

THE IMPACT OF PAUL ON THE WORLD

by Tom Wacaster

Few men have ever lived who made the kind of impact upon humanity and history, as did Paul the apostle. Converted in early adulthood, this enemy of the cross became the most ardent supporter and defender of Christianity. With the exception of Christ, Paul did more to advance the cause of Christ than any other human being. One astonishing feature of Paul's life was what he accomplished in the amount of time allotted him as apostle and preacher. The public ministry of Paul, from the third year after his conversion to his martyrdom, spanned only a quarter of a century. In those 25 years Paul made three great missionary campaigns with a number of minor expeditions, five visits to Jerusalem, and at least four years of captivity in Caesarea and Rome. Even if we allow the date of Paul's death to be as late as 68 A.D., that is still less than three decades to accomplish what few men accomplish in a life time.

Following his conversion he returned to Damascus where he began in earnest the task of saving souls. His love for the lost and his devotion to the Lord took him to the far reaches of the Roman Empire, and eventually even to Rome. He suffered mercilessly at the hands of the Jews who remained loyal to the tradition of their fathers. Yet he never lost his love for his kinsmen in the flesh. His heart ached for their conversion as a people, but deep in his mind he knew that would never happen. His love for both Jew and Gentile motivated him to turn his back on the things of the world, and march ever onward toward that "city which hath foundation whose builder and maker is God." His love for Jesus Christ took him to distant lands, into hostile environment, and brought upon him some of the most severe trials imaginable. After his third missionary journey he returned to Jerusalem for the fifth and final time, where he would be rescued from an angry mob and arrested by dutiful soldiers of the Roman army. The next five years would find Paul appealing to Caesar for a fair trial, a long and treacherous journey to Rome, and an opportunity to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the single most influential metropolis in the Empire - Rome. His work took him into the household of Caesar, where the apostle was instrumental in converting even some of the family members of the ruler of the known world. He would be released for a short period of time, and then arrested a second time, and eventually martyred because of his faith, thus ending his earthly sojourn.

Volumes have been written on the life and work of Paul the apostle. His life has convinced untold millions of the authenticity of Christ and Christianity. His words, by inspiration, still speak to men today. And though he be dead, he still speaks! Phillip Schaff offered this notable tribute to Paul. I'll close this week's article with his words:

It was the heroic career of a spiritual conqueror of immortal souls for Christ, converting them from the service of sin and Satan to the service of the living God, from the bondage of the law to the freedom of the gospel, and leading them to the fountain of life eternal. He labored more abundantly than all the other apostles; and yet, in sincere humility, he considered himself "the least of the apostles," and "not meet to be called an apostle," because he persecuted the church of God; a few years later he confessed: "I am less than the least of all saints," and shortly before his death: "I am the chief of sinners." His humility grew as he experienced God's mercy and ripened for heaven. Paul passed a stranger and pilgrim through this world, hardly observed by the mighty and the wise of his age. And yet how infinitely more noble, beneficial, and enduring was his life and work than the dazzling march of military conquerors, who, prompted by ambitions absorbed millions of treasure and myriads of lives, only to die at last in a drunken fit at Babylon, or of a broken heart on the rocks of St. Helena! Their empires have long since crumbled into dust, but St. Paul still remains one of the foremost benefactors of the human race, and the pulses of his mighty heart are beating with stronger force than ever throughout the Christian world (Phillip Schaff, History of the Christian Church).