

Note: these notes compile the draft of Chapter 1 for the forthcoming book. Normally the notes will be a summary of the material.

Understanding the role of Paul in the biblical revelation is critical. Paul's teachings, while distinct from those of Jesus and other disciples, are a significant part of the Christian faith. His emphasis on grace and faith has shaped much of Christianity's understanding of salvation. However, the difference between Paul's teachings and those of Jesus and the disciples has often been a point of contention, both within and outside the Christian community. Critics of Christianity frequently use the perceived discrepancy between the teachings of Paul and those of Jesus to challenge the validity of the Christian faith. If we as Christians do not fully understand and appreciate the distinct role of Paul, we may find ourselves ill-equipped to respond to these criticisms. By gaining a clear understanding of Paul's place in the biblical revelation, we can better defend our faith and respond to critics in a more informed and effective manner.

A SHORT INTRO ABOUT KINGDOM GOSPEL

The Gospel of the Kingdom, as proclaimed in the Bible, was the good news that God was sending a Messiah to the Jewish people (Isaiah 9:6-7, Micah 5:2). This Messiah would call them to repentance, and upon their repentance and acceptance of their Messiah (Hosea 3:4-5, Deuteronomy 30:1-3) He would establish the Davidic throne (Isaiah 9:7, Daniel 2:44). This would lead to the overthrowing of Israel's enemies (Jeremiah 30:8-9, Ezekiel 37:21-22), allowing the world to benefit from this new kingdom (Isaiah 2:2-4, Zechariah 8:22-23). The establishment of this kingdom would usher in a time of peace, prosperity, and perfection (Isaiah 11:6-9, Micah 4:3-4).

On the other hand, Paul's Gospel was distinctly different. Known as the Gospel of Grace, it was specifically directed towards those outside the covenants and commonwealth of Israel, as stated in Ephesians 2:12. This meant it was for the Gentiles, those who were not part of the Jewish community. Additionally, his Gospel was outside the Mosaic law, as expressed in Acts 13:39, meaning that it was not bound by the Jewish religious laws. Moreover, Paul's Gospel emphasized salvation through faith alone and not by works, as highlighted in Ephesians 2:8-9. This represented a significant shift from righteousness under the Mosaic law to righteousness in Christ.

This fundamental difference between the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Gospel of Grace will be our topic in subsequent chapters. However, here our goal is to emphasize that the critics of Christianity recognize these as clearly two distinct gospels, each vastly different from the other. These critics use this dichotomy as a point of attack on Christianity because, from an outsider perspective, it appears to be a glaring inconsistency. The two programs are as different as black and white, as oil is from water. Yet, regrettably, most of Christendom has become so accustomed to a theology that mixes these two that they fail to "see it" when these objections are raised by outsiders. I want us to "see it" because I believe that these critics are correct in identifying this discrepancy. However, they often draw a series of erroneous conclusions after recognizing it.

Throughout this book, my primary objective will be to provide a detailed explanation of the distinct nature of Paul's program. I aim to help us understand and correctly differentiate between these two programs - the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Gospel of Grace. This understanding will not only equip us to respond to critics but also guide us in our Christian journey in a manner that is logical, based on the Bible, and filled with grace.

THREE COMMON CHARGES

Many give charges that Paul is not an apostle, but an imposter. They say this because they recognize that Paul penned what started a fully new doctrine from that of the gospels. Should this charge frighten us? It is certainly used to do so. And the truth is that if we do not have a solid understanding both that Pauline doctrine is different, and why, we will be frightened. What we need is a robust understanding of Paul, and that is what we will attempt to provide.

But first, let's examine three charges against Paul that are more common than you may think.

THE JEWISH CRITIQUE: PAUL PERVERTED CHRISTIANITY

Jewish critics of Christianity often perceive the faith as being fundamentally Pauline - that is, based on Paul's teachings that emphasize the grace-gift of God received through faith, rather than adherence to Jewish law. This perception stems from their reading of Paul's letters, free from the influence of traditional Christian doctrines which have evolved over centuries. In this perspective, Jesus is seen as a proponent of Jewish law, albeit with radical interpretations at times. Paul, on the other hand, is viewed as someone who distorted Judaism for his own personal gain and renown, creating a faith system that is essentially non-Jewish. This is the major reason why they reject Christianity; they see it as Pauline Christianity, which they perceive as being in conflict with Jewish teachings and traditions.

In the Jewish tradition, figures such as John the Baptist and Jesus are accepted due to their adherence to Jewish laws and principles. The act of baptism, which was practiced by John the Baptist, and the ethical teachings of Jesus are also acknowledged. Moreover, the Jewish nature of Jesus' "religion" aligns with the Jewish tradition. If it were not for the Pauline scriptures, there would be a significant alignment between Jewish and Christianity teachings.

However, the introduction of Paul's teachings, which were radically non-Jewish, caused a profound shift in this dynamic. Paul introduced concepts and doctrines that deviated from the traditional Jewish laws and principles, leading to a new religious paradigm. Because of this, many in the Jewish tradition view Paul with disdain, regarding him as the founder of a new religion that perverted the Jewish faith. This perception of Paul as the progenitor of a fraudulent religion has significantly widened the gap between Jewish and Christian beliefs.

It is remarkable to note the contrast between the reasons behind the persecutions of Jesus and Paul. Jesus was put to death essentially for being "too Jewish." He was accused of wanting to fulfill the Messiah's mission and thus establish the Davidic throne, which led to charges of blasphemy and insurrection against him.

In contrast, Paul was continually criticized for being "not Jewish enough." He was advocating for a freedom from the Law, not adherence to it. This teaching was so unacceptable to the Jewish

community that they did everything in their power to imprison him and even kill him. Thus, while Jesus was persecuted for advocating for the strict fulfillment of Jewish prophecy, Paul was persecuted for promoting liberation from strict Jewish legalism.

THE CRITICAL THINKERS' OBJECTIONS: PAUL OR JESUS MUST HAVE BEEN WRONG

There are critical thinkers both within and outside the Christian faith who recognize a significant divergence between the teachings of Paul and those of Jesus. These individuals have observed that not only are the teachings different, but in some respects, they can also be seen as incompatible.

Here are a few quick examples of the discrepancies between the teachings of Jesus and Paul:

1. In Matthew 5:17-19, Jesus asserts that He has not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. He even goes as far as to say that anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. In contrast, Paul states in Romans 6:14 that Christians are not under the law, but under grace.
2. In Matthew 19:16-17, a man asks Jesus what good thing he must do to have eternal life. Jesus replies that if he wants to enter life, he must keep the commandments. On the other hand, in Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 3:28, Paul emphasizes that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast.
3. Finally, in Matthew 15:24, Jesus states that He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. But in Romans 11:13, Paul declares himself the apostle of the Gentiles.

These examples clearly demonstrate the stark differences between the teachings of Jesus and Paul.

In dealing with this apparent discrepancy, these critical thinkers often choose to reject either Jesus or Paul's teachings, and it is almost always Paul who is dismissed. They tend to prefer Jesus, but they scrutinize His teachings, searching for the "historical Jesus" and discarding aspects that they find unpalatable. What remains, they consider to be the authentic teachings of Jesus. If there are elements within Paul's writings that seem to contradict these, they conclude that Paul must be the one who is wrong.

Critics of Christianity exploit the discrepancy between the teachings of Jesus and Paul as a weapon against the faith as a whole. They argue that this inconsistency undermines the doctrine of inerrancy, which holds that the Bible, as the Word of God, is free from error. If Jesus and Paul, two significant figures in Christianity, are in disagreement, they argue, how can the Bible be considered infallible?

Furthermore, some critics use this perceived inconsistency to launch attacks specifically against Jesus or Paul, although the majority focus their criticisms on the Christian faith itself. They argue that a religion with such significant internal disagreements cannot be valid or trustworthy.

A small number of critics take a different approach, using the perceived discrepancy to establish a legalistic following based solely on the teachings of Jesus. They reject Paul's teachings on grace and argue that followers of Christ should adhere strictly to the laws and principles taught by Jesus.

The crux of the issue is that critical thinkers are correct in identifying the discrepancy: Jesus and Paul indeed have differing teachings. However, Christian doctrine has traditionally been a mixture of Jesus and Paul's teachings, with a tendency to overlook any differences. As a result, the Christian faith often lacks a comprehensive response to these observations, leaving those who read the scriptures critically susceptible to the unfavorable conclusions drawn by other critical readers. I believe that if Christianity could acknowledge these differences and learn how to navigate them through proper division, the challenges presented would virtually disappear.

THE ANTI-CHRISTIAN ATTACK: CHRISTIANITY IS MORE ABOUT PAUL THAN JESUS

While it is far from true, the fact that Christianity has any Pauline theology, such as salvation by grace alone, has led those who are anti-Christian zealots to charge that Christianity is more about Paul than Jesus. They claim that Christianity accepts this "Johnny-come-lately" apostle and makes his words the center point of Christian theology.

These critics argue that Paul invented a new religion, one that did not require any legal services to God but generously provided all the benefits. They claim that the religion should be labeled the religion of Paul, not of Jesus, or "Paulianity." This argument is an attempt to discredit Christianity by asserting that its core teachings are a radical departure from the teachings of Jesus, thereby challenging its legitimacy.

This argument is designed to have a shock value that will catch Christians' attention and turn them away from organized Christianity, and hopefully, from the Christian faith altogether. Unfortunately, it often works. The reason it works is that Christians, as a whole, have virtually no understanding of proper Pauline ministry, its separation from Peter's (and the 12's) ministry, and even from what Jesus was doing while on Earth. This lack of understanding about why Pauline theology is important has led unsuspecting Christians to hear these charges and leave the faith. It has also resulted in the mixing of Peter and Paul's teachings in most standard Christian theology.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this book is to foster an understanding that Paul is not simply the "13th apostle" or an extension of the original group of twelve disciples. Instead, he represents the genesis of a completely new form of faith that sharply contrasts with the teachings of Jesus and with the conventional Christian doctrine that is prevalent today. We invite you to embark on this thrilling, yet potentially unsettling journey with us.