**Outline the contribution of Paul to the development and expression of Christianity**

Paul’s contribution to Christianity was quite vast as he ensured Christianity become a religion in it’s own right. He also spread Christianity to people who were not Jewish (Gentiles) and provided them (along with other Christians) with ethical teachings and guidance.

Paul ensured Christianity was no longer a sect of Judaism by disregarding adherence to Mosaic Law for Gentile Christians. Before Paul, Peter had stressed the importance of Mosaic Law for all Christians, but Paul disagreed as his belief was that ‘observance of the Law cannot do what Christ’s death and resurrection have done-that is, bring about right relationship with God (justification).’[[1]](#footnote-0) As stated by Harrington in *Meeting St Paul Today*, Paul believed that the reasoning for the Law was to provide a guide for the Community whilst they were still ‘spiritually young’, until the time came when they could experience salvation through Christ. Now that Christ has died there is no reason for a non-Jew to follow Mosaic Law in order to have a relationship with God.

Upon conversion Paul also felt strongly that his mission in life was to spread Christianity beyond the Jewish community, where the Apostles were mainly preaching. Paul reveals this in Galatians 1:15-16 where he states ‘but when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles’. This did lead to some implications such as the riot in Ephesus (found in Acts 19:21-41), where men zealous with greed from the profit they claimed from making idols for temples caused an uprising and made attempts on Paul’s life. Although martyrs were present before Paul’s conversion (such as Stephen, who Paul attended the death of), Paul demonstrates the strong link to faith that many Christians now possess.

In addition, Paul provided ethical guides to the Gentile Christian communities he founded through his letters to them. Paul emphasized within these letters the need for Christians not to see each other as individuals, but as part of a whole. In 1 Corinthians Paul talks of the necessity that Christians cease attempting to make themselves more important then another as they are all equal in God’s eyes and how we are all parts of the body and must work as a unit in order to make the Body of Christ work as it should. He also raises the issue of sexual morality and makes it clear that just because Christ died for our salvation it does not mean that we have the freedom to do as we please and should acknowledge the sacrifice that Christ made by living our lives in his honour. Acts of sexual immorality can be viewed acts committed by one who is rejecting Christ. Paul also offered his followers a description of our own resurrection in Christ’s name and he also stresses the importance of believing in the resurrection or he says it is nothing that they have believed in (1 Corinthians 15:2).

To conclude Paul’s contribution to Christianity was in separating it from being a sect of Judaism by removing the need for Mosaic Law and allowing access to the religion for Gentiles. In addition to this Paul also provided the communities he established with ethical guidelines, which are still used by Christians today.

**Analyse the impact of Paul on Christianity**

Paul’s impact on Christianity can be seen to derive from his pastoral theology, his missionary journeys and his letters to the Gentile Christian communities.

Paul’s pastoral theology was recorded within the Acts of the Apostles 13-28 and accounts how he interacted with the early Christian Communities. Paul’s account of his conversion to Christianity, also within the Acts, and spread throughout his letters to the communities which he established, give converts a new hope within this religion as a once Christian murderer was accepted within their midst as a man of faith. Paul also stresses using his physical pains that pain and illness should not turn one sour but if should help them become more humble.

Throughout his pastoral theology and the letters which he wrote to the early Christian communities Paul focused on 3 main concepts, that of love, community and Christ.

Paul as a Hellenistic Jew described the love of one another and of Christ as that of agape love. It is a deep meaningful love that is unconditional and can easily be associated with that of a mother to her child or a husband and wife couple. Paul believed that Christ possesses this same love for us and that is why he died upon the cross for our salvation. In 1 Corinthians 15:2 Paul directly states one of the major foundations of Christianity, ‘That is the gospel, the message that I preached to you. You are saved by the gospel if you hold firmly to it-unless it was for nothing that you believe.’ Meaning that to be a Christian means to believe what is written (or stated in the time of oral tradition) regarding the life and death of Jesus and not to question it, for if someone was to not believe in it fully then they do not believe in the life and death of Jesus Christ and in him being the Messiah. A way in which this has impacted upon present Christian communities is that this recognition that one may question their belief in the life and death of Christ, however if they do not believe in Jesus’ resurrection then they are no longer Christians. Paul also talks of Jesus’ agape love with all of humanity for whom he suffered and died upon the Cross for, this included the persecutors, the murderers and the wrong doers, as shown through Paul, a former persecutor of Christianity as stated above.

Paul’s letter, which addressed the communities before giving a prayer of thanksgiving, were used not only as sources of guidance and support for those Christian community’s, but it also brought the community together from various races and genders. This impacted the society which received the letters as many of them were divided by race and social status, so much so that instead of sharing a meal together, the rich would eat in private before the Eucharist. These letters, the first written documentations of the Christian faith, were read to the entire congregation and addressed issues that had been raised within the community itself. In the letters Paul clarifies the teachings regarding the new issues as they arrive and from his letters the teachings of the marriage ritual, along with the cross and salvation can be found. Paul was also the person who made baptism (an initiation rite) apart of the Christian rituals, which brought the community closer together and made the congregation larger.

Also within Paul’s teachings is the strong notion of Christ love for humanity especially since our salvation can only be found through Him. ‘Paul is convinced that justification had already occurred through Jesus’ death and resurrection’[[2]](#footnote-1) whilst in the Jewish tradition this justification is believed to only occur on the last day. This means that as sin came to the world through Adam, sin left the world through Christ. For Christians, this creates a chance for us to have a closer relationship with God, to repent our sins and to receive forgiveness if it is truly sought out by a persons’ heart.

To conclude Paul’s basic concepts of love, community and Christ all bring us as Christians closer to our God and each other. They also teach us to respect each other, include each other and to have faith that Christ died for our salvation.

**Bibliography**

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1. Harrington, D pg 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. pg 83 Harrington, D [↑](#footnote-ref-1)