

2.1 Paul: The Man & The Mission (I Thessalonians & Galatians)

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Having read through the “official” History of the Early Church in The Acts of the Apostles over the last few weeks, featuring the leading role of Peter and Paul in establishing and institutionalizing Christianity, we now turn to the actual writings of Paul which make up a lengthy portion of the New Testament. We start with two of Paul’s early letters, which are perhaps two of the earliest surviving documents of Christianity overall, pre-dating the Gospels by a few decades. I Thessalonians is universally considered to be the earliest surviving text in Christianity, written by Paul from Corinth to the church he had recently founded in the northern Greek-Macedonian city of Thessalonica (Acts 17-18), probably composed around 50 C.E. It is a warm, encouraging pastoral letter that is full of apocalyptic expectation. Galatians, on the other hand, captures Paul in a much more combative mode: writing to a predominantly Gentile church he had founded in central Asia Minor (Acts 13-14), Paul is dismayed by those seeking to impose the Mosaic Law of Judaism on Gentile converts, and offers a fiery defense of his understanding of his Gospel for the Gentiles and its relationship to the Jewish Law. Galatians was written sometime between the late 40s and early 50s C.E., and its themes would be expanded in a more detailed and systematic fashion a few years later in the mid to late 50s C.E. in that masterpiece of Pauline theology that we will be studying in depth next week, which is probably the most influential text in all Christian theology – the Letter to the Romans.

Assignment #4 for Class on Saturday 9th February 2019

Reading

Please read through Paul’s two early Letters - I Thessalonians and Galatians. I suggest reading the introduction to each book in your Oxford Annotated NRSV Bible beforehand; and then reading through the letters, which are pretty short, in one sitting. Go back and re-read the letters again at a subsequent time, and try to get a sense of the theme and structure of each letter, and especially the specific tone that Paul adopts.

Thinking & Responding

For this week’s Response Paper, I want you to focus on the radically contrasting tone of each of these letters. Questions to think about: *Why is Paul adopting this specific Tone to his Audience? Who is his Audience? Why is he writing to them? What is his Message? How is “Paul the Man” manifested in “Paul the Messenger” in terms of his Presence / Rhetoric / Vocabulary / Metaphors / Arguments / Themes? How would his Letter be received by the Church Community he is Addressing? Do you think he is Effective? What kind of Leader does Paul appear to be in each Letter?* Please write two (2) Responses, approximately 225-250 words each, one for each Letter (12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margin, with your name at the top of the paper). Type up and print your Reflections, and be ready to share and discuss your Insights. I will collect them in to review and grade at the end of the class.