

Introduction

Paul is Christianity's most revered mortal. Jesus may have chosen Peter and given him the key to the pearly gates, but he is no match for Paul. Paul told the Galatians that Peter violated the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:14). No one even asks about Peter's side of the story. They just throw him under the bus, based solely on Paul's word.

Paul's status derives from his miraculous encounter with the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus. Virtually no one questions this story, even though much about it is dubious, and Paul himself contradicted parts of it. Furthermore, the teachings of Paul's resurrected Christ often contradict those of the real, historical Jesus.

A brief housekeeping note. Throughout this book, I restrict the use of *Jesus* to the historical figure, best represented by the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I contrast Jesus with Paul's resurrected Christ, an entity known only to Paul, and discussed in his letters. Occasionally, I abbreviate the latter entity as *Christ*, a term I never use for the historical Jesus. These distinctions are essential, as Paul's resurrected Christ often contradicted Jesus, even in central matters of doctrine and practice, as I discuss in the second section of this book.

For example, Jesus condemned the rich, saying a rich man has as much chance of entering heaven as a camel does squeezing through the eye of a needle. But Paul's resurrected Christ invented the Gospel of Prosperity. Paul told his well-heeled householders that if they contributed to his collection, his resurrected Christ would not only give them spiritual rewards, but handsome financial returns as well (2 Cor. 9:6-11).

Jesus prohibited his disciples from taking money for preaching: “You received without cost; give without charge” (Mt. 10:8). Jesus only let them accept their daily bread. But Paul’s resurrected Christ said he had a right to charge, much like a hedge fund manager: “If we have sown spiritual seed for you, is it too much that we reap a material harvest from you?” (1 Cor. 9:11); “When anyone is under instruction in the faith, he should give his teacher a share of whatever good things he has” (Gal. 6:6).

Faced with contradictions between Jesus and Paul’s Christ, *in virtually every case*, Christianity has chosen Paul’s resurrected Christ and thrown Jesus under the bus. That’s why laymen are rarely informed of these differences, and why they mistakenly assume that many doctrines of Paul’s Christ really came from Jesus. Conversely, they are unaware of some of Jesus’ central teachings.

Unlike virtually all books on Paul, I focus on *facts*, rather than the usual faith-based material. In particular, I focus on *inconvenient* facts, facts that are inconsistent with the conventional Christian story. In other academic fields, such facts are prized and widely discussed, as they show where theories need work, and facilitate progress. In New Testament scholarship, however, such facts are treated as heresy. These scholars ignore fundamental academic and intellectual standards while striving to uphold traditional articles of faith. This is especially common where Paul is concerned. Not only do they repeatedly suppress and misrepresent the facts, they even mistranslate their own Holy Scripture on Paul’s behalf.

The first section of this book focusses on some of these inconvenient facts. I’m confident you’ve never heard them from your pastor or priest. You’ve probably heard about Paul’s poverty, since he repeatedly complained of it. But the facts contradict it. The first chapter shows that less than one percent of all Romans could have afforded a house like Paul’s. Chapter Three shows that writing and sending let-

ters was extremely expensive. That's why the only Roman letter writers you've heard of are people like Cicero, Seneca and Pliny, who were also among the richest people in the Empire. This chapter also documents the extent to which New Testament scholars misrepresent these facts. When Paul wrote the Corinthians about his dire poverty, complaining that he lacked both food and shelter, the cost of that letter could have purchased room and board for over a year. While Paul repeatedly claimed to support himself by slaving night and day in his workshop, Chapter Four demonstrates that such work yielded very meager earnings, and could not possibly have supported Paul's spending. Other chapters in this section discredit Paul's claims of being a Pharisee from the tribe of Benjamin, as he repeatedly boasted. These arguments are based on the work of Hyam Maccoby. I also document the Holy War waged against Maccoby for raising such issues, and the refusal of professional Christians to acknowledge the facts. A Case Study illustrates the severity of the problem.

The second section of the book reviews ways in which Paul's resurrected Christ contradicted Jesus. Such contradictions include fundamental doctrines of salvation, as well as matters concerning money and power. Paul's resurrected Christ not only contradicted Jesus, he even contradicted himself when expedient. The chapter also documents that *most* of Paul's scriptural references actually misrepresent scripture.

The final section of the book reviews Paul's life and letters. While there are fourteen letters attributed to Paul in the New Testament, I only discuss the seven that are considered to be authentic: First Thessalonians (1 Thess.); First Corinthians (1 Cor.); Second Corinthians (2 Cor.); Galatians (Gal.); Philipians (Phil); Philemon (Phlm.); and Romans (Rom.). Much of the evidence for Paul's misconduct is scriptural, in plain view, and readily confirmed. Few people read the Bible, and few of those read it critically.

The Traditional View of Paul

I include a brief overview of Paul's story for those unfamiliar with it; there are more than I anticipated.

Paul was born in Tarsus, about five hundred miles northwest of Jerusalem. His father was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin who made tents. He was also a Pharisee, a group of highly respected authorities on the Bible. At a young age, Paul was sent to Jerusalem to study with Gamaliel, the leader of the Pharisees. He later joined the Temple guard, which also served as Jerusalem's police force. He quickly rose to a high position, and worked directly for the high priest. He was responsible for persecuting Christians, and went door-to-door to root them out and destroy the movement.

The high priest sent Paul on a secret mission to Damascus to persecute their Christian population. On the road to Damascus, he was accosted by the resurrected Christ, who complained of Paul's persecution. Christ blinded him, and knocked him down, but then appointed him Apostle to the Gentiles, and taught him His gospel. Paul stayed in Damascus three years before going to Jerusalem to visit Peter and James, the leaders of the Jesus-movement. After receiving death threats for his teachings, Paul went north to Syria, which included Tarsus. He spent about a decade there before he was recruited by Barnabas, who was heading up a mission in Antioch for Peter and James. After working in Antioch for nearly a decade, Paul had a fight with Peter and Barnabas, accusing them of violating the gospel. Paul left Antioch, and started his independent mission, part of which involved collecting money for the poor in Jerusalem. He traveled to major cities, including Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus, founding churches and writing them letters to answer their questions and provide guidance. After nearly a decade, he took the collection for the poor to Israel, where he was arrested. After several years, he appealed to the emperor as a Roman citizen, and went to Rome, where he was eventually martyred.

I argue that almost nothing about the traditional story of Paul's early life is credible. Neither he nor his father were Pharisees. The tribe of Benjamin had disappeared centuries earlier. Paul never had a high position in the Temple guard, and he never went door-to-door persecuting Christians. His miraculous conversion was created to inflate his credentials, and he kept changing his story.

Paul's final mission in Israel is known only from Luke's account in the *Acts of the Apostles*. Most of it was a cover story that Luke himself contradicted. It is full of holes. Paul's arrest involved the collection for the poor, something that Luke always concealed.

This raises another issue. Just as we must distinguish Jesus from Paul's resurrected Christ, we must distinguish the historical Paul from Luke's hagiographic account of Paul in *Acts*. There are huge discrepancies between the two. The conventional Christian account generally picks whichever alternative favors Paul. For example, although much of First Corinthians involved the depravity of Paul's church—including incest—Luke suppressed all mention of this, as do nearly all professional Christians. Paul never mentioned performing a single miracle, but Luke's account is full of them, and they are favorite Christian stories.

Religious charlatans were rampant in the Roman Empire. Unless you were an aristocrat or had a highly-placed patron, this was one of the most lucrative professions available. It wasn't long before followers of Jesus became targets of con artists and grifters. *The Teaching of the Apostles*, or *Didache*, was an ancient manual for Christian living. It warned of Christ-hustlers or Christ-peddlers, and devoted almost as much space to them as it did to the teachings of Jesus. For example, it warned that only a Christ-hustler would take money for preaching the gospel. None of the apostles or emissaries of the Jerusalem Church did.

In Paul's very first letter, the Thessalonians accused him of using his gospel as "a cloak for greed," and forced

him to declare, “the appeal we make does not spring from delusion or sordid motive or from any attempt to deceive” (1 Thess. 2:3,5). The Corinthians forced him to deny he was “adulterating the word of God for profit,” a circumlocution for Christ-hustler.

My primary thesis is that Paul was a Christ-hustler. This not only explains the inconvenient facts mentioned earlier, it explains many other facts. No one has been able to develop a plausible chronology of Paul’s early years, despite a paucity of data to account for. Paul invented his history, and kept changing it. It also explains why Paul intentionally contradicted Jesus, and why he misrepresented the Bible to his ignorant Gentile flock. It explains many other puzzling matters, such as how he acquired his stigmata.

Authors often request their readers to suspend their *disbelief*. I ask you to suspend your *beliefs* and examine the facts, including many inconvenient facts that are usually suppressed. I challenge you to find a better way to explain them.