

Paul the Apostle: The Radical Equality of the Gospel

We began our study with the accusations against Paul that

1. He “created” Christianity by twisting the religion *of Jesus* into a religion *about Jesus*;
2. He hated Jews and Judaism; and
3. He supported slavery and the subjugation of women.

To find out if these charges are true we have been working with the following assumption: You can only understand Paul by understanding *the world in which he lived, the people to whom he was sent, and the goal of his work, that is, what he hoped would result from his work and God’s action.*

The Jewish Message of Jesus Through Paul to the World

We have seen that his “world” was made up of the Jewish world of Shammaite Phariseeism transformed by his encounter with the risen Christ, but no less Jewish, and the Hellenistic Roman world of Imperial Religion centered on Caesar and his military conquests. We have seen the conflict that these worlds in Paul must have created as Paul’s message radically subverted Rome’s claims and authority. We have seen that Paul was fundamentally a Jew and that his entire mission was to take the message of the Jewish faith to the Roman world. That message was

1. There is one God over all the earth, one source of all life, all things, all peoples; and that
2. God promised to bless all peoples through the descendants of Abraham and Sarah,
3. By creating a world where the poor were raised up, and immigrants, widows and orphans were no longer disadvantaged, where the King was God’s own “son” who would bring justice to all; and
4. That God was now fulfilling and transforming that ancient promise through the life, death, and resurrection of the Jew, Jesus from Nazareth by calling all people to
5. A new way of life by living *in Christ*, in *the body of Christ*, a *Spirit-led* life of repentance and joy through prayer, worship, love and service to the neighbor in opposition to a world wracked by war, injustice, mass poverty, slavery, and murderous ethnic tensions.
6. This message claimed that God chooses to work in the world not through power, domination, and arms, but through weakness, taking the form of a servant who is utterly powerless and killed;
7. But who is vindicated by overcoming death in resurrection, thus giving the lie to death’s claim to ultimacy. For if death can be defeated, what is there left to fear?

We have seen that Paul didn’t create the gospel message and didn’t create Christianity (he wasn’t even a Christian!), but built on the work that Jesus began before execution, and upon the work already begun by the followers of Jesus Paul met after his encounter with the risen Christ. Moreover, Paul’s experience of the risen Christ was not only a confirmation of his “call” to be an apostle, but was an ongoing experience he continued to have well into his ministry, if not to the end of his life (*2 Corinthians 12*)

We have looked at Paul’s audience of primarily Greek-speaking Gentiles (non-Jews of many ethnic backgrounds) who have been driven to the great cities of the Empire as a result of the increasing commercialization and commodification of agriculture occurring throughout the centuries immediately before and after the birth of Jesus (4 BCE). We saw that the conditions of urban Roman life could be cruel and short for the new urban dwellers, peasants, artisans, freed-slaves, day laborers and others. And that such conditions worsened the usual ethnic tensions that are often found where differing groups are thrown together to compete for scarce resources. Loneliness, fear, extreme poverty, illness and debilitating injury, child labor, the death of parents and children, with a person’s end to be anonymously thrown out into the garbage dumps and burned without ceremony, recognition, or remembrance. What

kind of message would be “good news” to people living in such conditions? Can you understand how attractive was Paul’s radical message of life in the body of Christ as the preparation for the coming Kingdom of God? Paul taught that when Christ returned all the promises of justice that God had given to Abraham, Sarah, and all the prophets throughout history would at last be fulfilled. God would establish a government of true peace and true justice, where no ethnic groups were favored, where women and men were completely equal in status and leadership, where slavery was ended forever, where those more fortunate gladly shared with those who had less.

Now we are going to look at Paul’s primary goal and his expectations for his mission.

Paul’s Expectation for the Results of His Gospel

Paul believes that the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was the signal from God that the promise that God gave to Abraham that all the world would be blessed through Israel, that all the nations would be part of God’s new order of justice and peace was about to be finally fulfilled.

His entire mission to the Gentiles was predicated on his belief that Christ was going to return to call all nations to live out the prophetic visions of Jeremiah and Isaiah, of Amos and Hosea. He saw his mission as getting the Gentiles ready for the kingdom, and opposing the old order of Rome with its “Peace through Victory” campaigns that slaughtered hundreds of thousands, made entire peoples into slaves and burned to the ground city after city in the Anointed Caesar’s triumph. Rome’s “Good News” of peace and prosperity through power and status based on wealth, family, and arms was the opposite of Paul’s gospel of a crucified Anointed leader .

The issues of slavery and the role of women in church and society in Paul’s thought and ministry must be seen in that context.

Let’s start by looking at his most important letter. The one he wrote to the Christians in Rome. What does it tell us about Paul’s understanding of women?

Paul and the Role of Women

Read Romans 16.

How many times have I read this chapter, No, *not* read it, but skipped over it quickly because it didn’t seem to have any meat in it? It seemed like an early version of social networking, a sort of hand-delivered Facebook that delivers a single message to a select network of friends.

Who are all these people? And why are they all in Rome? They are from all over Asia Minor. They are the cream of the crop of the leadership of the churches that Paul founded. He has sent them in advance of his arrival. There are least 27 people listed here, and there are probably more that traveled with them. That is an extraordinary event. This is the first century, remember. While Roman roads made travel and commerce possible more than at any time in history, it must have been highly unusual for that many people to all end up in Rome at one time for a single purpose. They are gathered from different parts of the Empire, drawn from different walks of life, likely from different ethnic groups, mostly working in their second or third language, Greek, and possibly Latin. Imagine you are a CIA analyst. What would you think? Is there a pattern here? What if all these people represented an ideology not just different from yours, but opposed to yours. And they all ended up from all over the world in Washington, DC?

Let’s look more closely at these some 27 people whom Paul has hand-selected from the leadership of his churches across Asia Minor. This is his crack team. The finest leaders he had. They had proven their leadership skills, their maturity, their understanding of the mission, and their fearless commitment to the cause.

The thing that jumps out immediately is perhaps the most unexpected of all. It is hard to believe. You have to rub your eyes and scratch your head. How can this be? This is the First Century of the Common Era! It's not the 21st Century. In fact, this list of name is so highly unusual that you virtually NEVER see a list like this again. Even today, you see it only rarely, and only in certain quarters. What is so surprising? Let's look further.

Remember, this isn't just a list of people who are on vacation, taking the sights in Rome. They have been chosen by Paul for one over-riding purpose. He plans to take the gospel to Spain and on up to Europe. He has assembled this team of leaders to help him prepare for this breathtaking mission into Europe. Their job is to help marshal the support and finances from the churches in Rome that Paul will need for going to Spain, churches Paul has never visited, led by people he does not know.

He is worried that the controversies he's had elsewhere with his opponents from Jerusalem will have gotten to Rome ahead of him and will undermine his attempt to start the European mission. Remember that his opponents, many of whom seem to be supporters of James of Jerusalem (Jesus' brother) are demanding that if Gentiles want to become followers of Jesus they must go through the traditional Jewish rite of conversion, including circumcision.

Paul knows that the huge undertaking he is planning cannot be done the way he envisions it without strong backing from the believers in Rome. So, he writes a letter to the churches in Rome explaining his purpose and explaining his understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially in the Roman context of Emperor worship. He also has to present as clearly as he can his understanding of the relationship between Gentiles and Jews, and thus whether the Jewish law applies equally to Gentile believers in Christ.

It is an incredibly delicate task, full of risks and dangers, not the least from Rome itself, if this letter falls into the wrong hands. But, equally important is the theological substance of the letter and whether God's grace is sufficient for Gentiles to be accepted as they are or whether they must they, like Jewish believers, also follow the Law that God gave to Moses. A misstep on either the political front or the theological front will doom Paul's mission.

He knows that his Jewish-Christian enemies have been to Rome. There has been turmoil in the Jewish quarter in Rome, where the followers of Jesus live, as most are probably Jews. But, just as in Paul's churches there is a growing number of Gentiles in the fellowship, as well. The tensions between them are growing. The Roman authorities are suspicious. The leadership in Jerusalem where most of Jesus' original disciples are centered seem to be ambivalent about Paul's interpretation of the gospel to the Gentiles. On one hand they've approved of it to Paul's face. On the other hand there is a steady stream of opposition and hostility flowing out from the circles around the disciples, especially James.

Emissaries are sent to every church that Paul founded declaring that Paul is wrong and that Gentiles must be circumcised, keep kosher, and follow the Mosaic Law if they are to be a part of Jesus' new community. The leadership around James and the Twelve in Jerusalem know of Paul's vision to carry the gospel to Spain via Rome. In their eyes, Rome may be their last chance to save their movement and their understanding of Jesus from the domination of Paul and the Gentiles. For them, a bastardized church of clean and unclean, where there is no distinction between those who honor God's law and those loose-living Gentiles, is a rejection of Jesus. Paul must be stopped. Stopped in Rome.

The stage is set for an explosive conflict. Paul pours his heart and soul into writing a letter to Jesus' followers in Rome. He's never written anything like this letter before. It's theological erudition, its biblical knowledge and commentary, it's extraordinary scope and sense of the largeness of God's openness and love. It is his last letter. He, of course doesn't know that, but does he have an inkling, an

unconscious awareness? Read the 8th Chapter, verses 31-39 of this letter. No letter in history has been written with such logic and passion and with such an historic effect. But he knows that even it will not be enough to turn the tide against him.

He will arrive there to make the case himself. But he knows that even he, Paul the Apostle, even in person, can't rise above the forces gathering against him. He needs help. Thus he begins planning his campaign. He looks over the lifetime of his extraordinary ministry and identifies the very best, most able leaders he's ever met and sends them to Rome in advance to persuade the Jews and Gentile believers in Rome that Paul is not a renegade. And then, of them, he picks one to carry the letter itself. Who is this extraordinary person in whom Paul places so much trust? This will not be an ordinary letter carrier who delivers the mail and moves on. The bearer of this letter will be responsible for reading it aloud to the gathered assemblies wherever they are in Rome and explaining it, answering questions of the most difficult kind having to do with the Mosaic Law, the teaching of Jesus, the meaning of the resurrection, the coming of God's Kingdom, the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish believers, the tension between Law and grace, ethics and forgiveness, the role of the Spirit, relations with the Roman government, even God's plan for nature and non-human creatures. And let's not forget Paul's controversies with Jesus' disciples in Jerusalem.

Now, let's stop for a minute and look at the impact of Paul's letter to the Romans. I think it can safely be said that no letter in human history has had such consequences. No letter has been as widely read. No letter has been more debated. No letter has entered into the vocabulary, thought-worlds and culture of more people than this letter. And certainly no letter in history, written by Paul or anyone else, has produced more books that attempt to explain and understand it. The greatest most important theologians, philosophers, and biblical scholars in the past two thousand years have studied and written on this letter. People like Augustine, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Luther, Calvin, Isaac Newton, Leibniz, Karl Barth, Rudolph Bultmann, and more. Churches have been founded on its interpretation; others have split over it. So, who on earth could Paul possibly have identified and chosen as the one person he entrusted with this most important letter.

It was Phoebe. She was a church leader from Cenchræ, one of the two port cities of Corinth. She is probably a skilled organizer and administrator in the port city of Corinth. Paul had depended on her in the past and he knew he could trust her with such a critical task

And who are the other 27 leaders from all over Asia Minor that Paul had assemble in Rome? Chapter 16 lists them, but the most striking phenomenon is that at least ten, or more than a third of his crack advance team were *women*. If Paul is supposed to think women are second class citizens in church and society and are to be subjugated to men, why are a third of his most trusted leaders women? Moreover, examine what he says about the ten women among the 27 leaders, plus Phoebe, that he names.

The list, not surprisingly is headed by **Phoebe**.

Prisca and Aquila, are listed as "fellow workers in Christ" who risked their necks for Paul's life. He feels that not only he but the all the Gentile churches are in their debt. They were Jews who had been expelled from Rome by Claudius Caesar in 49 CE. They went to Corinth and ran a tent or awning business and may have hired Paul as an awning maker. One of the Corinthian churches meets in their home or possibly shop. He took them with him to Ephesus and left them there to build up the church he founded, Prisca being the more prominent one of the two. They even took under their wing the convert Apollos, one of the most dynamic of the gospel teachers, and trained him.

Andronicus and Junia, of whom Paul writes, "my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was." By relatives he means either fellow

Jews or perhaps fellow townspeople from Tarsus. But note the term “apostles.” As we have seen previously the word in Greek is from the word *apostelein*, which means “to send.” The word “apostle” had become a technical term in the early church applied only to those who had seen the resurrected Christ and received from Christ a commission, or was “sent.” Thus Andronicus and Junia have the same status as Paul himself, and for Paul, at least, the same status as James, Jesus’ brother and Peter, John, and the rest of the Twelve. They are one of the many husband and wife teams that were sent out to tell the good news of Jesus (e.g., James and his wife, Peter and his wife and others- cf. 1Cor 9:5). However, by about the ninth century, the leadership of the church become increasingly male-dominated and this reference to a woman as an apostle became embarrassing. Suddenly manuscripts began appearing that changed Junia’s name to Junias implying that this “apostle” was a man, not a woman. The problem is that in all of Greek and Roman literature there is no reference to the name *Junias*. It does not seem to be a name, all, while the name Junia is a common female name.

Mary, who has “worked very hard” among you. This phrase *worked hard* is a term that Paul uses for himself to describe his labors as an apostle.

Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Similarly, “Workers in the Lord,” implied leadership with Paul in evangelizing, reaching out to and training new converts. So, also, beloved **Persis**, who has “worked hard in the Lord.”

Rufus and his mother— Paul says Rufus’s mother has been like a mother to him, too. This may be a metaphor for her having “labored” to bring Paul to his new life in Christ. Was she one of the people who was instrumental in Paul’s training as a new Christian? Also note that family terms like mother, father, sister and brother were used to identify each other as followers of Jesus.

This may have been one of Paul’s most important contributions to the faith of Jesus he inherited, the idea that believers are as family to each other. Ethnic origin is set aside in the church. All Christians are sister and brother to one another and some are mother and father, meaning that they were responsible for training in the faith. Paul saw the whole world as a single household, whose householder was God. Thus all were equal, as in a family. Though they had differing responsibilities, none of those responsibilities were more important than any other.

Julia, Nereus and his sister. Here we don’t know if Nereus unnamed “sister” is his wife or his actual sister. They may be yet another married couple.

Add to this list in Paul’s letter to Rome another married couple he mentions in Philippians 4.3, **Euodia and Syntyche**.

Paul clearly not only relies on many women, includes them in establishing his special mission in Rome to take the Gospel to Spain, but praises them for their courage, their dedication, their skill, their leadership, and their faithfulness, even identifying some of them as *apostles* and *prophets*.

This identification of women as *apostles* and *prophets* is crucial to understanding not only Paul, but the early church in general. It is doubtful that Paul would have called someone an apostle on his own. An apostle was someone who was publicly known by the earliest followers as someone who had seen the resurrected Jesus and been given a commission. This was public knowledge that Paul learned when he began following Christ. The term *prophet* is almost as important. In the list of callings or vocations in Paul’s letters, the first three listed are always *apostles, prophets and teachers*:

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all

prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Cor 12: 27-30)

What is striking about this passage is that in the list of gifts Paul says that God's Spirit gives for the ordering and building up of the church, every single one of them was a gift that Paul recognizes as being given to women equally with men. Notice what these gifts are for. They are for leadership, teaching, preaching, evangelism, and healing: public leadership for the building of the church of Jesus Christ.

So, if it is clear that Paul's practice and teaching promoted equality between men and women how do we explain some of the troubling passages about women in Paul's letters.

In one of them, 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is dealing with some problem about which we don't have enough information to know what is going on. But what we do know is that there are women prophets in the Corinthian churches, and presumably in other churches that Paul has founded. There is some controversy about women prophesying with uncovered heads:

but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—(1 Corinthians 11:5)

Whatever the issue regarding head-covering was, the real issue regarding Paul's understanding of women and his relationship to them is that Paul recognized the authority of women to speak publicly in the church on matters of utmost importance. The role of the prophet was varied, sometimes it may have been some speech based on ecstatic utterances— speaking in tongues— but it primarily was a voice of criticism and reform. Much as the role of prophet in the Old Testament and Jesus as a prophet. It was the prophet's job to stand in the Temple and speak the word of God. And here, once again, Paul demonstrates his teaching that the gospel brings and requires equality. It is clear, therefore, that women played a leadership role in the ordering and teaching of the faithful in Paul's churches.

So given all of the evidence for Paul's quite radical understanding of equality, how did Paul get the reputation for being a hater of women? Let's look at 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹²I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

Or Titus 2:2-6

²Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.

³Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, ⁴so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵to 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.

In the first passage, from 1 Timothy, it couldn't be clearer: women are to be silent, and not only silent, but they are not permitted to teach or have authority over a man. And astonishingly her destiny has nothing to do with her relationship with Christ and God, but whether or not she gets pregnant!

In the second passage, from Titus 2, instructions are given that seem to pertain to men in vs 2 and vs. 6. But look at the instructions for women, depending on how you count it's at least more than 10 rules for women to 1 for men, as vs. 6 is just a repeat of vs. 1.

How could Paul who practiced such radical equality, and taught that it was required by the gospel write such unequal rules for men and women?

The answer to the puzzle is that, according to the majority of New Testament scholars the epistles to Timothy and Titus were not actually written by Paul. They reflect the conditions of the church toward the end of the first century or later, not the conditions that existed during Paul's lifetime. One of the concerns of these letters is to avoid being too noticed in the Roman society and by the Roman government. Gone entirely is Paul's radical opposition to Roman hierarchical and Imperial rule. Gone entirely is Paul's opposition to slavery and his expectation of complete equality. A new ethic has supplanted Paul's and domesticated his radical vision of the coming reign of Christ in which the Gentiles are brought into the Covenant with Abraham and there is no superiority among ethnic groups, slaves and owners and men and women.

But, what about this passage from 1 Cor 14. This is clearly one of Paul's letters.

As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. ³⁵If 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. ³⁶Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?

How do we make sense of that? Is this the same Paul who appointed women as leaders in his churches? This passage clearly says women should be silent in the churches and that it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

Let's look closely at the passage. Paul is writing about the chaos that has broken out in the Corinthian church during worship, and every other meeting, it seems. Here is the passage as we have it in our Bibles:

Orderly Worship

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

²⁶ What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. ²⁷If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. ²⁸But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. ²⁹Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. ³¹For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. ³²And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, ³³ for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. ³⁵If 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?

³⁷ Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. ³⁸ Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. ³⁹So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; ⁴⁰but all things should be done decently and in order.

There are three paragraphs in our English text. What is the subject of the first paragraph? Prophets and disorder And the second? Women. And the third? Prophets and disorder.

Now, look at the passage again:

²⁶ What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. ²⁷If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. ²⁸But if there is no

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³⁷ Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. ³⁸ Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. ³⁹So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; ⁴⁰but all things should be done decently and in order.

It reads better doesn't it? The subject of paragraph one, prophets making utterances without regard for orderliness, continues on in what is now paragraph two, with the same subject.

Most scholars, but not all, now believe that the section about women speaking in church is an insertion made later in the century, perhaps drawing on the passages from Titus and 1 Timothy. In fact, some English translations now put that entire section about women in parentheses. It does seem to be a later interpolation. There are good reasons, not just because it matches our modern sensibilities, for judging that the passage about women has been inserted in Paul's letter.

One, there are ancient manuscripts that do not have that passage at all.

Two, it clearly reads better and makes more sense. Remember there were no paragraphs in Paul's Greek letter, so the sudden appearance of a totally different subject would have been even more jarring than it is to us, today, and

Three, it totally disagrees with the bulk of Paul's writing in his other letters.

It seems clear that Paul's radical vision of equality has been undermined by developments in the later church in the apparent desire not to draw too much attention from the Roman authorities and their own neighbors. It was becoming increasingly dangerous to be a Christian in some parts of the Roman Empire. You can understand that a conservative leadership might have arisen, more concerned with the maintenance of the church than with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul and Slavery

Slavery is a similar issue to that of women. We find in Paul's letter to Philemon a strong statement that slavery is no longer acceptable in the household of God. Let us go through Philemon together and see Paul's unwavering commitment to equality, not just in faith, not just in "spiritual" matters, but in daily public and economic life as well. (*Read the Letter to Philemon*)

Now compare Philemon with the following passage in Colossians 3: 22-4:1.

²²Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, ²⁴since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality.

¹Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

And another from Ephesians 6.

⁵Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; ⁶not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, ⁸knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

⁹ 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.

Once again, we find the same pattern that we found with the passages about women. The commands to masters is one line and is very general, while the commands to slaves are basically put up and shut up and do it with joy in your heart. An owner might consider beating a slave as “just and fair” if it is thought that slaves are not of the same value as owners.

As you probably guessed, these two passages are from letters that are in dispute among scholars as to their authorship. They are clearly very Pauline in most respects. They do not have the distant and reactionary attitude about slaves or women that we find in Titus and 1 Timothy, but they are not the radical equality that Paul expects of his congregations preparing for the coming of the Kingdom of God through Christ. If Colossians and Ephesians are genuinely Pauline, you have to find a good argument for why he must have changed his mind, or gave contradictory instructions to different churches. It takes a less complicated explanation to assume that Colossians and Ephesians, though strongly Pauline, are nonetheless not from the hand of Paul.

To summarize, Paul’s expectation was that through the spread of the Gospel of Christ, new communities of faith would be established that would already live the way and values of the coming Kingdom of God. For Paul, one of the critical signs of the coming reign of Christ, was the establishment of patterns of relationships that reflected God’s original intention for creation and were promised in the teachings of the prophets. Those patterns of relationships were the unity of all peoples under God, that is, there would be no dominant ethnic group, there would be love for one’s neighbors across ethnic lines, collections for the poor to redistribute the goods of the world to benefit those who had lost everything, were poor, ill, unable to work or otherwise disadvantaged.

I hope that this brief study has been able to demonstrate that Paul did NOT create Christianity, but took what Jesus started and built upon it with amazing brilliance, that he was not only NOT a hater of Jews and Judaism, but that he remained a devout Jew to his last breath, and that far from supporting slavery or the subjugation of women, he preached and lived a gospel of radical equality under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We did not cover many of the great themes of Paul’s theology because our focus was narrowed to the three issues that have dogged Paul through the centuries. I hope that you will have been inspired to seek the deeper lessons that Paul has to teach us about what it means to live in Christ, to live in service to the gospel that he preached, and to look for that day when all God’s children will be one in a world of justice and peace rejoicing in the love of God.

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