THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. PAUL
A CALL TO IMITATION
WITH
BRIAN PURFIELD
OUTLINE OF DAY

• Introduction: Theme of imitation in Paul’s letters.

• Paul’s spiritual life:
  o A life of living by God’s grace
  o A life of living out & entering into the Paschal Mystery of Christ
  o A life of living by the power of the Holy Spirit – God’s Spirit
  o A life of living by the holiness God has bestowed upon him
  o Living by the weakness & the folly of the cross.
FOLLOWING CHRIST BY IMITATING PAUL

• The Gospels – Discipleship
  o Jesus calls people to follow him
  o Matthew 28:19-20

• Paul never speaks about making disciples
  o Paul calls others to imitate him.
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Because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power & in the Holy Spirit & with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. & you became imitators of us & of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia & in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia & Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it.  

(1 Thess 1:5-8)
PATTERN OF IMITATION
(1 Thess)

• Paul imitated Christ
• The Thessalonians imitated Paul
• The Thessalonians imitated the churches in Judea
• Other churches imitate the Thessalonians
• The Problem of Idleness

• “For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you” (2 Thess 3:7)

• Paul embodied the gospel he preached
BE IMITATORS OF ME
(1 Cor.)

• Paul makes explicit call to imitate him

• “Therefore I urge you, imitate me” (1 Cor 4:16).

• “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).
JOIN OTHERS IN IMITATING ME (Philippians)

• “Join others in being imitators of me, & observe those who conduct themselves according to the model you have in me” (Phil 3:17).

• Pastoral Problem – Then & Now

• “Imitate me, because it is no longer I, Paul, who live. But it is Christ who lives within me” (Gal 2:20).
IMITATION
“To teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is this latter lesson which tends to last the longest.”

1. LIVING BY GOD’S GRACE

• Origin of Paul’s Spirituality: Call & Conversion
• Already a deeply religious person
• A life centred around TORAH
• “When God, who from my mother’s womb had set me apart & called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me” (Gal 1:15-16).
DAMASCUS
CONVERSION, CALL, CONUNDRUM?
Now as he was going along & approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground & heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ 5 He asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But get up & enter the city, & you will be told what you are to do.’ 7 The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, & though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand & brought him into Damascus. 9 For three days he was without sight, & neither ate nor drank.
You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God & was trying to destroy it. 14 I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. 15 But when God, who had set me apart before I was born & called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me,* so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, & afterwards I returned to Damascus.
“In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!” (Gal 1:20)

• Paul persecuted the Church of God (Acts 9:1; Gal 1:13; 1 Cor 15:9)
• Paul believes he has encountered the risen Jesus (Acts 9:5; Gal 1:16; 1 Cor 9:1)
• Paul’s life is now a mission to outsiders (Acts 9:15; Gal 1:16; 1 Cor 15:10)
WHY PAUL CHANGED

• Paul is certain he saw Jesus (1 Cor 9:1)
• Paul fell in love with Jesus (Rom 8:35-39)
• Convinced the followers of Jesus were right
• You see, I am not ashamed of the gospel – for it is God’s power for the salvation of everyone who comes to faith, both Jew (in the first place) & Gentile. (Rom 1:16)
WHY PAUL CHANGED

• From Torah-centred to Christ-centred life
• Paul justified – correct & right relationship with God
• Everything was grace
• Justification by faith – a way of living
• A life of total dependence on God
“I have been crucified with Christ. Yet I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me. & insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me & gave himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God. For if justification comes through the Law, then Christ died in vain, He died for nothing”
Now I should remind you, brothers & sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, & that he was buried, & that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, & that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers & sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me....
“To know the power of his Resurrection, & the solidarity in his sufferings, being conformed to his death, so that somehow I may make it to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil 3:10-11)

“We who were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into his death. We were indeed buried with Him through baptism into death, so just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with Christ through a death like his, we shall also be united with Him in the resurrection” (Rom 6:3-5).
“For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus,” he says, “so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:10-11).

“So death is at work in us, but life in you” (2 Cor 4:12).

“Since then we have the same Spirit, according to which it is written, ‘I believed. Therefore I spoke.’ We too believe & we speak, knowing that the one, namely God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will raise us also with Christ & place us in his, in Christ’s, presence” (2 Cor 4:13-14).
3. LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

- Defining Aspect of Paul’s Spirituality

- **PNEUMA** (Spirit) & **PNEUMATIKOI** (Spiritual people)

- “Natural person” & “Spiritual person” (1 Cor 2)

- “Living according to the flesh” & “Living according to the Spirit” (Rom 8)
4. HOLINESS

• A Task & a Gift

• **HOI HAGIOI** – “the saints”, “the holy ones”

• The gift of holiness precedes the task of holiness

• “This is the will of God, your holiness: that you refrain from immorality…"

• *For God did not call us to impurity, but to holiness*” (1 Thess 4,3 & 7).
Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self.
5. POWER IN WEAKNESS

• Most distinctive aspect of Paul’s spirituality

• God reveals power & wisdom

5. POWER IN WEAKNESS

• Paul looks at his life in a new way

• “We are fools for the sake of Christ. But you (Corinthians) are wise. We are weak. But you (Corinthians) are strong” (1 Cor 4:10).

• “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (2 Cor 12:5).
PAUL’S BOAST

“I will rather boast more gladly of my weakness in order that the power of Christ may be manifest in me. Therefore I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, constraints for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10).

“Indeed, He (Christ) was crucified out of weakness, but He lives by the power of God. So also we apostles are weak in Him. But towards you, we shall live with Him by the power of God” (2 Cor 13:4).
HEART & SOUL OF PAUL’S SPIRITUALITY

• He lived by God’s grace.
• He lived by the Paschal Mystery.
• He lived by the power of God’s Spirit.
• He lived by the gift of holiness received from God.
• & he lived by the weakness of the Cross.
NEED FOR COURAGE

• Need Paul’s courage to call other people to imitate us.

• “Imitate me, & you will know what it means to be a follower of Christ.”

• Being witnesses for Christ
“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, & if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”

EVANGELII NUNTIANDI [1975] #41
THE CHALLENGE

• “Go & announce the Gospel of the Lord”
• “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).