

Madison Heights Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
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MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

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The Theology of the Apostle Paul part 1

I like the doctrine of the Apostle Paul because his focus is on Christ Jesus. No matter what pain, suffering, and setbacks he is experiencing in life, he is chronically joyous because the gospel is advancing. He is also tremendously grateful to God for sending Jesus to the world. This was not always the case. At first he vigorously persecuted the first Christians. However, that all changed when he encountered the post resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. That is a very important change, it changed everything for him and his life, it had a significant impact on the development of the church, and it has a huge impact on our faith formation. The absolute most important thing for anybody is the change that you make when you accept Jesus into your life.

I once heard a story about a farmer that had loaned his mule to a friend. The mule was exceedingly stubborn and no matter how hard the friend tried, he could not get the mule to move an inch. Finally out of desperation he contacted the farmer. The mule owner came to where the stubborn mule was located and whacked the mule with a 2 by 4 as hard as he could. The friend was shocked, felt terribly sorry for the mule and demanded "why on earth did you do that!?" The farmer said "well, first you have to get his attention." This is obviously a fictional story. However, the point is that sometimes it takes something significant to get your attention. Until then it remains hard for some of us to learn life's lessons. Sometimes there are very important events that are so significant that our lives are changed forever. Well, for the Apostle Paul that significant event was his encounter with the post resurrected Jesus.

The Apostle Paul wrote personal letters from prison to the churches that he founded on his missionary journeys. Now we know that being held captive is not a good thing but we are thankful that this happened to him because if it did not, these letters would not have been written and we would be missing very valuable theological doctrine. This doctrine was crucial in the development of the early church and it continues to be very valuable to us today in our own faith formation. While people pray for his release Paul assures them that in spite of his hardship he has found great satisfaction in the knowledge that the gospel is increasing. He is happy because his efforts have proven to be successful and the efforts to stop him did not stop the advancement of the gospel.

Paul's theology is centered on Christ and he teaches us that we are to copy Christ. It is a matter of change, surrendering your life from your past attitudes, behaviors, and worldview, to a new life that is modeled after Christ. The Apostle Paul is very serious about this. He is talking about a complete change. His life is an example of this. His encounter with the post resurrected Jesus was a complete game changer. Like the mule referenced above, Jesus had to get his attention. Paul is an expert theologian in Christology (theology that relates to Jesus Christ), and he teaches us how we are to respond to Christ. We are to copy the example of Jesus and live our lives as illustrated by the life of Christ. This requires a complete reorientation of your life like the Apostle Paul had a complete reorientation of his life. It is a matter of being focused completely on Jesus. When you are focused on Jesus you are not focused on yourself, conflicts, politics, or whatever someone else is doing or saying. Your focus is Jesus. There is no conflict at all in the life of the church when we are all of one mind - the same mind as Christ. Mirror your life after the teachings of Jesus. Focus on what Jesus said and did. Paul's primary theological concept is that Christianity means you must be like Christ. Adopt the attitude and behavior of Jesus, treat people like he treats people, and love others like he loves others.

George