

Compelled by Christ's Love: Paul's life and teaching -

Introduction by Coralee Lawrence

Hi! It's my delight and privilege to bring you an introduction to the KYB Study: Paul's Life and teaching: Compelled by Christ's love. Study written by the late Janice Kennedy.

Hello! My name is Coralee Lawrence.

I live in a little town called Mareeba. It's in Far North Queensland. If you know where Cairns is... it's just another hour's scenic drive from there. We're in easy reach of beaches, rainforest, and outback savannah. And when we get the chance, we love exploring our new neighbourhood. Four years ago, we flew the nest, leaving behind our two adult sons in Brisbane. My husband is the pastor of a local church. My previous job was being an Occupational Therapist with children. Now I am a full-time pastor's wife with a lovely mix of scheduled commitments and a bit of flexibility for life's surprises.

Usually, you'd be hearing this introduction to a new KYB study, from the author themselves. In this case, the author has been promoted to heaven, so understandably is unable to share with us today. I would like to pay special tribute to Janice Kennedy for her faithful work in bringing us this study on the life and teaching of Paul. I am also very grateful to Beth and the Editing Team, who are bringing this study to us.

So, let me give you a quick rundown on how this introduction will go.

I'd like to look at the purpose of studying someone like Paul, the backdrop to his life and his times, and the role his letters played in the lives of the early church. I would also like to explore a little of why the Compelled by Christ's love is part of the title of this study.

It's my hope and prayer that this will leave you excited to get started on this KYB Study!

As we go through this introduction, there'll be a chance to pause and discuss a question or two.

I call these "chatabouts".

Thanks so much for being prepared to share your experiences and opinions with your group.

This is meant to be short and sweet, so everyone who wants to can join in and then we can come back and dig into the topic some more.

So, let's get started with the first Chatabout:

{music}

What's your opinion of Paul of the Bible?

How would you describe him?

Is he someone you would like to have a chat with? Why or why not?

Welcome back! I hope your first Chatabout brought up a mix of opinions about Paul. Maybe some of you would love to have a chat with him, perhaps others (like me) might feel a little overwhelmed. I'm guessing there might be some great questions you would love to ask him?

I wonder if any of these impressions might change after this introduction, and very possibly after you do this term's study?

So, let's get some perspective now on why study the life and teaching of this man?

The primary reason is that... Paul, is the author of a very large chunk of our New Testament.

13 out of 27 books of the New Testament bear his name. We need to know who is behind this major contribution to God's Word. Paul was recognised as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the other apostles. By the way Apostle, is a Greek word meaning: one who is sent off. The

apostles of Jesus Christ were those who had seen him after he had risen from the dead. They were sent by him to go and spread the great news that he was alive and able to save those who believed in him. But Paul is unique, as he was not part of the original twelve, closest followers of Jesus. And yet he was called by God to be sent off to the gentiles, that is the non-Jewish people. Paul's apostleship is based first and foremost on God's say so. He states this up front in 9 of his books. This gives him a God given authority that we need to listen to.

A great deal of our understanding of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit comes through the writings of Paul. He gives us both lofty insights and practical application of the Christian life. To miss out on Paul would be like having a massive black hole in our understanding of many of the teachings of Christianity. For example, salvation is by grace alone, Jesus is the risen Son of God, the church is the body of Christ, and the role of the Holy Spirit are all teachings we are given through the writings of Paul. In learning about Paul's life, we gain a wonderful insight into the remarkable transformation of an enemy of Jesus into one of his most influential followers. For us in the 21st Century, there's so much to be gained from knowing more of this man's life and his teachings. Paul is an example for us to learn from and to imitate.

So, we know why we are going to look at Paul's life; let's take a historical tour back to his times.

Paul was born at an important time in history. His parents didn't know it, but he was a new era baby. Born just a couple years, historians estimate, right after Jesus Christ. Paul lived in the age of the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire was the dominant player in world affairs. From its beginning in just one city in Italy, the Roman occupying forces now basically ruled the known world. They brought with them a new level of law and order and better plumbing. Roman roads were built straight and with great drainage. They opened up better, quicker and safer travel routes. However, this all came at the cost of massive taxation for invaded countries, leaving people poorer. Maintaining the peace of society was a Roman priority. This was done often at the end of a spear! Hence the threat of riots and disturbances over religious matters, soon got the Romans' attention. This added to why Paul was so often in trouble!

Another attempt at maintaining order in the conquered territories was the use of the "Emperor Cult". This meant that each Emperor was seen as a God, worthy of worship and total obedience. Statues of each Emperor were worshiped, and ritual sacrifices and prayers were offered. Interestingly though, at the same time, Romans were tolerant of the pre-existing religions in each location, well up to a certain point. God's people, the nation of Israel had been overrun by a succession of other nations but were still able to maintain their worship at the Temple and meet in local synagogues. Many Jews had been spread out from Israel and over many years were living amongst gentile people in lands surrounding the Mediterranean.

In the Greek cities, there were temples to a range of different gods. We read how there was a lucrative business in selling shrines and images for people to worship. E.g., Acts 19 silver statues of Diana (Artemis of Ephesus.) In Athens (Acts 17) Paul refers to the altar of the Unknown God, and so opens up the opportunity to make the true God known.

There were also what was known as mystery religions, like secret sects today such as the stonemasons. These private groups had initiations and members were promised immortality if they followed the particular rules and rituals of that group.

Added into the mix were the pagan practices that called on spirits and demons, used spells and curses to try to achieve protection and blessing. Fortune telling and astrology all fell into that category. Acts 19 records a great burning of magic books when new believers realised they needed to get rid of them, and follow Jesus exclusively instead.

There was also the area of Philosophy. This is where a set of beliefs put forward by a particular “Thinker” would shape a person’s life and behaviour e.g., Plato, Gnosticism, Epicureanism.

So, into this multi-religion world, Paul and the other witnesses to the gospel, come with the amazing and radical news that there is only one way that leads to the Living God. This is enraging to many of those Jews living outside of Jerusalem who have rejected Jesus. To the Philosophers it is intriguing, and to the practisers of the magic arts, it is pure antagonism as it signals the end of their lucrative trade.

Let’s now look at what we know about him as a person. Paul has a very interesting background of which God makes full use!

Well firstly he wasn’t always known as Paul.

He was born as baby Saul, to Jewish parents in a Roman ruled Greek city.

But his hometown was no ordinary city. It was Tarsus, perhaps the second largest city outside of Rome, a place of trade but also a University City with a reputation for being a cultural centre. On our maps, you can find Tarsus in modern day Turkey.

Saul benefits from his impressive birthplace, it gives him lots of credence amongst Greek speaking intellectuals, but even more crucially, he gets to claim the privileges of being born a Roman citizen. This will certainly come in very handy later in his life.

It is thought that Saul receives his early education in Tarsus, as he speaks and writes in high level Greek. He also would have been taught Hebrew so he could learn the Holy Scriptures as a good little Jewish boy. In Synagogue school, Jewish boys had to learn and recite lengthy passages of the Old Testament. And after starting off in this prestigious city, Saul and his family move to Jerusalem. He says in Acts 22 that he was brought up in Jerusalem. It is here in Jerusalem that he gets to study under the famous doctor of Jewish Law, Gamaliel. To be accepted as a student of this important Pharisee, would be a very high honour. To qualify you'd have to be a young person of the highest moral standards according to Jewish Law.

We also know that Saul, like all other young men would also have a trade under his belt. We are told in Acts that he was a qualified tent maker (18:1-3.) This is a job that involves lots of sewing! Tent makers used prepared animal skins to create tents of various sizes. The Roman army at that time may well have been customers. It's very likely that Saul's Dad was also a tentmaker. Having a way to make his living, certainly was essential on Paul's missionary trips. Wonderfully God provided fellow believers Priscilla and Aquilla, who just happened to be tentmakers, whom he could work alongside.

So, what else do we know about Paul?

In 2 Corinthians 10:10 he quotes some people who had described him as being unimpressive in person and his speaking amounting to nothing. He says nothing to oppose this opinion.

There are non-biblical accounts that describe Paul as being small, bald and with a hooked nose. Whatever his appearance, his life was radically transformed once he met Jesus on the Damascus Road. He would go on to experience the most adventurous and daring of lives. Definitely not for the sake of doing so, but because of his intense desire to spread the good news of Jesus and to build up His body of believers.

And yet through all of this Paul highlights his weaknesses. In 2 Corinthians 11:30 we read of Paul begging God to remove a persistent problem from his life, three times. And the conclusion Paul comes to is that Christ's power was made perfect in his weakness. *"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. —NIV 2 Corinthians 12:7-9*

In fact, Paul sums up all of his achievements in Philippians 3:4-6

He could boast of his complete "Jewishness"; he was circumcised, a member of the tribe of Benjamin, being a Pharisee in his strict observance of the Jewish Law and being so zealous for what he believed that he actively persecuted the followers of Jesus. However, he goes on to say that all of this was a loss. He uses the term dung (see the King James Version for this!) or we might say impolitely "crap", compared to the "surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord".

He says that for Christ's sake, he has lost all things. What an example to us! Can we truly say that everything we have achieved and or accumulated in this life is worthless, compared

to knowing Jesus Christ? Are we willing to let go of all we hold dear for the sake of following God?

Well, it's time for another Chatabout!

{music}

How do you like to stay in touch with people? What works for you to communicate an important and possibly upsetting message? When was the last time you received a letter?

{music}

In the Roman world letters could be relatively quickly sent due to the improved roads and safety of travel on major routes. However, the catch was there wasn't a postal service outside of the army. Letters had to be hand delivered by trusted friends travelling from one place to another. Once a church received a letter, copies could be carefully made, and the original sent on to be shared with others.

We read Paul's instructions about this in Colossians 4:16

*"And when this letter has been read among you, **arrange for it also to be read** in the congregation of the Laodiceans and **for you also to read the one from Laodicea**".*

Intriguingly, we have the letter to the Colossians preserved in the New Testament, but not the letter to the Laodiceans.

Paul's writing in the New Testament is made up of letters sent to various churches. You may have heard of the word "Epistle" in connection with these letters. Epistle is a Greek word meaning letter, message or despatch. When we think of the letters in the New Testament,

they are more than just a catch up between people. They are written as formal instructions to the churches, carrying the responsibility of passing on God's message to His followers. It is from these letters of Paul that we have many of the major teachings of Christianity: In some cases, there's a need to be stern, where significant problems had to be dealt with. Paul addresses the dangers of adding to the gospel. He always preached that salvation came by Christ alone, and not by adding anything else to the mix. Paul was tough on false teachers and reprimanded them strongly. Yet, in other sections there are encouraging words, wonderful promises that we continue to claim for our own today. There are delightful personal greetings as well, but they usually come right at the end of all the serious stuff! We get insights into the roles of many men and women who served the early church.

How blessed we are that these rich and varied letters have formed part of the wonderful Word of God. Imagine the excitement and perhaps nervousness when a new letter arrived from Paul. Think of the concentration as people listened for the very first time to the treasured words we can now so easily take for granted, with our many copies and translations of the Bible.

This KYB study also looks at passages in the book of Acts. Here we are given a lively historical account from Luke, about Paul's first encounter with Jesus, his missionary journeys and even the content of some of his many sermons. We will look at Paul as a prisoner for his faith, and his role as a mentor. Three of his greatest passions: prayer, joy and of course Christ, is one of the units I am most looking forward to studying.

Even though Paul is one of the most influential teachers in Christianity in the New Testament, he is far from a one-dimensional person. You get a picture of him as a man of intense feelings, not just as a religious intellectual. It is Paul who provides the beautiful lists of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. He shares his feelings of deep brotherly love for the churches he writes to. Listen to his heart in the opening of Philippians,

“It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus “

Philippians 1: 7-8

In his famous prayer for the Ephesians, Paul asks that God might help them to grasp the amazing dimensions of the love of Christ -

Ephesians 3: 16b -19 ‘And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.’

He says that this love surpasses knowledge. Now as a scholar, Paul here is admitting that the reality of Christ’s love goes beyond anything that he could ever learn with his head, (and remember he was a top religious student). His heart is overflowing with the immense realisation that Christ’s love is the gateway to knowing all that God is.

This gives an insight into why Paul is compelled by Christ's love. He has experienced it first-hand. It is overwhelmingly real. He is prepared to dedicate the rest of his life to sharing this great news with everyone he meets.

{music}

Our Final Chatabout!

What sort of impression do you have of Paul now?

Has anything changed in your thinking about him as a person?

{music}

This KYB study on Paul's life and teaching is sure to be another worthwhile and faith enriching adventure. I am praying that as you discover more about Paul you will in turn discover more about the Jesus he loved. Paul's love of Christ compelled him to serve and to sacrifice everything. Be ready to be challenged! Thanks so much for sharing in this introduction, God's blessings to you and your group.

Note: Music composed by Coralee Lawrence using Garage Band.