

Leadership skills of paul of tarsus



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Carmel Gittens

In the light of Romans, 1 Corinthians and Galatians, what sources of authority does Paul draw on to reinforce his case and what can be learned from the apostle in this respect for contemporary church leadership?

Following his conversion on the road to Damascus, where Paul of Tarsus, one time persecutor of the followers of Jesus met with the risen Lord, he became the greatest defender of the newly forming Christian faith. His zeal and fervour once so attuned to ridding the world of this perceived threat to Judaism now turned to promoting the same. However, such was his dramatic and life changing meeting with Jesus, that Paul not only devoted his life to growing and nurturing early Christian churches, and spreading the gospel across the Mediterranean and beyond, but was willing to endure persecution and indeed martyrdom himself in the pursuit of his divine mission. It is widely held that Paul was uniquely equipped for this mission as he had many of the qualities needed for such an enormous task. In this essay, I will look at Paul's journey from persecutor to proselyte, a journey that took him many thousands of miles and one that required him to assert his message with conviction and authority. Paul would have to defend his teachings and the gospel he proclaimed in many varied and often difficult situations. To do this he used a variety of sources, for example, when Paul defends his apostolic status or challenges lax moral behaviour or advocates his gospel message he draws on his conversion experience, the Hebrew Scriptures, his finely honed and excellent rhetorical skill, and subsequent force of argument, to strengthen his case. Finally, I will look at how his leadership skills and methods may give us an insight into contemporary church leadership today.

<https://assignbuster.com/leadership-skills-of-paul-of-tarsus/>

Let us first look at Paul's apostolic authority. There is no doubt that Paul claimed to be an apostle, and he certainly exercised authority, but when he did would he have claimed this to be as an apostle? He would not particularly have claimed that his authority came from his appointment as an apostle, but there are times when in defending his status he does assert his apostolic position. In the first two chapters of Galatians and in the letters to Corinth Paul hotly defends the position of being an apostle. In Galatians, some had argued that because he was not one of the original apostles appointed by Jesus he is somehow inferior to them, but more importantly as inferior to Peter. Of course, this is at the heart of the debate over apostleship. Paul's response to this was furious, he was furious with the old teachers who questioned his authority and tried to tie up the Christians with the old laws. But he was even more furious with the Christians for succumbing to their intimidation.

Paul begins his letter with a strong and clear account of how his commission is not by vote of man, but God given. He continues to state how once James, Peter and John have recognised this they shake hands with him and Barnabus and assign them to a ministry with the non-Jews, while they continue with the Jews. He is stating here also that even as he rebukes Peter for certain practices that he thinks are out of line, Peter recognises his authority and equality with himself.

In 1 Corinthians 9. 1; 15. 8-11 Paul asserts his right to be included as an apostle. He had after all seen the risen Christ, and the mission work he was doing with the Corinthians attested to his position (1 Cor. 9. 1-2)

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? 2 Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

But this claim is not one that Paul constantly refers to. He actually only claims to be an apostle in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. In both Corinth and Galatia some denied that he was an apostle so it is here in his letters to them that he launches his defence. But in Romans he speaks from the outset as being an apostle perhaps because having never personally visited these churches he wants them to be clear from the outset that the gospel he proclaims is on the same standing and has the same authority behind it as that proclaimed by Peter and the twelve. He does not however have to defend his position as much in Rome as he does in Corinth and Galatia. But rather he gently reminds in Rom 11. 13:

13 I am talking to you Gentiles. In as much as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry.

It is clear from this that Paul only therefore claims his apostleship when this has been called into question by others, and not on the basis that he needs this authority in order to be a witness to the gospel. Paul's self-professed authority comes from God himself via Jesus the Son. Paul claims this has come from his road to Damascus vision of Christ, and as such he believes that he speaks authoritatively as one the Lord trusts. For example, when speaking to the Corinthians on the subject of marriage (1 Cor 7. 25)

25 Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

Although he does at times directly speak of the Lord's teachings; as when instructing about the proper way for the Lord's supper to be celebrated (1Cor 9. 14),

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

he does not regularly use the words of Jesus but claims that his authority comes directly from the Lord e. g., "for building up not tearing down" (13. 10).

Scuhz¹ argues that Authority is the interpretation of power and for Paul that power would be the gospel He claims that the thing that makes Paul so authoritative is his ability to interpret the gospel. This act of interpretation unlocks the source of power in the gospel and thereby makes that power accessible to those who respond in trust and obedience to it. Paul's ability to be a vessel of this power to people is what establishes his apostolic authority.

Because the gospel has both an initial and ongoing task to accomplish in the community, Paul's authority extends past the initial acceptance of the gospel and well into the intricacies of the communities everyday forms, patterns and practices. His right to speak to the communities he founded arises out of the foundational power which they both have experienced, the gospel that he both mirrors in his life experience and which he preaches.

The restraint on apostolic authority has its anchor in the nature and meaning of that same gospel. Power through weakness. No egotistical or authoritarian style for Paul. His authority and leadership are informed, shaped and regulated by the paradoxical content of the gospel he preaches. see I Cor 1: 18ff

Bibliography

Dunn, James D G (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), especially the essays in Part 3.

Furnish, Victor Paul, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968).

Longenecker, Richard (ed), *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997).

Malherbe, Abraham J, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

Sampley, J Paul, *Walking between the Times: Paul's Moral Reasoning* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

Kim, Sayoon, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹ Schütz, John Howard, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975).