

The Puzzle of Paul

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Do you find the Apostle Paul's contradictions puzzling? How can Paul say in one place that women must keep silent and have no authority within the church (1 Timothy 2), but in another place, praise the leadership of a woman "deacon" and an "apostle" (Romans 16)? Or what about the places where Paul seems perfectly comfortable with the practice of slavery (Colossians 3, Ephesians 6, Titus 2), but in his letter to Philemon he all but twists Philemon's arm to persuade the Christian slave owner to free his runaway Christian slave, Onesimus? Or have you found it strange that there is no mention in Acts of the thirteen letters attributed to Paul in the New Testament— How could someone write the story of Paul's life without referring to any of his letters or citing at least some of their content?

Session #1—Introduction to the Puzzle of Paul

First, let's recall a class done at Trinity Cathedral in February 2020, focused on a book by Stephen Patterson, *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity's Original Struggle Against Bigotry, Slavery, and Sexism* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

That book addresses the radical declaration of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:27-28: **"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."**

In a way, this class will be a sequel to that earlier class. This class will examine the fading of this original vision of radical egalitarianism, anti-patriarchy, and anti-hierarchy in the generations that followed Paul. Later generations continued to produce 'letters' in the name of Paul, but they progressively lost the original radical vision. Reflection question: how have we done over the past two thousand years in reclaiming and realizing Paul's original vision? Don't we still have a long way to go yet?

Session #2—The Four 'Pauls' in the New Testament, including the "Household Codes" in the Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral Letters

- News flash: Paul did not write all of the letters in the New Testament that bear his name. Of the 13 letters attributed to Paul (about half the New Testament!), we can only be confident that he wrote 7. After Paul was martyred, Christians who revered him wrote letters in his name for many years, seeking to keep his authority alive, but in fact advancing new ideas and new understandings of the Christian faith.

We will need to discuss briefly the phenomenon of "pseudonymity" ('writing under a false name') in antiquity. ("Anonymity" was also common.) Pseudonymity was not necessarily a sneaky or underhanded practice. Rather, it was a common way for a writer to honor and to capitalize upon the high regard with which a figure of an earlier generation was held. It turns out that there are four different versions of 'Paul' in the New Testament, which we will sketch *very* briefly.

- For the purposes of this class, the major innovation introduced by the authors of the pseudonymous letters of Paul was to advocate that Christians should live by "household codes" that describe the proper attitude and behavior of husband & wife, father & child, and master & slave. The radical, egalitarian, anti-patriarchal, anti-hierarchical Paul of the 7 indisputable letters never breathes a word about such household codes. However, the 'Paul' of the pseudonymous letters invokes a household code three times, and in other ways as well abandons the liberating vision of the authentic, historical Paul.

Session #3—'Paul' versus 'Paul' on Gender Roles in the Ekklesia**Session #4—'Paul' versus 'Paul' on Slavery in the Ekklesia****Session #5—'Paul' versus 'Paul' on the Fate of Israel****Recommended Resources****Books:**

Stephen Patterson, *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity's Original Struggle Against Bigotry, Slavery, and Sexism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)

Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon* (New York: HarperOne, 2009)

Bernard Brandon Scott, *The Real Paul: Recovering his Radical Challenge* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2015)

Websites:

Elli Elliott, "Which Letters Did Paul Write?," <https://biblesr.org/thesearch/which-letters-did-paul-write/> (Bible Search & Rescue is reliable resource for Bible study created by biblical scholars)

Katy E. Valentine, "Slavery in the New Testament," <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/slavery-in-the-new-testament/> (Bible Odyssey is another trustworthy academic resource providing accessible treatments of an array of biblical topics)

Biblical Archaeology Society, <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/> (another fine resource, but this one accompanies a print magazine and therefore requires a modest subscription for full access)

Bible Gateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/> (A reliable resource offering many translations of the Bible, including the new NRSVue)

Session #2—The Four 'Pauls' in the New Testament, including the "Household Codes" in the Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral Letters**• The 'Four Pauls' in the New Testament (see the handout below)**

• Let's consider "anonymity" and "pseudonymity," both of which were huge in the ancient world. The authorial claim to "copyright" protection is modern, print-culture phenomenon, totally alien to the ancient world, in which 80-90% of the population could not read or write.

Why do we think that 6 of the 13 letters attributed to Paul were not written by Paul?

• The authentic letters are typically written to specific groups of Christians, addressing concrete issues and concerns; the inauthentic letters lose that concrete specificity

- The pseudonymous letters are therefore not actually real letters as much as theological essays dressed up as letters
- New vocabulary and ideas are introduced; old language and ideas that originated with Paul are interpreted in new ways
- Different writing styles: Paul writes in short, choppy sentences; the pseudonymous Paul writes in long, flowing sentences that we would call paragraphs
- The implicit theology of the pseudonymous letters goes far beyond that of the authentic letters. E.g., "Christology" becomes much 'higher'-- Colossians 1:15ff. Paul's apocalyptic fervor cools; Jesus is no longer expected to come again soon, any second now. Etc.
- Movement toward institutionalization of the Jesus Movement. Formal leadership roles are emerging. A yearning for "sound doctrine" is emerging; we are on our way toward creeds. There are even some signs that a move toward a canon of scripture is under way.
- The radical egalitarianism of Paul is abandoned, and good old-fashioned Mediterranean hierarchy and patriarchy has reasserted itself in the household codes.
- Etc.

• **Household Codes, mostly in the Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral letters (plus 1 Peter)** (see the handout below)

Session #3—'Paul' versus 'Paul' on Gender Roles in the Ekklesia

1 Timothy 2:8-14 2:8 I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument, 9 also that the women should dress themselves in moderate clothing with reverence and self-control, not with their hair braided or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, 10 but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. 11 Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve, 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and	Romans 16:1-7 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, 2 so that you may welcome her in the Lord, as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. 3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the gentiles. 5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Israelites who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. [NRSVue] 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 7:1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to touch a
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love and holiness, with self-control. [NRSVue] 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 (As in all the churches of the saints, 34 women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?) [NRSV]	woman.” 2 But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife what is due her and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 This I say by way of concession, not of command. 7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. [NRSVue]
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Session #4—'Paul' versus 'Paul' on Slavery in the Ekklesia

Colossians 3:22-24 3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not with a slavery performed merely for looks, to please people, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord., 23 Whatever task you must do, work as if your soul depends on it, as for the Lord and not for humans, 24 since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. [NRSVue] Ephesians 6:5-8 6:5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ, 6 not with a slavery performed	Philemon 1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To our beloved coworker Philemon, 2 to our sister Apphia, to our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the church in your house: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always when I mention you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that the partnership of your faith may become effective as you comprehend all the good that we share in Christ. 7 I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother. 8 For this reason, though I am more than bold enough in Christ to command you to do the right thing, 9 yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. 10 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me. 12 I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. 13 I wanted to keep him with me so that he might minister to me in your place during my
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merely for looks, to please people, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul. 7 Render service with enthusiasm, as for the Lord and not for humans, 8 knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are enslaved or free. [NRSVue]

Titus 2:9-10

2:9 Urge slaves to be submissive to their masters in everything, to be pleasing, not talking back, 10 not stealing, but showing complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the teaching of God our Savior. [NRSVue]

imprisonment for the gospel, 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. 15 Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for the long term, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. 20 Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

22 One thing more: prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my coworkers.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. [NRSVue]

Session #5—'Paul' versus 'Paul' on the Fate of Israel

- Although 13 letters are attributed to Paul in the NT, the author of Acts never makes mention of any of them.
- Neither does Acts invoke Paul's typical vocabulary or ideas (no "justification by grace through faith," etc.).
- Acts is largely responsible for establishing the tradition of the "Twelve Apostles." But according to Acts, Paul could not be an apostle, because he was not a follower and companion of Jesus during his lifetime. According to Paul, however, not only was he an "apostle," but there were apparently many other apostles as well, including women.
- Throughout Luke and Acts, Roman officials routinely question or even put Jesus or his followers on trial and invariably judge them to be innocent and no threat to the peace, implying strongly that Rome is no threat at all to the Jesus Movement. How convenient, since Acts ends with Paul preaching freely in Rome (albeit under house arrest).
- At the same time, Acts several times sharply accuses Jews of killing Jesus, not Rome: Acts 2:23, 36; 3:14-15; 7:52. Thus does Acts imply that Jews are "Christ killers." But FYI, crucifixion was Roman punishment, not Jewish. Rome killed Jesus, not Jews.
- Paul identifies himself as an "apostle of Jesus Christ to the gentiles." However, Acts portrays Paul repeatedly preaching first to Jews, but then turning to gentiles in

frustration after the Jews reject his message. By the end of Acts, it appears that Paul has given up any hope that Jews will join the Jesus Movement. Only with gentiles is there hope for the future of the Jesus Movement. Thus does Acts pave the way for the development of Christian "supersessionism," or what we might call in today's language, "replacement theory."

Acts 13:46

Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the gentiles.

Acts 18:5-6

5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. 6 When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the gentiles."

Acts 28:23-31

23 After they had set a day to meet with him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. 24 Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. 25 So they disagreed with each other, and as they were leaving Paul made one further statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah,

26 'Go to this people and say,

You will indeed listen but never understand,

Galatians 3:28

There is no longer Jew or Greek...for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Romans 10:12

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all...

Romans 11:1-2

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

Romans 11:13-24

13 Now I am speaking to you gentiles. Inasmuch as I am an apostle to the gentiles, I celebrate my ministry 14 in order to make my own people jealous and thus save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy.

17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted among the others to share the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember: you do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 That is true. They were broken off on account of unbelief, but you stand on account of

and you will indeed look but never perceive.

27 For this people's heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
otherwise they might look with their eyes
and listen with their ears
and understand with their heart and
turn—
and I would heal them.'

28 "Let it be known to you, then, that this
salvation of God has been sent to the
gentiles; they will listen."

30 He lived there two whole years at his
own expense and welcomed all who
came to him, 31 proclaiming the
kingdom of God and teaching about the
Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and
without hindrance.

belief. So do not become arrogant, but be
afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the
natural branches, neither will he spare
you. 22 Note then the kindness and the
severity of God: severity toward those
who have fallen but God's kindness
toward you, if you continue in his
kindness; otherwise you also will be cut
off. 23 And even those of Israel, if they do
not continue in unbelief, will be grafted
in, for God has the power to graft them in
again. 24 For if you have been cut from
what is by nature a wild olive tree and
grafted, contrary to nature, into a
cultivated olive tree, how much more
will these natural branches be grafted
back into their own olive tree.

The 'Four Pauls' in the New Testament, according to John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg, in the video series, *Eclipsing Empire*, and in their book, *The First Paul*

"The Radical Paul"	"The Liberal Paul"	"The Conservative Paul"	"The Reactionary Paul"
Authentic Letters of Paul • Romans • 1 & 2 Corinthians • Galatians • Philippians • 1 Thessalonians • Philemon	• The Acts of the Apostles	Deutero-Pauline Letters • Ephesians • Colossians • 2 Thessalonians	Pastoral Letters • 1 & 2 Timothy • Titus
Written by Paul himself, probably in the 50s CE	Attributed traditionally to "Luke, the physician," but the author is actually anonymous. Written after the Gospel of Luke in the late first century CE or early second century CE	Written in the name of Paul within one generation of Paul's martyrdom in the early 60s CE, thus 70s or 80s CE	Written in the name of Paul two generations after Paul's death, thus at the end of the first century or beginning of the second century CE
"the radical Paul"—the actual, historical Paul; see the radical, egalitarian, anti-hierarchical Paul in Galatians 3:28 and elsewhere	a fairly "liberal" version of Paul, but Paul's original radicalism is beginning to fade away, and there are serious differences between Luke's portrayal of Paul and the radical Paul	"the conservative Paul" or "pseudo-Paul"—big steps taken toward domesticating Paul's radical egalitarianism	"the reactionary Paul" or "anti-Paul"—the transformation is completed: Paul has been totally transformed into an androcentric, patriarchal, hierarchical traditionalist

Household Codes, mostly in the Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral letters (plus 1 Peter)

Colossians 3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. 22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, 24 since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. 4:1 Masters, treat your	Ephesians 5:22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, 27 so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” 32 This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. 33 Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband. 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: 3 “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” 4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. 5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; 6 not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, 8 knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.	1 Peter 2:13 For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, 14 or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. 15 For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. 16 As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. 17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor. 18 Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. 19 For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. 20 If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 22 “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” 23 When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. 3:1 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives’ conduct, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. 3 Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; 4 rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God’s sight. 5 It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. 6 Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you. 7 Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.	Titus 2:1 But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. 2 Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance. 3 Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited. 6 Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. 7 Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, 8 and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us. 9 Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, 10 not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an
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slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.	<u>9</u> And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.		ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior.
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James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), p. 249. "**Aristotle considered the slave/master polarity one of the fundamental bases on which all of society is built.** The opening of his political treatise includes these words: 'Now that it is clear what are the components of the state, we have first of all to discuss household management; for **every state is composed of households. . . . The investigation of everything should begin with the smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children;** we ought therefore to examine the proper constitution and character of each of these relationships, I mean that of mastership, that of marriage . . . and thirdly the progenitive relationship.'" [Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1253b]