

Wallace S. Johnson

PAUL'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY AS REFLECTED IN THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

PAUL'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY  
AS REFLECTED IN THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

*This is a good general  
outline. It ought to  
much filled in*

In considering Paul's philosophy of history, it must be kept in mind that Paul was not an ignorant man in the sense that he did not know the prevailing philosophies of his time. He was an educated man, without doubt well acquainted with the thought life of his time. It must also be kept in mind that he was also rooted and grounded in Jewish tradition. A Pharisee of the Pharisees is the way he describes himself. So, as with every man who writes understandingly; it may be assumed that what he taught and believed, he did so, not because he was unacquainted with the thought of his day; but that he was fully aware of all sides of the subject involved and wrote from both selection and conviction.

Paul does not take up the theme of his philosophy of history and develop it in systematic order. What we know of his thought in this particular we learn by inference from the substance of his writings.

Concerning the question of origins, Paul believed in divine and direct creation, as did his fathers after the flesh. Genesis contains the record of that creation. Therein it is recorded that "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Man was created in the image of God and with the ability of apprehending Him.

Paul believed that the demoralized state of paganism as he describes it in Romans one is due to two causes. These two causes are two aspects of man's relationship to God. This first is man's side. Created in the image of God with the ability of apprehending Him, man failed to glorify Him as God, failed to thank Him, and became vain in his imaginations, darkened in his heart, and perverted in his conduct. The other side of the picture is that God has turned man over to the choices of his heart, that the morally degenerate condition of paganism is a judgment of God.

---

Paul's view of humanity was that of a humanity in need of redemption. It is a humanity that has sinned. How, why and when is not the question here. It is a simple fact simply stated that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous. Hence the righteousness of God, if it is ever to be a part of humanity must be the work of God Himself. Such is the message of the Gospel. In it is the righteousness of God revealed. It is received on the basis of individual faith in Jesus Christ, never apart from it. In other words, Paul's world is redempto-centric, a world being redeemed. It is God who is at work in this redemption. And it is man's faith, man's absolute unreserved committal to God, that forms the basis upon which God proceeds. This basis of redemption is not merely a Christian concept. Old Testament saints were also thus made righteous as is exemplified in Abraham.

This work of redemption does not operate merely in the forensic or legal. God counts righteous, that is true, but He also makes righteous. The cry of the awakened heart in Romans seven finds its answer in Romans eight where thru the Spirit's enabling and empowering, the righteousness of God is realized. The fullness of salvation for the individual is likeness to Christ.

Salvation or redemption also has its creation aspect. In Romans eight Paul presents creation itself as in birth travail, awaiting the consummation. History has direction. God is in it. God is in it as a directive force, so that Paul was able to say with all conviction, "all things work together for good". If God is on our side, who can be effectively against us. And Jesus Christ is the goal toward which all trends. In Him is an earnest of the interest and determined will of God.

The relationship of Jew and Gentile to each other and to the whole plan of God occupies Paul's attention in chapters nine to eleven. Paul here looks upon the whole problem as in retrospect. Israel's rejection of their very highest fulfillment of God's promises needed explanation. Paul's explanation grows out of his philosophy of history. First of all, God's will lies behind history, is not determined by

history. What has happened, has happened, and God is in it somehow. Again, God's actions are founded in His character, are not arbitrary. To sit in judgment over God's acts never occurs to Paul. What Paul finds, he assumes to be in line with God's will and character. Jews and Gentiles are both responsible for their attitude toward God. God is no respecter of persons. The Israel of unbelief may be set aside for the present. The Gentiles, then, come in, and so the Gentiles are included in the plan of God. God's love is as wide as the human race. But Israel is not definitely set aside. It is only temporarily so. Israel will return. But after Paul has said all this, he still stands aside and says there are some things which he can not understand. God's judgments <sup>are</sup> and unsearchable and His ways past finding out.

Paul's conception of the state was that it is a part of the ordained order of God for the well-being of humankind. To resist the state is to resist God, and to jeopardize one's own relationship to God. To enlarge the concept, all human life and organization is a part of a divine order. With Paul there is no secular and sacred. All things are of God, the state included, thinking of it as a concept rather than as personnel.

Paul's philosophy of history included a day of consumation. Together with the saints of the first century, he believed that that day was not far distant. It will not be fair to say he was mistaken. He was doing exactly what Jesus Christ had told His disciples to de--expect it at any moment. It seems that the day has been long delayed. Whether or not one will weave such a day into one's own philosophy of history, it must be admitted that such a day was in Paul's.

Briefly, it may be said that in Paul's thinking, God created the world and all things therein; He is active in providence, or rather, He is providence in that God expresses Himself thus; He is leading His creation on in redemptive work toward conformity to the image of Jesus Christ, the goal of all history; Jews and Gentiles are in the plan; there is much still that is inexplicable; but God will work till the day of consumation.