is no more light, no more truth to be given us. We are in danger of becoming careless, by our indifference losing the sanctifying power of truth, and composing ourselves with the thought, “I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” [REV. 3:17.] While we must hold fast to the truths which we have already received, we must not look with suspicion upon any new light that God may send. {GW92 389-90}

The life of Christ is a perfect revelation of the character of God. What then is our duty? Paul tells us. Christ revealed Himself to Paul as he was persecuting the saints, and the apostle declares. “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” Henceforth his one desire was to preach Christ and Him crucified. {Central Advance, April 8, 1903}