



# **Paul**

## ***On a Mission from God***

### **Week I**

#### **Paul's World(s)**

*And a note on reading Paul well*

Michael Gorman's book, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, has been very helpful in the development of this class.

1



## ***Introduction to this course***

- ❖ The syllabus
  - Course description
  - The class schedule
  - How the class is organized
- ❖ The weekly handouts – copies of the overheads
- ❖ The index cards
- ❖ The website – [www.standrewccl.org](http://www.standrewccl.org)
  - All materials will be posted there as I write them.

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## Paul's Mediterranean Culture

- ❖ Hellenization
  - Since the time of Alexander the Great, the Mediterranean and Asia Minor had been “Hellenized.”
- ❖ Group identity
  - A communal culture, where one’s identity is drawn from group membership – “we” not “me.”
- ❖ Honor and shame
  - Social attribution and withdrawal of esteem. The point of having wealth was to gain honor and avoid shame.
- ❖ Hierarchy
  - The class structure resembled the “Eiffel Tower.”
- ❖ Patriarchy – the *paterfamilias*
- ❖ Slavery
  - In urban areas, a significant percentage of the population were slaves. Even smaller households often had a few slaves.

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## The Roman Empire

- ❖ The *Pax Romana*
  - Octavian became “Augustus” in 27BC. He was seen as Rome’s savior, the incarnation of divine good news for the whole world. For centuries Rome ably, but ruthlessly, administered a vast empire. Crucifixion was used on those who jeopardized the *pax*, the peace.
- ❖ Community
  - Norms of honor and shame working in empire, city, and family
- ❖ Mobility
  - The Romans were superior road builders. Some are still in use. This system enabled Paul to move with relative speed (walking!) and safety.
- ❖ Unity
  - Devotion to the emperor was the key unifier across the geographical and cultural diversity of the empire. Julius was formally deified after his death, making his son and successor the son of a god. Augustus was formally deified in 14AD. The cult of the emperor spread like wildfire with huge imperial temples. As the bringer and keeper of peace and security, the emperors took upon themselves the titles of God, Lord, and Savior.

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## Paul's Judaism – unity in diversity

- ❖ Jews were unified in their belief that was one God who had chosen them (not Rome), saved them, given them the Law, and would one day put all things right.
- ❖ Oppression
  - Jews were unified in their opposition to the latest rulers – Rome. The first century was a violent time in Judea and Galilee. Many hoped for a Messiah who would throw off the oppressors. But there was no expectation of a *suffering* Messiah.
- ❖ Boundaries
  - The markers of what set the Jews apart from the world around them – food laws, Sabbath, circumcision. Jews obeyed the Law because the gracious God had chosen and saved them. The Law was not about *getting in* but *staying in* the covenant relationship with YHWH.
- ❖ The Day of the Lord
  - Apocalypticism – the expectation of a coming cosmic intervention by God that would put all things to right – judgment for all, punishment for the wicked, and a “new heavens and new earth.” The present age lies on one side of the Day of the Lord; the age to come lies on the other side.

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## Judaisms

- ❖ Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots
  - The Pharisees were a nonpriestly group zealously devoted to the keeping of the Law (written and oral) and the purity of Israel. The Essenes were also devoted to nationalism, purity, and the apocalyptic. They established a community on the Dead Sea. The Sadducees were the wealthy, aristocratic, priestly element. They denied the resurrection of the dead and aligned with Roman interests – the status quo. The zealots were dedicated to the forcible overthrow of Roman oppression.
- ❖ The diaspora Jews
  - These were Jews living away from Palestine. They adhered to the boundary markers and organized their religious lives around the synagogue. The Romans exempted them from the cult of the emperor. Paul was a diaspora Jew from Tarsus on the southern coast of Asia Minor.
- ❖ Mystics and God-fearers
  - “God-fearers,” like Cornelius, were Gentiles drawn to Judaism and affiliated with a local synagogue but not full-fledged converts.

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## ***Paul's pagan competitors***

- ❖ The Greco-Roman pantheon
  - A pyramid of divine and semi-divine gods. Some old (more powerful) and some new (less powerful). Lots of room to incorporate local deities. Religious tolerance was the order of the day.
- ❖ The practice of devotion
  - The pagan religion was not so much about doctrine or beliefs, but about devotional practices. The “church” and “state” were one.
- ❖ Temples
  - Temples were everywhere! Big and small. They were often built on hilltops that dominated the cities. Visits to one sort or another was a near daily practice for some. It was the place where you tried to deal with fickle gods.
- ❖ Living with capricious gods
  - The gods did what they wanted for reasons known only to them. Much of life was spent trying to stay out their way or striking deals with them.

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## ***The first urban Christians***

- ❖ The Gospels are stories from the rural world. Jesus avoided the major cities of Galilee and Jerusalem.
- ❖ But as Paul takes the Good News to the Gentiles, he takes it to the cities. Paul was a city person, growing up in Tarsus. From start to finish, Paul's was an urban movement.
- ❖ Rural and urban life in the ancient world could hardly have been more different. It was the fundamental division in society. Every measure of physical and social advantage was one-sided in the favor of the city. Though agriculture was the economic base, land ownership was increasingly held by city-dwellers.
- ❖ Any ambition or desire to change had to be taken to the city. The city was where new civilization – language, architecture, govt. – could be experienced. It was where you and I would encounter the Roman empire, the Greco-Roman world.
- ❖ The Roman Empire was similar to a commonwealth of self-governing cities. Rome made a practice of establishing colonies. Usually with veterans of the Roman legions. Corinth was reestablished as a Roman colony about a century after being razed by the Romans.

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# Paul and God's colonies



## *Traveling in the ancient world*

- ❖ Paul is founding colonies of his own – expand, expand, expand! Paul's trade, tentmaking, could travel with him.
- ❖ Paul traveled more than 10,000 miles in his journeys. And the main roads were busy! Most people walked – 15 to 20 miles a day tops. Of all the ancient anxieties, fears of travel sent people running to astrologers and temples more than about anything else. It was a well-founded fear. Paul himself would be shipwrecked on a journey to Rome.
- ❖ The Romans made travel possible in two ways. They minimized the threat of brigands and piracy. They built a system of roads. Paul's travel itinerary followed the main roads.
- ❖ Travel by sea was the fastest and cheapest way. Ships could make about 100 miles a day. Ships didn't sail much in the winter months.



## Reading Paul well – righteousness and faith

	Greek	Anglo-Saxon	French
Noun	<i>dikaistyne</i>	<b>righteousness</b>	justification
Adjective	<i>diksos</i>	righteous	just
Verb	<i>dikaisun</i>	[lost!!]	to justify
Noun	<i>pistis</i>	belief	<b>faith</b>
Adjective	<i>pistos</i>	believing	faithful
Verb	<i>pistetein</i>	to believe	[lost!!]

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## Reading well in practice – Galatians 3:6-7

- ❖ Just as Abraham “*believed* God, and it was reckoned to him as *righteousness*,” so, you see, those who *believe* are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would *justify* the Gentiles by *faith*, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.” For this reason, those who *believe* are blessed with Abraham who *believed*.
- ❖ Just as Abraham “*‘faithed’/had faith* in God, and it was reckoned to him as *righteousness*,” so, you see, those who *‘faith’/have faith* are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would *‘righteous’* the Gentiles by *faith*, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.” For this reason, those who *‘faith’/have faith* are blessed with Abraham who *‘faithed’/had faith*.

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