

**Question: How has Paul of Tarsus influenced contemporary Christian thought, practice, and worship? Also, how has he influenced the development and expression of Christianity besides his letters in the New Testament?**

Let me start first with my impressions of Paul. Before I took my classes on him I was not a fan. He seemed sexist and old-fashioned at best, although, I thought how he converted to following Jesus was interesting and miraculous. Upon studying Paul, I found him to be an amazing example of how God can take anyone and change their heart completely. Paul led by example and was able to say he started at the opposite spectrum of Christianity, literally trying to kill Christians, to become the most devout and most traveled teacher of Christianity. His story alone has surely helped thousands of people to accept Jesus as their savior.

Paul wrote over 25% of the New Testament! That's a huge portion! His words, inspired by God, have led millions to a better understanding of the Lord. He wrote at least 13 books (The author of Hebrews is unknown but often attributed to Paul).

The Apostle Paul continues to influence people today with his life-altering transformation, his missionary work, the books he wrote, and his place in the council of Jerusalem. His missionary work took him farther than many had been and without his missionary work Christianity would possibly still be in the beginning stages in many far-reaching places. Not to mention, he taught others to spread the gospel and started a chain reaction that I believe is still in effect today. His words in Romans have led to a method of helping others convert which is called Roman Roads.

His approval (or writing about God's approval) of Gentiles was more overreaching than any other book of the Bible which helped to propel the ministry farther. His letters to the different churches he had helped to build answer many questions that followers across the world struggle with, issues that are still around today and will be until the end has come. He also put a big emphasis on water baptism, which is still in practice today.

Moreover, Paul's personal testimony can soften even the hardest heart. A man who hated Jesus so much he was seeking out and killing Christ's followers and then he became the biggest advocate for Christ. If God can change the heart of a killer and forgive a killer how much more can He do for Christians now in a similar predicament? His greatest influence, in my opinion, is his influence in spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. Before Paul, the gospel may have been open to everyone but only the Jewish people felt the inclusion. Paul brought the rest of the world into the loving nature of Jesus and God. He spread the love, mercy, and salvation farther than anyone else. Without God using Paul, how many non-Jewish

people would be saved today? The list goes on, he preached on justification by faith alone, which franchised later into the reformed church separating Protestant from Catholicism. He spoke to people and did not just list history as a lot of the Bible does. He wrote love and the nature of God became available to the world.

Finally, Paul's words still cause debate among the secular world and the Christian world. Even among the different Christians. Take a look at Romans 1:18-23: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 1 since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles."

These words are still relevant today. Christian's argue based on Paul's inspired word that God is against homosexuality, which is a huge topic today as the secular world approves of a homosexual lifestyle. Further, these verses could potentially be pointing to the current times as the world becomes more condoning of behavior unsupported by God. Romans 13:11-14 speaks of the future that has not yet passed. Paul's words are ripe with inspired word mean for then and now.