PAULINE STRATEGY FOR ESTABLISHING CHURCHES


Quotable Quotations:

“...people have adopted fragments of St. Paul’s method and have tried to incorporate them into alien systems, and the failure which resulted has been used as an argument against the Apostle’s method....When these false and partial attempts at imitating the Apostle’s method have failed, men have declared that the apostolic method was at fault and was quite unsuited to the condition and circumstances of present-day missions. The truth is that they have neither understood nor practiced the Apostle’s method at all.”

“St. Paul’s method is not in harmony with the modern Western spirit....We cannot imagine any Christianity worthy of the name existing without the elaborate machinery which we have invented.”


The Pauline Cycle

- Entrust to Faithful Men
- Establish Local Churches
- Evangelize Strategic Cities
# Paul’s Letters as Establishing Tools

## The Process of Building Strong Churches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paul’s Early Letters</th>
<th>Paul’s Middle Letters</th>
<th>Paul’s Later Letters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong in the Gospel</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strong in the Mission/Vision of the Church</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strong, Mature Households and Leaders</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Early Letters of Paul

The early letters of Paul were all intended to establish the churches in the gospel. If this foundation was not laid, then they could not become mature churches. Think through these letters: Galatians—don’t follow a different gospel; 1 & 2 Thessalonians—stand firm in the gospel; 1 & 2 Corinthians—defense of the gospel applied to lots of divisions and confusions; and Romans was written as the great treatise of the gospel—Paul’s intent was to establish the Romans in the gospel (Romans 16:25–27).

### The Middle Letters

The middle letters are all similar in terminology and emphasis. The full plan of the Church is revealed in Ephesians and Colossians. The churches are encouraged to strive together for the progress of the gospel, and this can only be done if they are one-minded around the plan of Christ, the Church.

How could they be one-minded if they were not established in the gospel and were not willing to build their churches around Christ and His administration of the Church?

### The Later Letters of Paul

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are Paul’s final letters. They are all similar in style as well. Paul reviews for Timothy and Titus how to build strong families and leaders in the church and how to make each church a big household—a family of families. If the churches did not have strong leaders, no one would protect the community from false teachers coming in and upsetting whole families. And without a strong church family (community), there would be no impact in the city.
Paul’s Missionary Methods

Introduction

Paul, called of God to be the apostle to the Gentiles, is what we would call our “missionary par excellente” of the missionary activity recorded for us in Scripture. The apostle Paul is front and center. From all we know of him, he was an intense and supremely motivated man, both before and after his conversion on the way to Damascus (Acts 9). It was Paul’s mission activities (Acts 13:28) that contributed remarkably towards the Christian church’s move from the limited sphere of Judaism to the broader frame of the Gentile world. It then becomes, for all religious history, a preeminent model for missionary outreach.

The question then needs to be asked, “Did Paul have a strategy when accomplishing his missions?” Our problem in answering this today is that we live in an anthropocentric age. We think nothing can be accomplished, even in the Lord’s work, without having committees, workshops, retreats and conferences. So much depends on our definition of strategy in trying to answer this question. If by looking at Paul’s mission activities we mean a deliberate, well formulated, duly executed, plan of action based on human observation and experience, then it would be hard to determine a strategy. But if we take strategy to mean a flexible method of procedure, developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and subject to His direction and control, then Paul can be seen to have forethought to his work (Kane 1976:73). Roland Allen (1991:10) wrote, “It is quite impossible to maintain that St. Paul deliberately planned his journeys beforehand, selected certain strategic points at which to establish his churches and then actually carried out his designs.” In fact, it could be said that Paul developed theology and most of his mission strategy while doing missions (see Bennett 1980:138). (Though other missiologists do not write of Paul in this way, most use Paul as their model for ministry. Some may interpret Paul’s strategy more broadly than others, but this involves more reading. For starters, one may read the section in Perspectives: see bibliography.) Looking then at the history of Paul’s journeys, we can note several aspects of his strategizing (see Kane, Grassi, Allen, Hedlund).

Confined Efforts to Four Provinces

In looking at Romans 15:18,19 we can note two elements that summarized Paul’s work. First, he directed his work particularly to the non-Jewish world “to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles” (vs. 18). Second, he limited it to the main area of the Roman world where others had not gone. Paul claims “from Jerusalem round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” The concentration of his mission was on four of the most populous and prosperous provinces, Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia. Both Luke and Paul speak constantly of the provinces rather than the cities (Acts 9:31; 15:23; 16:6,9; 1 Cor. 9:2).
Chose Large Cities as Strategic Centers

The city was Paul's theater of mission. Paul's theory was not that he had to preach in every place himself, but by establishing centers of Christian life in the important places, the gospel might then spread to the provinces. The cities where he did plant churches were centers of Roman administration, of Greek civilization, of Jewish influence or of some commercial importance. (Allen 1991:13) It is important to note that, though we see today a rapid growth of urbanization, the city is not more important and the countryside less important. Rather, Paul's intention was to have the congregation situated in the city to be a center of light. (Acts 19:10) How else could Paul claim in Romans 15:19 that he had evangelized the whole province? Particularly, the church in Rome was to be of strategic importance when Paul planned to leave the East and begin work in the West. (Rom. 15: 23 24)

Began Labors in Synagogues

Paul followed the principle of “to the Jew first” (Rom. 16:1), thus his strategy was to target the people of the covenant in the synagogue. (cf. Acts 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1 2,10; 18:4,19) The custom was to invite a visiting rabbi to give a word of exhortation (Acts 13:15), so Paul took advantage of these devout, attentive, and intelligent audiences. Found there were three distinct classes: Jews, proselytes and God fearing Gentiles. Here Paul felt at home as all of them had knowledge of the one true God, an acquaintance with the Old Testament, and an expectation of the “coming” Messiah. Only when he was expelled did he go elsewhere.

Preferred to Preach to a Responsive People

For Paul, the spread of the gospel and the extension of God’s Kingdom were of paramount importance. He believed that every ethnic group had the right to hear the gospel and he would gladly preach to them, but if they adamantly refused the message and persecuted the messenger, no purpose could be served in staying amongst them. He felt it would be better to move on to a responsive group. Paul experienced that it was the devout Gentiles that were most responsive to the gospel (Acts 13:43; 14:1; 16:14; 17:4; 18:7), and the Jews that opposed his message (Acts 13:45,50; 14:2,19; 17:5; 18:12; 21:27; 23:12). Turning away from his own people hurt him deeply (Acts 13:46), for he loved them (Rom. 9:2,3), but he could not compromise the gospel. He was conscious of the fact that a Christian worker was required to be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

Maintained Contact with Sending Church

Though Paul was called directly by God to be a missionary (Acts 9:15; 13:2,47), he is confirmed by action (Acts 13:2,3) and sent by the church (Acts 13:3 4). Paul was convinced that the missionary must have a strong base at home, for at the end of each journey he always returned to Antioch to report on his journeys (Acts 14:26 28; 18:22,23). The connection between the prayers of the church and the success of the missions was a vital thing. Paul spent significant time on his return visits and knew the importance of it. When he was planning to go on to Spain with the gospel, a letter was sent to Rome to ask for their support (Rom. 15:15,24).
Planted Churches

Paul’s ultimate goal was to establish strong, indigenous churches; congregations that would be equipped to carry on the task (1 Cor. 1:2,7; 1 Thess. 1:1,8). He stayed as long as he could, set up the church in spite of the difficulties. When mature local leaders had been trained, he would move on, leaving the leaders in charge. These church plants were self-governing (Acts 14:23; 20:17), self-supporting, and self-propagating (1 Thess. 1:8).

Made Use of Fellow Workers

Paul believed in teamwork. On all the missionary journeys he had companions along. Barnabas and John Mark set out with him on the first journey (Acts 12:25; Acts 13:13), and Silas set out with him on the second (Acts 15:40). The preaching of the gospel was a joint effort (1 Thess. 1:1) and Paul must have recruited many as fellow laborers. Consider the following texts: Acts 17:4; 2 Cor. 1:19; 8:23; Col. 4:14; Acts 19:22; Col. 4:7,10; Acts 20:4; Phil. 2:20 22,25; Col. 2:7; Acts 18:2,3; Rom 16. Paul’s strategy in his letter to the Romans was also to involve them in his mission to Spain (Rom. 1:11,12).

Became “All Things to All Men”

1 Cor. 9:19-23 conveys to us the personal outlook of Paul on what the attitudes of a missionary should be. Paul knew the purpose of his life: to “gain” men to Christ. Though “free from all men,” Paul knew that this freedom was given him to bring God’s love to all, and thus he makes himself a servant to all. In practice this meant the complete subordination of every interest, personal and otherwise, to the work of Christ. (Rom. 15:2) Paul did not carry this “all” to include that which would be in violation of God’s law. And as to the content of the gospel message, he was adamant and dogmatic (Gal. 1:6 9). Paul does give some concrete examples of what it means to be “all” to the Jews (Acts 18:18; Acts 20:16; Acts 21:21 27; Acts 16:3), to the Gentile world (1 Cor. 8:1 6; Col. 4:5), and to the “weak” (1 Cor. 8:7 13; 1 Cor. 9:12).

Adeptly Communicated an Unchanging Message

Paul viewed himself as a chosen herald to announce a message from God himself that would affect the destiny of all mankind (2 Cor. 5:19). The message was not a matter of Paul’s personal conviction or opinion (1 Thess. 2:13), nor just a piece of information. It was an authoritative, life changing message (1 Cor. 15:14), which Paul himself preached with boldness, assurance and confidence (Acts 9:20,29). The proclamation of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the missionary task (Rom. 10:14 15) and Paul communicated Jesus Christ through his lifestyle, work and activity. Compare Paul’s communication of the gospel to different groups. When preaching to the Jews, he reasoned from the Scriptures. He began with their own historic beginnings and swiftly proceeds to the life of Christ, the promised Messiah (Acts 13:16 41; Acts 17:2,3). To the Gentiles, Paul reasoned from nature (Acts 14:14 18), and used circumstantial object lessons to bring about an understanding of the gospel (Acts 17:16 23). Notice also the testimony of Paul in his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17 38): how he was uncompromising in the declaration of Christ as the only Savior (vs. 20,21,26,27) and how he had “lived” the gospel (vs. 18,19, 24,31,33,34,35).
Bibliography

Evangelical


Roman Catholic


Evangelical but not necessarily Reformed


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