

THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES AND IMPLICATIONS OF MISSION IN THE LIFE OF PAUL ON DEALING WITH THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Through this study missiological of the biblical record, it is proved that: (1) The church is not immune to the challenges surfaced during the pandemic especially in evangelism; (2) There are biblical perspectives that can be implemented in mission for instance, before his repentance, Paul was a passionate man which indicates a passion that should be possessed by the mission workers today and, after his repentance Paul showed his consistency in his eagerness and the theme in his theology is the mission to the gentiles based in Christ's love; and (3) There is a couple of practical implications found in this research: (a) Paul was able to be confident in all kinds of people which indicate that the present-day missionaries should be acquainted with the people that they're going to reach; (b) Just as Paul encountered small and huge problems, the various challenges resulted by the pandemic should be overcome by the mission workers today; (c) It is evident through Paul's ministry that challenges doesn't always come from the outside of the church, therefore, the issues from the inside the church should be addressed in mission today during the pandemic; (d) Lastly, it is important to base any efforts of mission today on the Bible only as did Paul in his ministry.

Keywords: Mission, Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the world is in an unstable state due to the coronavirus pandemic. Every age category is affected by this pandemic, no one is the exception. Moreover, many aspects of life have been experiencing a crisis. Therefore, everyone can feel the impacts of the pandemic.

The introduction of the novel COVID-19 virus has taken the world by shock, and even so, there are many questions on the most appropriate approaches to be implemented to slow down the spread of the virus. People also make choices about the pandemic, depending on the country, culture, socio-economic context, age, and period. Authorities make decisions on the capacities of containment, restraint, isolation, quarantine, and health-care programs.¹

As a result of the pandemic, one of the most important aspects of the church has been affected which is evangelism. The cause of this impact is the restrictions resulted from the

¹ Allam, Z. (2020). *Surveying the COVID-19 Pandemic and its Implications: Urban Health, Data Technology, and Political Economy*. Amsterdam, Netherlands Cambridge, MA: Elsevier.

pandemic. Many Christians experience difficulties as the quarantine rules are keeping the gospel from spreading.² Therefore, it is important to stress the importance of evangelism, and in this case, by looking at the missiological figure in the bible.

Paul is a central figure in early Church history. He wasn't the only Pharisee to ever become a Christian (Acts 15:5), but he was undoubtedly their best-known.³ The figure of Paul, the founder of Acts and the reputed author of much of the letters contained in the New Testament occupies the second half of the New Testament.⁴ Therefore, Paul is an important figure in the Bible.

Paul's ministry addressed missiological concepts. It is believed that his letters offer numerous flashes of mission approaches, and they also show, in his reasoning and theology.⁵ Accordingly, Paul plays a crucial role in embracing the gentiles.

The story and writings of Paul have been linked with mission or ministry by Christians throughout history. His mission in the first century has since functioned as a main inspiration and standard for Christian mission over the centuries.⁶ In other words, there are some principles found in his story that can be applied as foundations for the mission.

As it is apparent, the pandemic has caused a lot of damage in many aspects of life, including, the church. Missiological efforts are affected for many restrictions have surfaced. This indicates the importance of emphasizing the need to spread the gospel despite the various difficulties from the pandemic.

Therefore, the questions that shall be investigated in this research to address the problem are:

1. What are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in the church or evangelism today?
2. What are the biblical principles found in Paul's life before and after his repentance that could be implemented in mission?
3. What are the significant theological implications found in this study?

There are three purposes for this study. Primarily, it is to expose the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in the church. Secondly, this research is to identify the missiological concepts in Paul's life before and after his repentance. Lastly, this study is to reveal the crucial theological implications of Paul's life.

The significance of this study is to verify the credibility of the relationship between the difficulties of the pandemic and the missiological concepts from Paul's life. More specifically, it is crucial in providing discovery of how these ideas of the mission are valuable insights to

² Mair, K., Cawley, L., Bannister, A., Wright, N., Kandiah, K., Wharton, K., Turner, R., Bailey, C., Strange, D. & Shaw, E. (2020). *Healthy Faith and the Coronavirus Crisis: Thriving in the COVID-19 Pandemic*. La Vergne: IVP.

³ Drane, J. W. (2000). *Introducing the New Testament* (p. 266). Oxford: Lion Publishing plc.

⁴ deSilva, D. A. (2004). *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation* (p. 475). Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.

⁵ Scobie, C. H. H. (2002). *Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (p. 526). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁶ Moreau, A. S., Netland, H., & Engen, C. van. (2000). *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (p. 731). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Baker Books; A. Scott Moreau.

address the evangelical difficulties caused by the virus. Furthermore, it shall determine the reliability of the missiological study at this state of the world in dealing with the pandemic.

This research does not address the validity or relevance of the conspiracy theories regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not an exegetical analysis of Paul's specific passage, either. The main focus of this study is on examining the correlation of this pandemic concerns in evangelism with Paul's story as the solution.

This is a missiological study on the concepts of evangelism in Paul's life concerning the current context. The first chapter of this research contains background information about this topic. Furthermore, the following chapter brings an analysis of the various impacts from the pandemic to the world, and specifically, the church. Moreover, the third section deals with evidence found in Paul's life that should be implemented with the evangelism in the time of the pandemic.

THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 IN THE CHURCH

The COVID-19 pandemic caught the world by shock and instantly erupted. According to a report done by Huang and friends⁷ and published in the journal *Lancet*, the earliest date for COVID-19 signs was December 1, 2019. Fifty days later, it was clear to the global community that the world as a whole was facing a very dangerous, infectious, and lethal illness. As time goes by, the rise in the number of cases is more and more irresistible.

Because of the pandemic, people are forced to adapt to the new way of living as many new guidelines have surfaced. There are some benefits and also disadvantages of these new rules. Therefore, there are two different ways of looking at this pandemic.

Some new and unique restrictions have appeared during this pandemic. For instance, the rule of washing hands and social distancing are applied everywhere. Jetten, Reicher, Haslam, & Cruwys stated that "Social distancing guidelines and COVID-19 asymptomatic carriers posing a health risk to the society."⁸

The economic state of countries all around the world are in crisis as a result of this pandemic. Several businesses have suffered to pay their employees and their debts as a result of large bankruptcies involving families and companies.⁹ Consequently, many families struggled to survive financially because of the economic crisis.

Moreover, several effects of this pandemic shall remain in society for a while. The long-term impact on the economy needs to be seen, even with upcoming federal spending measures being introduced. Schools, churches, restaurants, bars, were closed wherever people were gathered. As a result, many people will be adjusted with this new normal state that could result in a decrease in faith.

⁷ Huang C, Wang Y, Li X, et al. (2020). *Clinical Features of Patients Infected with 2019 Novel Coronavirus in Wuhan, China*. The Lancet. 497-506

⁸ Jetten, J., Reicher, S., Haslam, S. & Cruwys, T. (2020). *Together Apart: The Psychology of COVID-19*. London: SAGE Publications.

⁹ Baldwin, R. & Weder, B. (2020). *Economics in the Time of COVID-19*. London, UK: CEPR Press

Many churches have various kinds of response to the worldwide pandemic all across the world. Unfortunately, some churches have actively ignored policies on public health: attending to worship, planning marriages, or sometimes inaccurately saying COVID-19 does not influence Christians or is a judgment of God.¹⁰ Therefore, some opposition has appeared inside the church of many.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not excluded from these challenges by the pandemic. Throughout the globe, the Adventist Church's 13 World Divisions have been wrestling with how best to serve their members and societies.¹¹ In other words, many church leaders are currently doing their best of coming up with different ways to serve the members.

In Evangelism

As it is apparent, issues regarding evangelism have already surfaced even before the pandemic arrived. The fact is that even when life is going normal, many Christians are reluctant to express their faith at work or university or to talk about Jesus to their friends.¹² Many excuses were made to be used by several Christians that prevented them from proclaiming the gospel. Therefore, the difficulties of Christians in spreading the gospel are already there.

After the pandemic, even more, new obstacles have surfaced because of the regulations, for instance, the social distancing rule. The social distancing rule is very significant for the health of all people. The key to stopping getting infected with the Covid-19 virus is by frequent hand washing and social distancing.¹³ However, although this rule is beneficial for health, it also indicates a challenge for the ministry.

Physical contact is important in the ministry of Jesus. Among the many examples found in the Bible, Luke 14:4 provides a clear display of how Jesus showed his divine power by doing physical contact. Jesus has acted, helping the man by touching him and then letting him go, hence, performed a good deed on Sabbath. It was the physical contact that puts the man in the compassionate care of Jesus (Bock, 1996).¹⁴ In other words, the love of Christ can be transferred to other people by doing physical contact.

¹⁰ Mair, K., Cawley, L., Bannister, A., Wright, N., Kandiah, K., Wharton, K., Turner, R., Bailey, C., Strange, D. & Shaw, E. (2020). *Healthy Faith and the Coronavirus Crisis: Thriving in the COVID-19 Pandemic*. La Vergne: IVP.

¹¹ Aamodt, A. (2020). *Coronavirus Impact on World Divisions*. Spectrum Magazine. <https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2020/coronavirus-impact-world-divisions>.

¹² Mair, K., Cawley, L., Bannister, A., Wright, N., Kandiah, K., Wharton, K., Turner, R., Bailey, C., Strange, D. & Shaw, E. (2020). *Healthy Faith and the Coronavirus Crisis: Thriving in the COVID-19 Pandemic*. La Vergne: IVP.

¹³ Mosley, M. (2020). *COVID-19: Everything You Need to Know About the Corona Virus and The Race for the Vaccine*. New York: Atria Books.

¹⁴ Bock, D. L. (1996). *Luke: 9:51-24:53* (Vol. 2, p. 1258). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

MISSIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE IN THE LIFE OF PAUL

Paul provided a unique contribution to the mission that made him one of the greatest missiological figures in the bible. Mission was the theme in his writing; his mission to the Gentiles was the greatest of missions, and Paul was not its originator but its greatest leader.¹⁵ Therefore, among many reasons, Paul is a strong influence that caused many Christians are now engaged in ministering to the gentiles.

By looking at his life of ministry, many Christians today have acknowledged Paul as the role model in ministry. Particularly, the modern missionary effort has frequently tried to take direction from the missionary thought and efforts of the apostle.¹⁶ Moreover, because he is very successful in his ministry, a huge number of Christians wanted to achieve the same thing in their ministry. Consequently, he is a famous and key person in providing missiological concepts of today's evangelism.

As mentioned earlier, the rules or regulations that have surfaced because of the pandemic resulted in challenges in mission. The need to refresh the Christians' perception of the mission is more visible than ever. Just as Paul has overcome many obstacles in his mission, from his story, Christians could again see the need for ministry despite all challenges during the pandemic.

Before His Repentance

Paul's figure before repenting was indeed evil. The term found in the Septuagint translation of Psalm 79:7 is concerning a wild boar laying waste a vineyard and using that word, Luke identified Saul as a wild beast, a wild boar trying to kill the vineyard of God.¹⁷ However, although he has a terrible display, there are some significant concepts when we understand his point of view.

He'd been passionate for God long before Paul became a Christian. Anything else one may tell about him, Paul would always do what God wished him to do this passion of Paul is truly significant for all Christians, especially during the pandemic. Therefore, even though the pandemic caused a lot of restrictions, Paul's passion and obedience should be possessed by the church members.

When he is persecuting the Christians, Paul showed that he has always been a man of zealotry. As it was revealed, Saul of Tarsus has such feelings of an intense, unchecked rage to Christians.¹⁸ Even though it was for the wrong intentions, Paul's determined actions are admirable.

¹⁵ Barrett, C. K. (2004). *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (p. vii). Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

¹⁶ Moreau, A. S., Netland, H., & Engen, C. van. (2000). *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (p. 731). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Baker Books; A. Scott Moreau.

¹⁷ Fruchtenbaum, A. G. (1983). *The Messianic Bible Study Collection* (Vol. 164, p. 29). Tustin, Calif.: Ariel Ministries.

¹⁸ Horn, S. H. (1979). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (p. 694). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Saul speaks of his days in the Book of Galatians where he shed a light on his life before repentance. Here, he shared the profound devotion that filled his passionate youthful heart to the Pharisee's strictest understanding of Judaism's faith and life.¹⁹ In other words, he was a devoted man to his faith and rules.

After His Repentance

The ministry of Paul has been under relentless attack because of his character or figure. His opponents had made several slanderous claims to try to discredit the work of Paul and thereby to discourage people from being inspired by the ministry of Paul.²⁰ Just as many mission workers are facing several challenges, so does the ministry of Paul back in the day.

There is the same aspect of his ministry that displays his consistency. In nearly all of his letters, Paul gives a concise declaration about his ministerial desire, Paul's comments regarding his pastoral ambition are aligned with the main themes of his theology.²¹ In other words, after his repentance, he is still a passionate man which was seen in his ministry.

Paul and his team had no simple ministry because they encountered huge challenges at every step. Paul wasn't just up against the problems that God had let him, he replied with strong loyalty.²² Therefore, he endured all the obstacles in the ministry with his faith.

The message given by Paul was not about himself, but about Jesus who is the Light. The apostolic ministry is an outpouring of love for Paul himself was but a small vessel containing the precious pot: the declaration that Jesus is Lord.²³ Consequently, Paul's main concept in his ministry is Christ.

For Apostle Paul, mission contained all that the holy Christ has done and is doing for the construction of his church by his people. This included the proper practice of ministry gifts granted by Christ to all his people, as well as the ministry of those divinely named, including Paul, to create and nurture churches.²⁴ In other words, every credit that has been apparent in his ministry, Paul gave it all to Christ.

Paul was blessed with what may be considered a sacred mission in the first place. It was a divine ministry and verified by God for it was the heavenly bestowal of and affirmation of the

¹⁹ Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. (1987). *The Teacher's Commentary* (p. 758). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

²⁰ Butler, J. (2009). *Analytical Bible Expositor: Galatians-Philemon* (p. 231). Clinton, IA: LBC Publications.

²¹ Stenschke, C. (2006). *Review of Pastoral Ministry According to Paul: A Biblical Vision*, by James W. Thompson. Themelios, No. 2, January 2006, 32, 99

²² Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). *I & II Corinthians* (Vol. 7, p. 372). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²³ Dockery, D. S., Butler, T. C., Church, C. L., Scott, L. L., Ellis Smith, M. A., & White, J. E., (1992). *Holman Bible Handbook* (p. 698). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

²⁴ Hawthorne, G. F., Martin, R. P., & Reid, D. G. (1993). *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (p. 614). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press

ministry of Paul (Olford, & Olford, 1998).²⁵ Because he several times stresses Christ as the center of his mission, his mission was blessed with divine power.

PAULINE MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The theme of Paul's letter is always a mission to the non-Christians. In Paul's theology, the topic of the Gentile mission has been profoundly affirmed.²⁶ Therefore, various missiological implications can be found in his life as this is the emphasis of his theology.

Paul is confident with all sorts of individuals and in all types of conditions. When he claims he has encountered small as well as big, he means those that society considers as such.²⁷ This indicates that Paul has dealt with tiny and huge issues in his ministry or mission. Therefore, the present-day mission workers have to overcome any challenges in mission as did Paul.

Paul presents the two worldviews, the nature worldview, and the Spirit worldview. The flesh's perspective is based in me, that which represents and pleases me and my desires while The Spirit's philosophy is based on Heaven, on what represents and pleases the mission of Heaven and Grace to the earth.²⁸ Just as these two points of view that were mentioned, in the time of the pandemic, the mission workers should distinguish the worldly and godly perspectives.

Paul has shown numerous difficulties in mission in his letters, in particular those from inside. Evidently, some people rejected the mission to the Gentiles, and some doubted the position of Paul in the church, and some even attempted to combine theological views between Christian and non-Christian.²⁹ Therefore, just as Paul was facing issues from within, so will the missionaries deal with such challenges during the pandemic.

Paul, in his ministry, emphasized the value of the Bible. It is clear that in (2 Tim 3:14–17), Paul pointed to Timothy's most important guidance as he tried to be the servant of Christ — the Bible.³⁰ The significance of the Scripture hasn't changed today, hence, it is crucial to base every missiological effort in the Bible.

It is important to acknowledge that the setting of Paul's ministry has some similarities with the situations today. People today exist in a society like Paul in Athens (Acts 17), which has the power to take the Christians away from the true purpose of God.³¹ In other words, the

²⁵ Olford, S. F., & Olford, D. L. (1998). *Anointed Expository Preaching* (p. 346). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers

²⁶ Hawthorne, G. F., Martin, R. P., & Reid, D. G. (1993). *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (p. 614). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press

²⁷ Underwood, J., Davis, R. G., & Nickelson, R. L. (2002). *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary: 2002-2003* (p. 207). Cincinnati: Standard Publishing

²⁸ Toews, J. E. (2004). *Romans* (p. 217). Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press.

²⁹ Dowley, T., Briggs, J. H. Y., Linder, R. D., & Wright, D. F. (2002). *Introduction to the History of Christianity* (p. 84). Minneapolis: Fortress Press

³⁰ Polhill, J. B. (1999). *Paul and His Letters* (p. 435). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman.

³¹ McRaney, W. (2003). *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (p. 121). Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman

obstacles that are apparent today are similar to what was happening during Paul's time. Therefore, any challenges that the mission workers are facing due to the pandemic can be overcome just as Paul did in the past.

Back in the day, Paul had to face opposition that is not in line with his concepts or theology. Paul had to protect his apostleship in Corinth against the false apostles who confronted him with their imposing words and acts.³² Opposition still exists today as many shall surface especially in this time of plague. Therefore, a good foundation of the Scripture is crucial in defending the faith.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic stunned the world and exploded immediately. As several new recommendations have arisen, people are expected to adjust to the modern way of life because of the pandemic. Besides, some consequences of this pandemic will remain in society for some time to come. The pandemic isn't shielding the Seventh-day Adventist Church from these problems. Due to the laws, for example, the social distancing policy, new challenges have arisen since the pandemic, more so. Consequently, guidelines or regulations surfacing due to the pandemic resulted in mission difficulties. It is more apparent than ever that Christians need to renew their view of the mission.

Paul has made a remarkable contribution to the mission and has made him one of the Bible's greatest missiological figures. Even before Paul became a Christian he'd been enthusiastic about God. When he persecutes the Christians, Paul has proved he has always been a man of faith. Thus Paul's ministry was under constant assault due to his character or image before. He is still a passionate man after his repentance as was evident in his ministry. Paul and his team did not have a simple ministry, since they faced tremendous obstacles at every phase. In his faith, however, he faced all the challenges inside the ministry. Therefore, the principal principle of Paul in his ministry is Jesus Christ.

Various missiological meanings can be found in the life of Paul, as this is his theological focus. Paul is confident in all kinds of people, and all kinds of situations. This suggests that Paul, in his ministry or mission, has dealt with tiny and big problems. As already stated, mission workers should differentiate the worldly and godly viewpoints at the time of the pandemic. In his letters, Paul has demonstrated various difficulties in mission, especially those from within. Therefore, just as Paul faced problems from inside, so during the pandemic would the missionaries struggle with those difficulties. Much as Paul shows the essence of the Scripture, today it has not changed, so it is important to root any missiological initiative on the Scriptures.

Through this study missiological of the biblical record, it is proved that: (1) The church is not immune to the challenges surfaced during the pandemic especially in evangelism; (2) There

³² Polhill, J. B. (1999). *Paul and His Letters* (p. 435). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman.

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