

About Paul

Paul Who?

Luke (scholars tell us) wrote the book of Acts about 25 years after Paul died. Around two-thirds of the book is devoted to the ministry of Paul. So Acts is a primary source of information about where Paul went, when he went there, and what he did while there. But Paul himself is another primary source of that information, having written at least seven of the New Testament epistles (including Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon).

Since the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit, producing God's infallible, inerrant Word, we would certainly expect Luke and Paul to be in agreement on the details of Paul's ministry. So, let's see if that turns out to be the case.

Acts 8:1-3:

And Saul approved of their killing him [Stephen].

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house [in Jerusalem, in Judea], he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 9:1-2:

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest [in Jerusalem, in Judea] and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Galatians 1:21-22:

Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

According to Luke, Paul (prior to his conversion) was quite busy persecuting Christians in Jerusalem, which is part of Judea. So the Christians in the churches there would have known about Paul and would have recognized him if they saw him. Yet Paul says the Christians in Judea didn't know him. How can that be?

Maybe Paul was wearing a ski mask?

When Did Paul Go to Jerusalem?

Paul says he delayed going there for three years. He also insists that he had no contact with the disciples prior to that.

Galatians 1:15-20:

But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.

But Luke says Paul went to Jerusalem and met with the disciples after spending only a few days in Damascus.

Acts 9:18-30:

Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Who is right? Luke or Paul? They can't both be right. Since Acts was written several years after Paul's death, Luke could have been mistaken. We would certainly expect Paul to be the most reliable source about his own activities. Especially when he makes such a big deal out of it, claiming that he is not lying. Sounds like a bit of a sore spot with Paul. But why? What would be wrong with him visiting the disciples as soon as possible in Jerusalem? After all, the apostles were the ones who actually

walked and talked with Jesus. They are considered the final authorities on Jesus' life and ministry, and the foundation on which Christianity's authenticity is based.

Well, Paul did have a good reason for staying away from the disciples for three years and for making a point of that fact in his letter to the Galatians. It was a matter of Paul's authority being challenged. He wanted the Galatians to know that his teachings were based on what he personally received directly from God – not second-hand from the disciples.

But Luke also had an agenda. It was important for him to establish that the original disciples and Paul were in complete harmony and had been from the beginning. There was no lack of continuity in their message. They were all on the same page.

So, once again, we see Bible authors molding the facts around their message, instead of basing their message on the facts. If Paul is wrong, his credibility is shot and his message is meaningless. If Luke is wrong, then he is not a reliable source. If he has so little regard for historical accuracy, then how can we have confidence in anything he says? Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts are badly compromised, and Christianity crumbles. Because if Luke is unreliable, who else may be equally unreliable? Or, more accurately, how can we be sure that anything in the Bible is true or accurate?

Paul's Logic

Have you ever wondered what went on in Paul's mind as he made the transition from Christian persecutor to Christian preacher? Let's see if we can follow Paul's logic each step of the way.

Let's start at the beginning, before Paul's dramatic conversion. He was a good Jew, and like all good Jews, Paul had very definite ideas about what the messiah would be like. Jews may have disagreed on many points, but they all agreed that the messiah would be a powerful and forceful figure who would usher in the Kingdom of God (on earth) with grandeur and majesty. After all, he was a unique figure in special favor with the Jewish God, and that would be manifest in his appearance and

conduct. Nobody entertained the notion that their Messiah would suffer and die.

That probably explains (although Paul never says so in so many words) why Paul considered faith in Christ blasphemy, and why he was so violently opposed to it. Jesus simply didn't match the description of the Jewish Messiah. For most of the first century, Jews considered the claim of Jesus as the Messiah as ludicrous, blasphemous, and just plain crazy.

1 Corinthians 1:23:

but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

But then something happened that forced Paul to rethink everything.

1 Corinthians 15:1-10:

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.

It was obvious and undeniable to Paul that Jesus was, in fact, alive. And that could mean only one thing. Jesus was, in fact, the messiah. The concept of resurrection was not totally foreign to Paul. His Jewish faith taught him that at the end of the

current evil age, when God ushered in His new Kingdom, all humans would be resurrected to face judgment. Some would be referred for eternal reward, and others would go on to eternal punishment. It hadn't worked out quite the way Paul (and virtually all Jews) expected it to, and Jesus certainly wasn't the messianic figure Paul (and all Jews) had hoped for, but there it was. Jesus was alive, and Jesus was, therefore, the messiah.

Why, then, had Jesus the Messiah died? It couldn't be, Paul reasoned, because of anything Jesus did wrong. Therefore, it must have been for the sins of others. But why did God have the messiah die for the sins of others? It must be because the Jewish system of sacrifices was simply inadequate, and only a human sacrifice could atone for the sins of all mankind. It wasn't, Paul reasoned, only the sins of Jews that had to be dealt with. Gentiles also had to be included in God's plan for dealing with the human problem. The Messiah had to be sacrificed for Gentile sins as well, and therefore, Gentiles must also accept that sacrifice in order for their sins to be atoned.

But what about the Jewish law? Hadn't the Jews been set apart as God's chosen people, and hadn't God given them the law as their means of staying in God's good graces? Paul had believed that a person could be right with God by strictly obeying God's law. Wasn't that enough? Apparently not, Paul reasoned. Otherwise, crucifixion of the messiah made no sense. Now, a person could be justified only by believing in Jesus' death and resurrection as God's atonement for our sins.

For Paul, everything had changed. It was no longer necessary to observe the Jewish law. That could not lead a person to justification, no matter how fastidiously he adhered to the letter of the law. As a matter of fact, observance of Jewish law was no longer an option, because it interfered with a proper understanding of Jesus' sacrifice. Observing the law indicated that a person still believed it was the means (or a means) to justification, and that could only lead to sin. Therefore, Gentiles were not to become Jews as a prerequisite to becoming a Christian. Paul was adamantly opposed to that approach.

Galatians 2:15-16:

“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified”.

Paul still felt it was necessary to live a good ethical life and generally abide by certain fundamental values inherent in the Jewish law, such as love your neighbor as yourself. For Paul, it wasn't a means of achieving justification, but a manifestation of justification.

But that put Paul at odds with Matthew, among others. Matthew was not willing to turn loose of Jewish law. Paul's formula was okay, but acceptance of Paul's paradigm was not enough in itself without also continuing to observe the law. In fact, in Matthew's thinking, strict observance of Jewish law was more important than ever.

Matthew 5:17-20:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

And there you have it. Matthew had a very important ally. Jesus Christ himself. Paul was wrong.

All this time, Christians have been quoting Paul and feeling quite secure in their salvation using Paul's construct. And all this time, Christians have been wrong. Either that, or Jesus was wrong. And

Matthew was wrong. Either or. Christians can't have it both ways.

So, you have the Holy Spirit inspiring and guiding the authors of God's holy Word, yielding an inerrant, infallible record of God's instructions for we mere mortals. And yet, the Bible contradicts itself again and again. Paul and Matthew are two of God's heaviest hitters. Of the two, Christians rely most heavily on Paul's paradigm for salvation. Yet Paul and Jesus give us diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive formulas for justification / salvation.

Millions of Christians think they are saved, when Jesus himself tells them that they must adhere to Jewish law, which modern Christians most certainly do not.

That's the oops of which there is no whicher. You really should have read your Bible.

When Did Paul Go to Athens?

1 Thessalonians 1:1:

**[From] Paul, Silas and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace to you.**

1 Thessalonians 3:1-2:

**So when we could stand it no longer, we
thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.
We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-
worker in God's service in spreading the gospel
of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in
your faith,**

So, according to Paul, Silas and Timothy traveled with Paul to Athens. After a while, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church there. But, according to Luke, Paul, Silas, and Timothy went together from Thessalonica to Berea. From there, Paul went alone to Athens, and then later went to Corinth, where he met up again with Silas and Timothy.

Acts 17:14-15:

The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

Acts 18:1:

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

Acts 18:5:

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

This is not a major discrepancy. It doesn't seem to have any significant implications for Christian faith or doctrine. It's perfectly understandable that two men might remember details of past events slightly differently. But, according to fundamentalist evangelicals, the Holy Spirit inspired and guided the Bible authors, eliminating errors and contradictions such as this. Clearly, they are wrong. This is just one of many examples of Bible errors, contradictions, and inconsistencies.

aPauling Politics

In Revelation 17 we get a portrait of Rome that is ugly and harsh. It clearly refers to Rome, the city built on seven hills.

But that is incompatible with Paul's words in Romans 13:1-7:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath

on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

So Paul is at odds with Revelation. Paul is also at odds with Thomas Jefferson and all the American Founding Fathers. According to the Declaration of Independence, human rights, including the right to choose our own form of government, derive from God, or a higher power than the government itself. Paul says just the opposite. For him, our rights and responsibilities derive from political and civic authority, and we are obligated to willingly submit to that authority and obey its directives. Period. Paul would never have supported the American Revolutionary War, and he seems to extend blanket approval to brutal dictatorships as well as democracies. To Paul, might makes right.

Paul would have had no problem with Hitler, apparently. . . . for it [government authority] is God's servant for your good. Really? Hitler was doing God's work? Maybe so. Hitler was a devout Catholic.

Did Paul Preach to Gentiles or Jews?

According to Luke, Paul's newly established congregations consisted of both Jews and gentiles.

Acts 17:4:

Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

But Paul says he converted only gentiles. There were other apostles, like Peter, who were missionaries to the Jews.

1 Thessalonians 1:9:

for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned

to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

1 Corinthians 12:2:

You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.

Galatians 2:8:

For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles.

Pagans, not Jews, worshipped idols. Those congregations were Gentiles, not Jews as Luke said.

But so what? What difference does it make? The significance is this: Fundagelicals (fundamentalist evangelicals) claim that the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible Word. That is obviously not true, since the Bible is full of errors, inconsistencies, and contradictions. And, that being the case, how can we possibly have confidence that any of it is accurate or reliable?

Although we learn quite a bit about Paul from his epistles, much of what we know (or think we know) about Paul comes only from the book of Acts, authored (purportedly) by Luke. Clearly, Luke is not a reliable source of historical information, because he disagrees with Paul on several points. Paul has greater credibility, since he should know better than anyone else what he did and said, when and where he did and said them. Especially considering that Luke wrote Acts some 20 or 25 years after Paul's death.

If, as I have shown to be the case, Luke gets so many details wrong, how can we trust anything he says? For example, it is only from Acts that we learn that: Paul came from Tarsus (Acts 21:39); he studied in Jerusalem with a Jewish rabbi named Gamaliel (22:3); he was a tentmaker and a Roman citizen (18:3, 22:27), he was arrested in Jerusalem and spent years in prison; that he ended up in Rome after appealing to Caesar for his trial (25:11). It is Luke's claim that when Paul went to a city to evangelize, he first went to the synagogue (14:1) to try to convert Jews, which is not consistent with what Paul says. Those historical tidbits are

extremely suspect in view of Luke's disregard for historical accuracy.

On the other hand, maybe Luke is right about all those things, and Paul is wrong. That would be a vastly bigger problem for Christians.

What Did Paul Say About Baptism?

Paul had very strong opinions about a lot of things, including baptism, sin, and the resurrection. He seems to have put a great deal more thought into those things than did Jesus or his disciples.

Romans 6:1-8:

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Paul taught that sin isn't just something people do. It is a force of evil in the world that controls human nature and prevents man from communion with God. Baptism isn't just something Christians do as a symbolic gesture of initiation into the faith. It also is a force – one that transforms our human nature from the evil of sin into the redemption of God's grace. It is a conscious decision made by responsible adults, not a ritual of sprinkling holy water on babies.

Death is the only means of escape from our sinful nature. Just as Jesus died, so we must die. Paul believed in a sort of universal suicide pact for the Lord. Symbolic, of course, but more than mere

symbolism or ritual. Only by death can we truly live, as Jesus lived after his resurrection. Baptism is the proper manifestation of that death and rebirth. But somewhere along the line the question came up about exactly when the rebirth, resurrection, or raising up part takes place. It would seem logical that it is embodied in the baptism, reflected in the rising up out of the baptismal water. But Paul would have none of that.

In Paul's theology, the rebirth in Christ, our resurrection, our raising up doesn't happen at baptism or conversion. It happens later. Notice in the above verses that Paul uses the future tense. That part of the process is reserved for Christ's return to earth to effect the great final judgment and usher in the Kingdom of God. Meanwhile, Christians are to eschew sin and live their lives as reborn believers, but Paul instructs his converts to not read too much into the baptism. But that's just what many of them were determined to do. Many converts believed they had already been raised with Christ and were already ruling with him.

Apparently, other converts had an entirely different take on resurrection, believing that there was no such thing. Paul had a few thoughts about that, also, in Romans 15:12-19, 29-34:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?

And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? I die every day! That is as certain, brothers and sisters, as my boasting of you—a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

Obviously, Paul had his hands full keeping his converts on the right track. That's what a big part of 1 Corinthians is all about. So, let's consider what he has to say on the subject in a couple of other NT books traditionally ascribed to him.

Ephesians 2:5-6:

even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

That doesn't sound like the Paul of 1 Corinthians. In fact, it directly contradicts Paul's strong view that the raising up has not yet happened; it is a future event, scheduled for the return of Christ as He ushers in the Kingdom of God. Colossians 2:13 is similar. This is one reason why Paul is probably not the author of Colossians or Ephesians. Another reason is that the writing styles and vocabularies do not match Paul's known writings.

So, here is yet another contradiction in God's inspired, inerrant, infallible Word. We are raised up with Christ at baptism. We are raised up with Christ only at the end of times, when Christ returns to earth for the final judgment, resurrection, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Which is it? It can't be both.

We should also take notice that none of this stuff comes from Jesus. This is all Paul and whoever was impersonating him. Jesus never got that far, at least according to Mark's portrait of Jesus. Mark's

Jesus simply preached the traditional Jewish apocalyptic message of the coming Messiah's establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. According to Jesus, that was imminent. Jesus said it would happen during the lifetime of many of his listeners. That being the case, Paul's more elaborate eschatology would have been unnecessary and irrelevant.

So, who do Christians worship? Jesus / God, or Paul? How did Paul get to be such an expert? He never met Jesus. He didn't hang around with any of the disciples. He deliberately stayed away from them for at least 3 years, and even then he met with only one or two of them. Paul says he got his information directly from God. But so did the disciples, didn't they (if Jesus and God are one, as fundagelicals claim)? Paul's insights were certainly no more directly from God than Jesus' insights. Why didn't Jesus tell his disciples (and us) about any of Paul's ideas about baptism, sin, and eschatology? To Jesus, sin was simply failing to adhere to Jewish law.

Is it Christianity or Paulianity? Did Paul die for your sins? If Paul's direct line to God was so great, why did God need the disciples at all? Mark was the first canonical gospel written, and it didn't exist before Paul started his writings. Paul didn't need the disciples. Why would God reveal more to Paul than he did to his only begotten son and his closest followers?