

Acts 26

Paul's Gospel

(We can often assumptions about Paul and his message that do not square with the Biblical record.)

1. As Paul stands before the Government officials of his day, he reveals something of his soul.
2. His testimony forces us to ask some hard questions concerning popular assumptions that we make about the Christian faith.

"¹ And Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and {proceeded} to make his defense:

² "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; ³ especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among {the} Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. ⁴ So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my {own} nation and at Jerusalem; ⁵ since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they are willing to testify, that I lived {as} a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. ⁶ "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; ⁷ {the promise} to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve {God} night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. ⁸ "Why is it considered incredible among you {people} if God does raise the dead? ⁹ So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. ¹² While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, ¹³ at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. ¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵ And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ 'But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; ¹⁷ delivering you from the {Jewish} people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, ¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' ¹⁹ Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but {kept} declaring both to those of Damascus first, and {also} at Jerusalem and {then} throughout all the region of Judea, and {even} to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. ²¹ For this reason {some} Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. ²² And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; ²³ that the Christ was to suffer, {and} that by reason of {His} resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the {Jewish} people and to the Gentiles. "

²⁴ And while {Paul} was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! {Your} great learning is driving you mad." ²⁵ But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. ²⁶ For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." ²⁸ And

Agrippa {replied} to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." 29 And Paul {said,} "I would to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

30 And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, 31 and when they had drawn aside, they {began} talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment." 32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

- **The Gospel is the “end game” of Israel’s promised hope.**

6 "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 7 {the promise} to which our twelve tribes hope to attain,

1. One of the claims made by historical critics is that Paul (unlike James and Peter) broke away from Judaism and started a new religion.
2. Christianity (according to Paul) is not a new religion (distinct from Judaism) but the true religion of Israel.
3. The promise made to Abram is fulfilled in Christ.

Gen.12:2-3 “And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Deut.30:1-3 “1 So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, 2 and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, 3 **then** the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.”

- **The Gospel is not about religious zeal.**

6 ". . . as they earnestly serve {God} night and day.

1. Serving God is of little virtue if it is misguided. There have been and are many people in the world who are deeply committed and sincere in their religion but building a house on the sand not the rock.
2. Paul knew very well the zeal of Jewish religion in that he was among the most committed yet he came to realize that zeal without understanding was outside God’s salvation.

Rom.10:1-3 “1 Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for {their} salvation. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For not knowing about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”

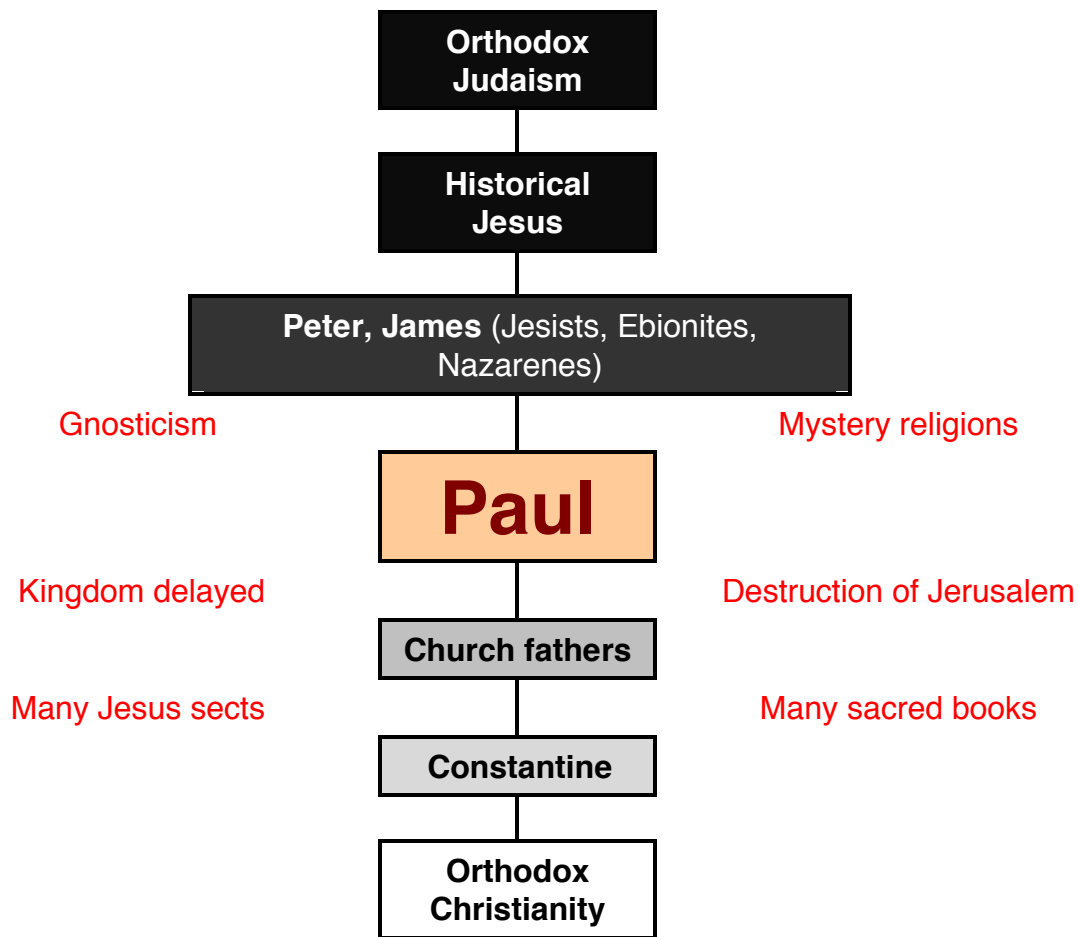
- **The Gospel does not originate with Paul.**

16 "But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister (apostello) and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the

things in which I will appear to you; ¹⁷ delivering you from the {Jewish} people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,

I Cor.15:9 “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” **II Cor.11:5** “For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.” **Gal.1:17** “nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia,” **I Thess.2:6** “as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.”

1. Historical critics would have us believe that Paul was a self ordained inventor of the “myth” that came to be known as Christianity. The formation evolved over time.



2. Critics tell us that Paul's Christian myth had roots in three traditions (two Greek and one Hebrew).
 - a. **Gnosticism** – a world of hellish darkness yearning for light from heaven. This is viewed as the source of Paul's hostility toward sex.
 - b. **Mystery religions** – sacrificial death of a savior at the hands of evil. The Mithras-cult was thought to provide the origin for the Eucharist.
 - c. **Judaism** – a sense of moral law code and history, a Messiah, a community of the saved, and in some groups an apocalyptic resurrection of the dead.
3. The Damascus Road experience of Paul (according to the critics) focused these three elements in his thinking, meeting his need for personal fulfillment, separating him from his Jewish roots, and endearing him more to Gentile culture.
4. The critics believe that the Gospels were written to give a "historical" foundation to Paul's theology. Critics point out that there is evidence in the NT that Paul was at odds with the Jewish followers of Jesus in Jerusalem (called Nazarenes and later in the 2nd century, Ebionites who rejected the deity of Jesus yet believed he was the Messiah).
5. Critics also emphasize the tension between Paul and Peter (along with James) suggesting that the Pauline Christian Church and the Jerusalem

(Jewish) Christian Church (Nazarenes – later Ebionites) were quite distinct and at odds with each other.

6. The critics believed that during the first 4 centuries of the Christian era, what came to be known as the orthodox Christian position, evolved through many redactions.

For a critical review of the Historical Critical method see apptoteach.org theology file #212.

- **The Gospel is about insight that leads to repentance.**

18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God,

Eph.2:1-2 “¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”

II Cor.4:6 “For god, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

1. Paul taught us that while we were living without forgiveness (redemption) we were in fact under the dominion of Satan, the world, and death.
2. We did not escape that condition by our own moral renewal or religion but by Christ’s redemption and the forgiveness that came through faith in Jesus who died for us.
3. The repentance that leads to faith starts with insight and understanding of the truth of the Gospel message.

- **The Gospel is about forgiveness.**

18 . . . in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance

Eph.2:8-10 “⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a results of works, that no one should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

1. The Gospel starts with the blessing of our full pardon from the penalty of sin. It does not start with our moral renewal and discipline.
2. The faithfulness and fruitfulness of the Christian life is what normally follows in the experience of one who understands who they are in Christ.

- **The Gospel is about faith.**

18 . . . among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’

1. Even the Corinthians were sanctified (made holy) by faith that had yet to produce Godly behavior in their lives.

I Cor.1:2 “to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours;”

Rom.4:5 “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”

- **The Gospel is about repentance that leads to obedience.**

¹⁹ Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but {kept} declaring both to those of Damascus first, and {also} at Jerusalem and {then} throughout all the region of Judea, and {even} to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.”

Matt.3:8 “Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.”

1. The turning of one’s life from self to God will mean a change in basic motivation, understanding, and experience.
2. This does not mean that every deviant expression of selfishness is removed at once.

- **The Gospel is about community.**

¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'
¹⁵ And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'

1. We cannot help but be struck by the dramatic way in which Jesus identifies with His church.
2. We are never alone as Christians in that our experience is His. He even experiences our shame as one who went to the cross to bear our sin.

Matt.25:40 “to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”