

## RELEVANCE OF SOME PAUL'S TEACHINGS TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY

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### **Abstract**

*This examination explores the enduring relevance of Paul's teachings to contemporary Christianity, highlighting their continued applicability in modern Christian contexts. Paul's emphasis on courtesy, inclusion, and social justice offer a powerful framework for believers to engage with pressing issues of inequality and injustice. His teachings on personal spiritual development and Church unity provide valuable insights for believers seeking to deepen their faith and live out their values in community with others. This discussion demonstrates the ongoing significance of Paul's teachings, inspiring believers to embody the values of the kingdom of God in their lives. Paul's teachings, albeit, done several centuries ago, are still quite relevant in the contemporary days. This is because the teachings address very salient points that are quite useful or relevant for the day-to-day human existence. Teaching is indeed germane in Christianity apparently because of the fact that some of the issues embedded in the religion are quite obscured to the proselytes. And there is the absolute need to consolidate what is already known by these who have held tenaciously to the faith, over the years.*

### **Introduction**

Paul, a distinguished Apostle in the Christendom, who has been frequently called the second founder of Christianity,<sup>1</sup> has very salient and fascinating teachings that would assist Christians in their spiritual journey. Some of his teachings can make individuals better citizens as they live in the country and also better believer as they relate with follow-believed in the Church, and also in homes. Teachings is germane in Christianity apparently because of the fact that some of the issues embedded in the religion are quite obscured to the proselytes. According to *The World Book Encyclopedia*, teaching is helping other people learn. It is one of the most important ways that people relate to one another. Teaching helps people acquire the knowledge they need to become responsible citizens to earn a living, and to live useful rewarding lives. Teaching also transfers knowledge from generation to the next. Much teaching takes place outside school. In homes for example, parents communicate values and teach their children many types of

skills and habits... children eagerly share new abilities and information with one another. But when most people speak of teaching, they mean the instruction provided in schools by professional teachers.<sup>2</sup> *The Encyclopedia Americana*, buttressing the above states that in primitive societies, much of the teaching was done in the family. Children learn by observation and imitation, by sharing in the work and other activities of the family, and by direct instruction from parents in matters of conduct and belief regarded as important. Even in the most primitive tribes, however, rituals and customs developed. The task of passing them on to new generations was generally assigned to the elders of the group. Rites associated with puberty were highly educational, dealing not only with proficiencies in skills such as hunting and fighting, but also ideas and beliefs concerning religion, morals, magic and health.<sup>3</sup>

### **Succinct Historical Background of Paul**

Paul was a distinctive apostle. He was trained by Gamaliel, the lawyer. According to Sinclair, the Apostle Paul, a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin was a Roman citizen in Tarsus of Cilicia with Hebrew name Saul. Paul was probably his Roman name.<sup>4</sup> Atowaju opines that the name is rendered *Paulos* in Greek and *Paulus* in Latin, translated as *little*. Although Paul was small in stature, the name *Paul* may have nothing to do with his size and height as established by some scholars. Saul, on the other hand, is of Hebrew origin; though phonetically similar to the Greek name, Paul; it connotes a different meaning entirely. Saul being translated, *asked of Yahweh*.<sup>5</sup> His diminutive stature probably had nothing to do with the etymological meaning of his name, but probably a mere coincidence.

It should be noted with utmost significance that Paul was albeit not one of the twelve that were called, who followed Jesus in his peripatetic ministry, however, he surpassed them. We should note that Paul was initially a persecutor of those that belonged to the way. He, however encountered Jesus on his way to Damascus for the persecution mission. The *Damascus Road* experience of Paul transformed him very radically. He, indeed, encountered the mighty hand of Jesus. He was struck blind momentarily, just as he heard a voice that queried him on why he was persecuting followers of Jesus. Ananias was directed to heal his blindness. Indeed, Ananias was initially recusant because he said that he had heard so much about the atrocities of Paul. However, he (Ananias) was directed to ignore that. When Paul regained his sight, he was used enormously by Jesus, as he went to various places to propagate the gospel. This was the gospel that he had hitherto detested with passion. He punished those that claimed to be Christians.

Besides his itinerance to disseminate the gospel, Paul wrote as an erudite scholar. Thirteen of the twenty seven books of the New Testament can be ascribed to the pen of Paul. It is true that his write-up was done several years ago, but, they are still very relevant even to the contemporary period. There is no aspect of his

teaching that can be discarded. In fact, one would wonder how Paul was able to write such brilliant epistles, some of which were replies to earlier letters sent to him, which are still extant. However, one would be mindful of the fact that all scripture are by inspiration (II Tim. 3:16). Arguably, it was not Paul that was writing, so to speak. He was writing via the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit who is the guide continually. Paul allowed himself to be guided continuously by the Holy Spirit as he made sure that he abstained from all mundane things of life. He made it his avowed resolve to be contented with whatever situation he found himself, whether there is food and raiment or not, whether there is persecution or friendship etc.

### **Some Salient Teachings of Paul**

Paul taught eruditely on some germane issues. Some of these will be discussed succinctly. Indeed, part of Paul's teaching states that ... *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come* (II Cor. 5:17). Essentially, new creation is rather figurative and it implies a change produced to make it proper to say that he is a new man. He has new views, new motives, new principles, new objectives and plans of life. He seeks new purposes and he lives for new end.<sup>6</sup> It does not really matter if a drunkard becomes reformed; there is no impropriety in saying he is a new man. If a man who was licentious becomes pure, there is no impropriety in saying that he is not the same man that he was before.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, *Old things have passed away* means for Jewish Christian converts, the former Jewish prejudices against Christianity, their natural pride, and spirit of seducing others; their attachment to their rites and ceremonies and dependence on them for salvation have all passed away.<sup>8</sup> With respect to Gentiles, their attachment to idols, their love of sin and degradation, their dependence on their own works have passed away. Since they have renounced old things, they have a common hope with the converted Jews. For them, all their former prejudices, opinion, habits, attachments have passed away. Their love of self, for sin for the world and their attachment to earthly friends, their sensuality, pride, vanity, levity and past ambition have passed away.<sup>9</sup> He is no longer what he used to be. A liar hitherto, for example, has jettisoned lying, a thief before, has left stealing, an adulterer, but has left adultery, he is now able to sing, "the things I used to do, I do them no more, there is a great change since I'm born again".<sup>10</sup> Besides, Albert Barnes postulates thus:

All is new. There are new views of God and of Jesus Christ; new views of the world to come, new views of truth and duty; and everything is seen in a new aspect and with new feelings. Nothing is more common than for them to say that all things are new. The Bible seems to be a new book and though they may often read it before, yet there is a beauty about it which they never saw before and which they

wonder they have not before perceived. The whole face of nature seems... to be changed, and they seem to be in a new world ... a new beauty is spread over them.<sup>11</sup>

As part of his teachings, Paul probably sympathetically states that, *if any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever* (I Tim. 5:8). Provision for the upkeep of the family is not something to be toyed with. It is really something to be taken with all seriousness, it deserves. If and when the necessary provision is not made in the home, the wife can become loose, and may wish to look elsewhere, for what is evidently unfound in the home. The scenario is worse with children who may become nothing but vagabonds that would be looking at everywhere to feed. Schooling may be something else. In other words, schooling may not be easy or outrightly impossible for the children who are supposed to be properly and adequately trained to guarantee their future. According to Henry, if any men or women do not maintain their poor relations, they in effect deny the faith. If they spend upon their lusts and pleasures what should maintain their families, they have denied the faith and are worse than infidels. If professors of the gospel give way to any corrupt principle or conduct, they are worse than those who do not profess to believe in the doctrines of grace.<sup>12</sup>

Paul also taught that, *As in all Churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the Churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate as even the law says* (I Cor. 14:34). However, in the contemporary days, there is obvious criticism against this teaching. The argument is that if women should keep quiet in the church, how would Aime semple Macpherson, who established the *Foursquare Church*, Florence Crawford, founder of *The Apostolic Faith*, could have been able to rise and establish their Churches. *Foursquare Church* established the Macpherson University, located at Seriki Sotayo in Ogun State, Nigeria, and the enviable Lighthouse International Foursquare Evangelical (LIFE) in Ikorodu, Lagos, Nigeria, while *The Apostolic Faith* founded the Crawford University at Igbesa, also in Ogun State. The two Universities and even the seminary are doing marvelously well in Nigeria. Indeed, they are flourishing. It follows in corollary that the teaching of Paul in respect of the muteness of women in the Church is absolutely not tenable in the contemporary days. The silence of the afore-mentioned women would have denied somewhat the propagation of the gospel via the establishment of the Churches. The Institutions they established, too, would have equally been outrightly denied. It should also be noted with utmost significance that the demise of Bishop Benson Andrew Idahosa would have also led to the moribund of *Church of God Mission International*. However, Margaret Idahosa, his wife, succeeded her husband. Till date, the Church is waxing stronger.

Paul also taught that... for *I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content* (Phil. 4:11b). This simply means that Paul was used to every situation. Put differently, he was pleased with surplus and even austerity. He was comfortable with a situation where he is sumptuously fed and even hunger. What was found at the inception of Christianity was the austere disposition on the part of the clergymen and even the laity. The ecclesiastic neophyte could trek long distances to ensure the propagation of the gospel. At best, bicycle(s) could be used for transportation in the dissemination of the gospel in all the nooks and crannies of the communities. However, in the contemporary days, the reverse is the case. Success in the ministry is measured by the type of car(s) a minister is riding, the mansion he lives in, and the amount of money standing as credit in his bank account(s), probably in his domiciliary account.

We should note that Paul's state of contentment does not depend on outward circumstances. He possesses the peace of God.<sup>13</sup> Tokunboh Adeyemo submits that as individuals, we experience gain and loss, communally we experience social upheaval, epidemics, poverty, natural disasters, and both international and external strife. To live contentedly in the good times, as well as bad times, we need the Lord who always remains the same and continually given us his strength.<sup>14</sup> The Apostle was often in bonds, imprisonments and necessities, but in all, he learned to be content, to bring his mind to his condition, and make the best of it<sup>15</sup> without necessarily bothering himself with whatever situation or condition that he has found himself.<sup>16</sup>

As part of his taught-provoking teachings, Paul states that, *I also want women to dress modestly with decency and propriety not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes* (I Tim. 2:9). Notice that Paul urges modesty, decency and propriety, which are all against extravagance. Advice is given about such practical details as hairstyles, jewelry and dress. Paul is not against any of these things, but urges the greater value of the godly life. In other words, the *good deeds* are to be more eye-catching than the outward.<sup>17</sup> Adeyemo postulates that... If Christian women who profess to worship God are too concerned about their external appearance, they will forget the essentials and will have neither the time nor the inclination to do good deeds.<sup>18</sup> Hale opines that in Paul's time, vain and worldly women used to braid their hair and tie it up with ribbons. They wore expensive jewelry and fancy clothes. Such women did this to show others how wealthy or important they were. Paul teaches here that such proud and ostentations behaviour is wrong. Rather, Let women wear ordinary and suitable clothing. A woman's finest "clothing" is her deed.<sup>19</sup> Women, according to Henry, who profess the Christian religion must be modest in apparel, not affecting gaudiness, gait, or costliness. Good works are the best ornament; these are in the sight of God, of great price. Modesty and neatness are more to be consulted in garments than elegance and fashion. And it would be well if the professors of

serious godliness were wholly free from vanity dress.<sup>20</sup> Henry goes on to enthuse that they (woman) should spend more time and money in relieving the sick and distressed than in decorating themselves and their children. To do this, is a manner unsuitable to their rank in life, and their profession of godliness is sinful. These are not trifles but Divine command.<sup>21</sup> “Costly array” includes that which can be ill-afforded and that which is inconsistent with the feeling that the principle ornament is that of the heart.<sup>22</sup>

Besides, Paul taught on love as he pontificates thus:

If I speak in tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a changing cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I am nothing (I Cor. 13: 1-3)

Love is seen by Shashi as a condition or phenomenon of emotional primacy, or absolute value. Love generally includes an emotion of intense attraction to another person, place or thing; and may also include the aspect of caring for or finding identification with those objects including self-love. Love can describe an intense feeling of affection, an emotion or an emotional state. In ordinary use, it usually refers to interpersonal love, an experience usually felt by a person for another person. Love is commonly considered impossible to define. The concept of love, however, is subject to debate. Some deny the existence of love, calling it a recently invented abstraction.<sup>23</sup> Shashi goes on to avow that others maintain that love exists but is indefinable, being a quantity which is spiritual, metaphysical, or philosophical in nature. The views that love does not exist or is indefinable may underlie the fact that approximately 13 percent of cultures have no word for love. The remaining 87 percent attempt to define this abstract concept and apply it to everyday life. Love is one of the most common themes in art and oftentimes is an excuse for “bad art”. Some Psychologists maintain that love is the abstract action of lending one’s “boundary” or “self-esteem” to another.<sup>24</sup> Love in Christianity, according to Geaves is the greatest of the three theological virtues expounded by Paul. The New Testament uses Greek *AGAPE* which means the highest form of love that sees something infinitely precious in the object of love. The highest manifestation of love of God according to the apostle was the birth, life and death of Jesus Christ and Jesus is the focal point of Christian love. Christ is the essential nature of God and it is also the correct and ultimate response of humans towards God.<sup>25</sup> This love is not dredge up as an act of will, in obedience to the law. Rather, it follows from within, for it is only God’s grace that enables one to love one’s neighbour as oneself or to love one’s enemy.<sup>26</sup>

In the Christian faith, there are four basic Greek renderings of the word *love*, viz: *agape*, which is divine love; *eros*, which denotes physical lust, *storge*, personal or blood love and *Philia* which denotes ordinary friendship.<sup>27</sup> *Agape* is a distinctly Christian term created out of necessity to depict adequately the gospel of the new creature. It is used primarily of the love that men have, or should have for one another, which is a reflection of God's love for them. They are to draw their pattern from him. *Agape* is unconquerable, benevolence, indefinable goodwill.<sup>28</sup> As such, it is a sharing concern and a caring identification with the heads of others. This concern is all-embracing even though recipients are undeserving; it results in the transformation of both the loved and the loving... *Agape* is a response of the whole person involving will, feeling, and intellect. It is not weak and harmfully permissive, but strong and disciplining.<sup>29</sup> We should note that no matter how else we may bear testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ, the absence of love nullifies all. Love is greater than anything we can say, or anything we can possess, or anything we can give, it is the utmost which is far over and above anything that we can think of on the surface of the earth, being the leader of the band of graces.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, love is inestimable.

Erudition in teaching is also demonstrated by Paul as he states that: *Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church...* (Ephesians 5: 22-23). This is an admonition that was somewhat strictly adhered to, by many wives in the days of yore and this guaranteed peaceful and harmonious relationship in many homes. Many wives saw their husbands as their heads and submitted outrightly to their authority, albeit not necessarily subservient, but mindful of Paul's teaching. However, in the contemporary days, gender equality is the vogue. This is probably as a result of civilization and or educational accomplishment. Predominantly, wives see themselves as contemporaries of their husbands; therefore, the idea of submission does not arise again, at all. Laws enacted by some advanced countries, where husbands must not beat their wives have ever exacerbated the scenario. Some wives in some of these advanced countries even capitalize on this and subject their husbands to trauma and agony. Recently, a wife (probably a Nigerian) was seen battering her husband on *Whatsapp*. She slapped him endlessly, to the extent that the husband asked if the wife wanted to beat him to death. Even in developing countries, some wives do not want to subordinate themselves to their husbands despite the fact that they avow to be Christians to the extent that the husband asked if the wife wanted to beat her to death. Even in developing countries, some wives do not want to subordinate themselves to their husbands despite the fact that they avow to be Christians.

### **Conclusion**

The teachings of Paul have assisted Christians phenomenally in their life. Some of the things that were probably unknown to them hitherto have been touched and

they are exposed to the things that were hitherto obscured. Doubtlessly, this has made many Christians to know many things and have been tremendously helped as a result. The teachings of Paul were not human but probably derived from the Holy Spirit that had continually served as his guide. Paul is known to be quite erudite and his teachings demonstrated this distinctively in virtually all ramifications.

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