

*Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh;  
even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet we know  
Him thus no longer.*

(2 Cor. 5:16 NASB)

# The Life of Jesus According to Paul

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## 1. THE BASIC PROBLEM

### 1.1. Conventional «Minimalist» Perspective on Paul's References to the Historical Jesus

**T**he relation of Paul to Jesus has been the subject of fervent discussion since Marcion, at least. In the modern period the problem is discussed in terms of continuity and discontinuity between the proclamation of Jesus and the theology of Paul. It has been noted that the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels is focused on the Kingdom of God («The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel.»), whereas the center of Pauline theology consists in the person of the Lord Jesus himself («Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.»). As the Christian tradition moved from the earliest Jewish to Hellenistic forms, the one proclaiming became the subject of proclamation. Other differences between Jesus and Paul, both subtle and obvious, have also emerged in recent theological debates. Yet up to the present day there is little agreement in estimating precisely how far Paul followed the earliest Christian traditions and where he diverged from them. Some critics, enthusiastic about the discontinuities, have even claimed that Paul was so innovative that it is fair to count him the real «founder» of Christianity.

In this essay we will explore just one aspect of the broader debate of how Paul is related to Jesus, namely the problem of reconstructing the life of Jesus through the Pauline Epistles. In other words, we will discuss how



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the acts of Jesus are reflected in the writings of Paul, leaving the associated issue of interpreting the sayings of the Lord in Paul's correspondence outside the scope of this brief article.

As a point of entry into the discussion, it is convenient to use Rudolph Bultmann's interpretation of 2Co 5:16: «Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh (*κατὰ σάρκα*); even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.» According to the German scholar, Paul means that he has no interest in the *historical* Jesus, because he regards as important only his *encounter* (for Bultmann, a term rich in existential meaning) with Christ.<sup>1</sup> The opposition prominent in Bultmann's thought between the historical Jesus and the Christ whom we can meet in kerygma even today, is often attributed by analysts to his dependence on existentialist philosophy. Those who do not share the same philosophical ideals sometimes dismiss it as arbitrary. Indeed, the apostolic statement can be interpreted in ways that avoid the opposition. If «after the flesh» is an adverbial phrase modifying the verb «have known,» rather than an adjectival phrase qualifying the noun «Christ,» then we can read Paul's statement as, «we regard no one from a worldly point of view» (NIV).

<sup>1</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, «The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Theology of Paul,» *Faith and Understanding: Collected Essays* (London: SCM, 1969), 220-246; and «Jesus and Paul,» *Existence and Faith* (New York: Meridian, 1960), 183-201.

Yet, although Bultmann is likely to be mistaken in this case, his interpretation points to a problem beyond the original meaning of this biblical passage. The fact is that the majority of scholars today accept a dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of Christian experience and tradition or, to put it in terms of Marcus Borg (a prominent American scholar of Christian origins), between the *pre-Easter* and *post-Easter* Jesus.

To preclude possible objections we should note that the problem cannot be written off as an offspring of the «introspective conscience of the West» (Krister Stendahl's phrase), since the limited number of Paul's allusions to the pre-Easter Jesus seems to justify this distinction. Paul rarely quotes from Jesus' teaching and almost never mentions an event (other than death and resurrection) from Jesus' ministry. This is an objective fact, not a creation of theological liberalism, since prominent evangelicals, such as the British scholar F.F. Bruce, would subscribe to the following summary:

There are some of the most familiar facts about Jesus that we could never have learned from Paul's letters: that he habitually taught in parables, that he healed the sick and performed other «signs.» From those letters we should know nothing of his baptism and temptation, of his Galilean ministry, of the turning point at Caesarea Philippi, of the transfiguration or of the last journey to Jerusalem. While we find clear and repeated references in them

to Jesus' crucifixion, we should know nothing from them of the events which led up to it<sup>2</sup>.

Since Paul is the earliest literary authority for the historical Jesus, his silence in those places where a reference to Jesus would be appropriate is problematic. It seems to support the critical assertion that this stratum of the gospel narrative had not yet appeared by the middle of the first century when Paul was writing his epistles, and therefore the gospel accounts represent a later stage of Christological tradition.

Thus, it is common in contemporary studies to assert that Paul's knowledge of the ministry of Jesus was next to zero. «Is Paul not an impressive example of someone who could set forth the heart of the Christian message without apparently having much knowledge of the early ministry of Jesus and, at least in his letters, showing next to no interest in such detail?» For many, this is merely a rhetorical question. According to S.G. Wilson, «One aspect of Bultmann's analysis has won the day: few would now deny that Paul's interest in the person and teaching of Jesus is minimal.»<sup>3</sup>

This argument is very attractive for authors hostile to Christianity. Representative of this trend is a

popular article by one Stephen Carr circulating on the Internet. This bitter but (let us be fair) quite ingenious atheist asks ironically, «Is it possible to teach people about the Gospel without mentioning Gospel stories?»<sup>4</sup> His underlying sarcasm implies no, not for a preacher who is familiar with them. Because Paul does not mention the gospel accounts, they must be fictitious. He could not refer to any miracles of Jesus because the miraculous stories were made up later by the church.

In Bultmann's own frame of reference, it was possible to both affirm the validity of the Christian proclamation and deny its historical basis. The faith is valid as long as it is grounded in the testimony of the church, because «...it is the Christ of the kerygma and not the person of the historical Jesus who is the object of faith.»<sup>5</sup> Yet, granted this explanation makes sense within the existentialist system, few Christians can honestly be satisfied with drawing fine Kierkegaardian lines between history and faith, although it seems like an easy way out for laypeople who do not want to burden themselves with tough historical questions. Even if there are still a few scholars, such as Luke Timothy Johnson, who claim that historical research is ultimately irrelevant, for most the recognition that the gospels

<sup>2</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1995), 97.

<sup>3</sup> S.G. Wilson, «From Jesus to Paul: The Contours and Consequences of a Debate,» in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honor of Francis Wright Beare*, ed. P. Richardson and J.C. Hurd (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1984), 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Carr, «What did Paul know about Jesus?» URL: <http://www.bowness.demon.co.uk/paul.htm> (Electronic publication). Downloaded: Oct. 23, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Rudolph Bultmann. «The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus» (1960), in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, ed. C.E. Braaten and R.A. Harrisville (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 17.

cannot be treated as reliable historical narratives is simply not an option. F.F. Bruce expresses this common evangelical concern: «If Christ of the kerygma is not also the Jesus of history, there is the danger that our faith may be placed in ‘cunningly devised fables.’»<sup>6</sup> However, is that not an unwanted but necessary conclusion? Or is there an alternative approach to the facts? Clearly, this is a question with serious apologetic ramifications.

## 1.2 David Wenham’s «Maximalist» Reassessment of the Data

If we could show that Paul’s knowledge of the life and ministry of Jesus is more extensive than what appears on the surface of the text, it would provide a strong argument for a greater continuity between the pre- and post-Easter Jesus than is allowed. This work has recently been done by David Wenham in his *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?*<sup>7</sup> Specifically, we are interested in chapter eight (pp. 338-372), where Wenham uncovers the evidence for the life of Jesus in Paul — the subject matter of our article.<sup>8</sup>

There are two reasons why it is necessary to analyze Wenham’s conclusions. First, Wenham has

accumulated and analyzed numerous allusions to Jesus in the epistles of Paul ranging from direct to quite obscure. His argument looks impressive. Second, Wenham is a leading British scholar whose findings have been welcomed by evangelicals as a breakthrough in the field, or, to use a cliché, as a paradigm shift, perhaps a little over-enthusiastically, as the following discussion will show.

We will follow Wenham’s division of the material according to the main stages of Jesus’ life: (1) the birth of Jesus; (2) Baptism and Temptation; (3) the ministry, miracles, and lifestyle of Jesus and the apostles; (4) Transfiguration; (5) Passion; (6) Resurrection and Ascension.

## 2. THE LIFE OF JESUS RECONSTRUCTED FROM PAUL’S EPISTLES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WENHAM’S CONCLUSIONS

### 2.1 The Birth of Jesus

Did Paul know anything of the traditions of Jesus’ birth recorded in the Gospels? Wenham admits that many scholars would, almost without thinking, give a negative answer to the question. However, he believes that for several reasons this conclusion should not be taken for granted.

There are, in all, four rather similar passages referring to Jesus’ birth in the Pauline epistles: Gal 4:4;

<sup>6</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Paul and Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 24.

<sup>7</sup> David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Earlier, Wenham presented material overlapping with this chapter in «The Story of Jesus Known to Paul» in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ*, ed. Joel B. Green, et al (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 297-311.

<sup>9</sup> See also Ro 15:8 (somewhat parallel to Gal 4:4); 2Co 8:9 for other possible allusions to Jesus’ birth.

Ro 1:3; 8:3; and Php 2:7.<sup>9</sup> At first glance, all they tell us is that Paul knew of Jesus' Davidic descent (Ro 1:3) and his Jewishness (Gal 4:4-5) — that is, not much.

The strongest argument for Paul's familiarity with Jesus' virginal conception comes from Paul's use of the Greek verb γίνομαι applied to the birth of Jesus: Ro 1:3 («descended from David»); Gal 4:4 («born of a woman»); and Php 2:7 («born in human likeness»). It was not a common way to refer to someone being born, and it is not used in this way elsewhere in the NT.<sup>10</sup> The usual verb for giving birth, or (in the passive voice) being born, γεννάω which Paul uses five times (Ro 9:11; 1Co 4:15; Gal 4:23.24.29). Wenham has pointed out that Paul always uses γίνομαι when he speaks of Jesus' birth and γεννάω when he speaks about other human beings being born. Does that imply that Jesus' birth was different from that of other human beings? The most striking example is in Gal 4, where, after speaking of Jesus being «born of a woman, born under the law» (v. 4), Paul goes on to speak of Sarah and Hagar giving birth to Isaac and Ishmael (vv. 21-31). In v. 4 it is γίνομαι that is used to refer to Jesus' birth, but in vv. 23.24.29

Paul consistently uses γεννάω to refer to the birth of Isaac and Ishmael.

Wenham explains the variation by Paul's familiarity with the story of Jesus' virginal conception. Paul avoids the usual verb — with its frequent connotation of male begetting — and uses the less obvious «become» verb instead.

I believe Wenham succeeds in showing that the two Greek verbs are not always interchangeable in Paul's vocabulary. Nevertheless, there is a better explanation of the lexical distinction than the one he proposed.

It is more likely that Paul is making this distinction because of his emphasis on Jesus entering the human state and condition, rather than on Jesus' birth as such. Paul avoids γεννάω, because this verb connotes the beginning of a new life and thus may obscure the idea of Jesus' pre-existence. Jesus was not literally «born» as were Isaac and Ishmael, i.e. his life did not originate at the moment of his human birth; technically, he received his humanity. Indeed, the pre-existence of Christ is the central theme of all four passages that speak of Jesus' birth (Wenham overlooked this striking fact). We can clearly see this theme in Gal 4:4: «But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...»; Php 2:6-7: «Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness»; and Ro 8:3: «For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his

<sup>10</sup> A possible exception is Jn 8:58. Some other scholars, however, believe that it was a perfectly normal verb for «to be born,» without any special significance. F.F. Bruce, for example, insists, «Paul's wording is applicable to any one of woman born; it throws no light on the question whether he knew of Jesus' virginal conception or not». In support Bruce refers to the use of γίνομαι in 1Es 4:16; Tb 8:6; WS 7:3; Sirach 44:9; and Jn 8.58. See, F.F. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 195-196.

own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.» Finally, comparison with the latter verse shows that the idea of Christ's pre-existence also underlies Paul's thinking in Ro 1:3. Therefore, the pre-existence of Christ is a common feature of all four passages in the epistles of Paul referring to the birth of Jesus, and is the real reason why he avoids the possibly misleading verb γεννάω.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 Baptism and Temptation

Is it likely that Paul knew of Jesus' baptism by John? There is no direct evidence to prove it. Nevertheless, Wenham argues that Paul's understanding of Christian baptism is a reflection of Jesus' baptism. To prove the point he identifies three common features. Jesus' baptism in the gospels is: (1) a baptism in water; (2) accompanied by the descent of the Spirit; and (3) associated with divine Sonship. Similarly, Christian baptism for Paul is: (1) a baptism with water; (2) in the Spirit, associated with the receiving of the Spirit; and (3) involving adoption of the Christian as a child of God.

How can we evaluate this argument? Normally, if we want to prove the interdependence of two practices we need to demonstrate that they have common features that are specific, or better yet, unique. Definite verbal

echoes are usually required to convince a skeptic.

When we look at Wenham's evidence, it is clear that the three features he pointed out are far from being specific. Yes, it is a baptism in water in both cases. We may ask what other means of baptism he might expect? There is no hint that the first century Jews experimented with sand. The use of water is not sufficient to show that Paul is specifically alluding to the baptism of Jesus. It is more likely that Paul is dependent on the baptismal practices of the early church. Therefore, a skeptic would be right to say that it is the practices of the Christian community that are the key, not baptism as an event in Jesus' life. Of verbal echoes between Paul and Jesus on the subject of baptism, we have none. Finally, we note that the event in the life of the Messiah that Paul unquestionably relates to the meaning of Christian baptism is the Cross, not the baptism of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

The evidence that Paul knew of Jesus' temptation experience in the wilderness is even thinner. The best parallel Wenham produces is Ro 8:13-15: «...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery...» (RSV). «Led by the Spirit» in this passage is paralleled in the gospel temptation narratives of Mt 4:1; Lk 4:1.

Obviously, one needs a real stretch of imagination to see Ro 8:14 as an allusion to Jesus' tem-

<sup>11</sup> Some other facts noted by Wenham, such as the contrast between «becoming in the human likeness» and «being in the form of God» in Php 2.7; the parallelism of «becoming from a woman» and «becoming under the law»; and the use of the participle γενόμενος are also in favor of the view that Paul's emphasis is on Jesus entering the human state.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ro 6.

ptation. Wenham himself is not very confident: «Paul could have known something like the ‘Q’ temptation narrative, but still the evidence is hardly distinctive or strong enough to allow us to assert confidently that he did.»<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3 Ministry, Miracles, and Lifestyle of Jesus and the Apostles

Paul does not specifically refer to Jesus’ miracles. Wenham, however, believes that Paul’s own ministry may have been modeled on that of Jesus the healer. In Ro 15:18-19 the apostle speaks of Christ making miracles through him, which would make particular sense if he was familiar with the deeds of Jesus. The same logic applies to Jesus’ lifestyle: Paul’s attitude toward servanthood, poverty, and faith may have been influenced by Jesus’ own example.

One problem with this reasoning is a lack of specificity in the parallels. It is widely accepted in biblical scholarship that Jewish exorcists and healers were quite common in the first century A.D.<sup>14</sup> The New Testament contains references to competing miracle-workers in the accounts of the Beelzebub controversy (Lk 11:14-26); the unknown exorcist (Mk 9:38-41); and the sons of Sceva (Ac 19:13-16). Other miracle-making figures contemporary to Paul ap-

pear in Josephus’ *Antiquities*. Therefore, if we were to build a strong historical argument that Paul patterned his actions on the ministry of Jesus it would not be enough to say that they both made miracles; we would have to demonstrate that their practices were very close in detail. Without such demonstration, it is sufficient to relate Paul’s miracles to the broader Jewish-Christian context.

But let us agree with Wenham for a moment. Suppose that Paul was influenced by Jesus’ own example. It still leaves us with a very general picture. Many critical scholars agree that the concept of Jesus the miracle-worker appeared quite early in the church. In Peter’s sermon in Ac 2.22, Jesus is presented as «a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders.» According to E.P. Sanders, «This is the seed which would grow, as time went on, into the great tree of the gospels: it became necessary to tell of Jesus’ deeds.»<sup>15</sup> Here is the typical line of reasoning: the gospel records are late, but the basic idea that Jesus made miracles can be quite early. In this frame of reference, Wenham’s argument proves no more than that Paul knew the «seed» idea. It is not possible to show that the apostle was familiar with particular miracles, such as walking on water or feeding the five thousand.

<sup>13</sup> Wenham, 350.

<sup>14</sup> For a contrary opinion, see: Eric Eve, *Jewish Context of Jesus’ Miracles* in JSNT Supplement (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 29.

It is striking that when Paul refers to the obedience of Christ (Ro 5:19; Php 2:5-9) or to his grace in making himself poor (2Co 8:9), it appears that he has in mind the whole drama of the Incarnation and the Cross, rather than any characteristic of Jesus' life (being a carpenter, for example). And when he points to the example of Jesus in bearing the burdens of others (Ro 15:3), he is reflecting on the depiction in the Psalms of the suffering of the righteous, not an episode in Jesus' ministry.<sup>16</sup> The overall impression is not to be discounted.

## 2.4 Transfiguration

The main evidence that Paul was familiar with the transfiguration story comes from 2Co 3:1-4:6, where Paul interprets the OT story of Moses going up Mount Sinai. According to Wenham, Paul may also have the story of Jesus' Transfiguration in mind. First, he notes that the picture of Moses on the mountain in the presence of God is itself «evocative of the transfiguration narrative.»<sup>17</sup> Second, the dominant theme of 2Co 3:1-4:6 is «glory,» which is also the focus of the transfiguration narrative. Finally, the verb «transfigure» in 2Co 3:18 is used by Matthew and Mark in the transfiguration narrative.

How strong an argument is this one? The first point is an example of circular reasoning: Wenham assumes

that the transfiguration narrative is implied in the story, exerting its «evocative» power on the reader, when that is precisely what needs to be proven in the case of Paul. The theme of «glory» is simply taken from the Moses story in the OT and requires no extra explanation. The third observation, that the word for «transfigure» is used in both 2Co 3 and in the Synoptics is probably the most interesting, but can be explained by a mere coincidence.

As a contrast to Wenham's reasoning, one could refer to standard practices of interpreting Mt 17:1-13. As far as our purpose is concerned, the case is similar to 2Co 3. In Matthew we have the transfiguration story, which is meant to evoke the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. In 2Co 3 we have a reference to the giving of the Law, which (as Wenham claims) connotes the Transfiguration of Jesus. Yet there is a reason why the argument is strong in the first case and weak in the second. That Matthew intends a comparison with the event in Exodus is certain, although the name of Moses is never mentioned, because the parallels between Jesus and Moses are repeatedly emphasized in the special Matthean material. This can be demonstrated point by point.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand there are no traces of editing in 2Co 3 that would make the transfiguration reference appear to be the Transfiguration of Jesus.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. J.M.G. Barclay, «Jesus and Paul,» in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 498.

<sup>17</sup> Wenham, 358.

<sup>18</sup> For details, see Robert Gundry, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 342-346.



## 2.5 Passion

Paul knew something of the sequence of events that led to the death of Jesus. It is made apparent in Paul's discussion of the Last Supper in 1Co 11:23: «I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread ...». Paul knew that Jesus died by crucifixion (Php 2:8; 2Co 13:4: «He was crucified in weakness»). Therefore, Paul must have been aware that Jesus' execution was carried out by the Romans, but he puts the primary blame on the Jews, who «killed the Lord Jesus» (1Th 2:14-15).

The evidence for Paul's knowledge of the passion story is not very extensive, but some of the points are undisputed. Hence, we can agree with Wenham's basic statement, that Paul knew some details of Jesus' passion.

## 2.6 Resurrection and Ascension

The most important evidence is 1Co 15:3-9. What can we say concerning Paul's knowledge of the Resurrection from this passage? First, Paul dates the Resurrection to the third day after Jesus' death and burial, as do the Synoptics. Second, he knows of several post-Resurrection appearances, which are somewhat more difficult to harmonize with the Gospels. It is not possible to be sure whether Paul distinguished the Resurrection from the Ascension, but he certainly thinks in terms of post-Resurrection appearances lasting for a limited period.

## 3. SUMMARY

Wenham has made a vigorous attempt to find arguments in favor of Paul's familiarity with the historical Jesus tradition. His primary method has been to identify allusions and parallels to the life of Jesus that are not apparent on the surface of the text. However, the result is disappointing for the most part. Although Wenham attempts to distinguish between different degrees of probability, it seems that his estimates are excessively optimistic. Generally, it is fair to count as «possible» those facts which he called «probable,» and «nigh to impossible» those which he described as «possible.»

Moreover, Wenham does not seem to notice the internal contradiction in his system. It is unreasonable to expect that we can find telling data on the level of obscure allusions when, admittedly, the number of direct references is quite limited. Why would Paul be reluctant to speak about the life of Jesus in a straightforward manner? Why would he avoid direct statements and instead make numerous cryptic allusions? It is not possible to answer these questions unless we are prepared to entertain a conspiracy theory, a reverse of the «Messianic Secret» found in Mark.

There is another dubious assumption present in Wenham's system. The whole enterprise is driven by what Albert Schweitzer ironically called the «apologetic of the heart.» It is the kind of partial rhetoric which is meant to press a point rather than achieve a true

understanding of historical facts. Three decades ago, Guenther Bornkamm warned against such speculations, saying that the lack of references to the historical Jesus in Paul is so clear that «there is therefore no point in trying, from apologetic motives, somehow to get around the impossibility.»<sup>19</sup> Yet, unfortunately, it has been hard for some evangelicals to accept the simple idea that truth is more important than a defense of certain preconceived notions. Readers often applaud apologetic works without any regard as to whether or not the author does justice to the evidence. The goal justifies the means. In contrast, we must emphasize that God and the Christian faith do not need to be defended by a distortion of the historical picture. What is required is a sober and, above all, honest approach which remains true to history.

#### 4. PERSPECTIVES

The principal conclusion of the discussion above is that the rarity of references to the life of Jesus in Paul's letters is still undeniable. Therefore, we are still faced with the problem of how «Paul's silence» is to be explained. Are we hard pressed between the two: the radical critical position that denies the historical basis of the gospels, and the poorly-conceived apologetics that operates by distorting historical facts? The

choice is not easy. Yet I think there is also a middle path between the two extremes.

First, we should note that the Pauline Epistles and the Gospels represent different literary genres. It is possible that Paul did not mention events of Jesus' life because they did not fit his practical goals. Because Paul wrote his epistles on specific occasions and kept them relatively brief, he had to be selective. If some data is missing it can be due to selection, not ignorance.

Second, Paul may be reluctant to speak about the pre-Easter Jesus, because it goes outside the scope of his own first-hand information. Indeed, an appeal to eyewitness experience is typical for NT literature. The most moving statement of this kind is probably 1Jn 1:1: «That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim.» It makes perfect sense, therefore, that Paul preferred to stick to his own knowledge and turn to the testimony of others only when it was necessary. Not being a direct disciple of Jesus, Paul would not often mention events in the life of the Messiah, because he would not be able to give his personal testimony to these events. Paul's perspective changed when he had the vision of the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. Hence, he felt no need to share the episodes of Jesus' life because they were not part of his own revelatory experience.

This reminds us that Paul was relatively independent from the

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<sup>19</sup> Guenther Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 110.

Jerusalem church. The precise nature of his relationship with the apostles and other Christians in Jerusalem is the subject of a long debate. The problem was raised by F.C. Bauer in the nineteenth century and has never achieved a completely satisfactory resolution. There are cases, as 1Co 15, when Paul agrees with some core information about Jesus handed over to him by other Christians. However, such exceptions do not constitute the fundamental nature of Paul's proclamation. When Paul comes to the apostles for approval, he already has the gospel in his hands (Gal 1-2). He strives to make his gospel recognized and authorized by the leaders of the Jerusalem church. However, in essence Paul's gospel is independent from the Jerusalem church and the tradition of the direct disciples of Jesus.

Third, there seems to be too easy an equation between «late» and

«mythical.» Logically, it does not follow that a certain event that occurred before Paul and was recorded after Paul was necessarily created by the church. It could have been preserved in memory rather than in tradition, or perhaps in a local tradition with which Paul was not necessarily familiar. The factor of geographic distance has to be taken seriously.

Although none of the last three observations gives a sufficient explanation, if we put together the fact that Paul wrote epistles, not gospels; selected material related to his conversion experience; was relatively independent from the Jerusalem church; and did mention occasionally a few events of Jesus' life, the cumulative force of the argument is strong. Finally, it is good to keep in mind that our evidence is limited to the extant letters of Paul and his real knowledge was more extensive.

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